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Teachers' Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning Instruction and High Residential Mobility Students' Reading Literacy

Janel Dorene Morris
Walden University

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Walden University

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Janel Dorene Morris

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Review Committee

Dr. Patricia Patrick, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Sarah Hough, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Sydney Parent, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2022

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning Instruction and High Residential

Mobility Students' Reading Literacy

by

Janel Dorene Morris

MSEd., Walden University, 2015

BA, Point Loma Nazarene University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2023

Abstract

Based on recommendations from research, leaders in a north Texas public school district implemented social emotional learning (SEL) to address academic gaps among high residential mobility (HRM) students. Incorporating SEL instruction improves academic achievement 11 percentile points on average; however, in Adoniram School District (ASD), 2021 passing rates fell 8% from 2019 despite adopting SEL curriculum. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how ASD elementary teachers instructed SEL, and their perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. The study on social and emotional skills (SSES) conceptual framework guided this study because SEL instruction may improve student academic growth, including reading literacy. Data were collected by interviewing 15 ASD teachers and reviewing their lesson plans and analyzed thematically through open and axial coding strategies. According to results, teachers perceived HRM students' academic growth was positively impacted when SEL was taught each morning and reinforced during core content instruction. Participants indicated the level to which SEL influenced students depended primarily on leadership attitudes toward SEL, and collaboration in professional learning communities. The findings led to a white paper offering ASD leaders research-based recommendations to support teachers in SEL implementation during reading literacy instruction. This study may contribute to positive social change when teachers integrate SEL principles in core content lessons to provide HRM students with resilience strategies that facilitate acquiring new skills, including reading literacy, resulting in satisfactory performance on state assessments.

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Dedication

To my AMAZING husband: you are the kindest, smartest, most generous, and most loving man I know. *It always seems that I'm following you, because you take me to the places that I know I'd never find.* Thank you for pushing me to do hard things I never believed I could achieve. Even when I lost my motivation, you never let me quit what I started until finished (*Rom. 8:18*). God was so gracious to give you to me (*James 1:17*). Thank you for choosing me as your bride. You have truly been with me, for better or worse, in sickness and health, for richer or poorer, and forsaking all others. I love, honor, and esteem you above anyone on this earth, with ALL my heart. I am blessed beyond measure, and I can't wait to grow old with you (*Matt. 19:6*). **Further up and further in!**

To my WONDERFUL children: you are each a unique treasure to me. I marvel at the evidence of God's fingerprints all over your hearts, souls, and minds. I know you will each do great works for the glory of His Kingdom (*I Tim. 4:12, III John 1:4*). I love each of you so VERY much. You all inspire me to be a better Christian and remind me to thank God for the wonderful gifts He has been so kind to bestow on me.

To my eldest: You hold a special place in my heart as our firstborn. Thank you for taking pride in your work, enjoying music, being responsible, and genuinely loving to serve and protect others (*I Sam. 12:24*). God made you a "Martha"—embrace who you are, and the special purpose your Creator has for you. Trust in Him to direct your path.

To my son: the joy of the Lord is your strength (*Neh. 8:10*). Thank you for following in your father's brave and kind legacy. I hope and pray that, whether this sinful world brings you cause for celebration or sorrow in life, you always find a way to keep laughing, and

your genuine happiness remain contagious to those you love. **To my youngest:** you have always had a sweet, tender heart, loved to cuddle, and never held a grudge against anyone (*Eph. 4:32*). Thank you for always being there to give me hugs and kisses, whether I was happy, sad, worried, or frustrated. You truly embody all the traits of your namesake.

To my parents: thank you for being my first models of Christianity and doing it so well. **Daddy**, your passion for the Scriptures, and your love for ALL children, especially the preborn, still guide me each day. Thank you for your legacy as a godly man to your children and grandchildren (*Ps. 127:3-5*). I still feel your hugs, and kisses, and tickles, in my heart, every time I see or hear *Adventures in Odyssey*, *Peppercorn Puppets*, *McGee & Me*, or *The City That Forgot About Christmas*. **Mom**, you have modeled for more than 20 years a commitment to helping all children read fluently and love literature. Thank you for showing me how to work with challenging students as an educator and instilling a joy of reading in your sons and daughter from an early age with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Follow My Leader*, and, above all, the Bible (*Prov. 22:6*). **To my brothers:** Life with you has been a joy and honor. I treasure our childhood memories—growing, laughing, and learning together (*Ecc. 4:9-12*). I am so proud of the godly men you have both become and the families you are leading. I love my Ginn family with all my heart (*Josh. 24:15*).

Above all, this study is an insignificant gift I lay on the altar of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (*Ps. 116:17-18*). Thank You for Your immeasurable blessings to me. Thank You for each precious child You created who needs the security, kindness, worth, and mercy found only in Your amazing gift of salvation. May this work inspire others to treat Your children in the manner You modeled for us, until You return (*Rom. 8:23-25*).

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Section 1: The Problem

From 2013-2019, the passing rate of students in Grades 3-5 on state reading assessments in Adoniram School District (pseudonym), a large urban public school district in north Texas, declined from 67% to 36% (director of communications, personal communication, September 17, 2019). During that time, the number of students in foster care placement in the north Texas county where Adoniram School District (ASD) is located increased from 2,500 (Blow, 2014) to more than 11,000 (Garrett, 2020). High residential mobility (HRM) students, including children in foster care placement, lack the cognitive resilience skills needed to overcome learning gaps that result from frequent school changes (Clayton, 2018). Resilience skills may support HRM student academic gains in reading literacy development (Ortlieb & Schatz, 2020). Research shows social emotional learning (SEL) helps students develop resilience skills and mediates poor outcomes among HRM students (Jones & Kahn, 2017). In 2020, ASD implemented the *Rethink Ed* curriculum to incorporate SEL instruction, including development of resilience skills, to address student achievement concerns among HRM children (ASD director of SEL and guidance, personal communication, August 17, 2020).

The Local Problem

ASD leaders did not have data about how teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students, or teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. In response to the 31% decline in student performance on state assessments from 2013-2019 (Texas Education Agency, 2019), the Texas Education Agency (TEA) appointed a

conservator to manage the operations of the ASD superintendent and school board in 2020 (Smith, 2020). Research shows that incorporating SEL instruction improves academic achievement an average of 11 percentile points (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019); however, despite adoption of the *Rethink Ed* curriculum in ASD, 2021 passing rates were 8% lower than in 2019 (Texas Education Agency, 2021). If student performance does not improve, ASD may be permanently closed (ASD superintendent, personal communication, September 4, 2020).

An audit was conducted by an outside agency that identified 19 academic target priorities. In response, ASD developed a corrective action plan (CAP) with the conservator, which focused on 10 identified challenges at the elementary grade levels to improve student achievement. To address these challenges, ASD established district-wide procedures implementing a whole-child instructional approach (WCIA) and integrating SEL with literacy and math instruction. ASD committed to (a) providing support for teachers on the district curriculum through professional development (PD) twice per month; (b) facilitating professional learning communities (PLCs) to increase teacher collaboration on effective instructional strategies to improve student learning; (c) conducting administrative classroom observations to assess curriculum delivery and provide coaching to improve teacher practice for increased student learning; (d) establishing multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) teams on each campus to identify and support all learners through SEL and academic interventions; and (e) increasing the number of campus data assessment meetings to measure quantifiable improvement in reading literacy and mathematics.

According to documentation from the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, the ASD director of SEL and guidance provided *Rethink Ed* professional development (PD) to classroom teachers for one hour. The PD included (a) an overview of the digital media resources available in the *Rethink Ed* library, (b) the SEL instructional calendar outlining what lesson to teach each week of the academic year, and (c) expectations of what activities teachers should conduct with their students during the daily, 30-minute SEL block. No additional PD was provided to educators during the school year, and PLCs were not organized or facilitated for SEL collaboration among teachers.

With the intention of implementing districtwide required SEL instruction, ASD administrators built time for the initiative into the district's elementary master schedule. During the 2020-2021 school year, district administrators conducted classroom observations at elementary campuses on January 28, 2021, during the SEL instructional block, from 8:00 a.m.-8:30 a.m. No data gathered by ASD administrators during the observations were communicated to the director of SEL and guidance, campus administrators, or teachers. No other elementary campus visits from district administration occurred during the academic year. The MTSS and data assessment meetings were left to each campus to implement, with no system or framework provided by the district to ensure fidelity or process by which to develop best instructional practices. School leaders were only required to submit the following documentation as evidence that MTSS and data assessment meetings occurred: (a) Tier 2 and 3 student rosters for reading and math, (b) sign-in sheets from the meetings that listed the date and team members' roles, and (c) meeting agendas.

Rationale

The annual state assessment data (Texas Education Agency, 2021) showed a need to improve reading literacy among elementary students. ASD results indicate the percentage of students who took the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading assessment in the spring of 2019 and met grade-level reading proficiency were as follows: Grade 3 at 27%, Grade 4 at 28%, and Grade 5 at 44% (Texas Education Agency, 2019). These percentages were 18%, 16%, and 10% below state averages, respectively. Reading assessment data were unavailable in 2020 because the Texas Education Agency waived all STAAR testing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on 2021 STAAR data, the following percentage of students met grade-level reading proficiency: Grade 3 at 18%, Grade 4 at 22%, and Grade 5 at 14% (Texas Education Agency, 2021). For school years 2019 and 2021, the data indicated third grade reading scores decreased 9%. Simultaneously, fourth grade reading scores decreased 6%. In addition, fifth grade reading scores decreased 30%. The low student reading achievements denoted in the data suggest an extensive problem exists in student performance, which depicts continued need for educators to improve instructional practices. ASD leadership stated that:

Taking a whole-child approach to instruction, by meeting our students' physical, social, emotional, and mental well-being needs, before asking them to engage in the rigors of academic work, is well-documented to effectively support at-risk youth in achieving significant growth in all core subjects. (Director of SEL and Guidance, personal communication, August 17, 2020)

ASD demographic reports provide evidence that the district has one of the highest HRM rates in the state (Texas Education Agency, 1997). ASD leaders were unsure how teachers used the *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. At the study district, the application of various SEL strategies led to few changes in low reading achievement scores; therefore, an exploration of how ASD elementary teachers currently incorporate SEL in reading instruction may lead to identifying factors that constrain implementation of best practices that can then be shared with ASD and other education communities. The purpose of this study was to explore how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, as well as their perceptions of how these techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development.

Definition of Terms

Corrective action plan (CAP): According to TEA, the purpose of a corrective action plan is to guide a school district's governing members through analysis of the organization's components that contribute to noncompliance to develop strategies for resolving the noncompliance issues, as monitored by State Performance Plan (SPP) federal requirements, or Differentiated Monitoring Support (DMS) activities (Texas Education Agency, 2020).

Differentiated instruction (DI): Differentiated instruction is defined as a philosophy and praxis of teaching intended to address academic diversity, including student interests and learning profiles, to maximize learning (Gheysens et al., 2020).

Early childhood (EC): Public education classes provided for three- and four-year-old (preschool-aged) children, with a focus on activities designed to promote cognitive and social development (Benson, 2020).

Hierarchy of needs: A theory established by Abraham Maslow that proposes people are motivated by five basic categories of need—physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization—and that each level of need must be met before a person will seek to satisfy the next category in the ascending order of the hierarchy (Crandall et al., 2020).

High residential mobility (HRM): Changing schools for reasons other than grade promotion, within a school year. Also referred to as “churn” or “transience,” residential mobility may be voluntary—such as a student changing schools to participate in a new program—or involuntary, such as being expelled or escaping from bullying (Polat, 2020).

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS): A systemic, continuous improvement framework in which data-based problem-solving and decision making are practiced across all levels of the educational system to support students (Steed & Shapland, 2020).

Professional development (PD): Specialized training, formal education, or advanced learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Svendsen, 2020).

Professional learning community (PLC): A group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students (Admiraal et al., 2021).

Resilience skills: A person's capacity to maintain positive self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to solve problems during adverse conditions. Resilience skills include humor, adaptability, engagement, control, and competence (Sagone et al., 2020).

Rethink Ed curriculum: SEL program that promotes well-being, connectedness, and success by helping students develop emotional regulation and resilience skills, designed for students in Grades K-12 (Harris, 2021).

Social emotional learning (SEL): Instructional practices designed to help students gain self-awareness, self-management, ability to make responsible decisions, social awareness, and relationship skills (Durlak et al., 2016).

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound (S.M.A.R.T.) Goals: Instructional objectives set by educators, to assess student growth and progress toward grade-level appropriate achievement in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies, and determine when additional supports or intervention should be provided (Redding & Searby, 2020).

Whole-child instructional approach (WCIA): Teaching methodology that emphasizes nurturing all areas of children's development, from SEL and cognitive skills to literacy, math, and science understanding. This approach promotes instructional responsiveness to children's understandings, interests, and abilities, while also encouraging their natural curiosity and eagerness for exploration and discovery (Daily et al., 2020).

Zone of proximal development (ZPD): The difference between what a learner can do independently, without help, and what a learner is close to mastering, but can only

achieve with coaching and encouragement from a skilled guide or partner (Kostogriz & Veresov, 2021).

Significance of the Study

Research shows that incorporating SEL curriculum as a component of WCIA can improve outcomes for HRM students (Pinchumphongsang & Sumalee, 2019); however, ASD students' academic performance did not improve (TEA, 2021) despite state-appointed conservatorship and implementation of SEL instruction. A factor contributing to the lack of improvement could have been the ways in which the SEL curriculum was implemented in reading literacy and math instruction. The findings of this study may interest the following stakeholders: district leaders, teachers, and students. This research can provide ASD administrators with data about how teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. District leaders may apply the findings to improve their coaching support of educators to more effectively implement SEL instruction.

Teachers who participated in this study may apply the findings to clarify strengths and weaknesses of their existing SEL instruction and adjust their use of resilience skills and strategies to improve their reading literacy instruction. A better understanding of how SEL influences academic achievement of HRM students may help educators address the learning gaps of this subpopulation. Students may benefit socially, emotionally, and academically when teachers adjust their SEL instruction to improve reading literacy learning experiences. This information has the potential to promote positive social change

by providing educators with insights into which SEL practices can help HRM students improve their reading literacy, as well as changing teacher behaviors and strategies. The outcomes may provide valuable information to school leaders and educators in school districts with HRM enrollments by defining how teachers view their ability to help students develop resiliency skills.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single case study was to explore how K-5 educators implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students and determine teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. At the study district, the application of various SEL strategies did not lead to improvement in reading achievement scores; therefore, an exploration of local SEL instructional practices may help identify gaps between current implementation and best practices, which can be shared with ASD and other education communities.

The research questions guiding this study were used to examine SEL instructional practices of ASD elementary teachers. RQ1 provided information about how teachers use SEL curriculum with their students. RQ2 enabled me to understand teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influence HRM elementary students' reading literacy development.

RQ1: How do Adoniram School District elementary teachers implement *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily social emotional learning instruction to support reading literacy for high residential mobility students?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of Adoniram School District elementary teachers about the influence of *Rethink Ed* curriculum on high residential mobility students' reading literacy development?

Review of the Literature

The literature review begins with a description of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conceptual framework for the study on social and emotional skills (SSES). SSES was the conceptual framework used to analyze and interpret findings for this study (Chernyshenko et al., 2018). The conceptual framework is followed by a review of the literature related to SEL instruction with HRM students to improve reading literacy and is thematically organized into the following topics: educational reform, differentiated instruction, hierarchy of needs, high residential mobility, instructional leadership, reading literacy, resilience skills, social emotional learning, teacher beliefs, teacher collaboration, teacher leadership, and whole-child instructional approach.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in prior research related to SEL instruction and its influence on reading literacy academic progress among HRM students. The models and theories of action for the SSES conceptual framework found in the literature are built on work by John and De Fruyt (2015), who developed the *Framework for the Longitudinal Study of Social and Emotional Skills in Cities*. John and De Fruyt stated that effective SEL increases academic achievement and positive social interactions while decreasing negative outcomes later in life. The OECD expanded on John and De Fruyt's study to

develop a comprehensive set of metrics for cognitive, social, and emotional skill development among children and adolescents. These metrics are organized into six domains: (a) compound skills, such as critical thinking and self-efficacy; (b) engagement with others, including sociability and assertiveness; (c) open-mindedness, which is evaluated by a person's curiosity, tolerance, and creativity; (d) collaboration, including empathy and trust of others; (e) emotional regulation, such as stress resistance and optimism; and (f) task performance, including persistence and self-control. The framework also examined family, school, community, and other extrinsic factors that promote, or hinder, students' development of these skill sets.

Understanding how children acquire social skills, along with the importance of adults teaching and modeling appropriate behaviors and emotional regulation is critical to WCIA. Intangible "soft skills" can be challenging to observe, assess, and measure. The categorization and metrics set developed by the OECD can assist educators and others who work with children in this challenging task. The metrics also provide connections between SEL and students' aptitude for success in life skills needed both in, and outside, the classroom. For HRM students, this is important because the nature of their home and family instability creates hardships that are often traumatic for children. Learning resilience skills to help adapt in difficult situations can help mitigate the negative impact of frequent relocation, transition more easily into new environments, and build confidence to control personal emotions, rather than focusing on what they cannot control.

Compound Skills

Compound skills represent the integration of two or more individual skill sets (John & De Fruyt, 2015). For example, critical thinking involves an ability to evaluate and interpret information combined with independent, unconstrained analysis. Compound skills are relevant to critical work and life outcomes because they combine multiple practical skills into an overall composite (Schleicher, n.d.). This study examined through interview participants' responses to RQ1 and RQ2, as well as lesson plan reviews, whether teachers perceived a connection between SEL skills, such as critical analysis and reading literacy development among HRM elementary students.

Engagement with Others

Engagement with others includes appropriate interactions with people by successfully navigating settings with diverse individuals and groups. This domain is also referred to as extraversion, and includes a person's capacity to communicate effectively, advocate for human rights, and demonstrate assertiveness. Extraversion skills enable individuals to build and maintain social connections, possess the confidence to lead a team, and overcome fear of public speaking (Chernyshenko et al., 2018). These skills are often underdeveloped in HRM students, who tend to avoid engaging with others, due to fear they will relocate and lose any friendships formed (Campbell et al., 2018).

Teacher responses to RQ1 provided insight into their approach to implementing the SEL skill of engagement with others during academic instruction. HRM students often prefer to work alone and several teachers mentioned they were intentional about building opportunities during the lesson to help students engage with their classmates,

and the teacher. Answers to RQ2 demonstrated teachers' prioritization of providing students with opportunities to engage with each other during reading instruction. A review of lesson plans revealed evidence of activities where students practiced engagement with others during reading classes, including "read-aloud" tasks to peers or adults, or discussions about a reading assignment.

Open-mindedness

Open-mindedness refers to an individual's preference for novelty and variety. This may include intellectual stimuli, such as new ideas and theories or novel experiences, which fall under the sub-domain of aesthetic and cultural interests (Schleicher, n.d.). Those with a healthy sense of open-mindedness appreciate diversity, value failure as a learning opportunity, and are inquisitive (Hanin & Van Nieuwenhoven, 2020). Participant responses to RQ1 and RQ2 indicated teachers' open-mindedness toward SEL and WCIA, which revealed valuable information about their attitude toward integrating SEL in core content instruction. Answers to interview questions pertaining to RQ2 demonstrated teacher perceptions of HRM students' development of open-mindedness SEL skills, which includes curiosity and interest in reading to learn new information.

Collaboration

Collaboration shares some characteristics found in the "engagement with others" domains; however, this SEL skill set focuses more on an individual's ability to work well with others to achieve a goal. Collaboration skills include seeking or offering support when needed, constructive conflict resolution, and building positive relationships based

on effective team problem-solving (Schleicher, n.d.). Collaborative individuals are often described as empathetic, trustworthy, and cooperative. Students with these skills find it easy to get along with others, are happy to share, eagerly console people who are upset, and respect decisions made by a group (Taylor et al., 2020). Participants' answers to interview questions related to RQ2 and lesson plan reviews provided evidence of teachers' emphasis on reading activities that encourage students to build collaborative skills by cooperating in group activities and building trust between classmates.

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation skills include stress resistance, optimism, and development of effective strategies to maintain control of one's negative feelings during conflicts (Durlak et al., 2016). Individuals demonstrate emotional regulation by exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation and setting personal goals for which they plan and organize the steps needed to achieve them. In addition, the capacity to delay gratification and muster the courage needed to take initiative are fundamental facets of emotional regulation. A person with well-developed emotional regulation is usually relaxed and happy, which enables him/her to perform well in high-pressure situations and remain in control of feelings related to fear, anxiety, and insecurity (Schleicher, n.d.). Participant responses to RQ2 revealed that teachers believe it is a priority to model and instruct SEL techniques, such as breathing exercises and visualizing, to help students meet lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs so they can ultimately achieve self-efficacy.

This domain is most important to HRM students, as frequently changing schools and/or homes is stressful and frustrating (Cordes et al., 2019). Emotional regulation

strategies can help children develop resilience to the negative outcomes of HRM, which improves student adaptation to new learning environments, and increases their ability to close academic gaps more effectively than those who lack confidence in their capacity to control their own feelings and modulate their anxiety (Marks et al., 2020). Triangulating data collected to answer RQ1 and RQ2 provided valuable information about ASD teachers' effectiveness at helping HRM students build these skills through WCIA. Interview responses and lesson plan review revealed how teachers integrate SEL techniques, including emotional regulation strategies in reading literacy instruction.

Task Performance

Task performance, also referred to as conscientiousness, connects the “soft” skills taught through SEL, with the intangible personal characteristics that students need to be successful in school. These include achievement orientation, responsibility, self-control, and persistence. Students who are successful in task performance reach the final tier of Maslow's hierarchy and take personal pride in mastering activities at a high level (Crandall et al., 2020). Individuals for whom task performance is an area of strength will set high standards for themselves, meet deadlines, maintain focus, and persevere in activities until completion (Schleicher, n.d.). Participants' responses to interview questions addressing RQ2 provided data about teacher perceptions' of how SEL instruction influences HRM students' development of task performance skills.

SSES emphasizes that SEL skills develop and change with age. Educators are encouraged to align skills across different stages of learning (primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary). Additionally, the framework links each domain to specific

individual life outcomes, including school achievement, job performance, and mental well-being with societal outcomes such as civic engagement and public safety. Several factors contribute to HRM students' academic gaps, including different instructional calendars from one school to another, which prevents students who move frequently from learning content in sequence (LeBoeuf & Fantuzzo, 2018). This is detrimental to the early reading literacy process as children need to learn foundational skills and build new content knowledge as each skill set is mastered (Green et al., 2019). According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, students must feel a sense of safety and belonging before they can pursue self-efficacy, which is the hierarchy level in which people can learn new skills (Crandall et al., 2020).

Following John and De Fruyt's study, an in-depth exploration of the connection between personality and SEL was conducted by the OECD in elementary schools around the world (Kankaraš, 2017). Students from various backgrounds, including race and socioeconomic status, demonstrate different characteristics or traits, which are shaped by their respective environments. Teacher participants from schools with a low percentage of minority students, and those who are economically and residentially stable, reported that SEL instruction helped with emotional self-regulation and individual ability to manage their stress levels. Teacher participants from schools with a high percentage of minority and economically disadvantaged students reported that SEL instruction inspired positive academic reform in schools. Therefore, this study explored how teachers implemented SEL in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how these techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development.

Other researchers have expanded on John and De Fruyt's framework and included their research on the overlap between the Big Five Model (Durlak et al., 2016) and development of 21st century skills emphasized in student learning objectives: communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical analysis (Taylor et al., 2020). This overlap demonstrates the connection between effective SEL instruction and improved academic achievement among students. Classroom teachers are considered the most influential factor on students' development of emotional regulation skills needed to succeed academically (Zarra-Nezhad et al., 2019). Exploring teachers' experiences with SEL instruction, and how teachers use SEL curriculum with their students may inform this connection as a process of developing best practices to train teachers on effective implementation of SEL instruction (Svendsen, 2020).

Literature on SSES showed an evolving application of SEL in the instructional setting. First, scholars conducted an international survey assessing 10- and 15-year-old students worldwide. John and De Fruyt (2015) stated that SEL offers resources that ensure diverse students, particularly those impacted by structural inequality, are represented to provide educators with greater understanding of how individual culture plays a part in developing SEL competencies. Chernyshenko et al. (2018) described SEL instruction as the process of teaching individuals to develop awareness of their emotions. Once a person understands their feelings, it is important to find healthy ways to manage those emotions so they can foster a positive sense of self-worth, and interact respectfully and collaboratively with others.

Moreover, the process of implementing SEL curriculum in schools was aligned with core content learning. Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez (2019) stated that incorporating SEL instruction improves academic achievement an average of 11 percentile points, increases pro-social behaviors, positively influences student attitudes toward school, mitigates stress, and reduces depression among children and adolescents. Researchers agree that effective training and support for teachers on the SEL instructional process is critical to students acquiring the resilience skills needed to close learning gaps and achieve academic growth (Sagone et al., 2020). The coaching process to which the research alluded includes first-round instruction from an SEL curriculum expert, and PLCs for ongoing collaborative support between teachers, facilitated by school or district leaders who are experienced implementing SEL instruction in the classroom. This emphasizes the importance of determining how ASD elementary teachers implement *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction.

The plausible connection among the fundamental elements of the SSES framework comprises effective SEL instruction to help students develop emotional regulation strategies, and reinforcing those resilience skills during academic instruction so students learn self-confidence to persevere in challenging situations, such as learning new content and closing academic gaps (Abrahams et al., 2019). The SSES framework relates to the approach and research questions of this study. The SSES framework significantly influences student academic achievement, when used to inform coaching support for teachers to create effective classroom practitioners (John & De Fruyt, 2015). PD and PLCs provide teachers with curriculum familiarity and SEL strategies. Teachers

use PD and PLCs to refine their SEL instruction, which are formed by their pedagogical experiences, teaching style, and the needs of their students (Harris, 2021).

The SSES framework provided the foundation for exploring how ASD elementary teachers use the *Rethink Ed* curriculum. *Rethink Ed* was designed to help students focus on each of the following skill set units, for six weeks at a time: critical analysis, social interactions, creativity, collaboration, emotional regulation, and perseverance. These units closely align to the constructs within the OECD conceptual framework. Evidence of teachers integrating SEL in their reading literacy lessons included use of these focus areas in lesson plan activities, such as incorporating higher-order thinking questions in discussions of assigned readings, to encourage students to build critical analysis skills.

In this study, I explored (a) how teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily SEL instruction, and (b) teachers' perceptions of how these techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. Teacher responses to interview questions referenced how they address each of the six conceptual framework metrics in their reading lessons to reinforce their daily SEL lessons, and provide opportunities for students to practice applying SEL techniques in real-world situations. They also communicated evidence of student acquisition of these skills, directly or indirectly, in their answers to the interview questions related to their perceptions of how these techniques influence HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. In particular, I was interested in teachers' comments about HRM students' development of emotional regulation and task performance skills. These skills directly contribute to

resilience, which is often a lacking trait for students in foster care, or other children who change homes, and schools, frequently (Abrahams et al., 2019).

Review of Current Literature

The scholarly literature begins with higher-level concepts and broad implications, before focusing on specific research studies. The strategy used to gather literature to inform this study comprised examination of books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and publication links on websites, which inform OECD practices. The primary sources of literature were scholarly articles from the Walden University library and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) publications listing. I used several databases to complete the literature review: Child Trends, Children's Defense Fund, Dissertations & Theses @ Walden University, EBSCO ebooks, Education Commission of the States, Education Source, ERIC, Google Books, Kids Count Data Center, National Academies Press, NCES Publications, Open Library, OpenDissertations, PQDT Open, Project Gutenberg, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, ProQuest Ebook Central, PTSDpubs, SAGE Journals, ScholarWorks, Taylor and Francis Online, Thoreau Multi-Database Search, US Department of Health and Human Services, and Walden Library Books. To reach saturation in the literature review, I consulted with a Walden librarian for key terms that included: *academic achievement, academic gaps, high residential mobility, foster care, literacy, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, migratory families, positive behavior intervention support, resilience skills, restorative justice, social emotional learning, student intrapersonal skills, whole-child instructional approach, and zone of proximal*

development. I reviewed the abstracts of the selected literature to narrow the scope and choose literature most applicable to the research questions.

Educational reform. Education reform movements have substantially impacted schools and districts in the United States. SEL instructional practices are seeing a global focus, with countries such as Portugal, Sweden, and England praising the influence of emotional regulation strategies on students' academic achievement (Cristóvão et al., 2017). Worldwide, schools are held responsible by government authorities and local communities to ensure all students achieve grade-level reading proficiency each year, and standardized assessment data are the determining metrics.

In the United States, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) represented the pinnacle of this evolution in school accountability, and led to the development of several education reform movements, including the WCIA (Daily et al., 2020). NCLB established requirements for all public schools receiving federal funds assess students' math and reading proficiency annually in Grades 3-8, and at least once in Grades 10-12 (Green et al., 2020). Schools must report the collective performance of the student population, as well as the achievement rates among different groups of students, including racial minorities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged children.

In 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB as the country's primary education law (Green et al., 2020). One significant aspect of ESSA is its promotion of schools using comprehensive academic and nonacademic measures to inform leadership decisions about school quality. ESSA encourages administrators to use evidence-based measures, such as an intervention or strategy, to improve their school

systems (Herman et al., 2017). ESSA prioritizes a commitment by schools to ensure each child receives an education from early childhood through postsecondary to adequately prepare them for success in life, college, or career (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). ESSA emphasizes less time devoted to standardized testing, and more time incorporating 21st century skills into school performance measures.

While ESSA preserves academic achievement on math and reading assessments as a success metric, it requires that states consider additional criteria, including (a) academic progress of students, (b) English proficiency acquisition, (c) graduation rates, and (d) one or more nonacademic component of School Quality or Student Success (SQSS). SQSS nonacademic indicators may include (a) access to advanced coursework for students, (b) student engagement, (c) school climate and safety, or (d) postsecondary readiness (Portz, 2021). These changes to redefine how school quality and student learning are evaluated were intended to promote WCIA best practices to support academic growth. Furthermore, the additional metrics provided state education agencies and local district leaders with data that support the implementation of evidence-based programs and interventions to support educator and student improvement.

The impact of collaboratively-developed WCIA was further examined by an OECD team of experts from various domains in which SEL is studied and applied (Chernyshenko et al., 2018). Their research culminated in the development of the SSES framework, meant to provide families, educators, and communities with comprehensive SEL tools to foster student growth. The framework identifies factors in students' environment that play a role in their development of SEL skills. It also presents a

conceptual model of the SEL skills that were assessed by the team, the predictive nature of these skills, and how they develop within individuals.

Differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction (DI) is an important component of nonacademic strategies and interventions emphasized by ESSA. Teachers committed to providing DI identify the individual learning needs of students, including their learning styles, interests, cognitive abilities, native language, and achievement data, in order to develop an instructional approach responsive to those needs, to close learning gaps (Whitley et al., 2021). DI emphasizes the academic learning process is not “one size fits all,” and encourages teachers to understand the facets impacting each student’s learning strengths and barriers to content mastery, in order to develop WCIA and make the requisite knowledge and skills universally accessible (Daily et al., 2020). DI takes place when teachers use qualitative and quantitative data about all of their students to create individualized plans for academic success (Gheysens et al., 2020).

SEL is a significant element of DI, as it focuses on the idea that students who learn emotional regulation techniques and resilience skills are better equipped to succeed academically. These students are more likely to persevere in challenging situations, such as learning academic content that is unfamiliar or difficult to master (Kankaraš, 2017). SEL instruction also leads to positive relationships between the teacher and students, giving educators valuable insights into the ways in which their students learn, personal interests, and individual children’s catalysts that may lead to task avoidance (Harris, 2021). Additionally, SEL may be of particular benefit to teachers who are new to the education profession, or making a significant transition of instructional levels (such as

high school to second grade), to identify the zone of proximal development (ZPD) for their students, which will inform their lesson planning to provide the appropriate level of direct instruction, modeling and think-aloud with exemplars, guided practice, and the appropriate feedback to provide learners during independent practice (Kostogriz & Veresov, 2021).

DI research primarily emphasizes the connection between student comprehension and level of active engagement during classroom activities (Whitley et al., 2021). This is important for ZPD, which is concerned with the skills that children are unable to learn independently, and must be taught by an adult in whom they trust, so they can observe, and practice, until mastery. These skills, including SEL strategies for emotional regulation and assertiveness, must be modeled frequently, in a variety of ways, by parents and teachers. DI provided through SEL strategies has shown to improve self-confidence among students described as withdrawn during class discussion, which led to their willingness to answer questions voluntarily during a group lesson, with increasing percentage of correct responses over time (Pulimeno et al., 2020).

Flexible grouping is a key strategy of teachers who consistently implement DI (Gheysens et al., 2020). A class is divided into groups based on current aptitude, and the groups are reviewed and restructured periodically, as their progress monitor data changes (Steed & Shapland, 2020). Students are sometimes assigned with classmates whose achievement levels are comparable to their own, and other times a high-achieving student is intentionally paired with a lower-achieving student (Campbell et al., 2018).

Additionally, teachers may establish cooperative learning groups of students with similar learning styles, to achieve a shared task or project (Gheysens et al., 2020).

Students' ability to retain and apply their learning is significantly affected by the way in which they receive the information (Gebauer et al., 2020). Teachers must consider student learning styles when determining ZPD, and conduct frequent, formative assessments to evaluate which students are mastering or struggling with new content. Instructional strategies should be monitored in response to this data (Kostogriz & Veresov, 2021). Reflective practitioners develop future lesson plan based on trends observed. For example, a teacher may notice students who exhibit strengths as visual learners seem to struggle with learning new information more than those identified as auditory learners. Upon noticing this pattern, the teacher may realize that most direct instruction is provided verbally, and might adjust their teaching to write information on the board as it is being discussed, or give the class a typed note outline of the spoken exemplars to use as a reference when transitioning to guided and independent student practice. These additional strategies may increase the understanding and retention of the information by visual learners.

Hierarchy of needs. Maslow's study of human psychology revealed information beneficial for educators seeking to develop intervention strategies to address SQSS nonacademic indicators. According to Maslow's research, humans require physical needs be met first, followed by feelings of safety, acceptance, and value to a community, before they can engage in meeting higher levels of need for themselves, such as learning new skills and achieving goals, to achieve their full potential and feel completely satisfied

with who they are as individuals (Maslow, 2018). A strong sense of security and feeling safe when engaging with others are pre-requisites to esteem, the level of the needs hierarchy in which individuals strive to accomplish goals, which include learning new information and mastering new skills, in order to reach the pinnacle of the needs hierarchy: self-actualization (Crandall et al., 2020).

Maslow's research focused on basic human needs, as well as the theoretical framework psychology. From his studies, he created the "hierarchy of needs" model. The model suggests social and emotional concepts are basic human needs, which must be met before individuals can learn new skills (Fisher & Crawford, 2020). School-based SEL practices complement the idea that a student's basic needs must be addressed prior to attempting student engagement with academic curriculum and content (Anderson, 2021). As teachers connect with students on lower levels of the needs hierarchy, higher growth needs such as self-actualization or reaching academic goals are attainable (Fisher & Crawford, 2020).

In 2018 and 2019, Smurr and Cano (2021) developed an SEL curriculum based on Maslow's hierarchy and research. The curriculum emphasized social emotional competencies within classroom curriculum and content, which research evidence supported as an instructional approach to improve student engagement within the classroom (Smurr & Cano, 2021). Students are more engaged with content to which they have an emotional connection (Fisher & Crawford, 2020), and studies revealed that students who participated in SEL content experienced higher academic success rates than those who did not receive SEL instruction. According to Haymovitz et al. (2018), SEL

interventions that focused on meeting student needs for emotional regulation strategies, and appropriate interactions with peers and adults, before addressing academic instruction, resulted in gains of 11-17 points, on a scale of 100, in test scores among students observed.

High residential mobility. HRM students experience learning gaps as a result of changing schools two or more times within a single academic year, compared to students who do not change schools (Welsh, 2017). According to Polat (2020), HRM students are 30% less likely to read on, or above, grade level than non-HRM peers. In 2017 and 2018, student achievement on state and national reading assessments declined, and in 2019, only one out of every five HRM students performed satisfactorily on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), or state-mandated equivalent assessment (Terry, 2021). Cumulative school mobility among early childhood grades (PK-3) resulted in reading achievement one, or more, years below grade level by the end of third grade (LeBoeuf & Fantuzzo, 2018).

HRM negatively affects students who relocate two or more times within a single academic year, as well as students who are left behind by the child when he/she moves to another school (Degroote et al., 2019). The researchers investigated the effects of mobility rates and school dropout percentages among the stable school population in 25 schools in Belgium. The findings suggested that higher levels of student mobility cause lower levels of behavior engagement from non-mobile students. This engagement discrepancy often leads to more discipline referrals, as well as less academic progress among HRM and non-mobile students. This multi-level analysis added insight to my

study by showing that a focus on supporting HRM students may bring about positive social change and promote a school culture that also benefits non-mobile students.

Several factors affect student achievement, including residential mobility (Hansson & Gustafsson, 2018). The authors studied the effects of school mobility in Sweden for students who lived at home with their family, compared to those in out-of-home care (OHC). In Sweden, the term “out-of-home” care refers to children residing in a location other than their permanent home, including foster care and long-term in-patient treatment programs. Mobility data, student performance on a cognitive ability test, and student grades were examined. Most mobile students who changed schools once within an academic year scored 5% lower on the test, and on report cards, compared to peers who did not. However, the academic achievement gap doubled if students changed schools a second time. This information was valuable to my research because it provided supporting evidence that the findings of my study may have applications in academic settings globally.

In 2018, more than 675,000 U.S. children were removed from their homes as a result of a confirmed report involving neglect or abuse, typically from the child’s caregiver, placing them in an HRM setting indefinitely (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020). The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2020), a division of U.S. Health and Human Services, publishes annual reports and estimates trends among children and youth in foster care over time, revealing the number of students in out-of-home placement, and root causes, such as abuse or neglect, which are often early indicators of behavioral and emotional disturbances. The data for this report were

collected in all 50 states between 2008-2018. During that time, the number of school-age children who spent any amount of time in foster care more than quadrupled. Students who change schools two, or more, times within an academic year, are four times more likely to be at least one year behind their grade-level peers in reading achievement. The average child in foster care changes homes, and schools, four times within an academic year. The information contained in the report was valuable to my study because it shows the need to consider HRM students' unique needs is increasing, due to the rising number of mobile students.

Since 2009, Colorado state legislation has prioritized dropout prevention, student engagement, and high school graduation rates (Colorado Department of Education, 2016). An office was established and dedicated to monitoring progress in these areas. The state policy report from the Colorado Department of Education: Division of Innovation, Choice and Engagement (2016) summarized research of strategies to increase student engagement and reduce student dropout rates. The report revealed that 35.2% of children who drop out of school without graduating are HRM students. This publication provided strategies for increasing student engagement among HRM students that added insight to my study and assisted me in developing research questions for my interviews.

Prior empirical research on the consequences for student performance among HRM students is largely correlational, which offers minimal insight into the impacts of mobility on academic achievement (Cordes et al., 2019). The authors used longitudinal data to estimate the effects of residential mobility on the academic performance of public school students in New York City. The study employed student fixed effects and

instrumental variables approaches to explore the influence of changes in housing on HRM students' lower scholastic achievement, compared to non-mobile school peers. Authors found that, in general, short-distance moves had a positive impact on students' academic growth, which were often associated in parents' increased income and the ability to move into a more affluent area, where public education quality is higher. However, long-distance moves were usually accompanied with loss of income, and resulted in negative academic effects for students. This study was relevant to my study because it provided supporting evidence of the problem I addressed in my research.

The implications of HRM on elementary students include increased likelihood of low academic achievement, higher rates of absenteeism and discipline infractions, as well as greater risk of grade retention and dropping out of high school early (Clayton, 2018). The author conducted a quantitative ex post facto study to examine the cognitive and behavioral implications of mobility on a group of fifth-grade students. A non-experimental research design was used to collect and analyze data from 2,195 students to answer questions guiding the study. According to the results, students who changed school placement once within a school year typically scored 20% lower on state assessments, missed school twice as often, and were 25% more likely to commit discipline infractions than peers who did not change schools. This study was valuable to my research because I focused on teacher perspectives' of how SEL influences HRM elementary students' reading literacy development.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) applies to all children; however, due to their HRM rate, students in foster care are vulnerable to academic stagnation or

regression, rather than achieving annual grade-level progress (Clemens et al., 2018). The study was conducted to examine the effects of school stability on academic growth trajectories of 7,674 students from the same state, who spent any length of time in foster care, from Grades 4-10. Researchers focused on scholastic achievement of children who were in foster care during their elementary and/or secondary education. Findings showed that school mobility had a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement, and they required "catch-up" interventions each time they transitioned to a new campus. The academic gaps increased exponentially with each subsequent school change within the same year. Children in foster care placement comprise more than half of the HRM student population in ASD. Understanding the connection between school movement and academic performance reinforces justification for conducting my study in this district.

LeBoeuf and Fantuzzo (2018) conducted a study to assess the relationship between school mobility and early reading achievement. A cohort of students in Grades 1-3 was selected in a large urban district, whose longitudinal administrative school records were examined. Findings indicated that mobile students had lower reading achievement scores at the end of each grade, compared to peers who remained at the same school, and the negative effect on reading achievement worsened by the time the students reached third grade. The study was relevant to my work, which focused on the academic achievement of HRM students among elementary students, particularly in reading literacy.

Welsh (2017) conducted a literature review on student mobility for Grades K-12 in the U.S. The review found a consistent trend of higher mobility rates in urban school

districts, as well as among low-income and minority students. In most instances of changing schools within an academic year, mobility resulted in a negative effect on students' academic achievement. Since mobility occurs more frequently in urban school districts, among low-income and minority students, this negative effect is compounded by the reality that urban, low-income, minority students are already often at-risk of not graduating due to common life factors among these subpopulations. The summary supported my study by offering evidence from multiple data sources that failure to address cognitive needs of HRM students may compound poor educational outcomes for this subpopulation.

Instructional leadership. Instructional leadership involves training, guiding, and supporting teachers to become reflective practitioners who are committed to lifelong learning, and respond appropriately to the unique social and emotional needs of their students (Yalçinkaya et al., 2021). Participative leadership standards are based on the leader offering guidance to group members, while participating as a member of the group and seeking input of other group members. Research shows that participative leadership facilitates higher-quality contributions made by group members, compared to groups directed by an autocratic or delegative leader (Redding & Searby, 2020).

The participative leader is defined as one who invites group members to provide input and participate in decision-making, while reserving the final say in most matters of dispute (Yalçinkaya et al., 2021). Effective educational participative leaders also combine elements of transformational leadership when they recognize a needed change within the school system, and motivate the group to work toward making that change (Kilinç et al.,

2020). Democratic-transformational leaders are suitable for the conceptual model of this research to bring change by training and coaching teachers to effectively implement SEL instruction, which may positively influence HRM students' academic achievement through the development of resilience skills.

Leadership is a key factor in school culture and expectations for effective use of SEL as a WCIA (Herman et al., 2017). Yalçinkaya et al. (2021) determined that school and district leadership support, or restrict, teachers' ability to emphasize SEL instruction in the classroom. The authors concluded that variables perceived by teachers as leadership support include 16-24 hours of introductory PD when adopting new curriculum, expert coaching support contacts, and ongoing PLCs to collaborate with peers and refine instructional best practices. The literature indicated that campus leaders are the primary drivers to develop and maintain effective implementation of SEL instruction in schools (Harris, 2021).

Strong leaders of collaborative learning environments directly impact the successful adoption of a new instructional model, by facilitating input of participants, cooperative decision-making, implementing staff accountability protocols, and coaching initiative-resistant teachers to establish buy-in (Herman et al., 2017). According to Gouédard et al. (2020), the effectiveness of implementing any school program with fidelity is dependent on trust between faculty and campus leadership.

Moreover, leaders must balance learning needs of the instructional group, while targeting opportunities responsive to individualized aptitude and staff roles (Smith, 2021). School districts with transformative campus leaders are more likely to achieve

significant academic gains with students who receive SEL instruction than those with compliance-driven, autocratic leaders (Harris, 2021). Participative leaders instill self-confidence in their teachers by encouraging them to self-select DI best practices that convey learning objectives in the manner that will be best received by their students (Smith, 2021). This approach communicates leadership trust in their faculty as practitioners, which has proven successful at turning around low-performing schools (Rester, 2020).

In order to maximize the potential academic gains, administrators should collaboratively set S.M.A.R.T. goals for student learning with teachers, and hold them accountable to reach the agreed-upon measures (Redding & Searby, 2020). According to Redding and Searby (2020), accountability should not be approached punitively; rather, leaders and teachers should meet regularly to discuss progress toward goals, and collaboratively brainstorm intervention approaches for students not making adequate academic growth, so that goal achievement is clearly a team effort. School leaders should also foster a work environment in which instructional risk-taking is encouraged, and mistakes are treated as opportunities for teachers to learn and grow, rather than face disciplinary action for failure to produce desired outcomes. It is important for campus and district administration to publicly celebrate success, which raises awareness of positive transformation, and improves school culture (Rester, 2020).

PLCs are most beneficial in schools focused on closing academic gaps through whole-child instruction and reflective instructional practices that encourage teachers to monitor student progress. The student progress data provide educators with information

needed to help them adjust teaching methods to reinforce previously-covered topics in which learners do not yet demonstrate mastery (Reimers, 2020). Reimers stated that leaders who actively support PLCs extend valuable collaborative learning opportunities for teachers to exchange meaningful ideas and develop SEL instructional best practices. These findings supported the significance of this study to explore how teachers implemented SEL in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how these techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development.

Reading literacy. According to Goldhaber et al. (2020), a student's reading proficiency level by the end of fourth grade is the greatest predictor of whether the child will graduate from high school. The study examined data from measures of reading achievement in Grades 3 and 4 among elementary schools in Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Washington to evaluate how accurately these early measures predicted students' secondary school outcomes. Researchers tested the extent to which specific demographic data sets sacrificed forecast accuracy, and the degree to which use of parameter estimates developed from data in one state reduced prediction accuracy in other states. The authors compared Grade 8 reading test scores, high school course grades, and graduation rates to elementary reading assessment results.

Resilience skills. The development of resilience skills is a key factor in a student's ability to close learning gaps following one, or more, mid-year school transitions (Marks et al., 2020). Additionally, Kong (2020) found that students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds often struggle to develop resilience skills. Kong analyzed data collected from 7,000 students, their caregivers, and their teachers, to

identify risk and protective factors that are predictive of low SES learners' academic achievement, and determine whether those factors were unique to low SES students, when compared with the data of high SES students. The study findings suggested that low SES and high SES students share similar academic goals, attention spans, and community values; however, the strength of protective factors that lead to academic achievement was greater among high SES students. Kong (2020) stated that the exception to the trend of weaker protective factors among low SES students was evidence of close relationships between female students and adults, which promoted academic resilience exclusively among that subpopulation. This information contributed to my study because 78% of HRM students are economically disadvantaged.

Students who do not develop a sense of belonging at school may fail to achieve their learning potential, and their intellectual performance may be negatively impacted (Pendergast et al., 2018). The authors conducted a study that explored the use of engagement strategies with young adolescents to help those students develop a sense of belonging, in order to form a focused literature base. The study conducted focus groups of 25 students, 25 teachers, and 39 school leaders. Social emotional engagement strategies for marginalized students in an Australian educational jurisdiction were found to be effective at helping students develop a sense of belonging at school, which led to improved academic achievement. The data were valuable to my study because they provided evidence that when at-risk learners, including HRM students, develop a sense of belonging at school, they build resilience skills. Those resilience skills may provide immunity against their

vulnerability to disengagement from learning, and reduce the likelihood they will drop out of school without earning a diploma.

Sense of belonging. Zarra-Nezhad et al. (2019) examined how children's peer acceptance and internalizing problem behavior development was connected to adult affection they experienced. The study followed 608 children from first through sixth grade. Results showed that peer acceptance was associated with the development of internalizing problems: the higher the peer acceptance, the bigger the decrease, and vice versa, in the level of internalizing problems across time. However, adult affection from a trusted caretaker (such as a parent or teacher) provided a buffer against this impact of low peer acceptance. This article was important to my research, because it provided evidence that children with adults in their life who offer supportive caregiving and emotional sensitivity are better able to cope with low peer acceptance, which is a common problem for HRM students who enter a new school mid-year, after most friendships are formed.

Korpershoek et al. (2019) examined the connection between students' sense of belonging in school to various educational outcomes, including academic performance, using 82 peer-reviewed correlational studies published over 18 years. The meta-analysis revealed positive relationships in the areas of scholastic achievement, motivation, behavior, and social-emotional outcomes when students indicated a sense of belonging at school. The data demonstrate evidence of academic improvement among HRM students who develop a sense of belonging within their school community, which is a focus of SEL instruction.

Social emotional learning (SEL). The “Longitudinal Study of Social and Emotional Skills in Cities,” was a research project conducted in 2015 by Oliver P. John, from the University of California, and Filip De Fruyt, from the University of Ghent, for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). One result of the longitudinal study was the development of EC-12 SEL curriculum for use by teachers in instructional settings, to strengthen students’ ability to work with others, manage emotions, and achieve goals (John & De Fruyt, 2015). ASD requires implementation of *Rethink Ed* curriculum during the daily SEL period and core content instruction, as part of its school reform efforts.

Development of SEL skills in early childhood, and continued into adolescence, are shown to contribute to positive incomes in adulthood. As these skills are intangible, assessing them presents methodological, as well as conceptual, obstacles. John and De Fruyt (2015) reviewed previously-developed classification of SEL skills and assessment methodologies. The authors proposed improvements on these techniques, which overlap with emotional intelligence constructs and the Big Five personality dimensions (John & De Fruyt, 2015). The authors developed an integrative set of social and emotional skill domains, and illustrated examples of approaches by which assessments could be improved.

An extensive literature review of prior SEL assessment approaches and frameworks were incorporated from various fields of science, civics, and education (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019). The authors stated that SEL skills help people adjust to circumstances and changes to their environment. When cultivated within a society, the

result is a respectful and cooperative community of citizens who assume personal responsibility for their choices, and work toward shared goals, such as economic growth, literacy, and tolerance. Childhood is the most critical time to develop these skills, when they are most significantly shaped by interactions with peers and adults at home, as well as in school and other social settings, such as corporate worship or participation in athletic teams.

Emotional and behavioral problems are strongly connected to negative academic outcomes, and contribute to a growing number of students qualifying for special education services (Campbell et al., 2018). Authors used seven systematic reviews and five meta-analyses, covering studies conducted from 1968 to 2012, which focused on the connection between behavioral and emotional interventions and academic outcomes among special education students diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disorders. Authors coded the systematic reviews and meta-analyses, which focused on the academic growth in reading, writing, math, and content areas among on 3,366 students in Grades K-12. The research showed that SEL skills implemented with these students resulted in fewer discipline referrals, improved academic achievement, and equipped students to interact more appropriately with children and adults in social settings. The results related to this study because 55% of HRM students in foster care are diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disorders, compared to 7.9% of students who experience residential stability and consistency (Welsh, 2017).

Research demonstrates that SEL promotes healthy student development, and positive academic achievement (Cristóvão et al., 2017). However, the positive outcomes have not been studied extensively in countries other than the U.S. to determine whether it

is a universal best practice for all classrooms. The authors conducted a bibliometric study on the role of SEL in student development and academic achievement in Portugal. The review sought to identify how many schools used SEL programs, and whether any relationship between SEL and academic achievement existed. Researchers selected five public school districts, and the SEL programs used by schools in those districts to observe and collect data. The authors concluded that SEL appeared to have a positive effect on academic success; however, the extent of the positive effect on academic success varied by district, which was likely affected by other factors, such as mean family income, educators' years of teaching experience, fidelity with which SEL programs were implemented, etc. This study identified the need for teacher support and training, which correlates with my research, knowing that SEL instruction is a learned skill set, and should be unique to the needs of students in a particular educational setting.

Students who received SEL interventions demonstrated better academic performance, social skills, and resistance to poor choices (such as drug use) than peers who did not participate in social emotional learning (Blad, 2017). These effects were still evident 3.75 years after the interventions were provided. CASEL conducted meta-analysis research to review results of studies from 82 school-based, SEL interventions, including programs in 38 countries outside the United States (Borowski, 2019). The studies included 97,406 students from kindergarten through high school, and the interventions were administered to all students within the school. Students who completed SEL interventions experienced positive growth in the areas of academic

performance, social skills, and were more successful at avoiding negative behaviors, such as drug use, compared to those who did not participate in SEL.

Teacher Beliefs. Teachers' beliefs, values, and prior experiences affect the ways that teachers interpret and instruct SEL curriculum (Pinchumphongsang & Sumalee, 2019). Pustika (2020) explored teachers' beliefs about SEL instruction. The research indicated that teachers who reported childhood experiences of economic hardship, residential mobility, and uninvolved parents were more likely to view SEL as essential to academic progress, compared to teachers who reported childhood affluence, residential stability, and high levels of family support at home. Additionally, those who entered the teaching profession before 1988, and were unsure what the phrase "whole-child instructional approach" meant, were unlikely to consider SEL instruction a valuable use of time during the school day. In contrast, teachers who began teaching after 2011, and accurately described WCIA as a teaching methodology that emphasizes nurturing all areas of children's development, and promotes responsiveness to children's unique needs, understandings, interests, and abilities (Pustika, 2020), typically considered SEL instruction of equal importance to math and reading lessons.

A study conducted by Harris (2021) investigated the connection between teachers' personal values and prior experiences to their perceptions of SEL instruction. The research findings showed that many teachers who indicated their personal value system was largely shaped by a military background (prior enlistment, raised near a military base, or child of parents who served in the military) did not consider SEL a meaningful part of the instructional day. Teachers who indicated their personal value

system was influenced by a strong religious background, involvement in social work, or volunteerism and charity organizations, were most likely to consider SEL instruction essential to students' academic success (Harris, 2021). Teachers who spent time in foster care placement as children, reported being childhood victims of abuse, or received free breakfast and lunch in school due to their family's economic status were more likely to consider SEL instruction a valuable classroom activity than those who did not experience the same factors during their childhood (Anyon et al., 2016). Teachers' perceptions have the greatest potential influence on SEL instruction and its effectiveness (Pustika, 2020).

Teacher collaboration. One variable affecting success of SEL instruction is the consistency of PLC meetings (Joram et al., 2020). A study conducted by Burić and Moè (2020) compared student academic progress made by schools that introduced SEL curriculum with routine PLCs to monitor and adjust the implementation process as warranted, to schools that did not facilitate routine PLCs. The results indicated students performed higher on standardized assessments in schools where teachers are given the opportunity to share ideas, and work together to navigate new SEL instruction, compared with those that implemented SEL curriculum independently, without the support of a PLC (Burić & Moè, 2020).

Teacher learning is fundamental to collaboration. Current literature suggests that many teachers lack familiarity with SEL practices necessary to help students develop resilience skills, which may aid them in closing academic gaps (Pustika, 2020). Research supports PLCs as an effective system to help teachers become increasingly comfortable with delivering SEL instruction (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019).

Introductory PD, ongoing PLCs, and accessible coaching support from SEL experts are the collaborative phases that contribute most to teacher perceptions of adequate preparation and self-confidence to implement new curriculum (Durlak et al., 2016). The meaningful exchange of ideas through dialogue is key to promoting teacher familiarity with SEL strategies and comfort level implementing them into their daily instruction to help students develop resilience skills (Pinchumphongsang & Sumalee, 2019). The study conducted by Reimers (2020) revealed that communication between teachers about SEL instruction leads to greater self-efficacy among faculty, and higher frequency of educators using resilience skill acquisition strategies in their core content instruction. For this reason, my study focused on how teachers implemented SEL in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how these techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development.

Teacher Leadership. Teacher leadership often necessitates a frequent shift between the roles of classroom educator and instructional coach (Svendsen, 2020). This can pose challenges for teachers serving in this capacity, which include balancing the duties of two separate roles in the same timeframe available to someone completing only one position, and faculty who resist corrective feedback from a peer (Buchanan et al., 2020). Educational transformative leadership encompasses three elements: working within school systems; working with people; and working to establish positive social change (Whitley et al., 2021). According to Reimers (2020), working within school systems includes understanding instructional programs, operating policies, and stakeholders, as well as knowing how these components interact and how they are

different from each other. Working with people is most successful when using a participative leadership approach and creating buy-in from stakeholders to believe they can directly impact change within their school community. Working to establish positive social change involves the implementation of strategic planning, evaluating student progress, and collaboratively adjusting instructional plans in response to student needs that foster academic improvement (Whitley et al., 2021).

Teacher leaders play an active role in their school community, advocating for continuous improvement among adults to impact positive student outcomes (Burić & Moè, 2020). They support the children in their classrooms, and indirectly impact other learners by mentoring new teachers and advising colleagues (Buchanan et al., 2020). Their leadership role is unique from that of a school or district administrator, because they can offer coaching based on their own current classroom teaching situations, rather than past experiences, which may be more relevant and helpful to fellow teachers (Reimers, 2020). Their support is also valuable to campus leaders, who often struggle to observe classes and offer meaningful feedback as frequently as desired, due to interruptions caused by student discipline, parent conferences, maintaining required federal and state compliance documentation, and mandatory district meetings (Kilinç et al., 2020).

Research indicated that teachers who consider themselves leaders within their school communities possess strong interpersonal skills, proactively seek well-informed instructional best practices to share with supervisors and colleagues, and pursue lifelong learning opportunities (Burić & Moè, 2020). They value external contributions to

educational processes, and search for relevant PD that may promote positive social change (Svendsen, 2020). Attributes of an effective teacher leader include adaptability, growth mindset, self-efficacy, creativity, and the ability to respond appropriately to the needs of others so they can build rapport with students, parents, and faculty (Whitley et al., 2021). ESSA educational reform necessitated teachers become increasingly familiar with SEL practices to improve performance in evidence-based, nonacademic measures (Kautz et al., 2014).

Whole-child Instructional Approach (WCIA). Educational reform brought about by ESSA required school systems to examine students' academic achievement within expanded parameters of non-academic context. Maslow's theory and hierarchy of needs established foundational groundwork for the concept that children's ability to meet various physical, emotional, and social interaction needs affect their academic success (Daily et al., 2020). A study conducted by Brandeis University (2020) revealed that children's opportunities to have these needs met are affected by geography, and that minority students who live in urban areas experience the lowest rate of socioeconomic stability and life expectancy. School district data from these areas also reflects academic achievement among third-grade students is among the bottom 10% of scores nationwide, and less than 50% of children in these neighborhoods graduate on time (Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2020).

In order to implement WCIA, school systems must integrate student-focused initiatives that address restorative practices and cultural responsiveness through an equity-based lens (Lo, 2020). The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social,

Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) released a comprehensive report, which gathered input from scientists, educators, policymakers, students, and parent organizations. The Commission also published recommendations for schools to effectively implement whole-child instruction, based on the report findings. These recommendations focused on teaching and learning that complements academic rigor with development of social and emotional competencies, which students need for success in school, careers, and other situational contexts of life.

Implications

I collected relevant information about how teachers implemented SEL in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how these techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. The data collection and analysis revealed barriers to teachers effectively using SEL instruction, or reinforcing SEL strategies during core content instruction to directly impact elementary reading literacy development. Recognizing potential gaps between elementary teachers' implementation of SEL instruction, and their perceptions of how these techniques influence HRM students' reading literacy development may provide insight that leads to developing more effective training and support. The improved training and support resources may help teachers increase their SEL strategies proficiency and aptitude at reinforcing resilience skills during reading instruction. The findings of this research may inform district leaders, school administrators, and teacher leaders about SEL instructional best practices and coaching support needed by classroom instructors to increase the academic impact of SEL strategies.

This study may affect students' academic proficiency if elementary teachers implement SEL resilience skills during their reading instruction. The findings could improve current students' reading literacy by providing faculty with SEL instructional best practices and support resources to increase their familiarity with using emotional regulation strategies during reading instruction. Answers to the research questions provide leaders and educators with insight regarding teachers' perceptions of how SEL influences HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. I shared the results of this study with participants and stakeholders, by providing a summary of the findings.

The project deliverable was informed by the findings of the research. The deliverable included elements of ongoing professional development and coaching feedback for teacher leaders and campus administrators. These elements were intended to establish consistent best practices that effectively reach all K-5 HRM students, and help them develop SEL strategies, including resilience skills, to assist in reading literacy growth. These skills may help close academic gaps so children who change schools frequently can learn to read age-appropriate texts with fluency and comprehension.

Summary

The problem focus is that despite providing elementary teachers with *Rethink Ed* curriculum, a trauma-informed SEL program, and designating time in the master schedule for SEL lessons as part of WCIA to improve reading literacy, ASD leaders were unsure how K-5 educators implemented the *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and their perceptions of how it influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. A review of the literature indicated that, although evidence exists to connect SEL instruction with closing

academic gaps and improving student achievement on reading assessments, not all teachers use SEL emotional regulation strategies and resilience skills effectively to help students persist through academic challenges. The relationship between SEL instruction and reading literacy development warrants additional attention from education practitioners and researchers. Student achievement data reported by the district and state suggested the problem occurs beyond the local environment. Improved training and support for teachers adopting SEL initiatives, through PD, PLCs, and expert coaching, has far-reaching implications for students to become strong readers and develop 21st century skills necessary to succeed after school.

A qualitative exploratory single case study was used to explore how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. Areas of focus for this study included what PD district and campus leaders provided teachers for implementing *Rethink Ed* curriculum, the PLC process for teachers to collaborate on implementing SEL instruction, and the expert coaching support available to teachers throughout the adoption year. The investigation comprised interviews with ASD elementary teachers to understand how they implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with SEL instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. Additionally, their lesson plans were analyzed to gather information about how they implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and the ways in which they address the six objectives outlined in the OECD conceptual framework. This study could enhance the

actions of teachers implementing SEL in their reading lesson plans by examining how teachers use SEL strategies in their daily reading instruction. Section 2 introduces the case study, the participants, and the instruments used to collect data.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

Adoniram School District (ASD) leaders were unsure how teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of social emotional learning (SEL) techniques influenced high residential mobility (HRM) students' reading literacy development. Hence, this qualitative exploratory single case study explored how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and how they perceived SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. I pursued a deeper understanding of teachers' use of SEL skills in their daily reading instruction by documenting how ASD elementary teachers demonstrated use of SEL strategies in lesson planning for reading literacy instruction.

A quantitative study was not appropriate to investigate the problem focus for multiple reasons. Given the problem and research questions, the relevant data did not focus on mathematically measurable relationships. Additionally, the data sought relating to human perceptions and experiences were not numerical (Breen et al., 2014). It is worth noting that certain effects of SEL, such as changes in student academic performance after acquiring resilience skills, do yield quantitative data. However, the effectiveness of strategies for teaching emotional regulation and appropriate social interactions should not be assessed by developing and testing a calculable hypothesis. Social and emotional skills are considered "intangible," and are measured through individuals' self-discernment, and their perceptions of how comfortably they interact with others (Hanin & Van Nieuwenhoven, 2020). The design of the research questions for this study meant a

qualitative research method was appropriate for gathering the desired data by exploring experiences to which participants ascribed significance (Post et al., 2020). Exploratory studies enable a researcher to gain knowledge about distinct phenomena characterized by a lack of detailed preliminary research, especially formulated hypotheses that can be tested, and/or by a specific research environment that limits the choice of methodology (Yazan, 2015). Qualitative research seeks to provide insight about how experiences affect people in a natural setting, rather than focus on the cause(s) of those experiences (Mardis et al., 2014).

According to Yin (2017), a qualitative exploratory single case study is the appropriate methodology when the study focus addresses current situations and seeks to answer questions that begin with *how*. The research questions, which determined the appropriate design, scope, and methodology, addressed (a) how K-5 educators in ASD implemented SEL in their daily reading literacy instruction, and (b) teachers' perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. To answer the research questions, detailed in-depth data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, and collection of lesson plans for analysis. This qualitative approach was based on the SSES conceptual framework that provided direction for the study (Chernyshenko et al., 2018). Themes were established during the interview process based on participant responses to the research questions and related terms included in lesson plan submissions (Bernard, 2013).

Qualitative studies may be classified as narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or case study (Stake, 2010). Each approach implements a specific

research procedure, and each type of research presents its own challenges. In considering the approach that was most appropriate to answer the research questions for this study, I compared each research type to my objective. The criteria associated with each type of study helped me determine the appropriate course of action.

A narrative study reports on the life of a single individual (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher may choose one or more individuals and seeks to tell the stories of their individual experiences. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), narrative research is rooted in the humanities, including anthropology and sociology. A narrative study was not appropriate for my research because I needed a larger perspective than individual accounts. It is important to have a large enough study group to establish a measurable trend or pattern.

Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of an experience (Stake, 2010). A phenomenological researcher collects data from individuals who shared a common event and gathers their descriptions of the phenomenon through which they lived. Phenomenology was not appropriate for my research because of my focus on students' SEL development and teacher perceptions of the connection between the SEL skills and HRM students' reading literacy progress. A phenomenological study would be appropriate if I sought knowledge about HRM students' experiences of changing homes and schools frequently, and their perceptions of how mobility has affected them academically or cognitively.

Creswell and Poth (2016) stated that grounded theory research is designed to use data from the field to develop a theory. To achieve this outcome, a researcher will study a

group that shares the same culture. Similar to a narrative study, grounded theory is rooted in anthropology and sociology. A grounded theory study was not appropriate for my research because I was not seeking to develop a theory. I also wanted to study perceived connections in education between SEL and academic achievement, which may transcend culture groups, so the findings could be useful in schools representing various demographic groups and subpopulations.

Ethnography research is best suited for a study involving a particular people or culture group, or set of groups (Côté-Boileau et al., 2020). An ethnographic study collects data from the group(s) over a period of time regarding a particular phenomenon. For this study, ethnography was not appropriate because my research did not focus on a group of people or cultures, and I did not fully embed myself within the locale where I conducted my research.

Case study allows the researcher to develop in-depth description and analysis of one or more cases (Stake, 2010). The researcher examines an event, program, or activity involving one or more individuals. This was the most appropriate form of qualitative research for my study because I wanted to explore how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. I wanted to explore possible connections between students' social-emotional development and academic growth in reading literacy through the findings of my study of ASD teachers' implementation of SEL.

Interview data addressed RQ1 and RQ2 because teachers were asked what SEL practices they implement with HRM students; and how they implement SEL into their reading literacy instruction. The lesson plans provided additional insight into RQ1 and RQ2 by documenting the SEL practices teachers implemented with HRM students during reading literacy instruction and provided data for triangulation of the findings to ensure accuracy. Utilizing the exploratory case study approach, I analyzed interview data with an open coding process, which allowed me to focus on data from individual educators.

An exploratory single case study seeks to explain the rationale of phenomena (DeCarlo, 2018). An explanatory study was inappropriate for this methodology because I did not seek to answer *why* questions. Additionally, the study of this focus was on how teachers' perceptions of the influenced SEL techniques have on reading literacy instruction informs their use of SEL in daily reading lessons. I did not focus on the cause(s) of those experiences and perceptions. Explanatory research sought to gain understanding of the participants' experiences and the emotional impact of these experiences on them as professionals (Bernard, 2013).

A descriptive approach depends on a selected topic the researcher attempts to define through the collection of evidence (DeCarlo, 2018). Descriptive research was not appropriate to this study, which focused on understanding human perceptions and reactions to a particular phenomenon, rather than define a topic in education research. Additionally, data for a descriptive study is often gathered through a poll or questionnaire, which I did not select for my data collection method, in order to avoid participant non-responses or responses that were difficult to understand without the

ability to ask follow-up questions to gain clarification (Manhas & Oberle, 2015). My study required open-ended data collection, which facilitated the gathering of additional information as needed; therefore, a descriptive case study was not appropriate.

Multiple qualitative research designs exist, and each are well-suited to specific desired outcomes. I selected a qualitative exploratory case study design because I conducted new research through an investigation of teachers' perceptions of the influence of SEL in reading literacy development. Qualitative exploratory single case studies enable a researcher to investigate and describe occurrences over a period within the natural environment of the participants (Yazan, 2015). An exploratory case study research design offers the ability to understand a problem in research by investigating *how* questions (Lewis, 2015).

For this study, the interview procedures facilitated investigation of the experiences and perceptions of the participants and sought in-depth, detailed participant responses to semi-structured interview questions. The transcripts from these interviews yielded answers to RQ1. Collecting and analyzing lesson plans provided insight on how teachers integrate SEL into their daily reading instruction, which answered RQ2. A qualitative exploratory single case study design was most appropriate for this doctoral research, based on the research questions developed.

Participants

Criteria for Participant Selection

Participants selected for this study were K-5 teachers in ASD. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select 15 participants who use the *Rethink Ed* curriculum,

and teach elementary reading lessons daily (Spaulding, 2013). The 15 teachers were selected from different grade levels and different elementary campuses within the district. I sought participants with varying years of experience as a teacher, and those with experience teaching grade levels other than elementary students. Choosing participants with these differing backgrounds and attributes resulted in data from multiple perspectives, further validating the results of the study. Interview data revealed that teachers' implementation of *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and perceptions of how SEL instruction influences HRM students' reading literacy development, varied across the district. Teachers who did not use *Rethink Ed* curriculum, or did not teach reading, were not selected for this study.

I solicited teachers to participate through email invitations. The criteria for selecting participants included (a) individuals who hold a valid intern or standard teaching license from the Texas State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) with a generalist, self-contained, special education, English as a Second Language (ESL)/bilingual, or core subjects endorsement in Grades EC-6, 4-8, or EC-12; (b) teachers who were employed as exempt, full-time teachers in ASD and were not completing a growth or intervention plan at the time of the interview; and (c) taught a minimum of 90 minutes of reading classes each daily, either as a stand-alone subject, or as part of a comprehensive English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) block five days each week. The 15 teachers were selected from different grade levels and different elementary campuses within the district. I sought participants with varying years of

experience as a teacher, and those with experience teaching grade levels other than elementary students.

Teachers' perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development were researched by collecting and analyzing data from ASD elementary teachers who instruct reading in different elementary grade levels, as well as who use *Rethink Ed* curriculum for daily SEL instruction. A total of 15 participants was appropriate and adequate for this study because a deeper level of understanding on this topic can be gained through fewer participants who provide sufficient data to establish themes (Yin, 2017). According to Saunders et al. (2018), interviews are appropriate for gathering qualitative data; however, there is no minimum number of interviews necessary to collect sufficient research on a topic. Focusing on the depth of understanding that can be gained through interviews and analysis of lesson plans is more important than a large sample size (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Procedures for Gaining Access

The study occurred in an elementary school setting. I requested permission to complete the research by submitting an application to the institutional review board (IRB) at Walden University. Upon receiving approval to begin my research, I sent an email invitation to potential participants that explained the purpose of my study, and relevant details. Fifteen participants were selected, based on their interest to participate and satisfaction of the candidate selection criteria. The email invitation explained the purpose of the study, participant expectations (including anticipated length of interview sessions and number of lesson plans to be collected), ethical considerations, contact information,

voluntary nature of participation, and directions for completing and returning the informed consent form. Potential participants were asked to return the completed informed consent form within 10 business days, if interested in volunteering for the study. Through the invitation, I communicated there were no repercussions for electing not to participate in the study.

Methods of Establishing a Researcher Participant Working Relationship

A research-participant working relationship was established through multiple measures. Each participant received an email invitation outlining the purpose of the study, participant role, and potential advantages of participation in the research. I contacted participants to arrange a date, time, and location to conduct interviews. I distributed the informed consent forms to potential participants, and collected them through returned email. Consent forms provided (a) the researcher's contact information, (b) the voluntary nature of the study, (c) study procedures, (d) risks and benefits of the study, (e) disclosure statements, and (f) privacy disclosure of statements of research document retention and security for five years (Walden University, 2020). I kept all data collection confidential, and assigned codes to all participants for masked identification throughout the research process.

Relationships between a researcher and study participants require trust so the researcher is able to gather accurate information that informs the study (Yin, 2017). I did not work in the capacity of a supervisor over any participants of this study, nor did I exert any other authoritative influence over them. The participants and I have a pre-established

level of trust given that I previously worked in ASD, and we may have attended training or other district events together.

Measures for Ethical Protection of Participants

Responsibilities of a researcher include ensuring their study adheres to approved ethical standards (Vanclay, 2020). I followed all proper protocols to seek IRB approval of the site for access. The Walden University IRB approval number issued for this study is 03-10-22-0552250. Ethical research involving human subjects necessitates use of the informed consent process (Nasrabadi & Shali, 2017). Informed consent documents should include the purpose and voluntary nature of the research study. Consent was obtained from all participants, in writing, prior to the study, in compliance with Walden University standards of ethical research, as well as to safeguard the participants' rights.

Confidentiality protects participants and maintains trust between the researcher and participants (Yin, 2017). All participants were assured of the voluntary nature of the study, their ability to withdraw from participating at any time, and freedom to refuse to answer any question during any stage of the interview. They were assured of the confidentiality of their personal identity and study responses. Additionally, I expressed that the purpose and intentions of the study were to identify instructional practices that address student learning needs other than academic core content, which might provide students with additional tools necessary to access the academic material.

Data Collection

Use of multiple data collection sources allows for triangulation, increases the reliability of research study findings, and helps establish trustworthiness in study results

(Twining et al., 2017). For this reason, I selected 15 teachers to interview, and conducted a review of lesson plans. Multiple forms of data provided sufficient depth of data to explore how ASD elementary educators implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students, and their perceptions of how *Rethink Ed* curriculum SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. Alignment of the research purpose, research questions, and conceptual framework domains is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Alignment of Research Purpose, Research Questions, and Conceptual Framework Domains

Research purpose	Research question	Conceptual Framework Domains
Teachers' implementation of SEL in their daily reading literacy instruction	RQ1. How do Adoniram School District elementary teachers implement <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum in their daily SEL instruction to support reading literacy for HRM students?	Emotional regulation
		Collaboration
		Engagement with others
		Task performance
		Compound skills
Teachers' perceptions of how SEL techniques influence HRM students' reading literacy development	RQ2. What are the perceptions of Adoniram School District elementary teachers about the influence of <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum on high residential mobility students' reading literacy development?	Open-mindedness
		Task performance
		Compound skills
		Emotional regulation
		Open-mindedness

I collected data using one-on-one interviews with K-5 teachers, and analyzed lesson plans from the same teachers. For participants' convenience, as well as my personal organization of records, each form of data was collected sequentially. I designed the interview protocol using constructs from the conceptual framework and literature

review as a guide. I sought teachers from different grade levels, with a range of experiences and background in education, at four elementary campuses in ASD, to determine whether teachers' experiences implementing SEL curriculum in reading literacy instruction, and perceptions of SEL techniques' influence on HRM students' reading literacy development, varied among individuals and schools within ASD, or were consistent across the district. Teacher experience demographics are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher Experience Demographics

0-5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years	More than 20 years
T6	T1	T4	T2
T13	T12	T5	T3
T14		T7	T8
		T9	
		T10	
		T11	
		T15	

Interviews

I used interviews, which are the most frequently used form of qualitative data collection (Allan, 2020), to obtain comprehensive data for the study. I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with each study participant (Sampson & Johannessen, 2019). One-on-one interviews facilitate interpreting information, making judgments, and gathering data regarding the participants' perceptions (Azungah, 2018). Due to the difficulty observing specific teacher experiences implementing SEL instruction, and perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influence HRM elementary students'

reading literacy development, semi-structured interviews were a necessary data collection method for the purpose of this study. Structured interviews enable researchers to collect more information on a research topic; however, semi-structured interviews are similar to conversations and provide researchers with detailed data (Sampson & Johannessen, 2019). One-on-one interview data may also reflect participants' opinions more accurately than focus groups, where participants may be fearful of sharing their honest thoughts with peers and colleagues (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2021). Interview data can be collected through recordings, notes, or a combination of both methods (Allan, 2020). Azungah (2018) recommends that qualitative researchers collect data through interviews to learn new information, and use additional probing questions to acquire additional relevant data. This interview process maintains validity of the data collected from participants (Allan, 2020).

A preliminary interview protocol is mandatory for a qualitative exploratory single case study, to establish essential questions for all participants (Yin, 2017). To establish the interview protocol questions, I followed the process outlined by Weller et al. (2018). The interview questions focused on how K-5 educators implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students, and teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. I created an interview protocol (Appendix B), guided by the conceptual framework, exploratory single case study examples, the literature review, and the research questions developed for the study, which served as a guide to collect and describe the participants' perspectives (Azungah, 2018). The questions were written according to the conceptual

framework (Chernyshenko et al., 2018) and literature review, which recommends that research participants provide detailed responses about their experiences (Olson et al., 2019). The questions were purposefully semi-structured (Allan, 2020), to facilitate participants ability to give as much detail as they wanted about their experiences and perceptions. Table 3 shows the alignment of the research questions with the interview protocol questions.

Table 3

Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions

Research Question	Alignment of Interview Protocol Questions to Research Questions
RQ1. How do ASD elementary teachers implement <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum into their daily SEL instruction to support reading literacy for HRM students?	<p>PQ2. Please describe your experiences implementing <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum into your daily social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction.</p> <p>PQ3. Please describe your comfort level incorporating SEL strategies and techniques into your ELAR core content instruction.</p> <p>PQ4. Please describe how you reinforce the SEL techniques and strategies taught during the morning SEL block during your ELAR core instruction block to provide your students with opportunities to develop open-mindedness, engagement with others, emotional regulation, collaboration, task performance, and/or compound skills.</p> <p>PQ5. Please describe the ways you consider activities that reinforce the following SEL strategies and techniques: open-mindedness, engagement with others, emotional regulation, collaboration, task performance, or compound skills, during the development process of creating your ELAR lesson plans.</p> <p>PQ8. Please describe the professional development and coaching feedback you were provided with for implementing <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum this year by ASD leadership.</p> <p>PQ9. How do you feel the professional development from campus and district leadership has equipped you to effectively teach the <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum and integrate SEL in your core content instruction?</p> <p>PQ10. Based on your experiences with SEL, what do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum?</p>
RQ2. What are the perceptions of Adoniram School District elementary teachers about the influence of <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum on high residential mobility students' reading literacy development?	<p>PQ6. Please describe your HRM students' reading literacy achievement, and how it compares to your non-HRM students' reading literacy achievement.</p> <p>PQ7. How do you perceive the following SEL skills: open-mindedness, engagement with others, emotional regulation, collaboration, task performance, or compound skills, are influencing your HRM students' reading literacy development?</p> <p>PQ11. Please describe how PLCs and coaching feedback would influence the decisions you make regarding SEL instruction.</p>

Participants were provided a copy of the semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B) prior to the interview. This process improves participant understanding of the study, gives each participant sufficient time to prepare for the interview (Allan, 2020), and facilitates a collaborative working relationship between a participant and the researcher (Sampson & Johannessen, 2019). Advance preparation for question responses may also yield more informative answers to interview questions (Azungah, 2018). Sampson and Johannessen (2019) recommended interviewees receive questions in advance, for the opportunity to seek clarity and explanation. Additionally, I provided an opportunity for participants to review a summary of my interpretation of their responses to the interview questions, to increase the validity of the results of this study and improve the quality of data analysis (Fusch et al., 2018).

I interviewed each teacher individually, at the location of their choosing. Each interview lasted approximately 20-50 minutes. I remained respectful and nonjudgmental for the duration of each interview. I recorded each interview, with advance permission from all participants. I collected teacher background information by asking the first question listed on the interview protocol (Appendix B). I then asked the remaining ten interview protocol questions that aligned to the research questions for the study. Additional probes were optional during the interview process to enable participants to further develop their responses (Sampson & Johannessen, 2019). During two of the interviews, I asked a follow-up question about participant responses to the interview question to seek clarification or additional information. I did not use leading questions during the interviews (Sampson & Johannessen, 2019). Interview transcriptions were

initially captured in Google Docs, using the voice-typing feature, during the live interview with each participant, then downloaded into Microsoft Word. I made notes during each interview, to document my reflections. I transcribed each interview afterward, from the recording, into an electronic document, to organize the interview data collected.

Lesson Plan Review

Archival records may include books, personal records or journals, prior research, and online resources (Yin, 2017). For this study, I collected reading lesson plans for methodological triangulation (Appendix D). Lesson plans were requested from participants, submitted in their original format (using the ASD K-5 lesson plan template), for one week (five days) of instruction. Lesson plan data added to the trustworthiness of the study, because lesson plans show what a teacher actually intends to do regarding incorporation of SEL in reading literacy instruction. I asked interviewees to provide a copy of their lesson plans at the conclusion of each interview. All student identification information was removed from the lesson plans before submission.

I used a self-developed lesson plan review protocol (Appendix C) to collect additional data. I asked participants to voluntarily submit a copy of one week of reading lesson plans (using the ASD K-5 lesson plan template), without student identification information. I analyzed the lesson plans to determine how teachers use SEL curriculum with their students during reading literacy core content instruction (Fusch et al., 2018). Lesson plan analysis supports methodological triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participant interviews provided self-report data, while lesson plans offered evidence of

what the teacher actually intended to do with SEL instruction during reading classes. The lesson plan review protocol (Appendix C) was used to explore how teachers implement SEL during academic instruction.

I developed the lesson plan review protocol from the conceptual framework (Chernyshenko et al., 2018) and literature review of SEL best practices (Olson et al., 2019). I was able to understand how certain SEL strategies were used during whole-class instruction, small-group interventions, or with individual students (Harris, 2021). This analysis included identifying evidence of DI for students in special education or English learner subpopulations through the use of certain SEL techniques that may not be used during whole-group activities (Campbell et al., 2018). In particular, I examined indicators of tailored instruction in resilience skills for students qualifying for special education services as children with behavioral or emotional disturbance disorders, as these are more prevalent among HRM students.

I also analyzed the lesson plans to determine whether any SSES domains were not represented in teachers' tasks and activities. I found evidence of activities that addressed all six domains within the lesson plans; however, emotional regulation activities written in lesson plans were typically short and proactive, such as practicing a breathing exercise for a few minutes. Interview responses indicated that educators spend most of their time teaching emotional regulation through conflicts that arise spontaneously in the classroom environment, which cannot be anticipated during lesson planning. They described the breathing exercises as a "Tier 1" best practice for all students, and explained that other

emotional regulation activities tended to be effective when used as “Tier 2” or “Tier 3” interventions when students responded inappropriately to upsetting situations.

Data Tracking

I developed an electronic document to track the data transcribed, following each participant interview. I sent participants a summary of their statements, to ensure their interviews were recorded and interpreted correctly. Each participant was asked to provide written confirmation that no corrections or edits were needed. I also developed an electronic document to track the data extrapolated from each lesson plan submitted. The electronic documents were cross-referenced with interview data and cataloged, using an open-coding system.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

After obtaining consent from the IRB at Walden University, I conducted the procedures to gain consent from study participants. I used the participant forms to obtain consent from the 15 participating teachers to meet for interviews, and provide lesson plans for review. The participant criteria included individuals who: (a) hold a valid intern or standard teaching license from the Texas State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) with a generalist, self-contained, special education, English as a Second Language (ESL)/bilingual, or core subjects endorsement in Grades EC-6, 4-8, or EC-12; (b) were employed as exempt, full-time teachers in ASD, and not currently completing a growth or intervention plan; and (c) teach a minimum of 90 minutes of reading classes in Grades K-5 daily, either as a stand-alone subject, or as part of a comprehensive English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) block. The purposefully selected teachers were

emailed an introductory letter, which clarified the research background, purpose, and procedures for this study. In addition, the voluntary nature of this research, risk factors, and potential benefits of participation were stated. The email also included protections of privacy, my contact information, Walden University contact information, and a request for consent to participate.

The 15 participants were asked to provide a date, time, and location for conducting the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. I distributed, and collected, possible participants' informed consent letters. I provided each potential participant with an informed consent form for the lesson plan submissions for review as part of the study data. Each participant was advised that participation in the study was voluntary, and that no incentives would be provided in exchange for participating. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. I kept all data collection confidential, and identified participants using codes throughout the process. I obtained permission from each participant to record the interview. During each interview session, I first obtained the informed consent from the participant. I then initiated the interview process, and followed the interview with a request for lesson plan submissions to review.

Data Management and Storage

I maintained a secure data management system, which included field notes and interview transcriptions, in an electronic document for coding (Azungah, 2018). I created an electronic folder to store research data. The electronic folder contained records of observation notes, audio and video recordings of interviews, typed transcripts, participants' submitted lesson plans, my lesson plan review logs, and participants'

consent to be part of this study. All data will be kept confidential, and secured with a password, required to access my personal USB external hard drive. All protocol notes and transcriptions include codes to protect the identity of study participants. Data will be stored for five years following the completion of this study. Upon five years from the completion of the study, all electronic data will be permanently deleted, and any physical, paper-based data will be shredded.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the role of the researcher includes acquiring, organizing, and interpreting the data collected (Allan, 2020). During the data collection process, the researcher is referred to as the instrument (Azungah, 2018). I served as the primary data collection instrument during this research study, and I adhered to the ethical principles and guidelines that protect human subjects throughout the data collection process. My role in this study included designing the research questions, interview questions, and lesson plan review protocol, as well as contacting potential research study participants. My role was also to collect data through semi-structured interviews and review of submitted lesson plans from participants. I coded language from the interviews and lesson plans to analyze the data collected. After establishing codes, I looked for patterns, and grouped codes in similar themes. Patterns discovered in data collection were reviewed to determine if, and how, they relate to the topic of SEL instruction.

I disclosed to each participant the requirements and purpose of this study, and the doctoral program. I communicated to participants that this study, and program, were selected because of my desire for personal growth, and to promote positive social change.

Conducting the study was a learning experience that enabled me to reflect on, and adjust, my own practices as an educational practitioner. In my role as an administrator, I seek continuous opportunities to better support my staff and students in the teaching and learning process.

Past roles. I was a teacher in one private, and multiple public, elementary and secondary schools, for a total of eight years. I also served as a campus administrator in three public elementary and secondary schools, for a total of six years. Each of these experiences was very unique from one another, ranging from an affluent high school with approximately 3,200 students in Grades 9-12, less than 30% of which were eligible for free or reduced lunch, to an urban Title I school where approximately 20% of students were children of incarcerated or deceased parents. These schools were all located in northeast Texas. My experiences in public education, along with my beliefs and practices as a parent, influenced how I interpreted the data, and, as a result, the findings of my qualitative exploratory case study. An explanation of my biases is more thoroughly detailed in a subsequent section.

Current role. Currently, I am the principal of a 1-A public school district in Texas. In this capacity, I oversee 140 students in Grades PK-12, and supervise 32 instructional and auxiliary campus staff. I am responsible for monitoring annual student academic progress; ensuring compliance with instructional accommodations for special education, 504, and emergent bilingual (EB) students; and appraising teachers annually, using the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) criteria. I also monitor student attendance; lead teachers to help prepare students for satisfactory

performance rates on state and national assessments; and make final decisions regarding curriculum selection, MTSS interventions, and professional development for staff. None of these duties take place in ASD.

Relationships to participants. I do not currently participate in any activities in ASD. I did previously serve as a campus administrator in ASD; however, the campus at which I worked was closed by the district as part of a financial exigency plan. No teachers I supervised when the campus was operational were selected to participate in the research study. Teachers who participated in this study had no prior experience working directly with me, thus removing any potential conflict of interest. I am not currently employed with ASD in any capacity.

Potential bias. In a qualitative research study, researchers serve as the primary data collection instrument, and must be aware of potential bias in their research (Azungah, 2018). Researchers must recognize purposeful sampling containing bias and potential bias in their approach (Allan, 2020). Utilizing an open style process during interviews may help the researcher avoid bias (Sampson & Johannessen, 2019). Semi-structured interviews enable participants to share experiences and perceptions in their own words. I provided participants with a summary of findings to review my interpretation of what they said, and the opportunity to confirm whether they felt their responses were accurately represented, or offer clarification.

I recognize potential bias in my research as a result of my personal beliefs and experiences; therefore, I sent participants a summary of the transcribed interview for their review and approval to mitigate potential bias, as suggested by Daniel (2019). Potential

bias may include my perceptions of how SEL instruction should be implemented, and how teachers should use SEL as part of a WCIA to teach reading literacy with HRM students. Review of my interview summary by each participant increased the quality of data analyzed and improved the validity of the results of this study (Fusch et al., 2018).

Data Analysis

The purpose of qualitative analysis is to interpret data gathered from sources and identify themes that emerge during interpretation to establish understanding of the phenomena being studied (Creswell & Poht, 2016). I collected data using one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with K-5 teachers. I also analyzed lesson plans from the same teachers for triangulation of the data. My qualitative data analysis included transcribing the interviews and conducting an inductive thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report patterns among the data gathered. Table 4 shows the data analysis process used.

Table 4

Data Analysis Process

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Identification of Themes
Reviewed auto-generated transcripts and field notes with recordings to ensure accuracy	Identified relationships between open codes	Answered research questions guiding the study
Second reading of reviewed transcripts; marginal notes, identified initial emerging broad codes	Compared research questions and conceptual framework to initial codes	Addressed domains of conceptual framework
Created initial code list of 36 broad codes	Collapsed codes not relevant to the study purpose; reassigned quotes associated with RQ1, RQ2, or conceptual framework domains to remaining codes	Created themes based on codes' relationships to conceptual framework domains
Analyzed lesson plans submitted by interview participants; identified emerging broad codes		Assigning codes to each theme
Compared lesson plans codes to interview transcripts codes for alignment and triangulation		

I conducted data analysis using natural context within multiple sources (Nowell et al., 2017). I analyzed data from 15 interviews, and reviewed lesson plans of the

participants to answer the research questions and arrive at the findings of the study. Each participant provided one week (five days) of lesson plans for review, which satisfied the requirements of a purposeful sampling (Spaulding, 2013). Reviewing lesson plans submitted by the interview participants offered increased credibility to the study findings.

Methods of Precoding

All interview data collected for the case study were coded in Microsoft Word. Transcripts were reviewed while listening to the audio recording, for corrections. Participant comments were highlighted in different colors to indicate themes among the data. During my first review of the data, 36 codes were initially identified. To confirm I completed coding accurately for all data, I sent the documents to my chair and second committee member for input. In subsequent review rounds, I merged codes as I observed information that was connected: for example, two of the initial codes were “strengths of *Rethink Ed* curriculum” and “weaknesses of *Rethink Ed* curriculum,” which I merged into “strengths and weaknesses of *Rethink Ed* curriculum.” I used the domains of the conceptual framework and research questions to identify data most relevant to the study, and establish the final themes. Codes that did not appear related to the conceptual framework domains, which served as the research finding themes, were collapsed. The quotes associated with those codes were re-coded or deemed unrelated to the study purpose.

Lesson plan data were primarily submitted in PDF format. I used the self-developed lesson plan review protocol (Appendix C) to preliminarily assess whether the lesson plans contained data relevant to ELAR instruction that reinforced SEL strategies

and techniques. The documents were annotated using Kami software to highlight tasks and activities using the same colors selected during interview coding. Inductive thematic analysis facilitates natural emergence of frequent and dominant themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Coding divides raw data into manageable sections, based on their relevance to the research questions and purpose of the study.

I used a thematic analysis approach that reflects frequently reported themes or patterns in a data set. I started by reading each lesson plan set multiple times, to familiarize myself with the data, and observe recurrent words and phrases. Coding reduces the amount of raw data to facilitate reporting of patterns and themes that emerge during review (Creswell & Poth, 2016). According to Bernard (2013), open coding also provides the researcher an opportunity to identify relevant words and synthesize the data. I used open coding by reading each transcript multiple times and assigning highlight colors to each word or phrase that appeared frequently. I made marginal notes about my impressions while reading the raw data and established tentative codes for categories of data. Most of these aligned with the codes identified in the interview transcripts, with the addition of four codes that addressed lesson plan student activity content that did not emerge in participants' responses to interview questions.

Open coding enables researchers to identify text segments that convey similar, or related, concepts and ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I completed line-by-line coding of all transcripts and lesson plans, using different colors to highlight text for each concept identified. This process produced more than 30 broad codes assigned to raw data. I then reviewed the coded transcripts and lesson plans and compared them to the code list to

ensure I accurately represented all concepts. I checked the coded documents to determine the frequency with which words or phrases appeared. This enabled me to understand participants' experiences and perspectives. This information helped me establish dominant categories and themes and reflect on their significance.

In the next stage of the process, I used axial coding to identify relationships between the codes that emerged from the data (Williams & Moser, 2019). During this stage, similar codes were organized and compared, in terms of similarities and differences related to the research questions, and identified themes were named. In the axial coding process, I consolidated similar concepts, which led to the identification of six themes. Table 5 shows the coding progression with codes, subthemes, themes, interview excerpts, and frequency used to analyze the data.

Table 5

Coding Progression

Theme	Codes	Excerpts	# of participants
Teacher attitudes toward SEL instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEL instructional experience • When SEL is taught • How SEL is taught • Comfort level/attitude toward instructing SEL • Challenges to implementing SEL • Natural, unplanned opportunities to reinforce SEL • Reflective practices • Lesson plan activities to reinforce SEL 	<p>“The primary time we have SEL is always in the morning. That’s when we focus on SEL and that started about five years ago.”</p> <p>“I have also taught the SEL lessons on Zoom to a group of 50 students, which also has the same curriculum. This was also a beautiful experience because it afforded [our administrator] the ability to share her personal experiences with us, this made it more relatable.”</p> <p>“Maybe we check in with students that may have been having some issues of problems. Overall the over-arching purpose is to create positive relationships and intimacy with our students in order to gain academic buy-in from them.”</p>	13 (87%)
SEL curriculum, professional development, and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development • SEL instructional materials • Leadership coaching, feedback, and support 	<p>“We were given the program and shown how to utilize the program you know in person and then also given manipulatives to use, like a “calm corner” students can use when they need two minutes to get themselves pulled together, so we</p>	9 (60%)

Theme	Codes	Excerpts	# of participants
leadership support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengths of <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum • Weaknesses of <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum 	<p>received training on the computer program as well as the things that are more tangible.”</p> <p>“I think the strength would be that it was the main culture that we are servicing and how those social emotional needs are for that for that demographic, as well as for that the community itself.”</p>	15 (100%)
<p>SSES conceptual framework: students’ self-development and interpersonal skill growth as a result of SEL instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with others • Problem-solving • Collaboration • Open-mindedness • Self-efficacy • Compound skills • Self-awareness and emotional regulation • Compassion and empathy • Goal-setting and task management • Developing resilience/perseverance skills 	<p>“When I finish giving instructions and let them work on their own, I encourage them to collaborate. I love the “rally coaching” strategy, when two students are partnered together. One does all the work, but the other coaches him through the entire process, step-by-step. Then they switch. That helps them learn to play and work collaboratively so that, in the end, they learn how to talk to each other each other.”</p> <p>“This year we’ve had to talk a lot about open-mindedness, because we have an inclusion class. Some students have behaviors to where they act younger than what the other kids are used to, so we have to accept it.”</p> <p>“If they found a solution to an issue that occurred during the day, the journal gave them a voice to express that.”</p>	
<p>Collaborative planning to support students’ academic growth as a result of SEL instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought process • Differentiated instruction • Using SEL for academic intervention • Overcoming obstacles to learning 	<p>“He could write all his letters. He just didn't know what they had what their names were. He was brilliant--I mean, we could read a story, or a technical book about airplanes, and he could tell you everything about those airplanes afterward, but he just didn't know his letters and numbers. So the main thing I did work with him was go back to that background that he would have had, had he finished kindergarten.”</p>	12 (80%)
<p>Pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLC and teacher/staff collaboration • Teacher-student rapport • Diversity appreciation • Communication • Whole-child instructional approach • Classroom management 	<p>“I think it helps the child become more well-rounded in any activity, subject, even the hallway or the lunchroom. When they can learn those skills and apply them, I think it really helps them.”</p> <p>“Maybe those of us who understand why it matters can help them see why our students need it so much.”</p> <p>“Sometimes they have this false sense of a cookie cutter reality, but that’s not accurate. You come from one place, and I have a different kind of family, and in my culture we don’t do things the same way. We should surround ourselves with people who have different experiences and perspectives, so we can learn from each other.”</p> <p>“But I really want to check in and ask, ‘How was the day for you? Was there something’—because there was a lesson we did that really hit home to me when—it was like, ‘Did I do something ...’ because as a teacher, I had never asked, ‘Did I do something to make you unhappy, or did I do something to change your mood in a negative way?’ because I want them to tell me.”</p>	14 (93%)

Theme	Codes	Excerpts	# of participants
Factors affecting HRM students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative effects of high residential mobility • Impact of SEL strategies with HRM students • Home/family factors affecting student achievement 	<p>“It starts their day off good. Even if it started off bad before they got to us, when we do this, it makes things better.”</p> <p>“If you don't feel comfortable or that you're at the same standard as everybody else sometimes you just kind of want to shut down and not even try.”</p>	11 (74%)

Familiarization

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), researchers control reliability, validity, and trustworthiness in thematic analysis by ensuring a well-structured, clearly defined procedure is followed. The steps of data analysis include familiarization, also referred to as precoding; open coding; and axial coding for this study. I analyzed the interview transcripts and lesson plans separately. I conducted the interview transcription analysis first, since I scheduled and conducted the interviews before asking participants to send lesson plans. When I analyzed the submitted lesson plans, I used the same coding process, which yielded many of the same codes that emerged during interview transcript analysis, as well as several unique codes that evidenced teaching practices and student activities addressing SEL instruction and reading literacy development.

I began by replaying the interview recordings and documenting the information. Transcription of each interview allowed for deeper understanding of the data (Azungah, 2018). Each participant was assigned a letter and number code for masked identification purposes. I listened for terms related to the research questions and conceptual framework metrics to establish initial codes. During the review process, I consolidated like terms into broader codes to determine final themes.

When analyzing the lesson plans, I used a similar approach to interview transcript analysis. I highlighted terms related to the research questions and conceptual framework metrics to establish initial codes. Most of the initial codes identified in the submitted lesson plans were identical to terms used by participants in their responses to interview questions, although a few additional codes emerged related to specific instructional activities designed to help students achieve a specific objective. During the review process, I consolidated like terms from both data sources in arriving at the overarching themes.

Open Coding

During precoding, I found 36 initial codes. After precoding, I conducted an open coding process, in which I broke apart the textual data into discrete parts to identify segments that might be useful to the study purpose, and annotate these segments in the margins (Allan, 2020). This stage of data coding began by reading interview transcripts, and my notes, to saturate myself with the data. I created a data analysis code table, using Microsoft Excel, to record codes and categories that emerged during the process. I coded the interview data, by hand, in the left column of the data analysis code table. After this process, I collapsed 36 initial codes into nine broad codes that covered a range of data with one or two key terms.

I read the data multiple times, asking adaptations of the Frankfort-Nachimas and Nachimas research questions (2008): (a) What do the teachers' interview responses reveal about the type of SEL instruction demonstrated? (b) What is the structure of SEL instruction during a designated time of the day, and evidence of reinforcement of SEL

strategies and techniques during reading literacy instruction? (c) How frequently does SEL instruction during a designated time of the day, and reinforcement of SEL strategies and techniques during reading literacy instruction, occur? (d) How is SEL instruction provided during a designated time of the day, and what SEL strategies and techniques are reinforced during reading literacy instruction? (e) What are the consequences of the way SEL instruction is provided during a designated time of the day, and SEL strategies and techniques are reinforced during reading literacy instruction? and (f) What are people's approaches to presenting SEL instruction using the *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and reinforcing SEL strategies and techniques through planned, or unplanned, activities during reading literacy instruction?

Reading the data multiple times, while asking the research questions, assisted in the data analysis process and code formation. I used colored fonts to represent different codes that emerged during the analysis. For example, if teachers repeatedly mention compound skills in discussing their perception of connections between SEL and reading literacy, I used the same color font each time compound skills were mentioned, and created a "compound skills" code. I developed a color-coded key electronic file that listed all identified codes with each data set to facilitate data management and look for core themes that emerged from the data collected in the interview transcripts, and from reviewing the text of lesson plans submitted by study participants.

Axial Coding

The third step in thematic analysis was to seek connections between the open codes and identify the relationships between them. I collapsed the 36 initial codes into

nine broad codes. These relationships helped me identify patterns to generate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of generating themes also provided an opportunity to review codes, and discard any that were too vague or irrelevant to the study purpose. I also identified certain codes that were significant enough to the study purpose to establish as themes. From the data I analyzed, six themes were established for the overview of these findings, using the conceptual framework.

Development of Themes

I reviewed the themes established to determine whether any of them needed to be merged, split, or discarded, for accuracy and relevance. After reviewing the themes, I defined the meaning of each final theme and determined how it would help me understand the data. Finally, I assigned each theme a succinct, easily understood name. This addressed all components necessary to write the data analysis section of the study. The description of the initial codes, collapsed codes, themes, and evidence is further fleshed out in Table 6.

Table 6

Development of Themes

Initial code	Collapsed code	Theme
Natural, unplanned opportunities to reinforce SEL Classroom management Whole-child instructional approach When SEL is taught How SEL is taught Comfort level/attitude toward instructing SEL Lesson plan activities to reinforce SEL	Instruction	Teacher attitudes toward SEL instruction

Initial code	Collapsed code	Theme
Professional development SEL instructional materials	Professional development Support	SEL curriculum, professional development, and leadership support
Leadership coaching, feedback, and support Strengths of <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum Weaknesses of <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum Challenges to implementing SEL PLC and teacher/staff collaboration		
Self-awareness and emotional regulation Open-mindedness Compound skills Goal setting and task performance Engagement with others Collaboration Compassion and empathy Problem-solving Overcoming obstacles to learning Thought process	SEL skills Relationships	SSES conceptual framework: students' self-development and interpersonal skills growth as a result of SEL instruction
Students' self-efficacy	Self-management Efficacy	Collaborative planning to support students' academic growth as a result of SEL instruction
Communication Teacher-student rapport Diversity appreciation Impact of SEL strategies with HRM students Developing resilience/perseverance skills Home/family factors affecting student achievement Negative effects of high residential mobility Emotional trauma	Transience Instability	Pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement Factors affecting HRM students

Technology was important during the process of data collection and analysis. I correspond with ASD administrators, campus leaders, and teachers through email. I used Zoom to conduct interviews with participants who requested virtual meetings, and recording software to document the 15 interviews. I used the voice-typing feature in Google Docs to conduct the initial transcriptions, and downloaded the completed interview transcripts into Microsoft Word. I also used Microsoft Word to complete open coding for thematic analysis and create data analysis code tables.

Evidence of Quality and Procedures

Internal validity. Internal validity considers factors that may affect my use of participant data to draw conclusions (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). To provide credibility to this study, I established internal validity by developing an interview protocol (Appendix B). I consulted with knowledgeable educators, who hold doctorate degrees, to review the interview questions. I noted suggestions from their feedback and revised the questions, based on their recommendations.

For accuracy and trustworthiness, I used transcription checks to validate the findings. Transcription checks increase reliability and validity of data collected (Fusch et al., 2018). I transcribed each interview, and provided an opportunity for participants to review a summary of my interpretation of their responses to the interview questions. Participants' ability to confirm the accuracy of their statements, or correct any information in the summary, increase the validity of the results of this study and improve the quality of data analysis (Guthrie et al., 2021). Each participant confirmed the interview summary and did not require any changes to the transcripts.

I analyzed two sets of data: interview transcriptions and lesson plans. Data were validated using triangulation of data from both sets. Collecting information from multiple sources adds to the credibility of qualitative study data (Fusch et al., 2018). Findings are more reliable when substantiated by separate data sets (Guthrie et al., 2021).

External validity. Study findings have greater significance when they are transferable to various situations (Vanover et al., 2021). If external validity is not established, it becomes difficult to transfer the findings of a study to other contexts

(Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). Threats to external validity challenge a researcher's ability to correctly interpret case study data and apply it in other settings or measures (Vanover et al., 2021). I included quotes, and summaries, from transcripts to the study findings and final themes, which strengthened the findings results. I also identified discrepant cases that emerged while analyzing the data. The discrepant data were included in the study to support credibility of the study, by addressing contradictory information (Guthrie et al., 2021).

Discrepant cases. Vanover et al. (2021) defined discrepant cases as evidence contradictory to themes that emerge during data collection. While coding interview transcripts, I compared discrepant cases to my observation notes and examined lesson plan data. Most participants had similar experiences and expressed comparable frustrations to one another; however, disconfirming evidence was present in the data. One of the 15 participants was uncertain whether SEL instruction had any effect on student reading literacy growth. Additionally, two participants did not include SEL strategies in their lesson plans, because they prefer to use SEL as impromptu situations arise during class that may provide opportunities for students to practice skills such as regulating their emotions, or communicating effectively with a peer. Discrepant cases were identified because they differed from the data presented by other participants during interviews or lesson plan analysis.

Data Analysis Results

ASD leaders did not have data about how teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students, or teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction

techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how ASD elementary teachers instructed SEL, and their perceptions of how SEL influenced academic growth. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and lesson plan review. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, with a summary sent to each participant to review for accuracy. Lesson plans were submitted by each interview participants. Data were analyzed through open and axial coding to identify themes.

I documented K-5 teachers' thoughts and perspectives through thick description. Thick description is a qualitative data presentation approach that not only records and describes data, but provides background information an audience needs to understand the relevance and meaning of particular social interactions (Aksikas, 2019). The data comprised interviews and lesson plan review. The data described how ASD elementary educators implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum for social emotional learning (SEL) instruction with their students during the daily SEL instructional block designated on the master calendar, and reinforced those skills during core content reading instruction. It also addressed K-5 teachers' perceptions of how SEL strategies and techniques influenced high residential mobility (HRM) students' reading literacy development.

Data revealed participant experiences with SEL instruction and teachers' perspectives of whether SEL positively impacted academic achievement. Fifteen educators participated in the study by consenting to answer interview questions and provide one week of lesson plans for review. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted outside instructional time. The lesson plan data showed how teachers

reinforce SEL strategies and techniques through the student activities during core content instruction, which provides evidence of whether the whole-child instructional approach (WCIA) is used when reading literacy is taught to elementary students in ASD.

During data analysis of interviews and lesson plan reviews, the following core themes related to the purpose of the study were established: teacher attitudes toward SEL instruction; SEL curriculum, professional development and leadership support; SSES conceptual framework: students' self-development and interpersonal skills growth as a result of SEL instruction; collaborative planning to support students' academic growth as a result of SEL instruction; pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement; and factors affecting HRM students.

Overview of Themes

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: How do Adoniram School District elementary teachers implement *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily social emotional learning instruction to support reading literacy for high residential mobility students?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of Adoniram School District elementary teachers about the influence of *Rethink Ed* curriculum on high residential mobility students' reading literacy development?

Core themes identified were taken from common language used by most, or all, elementary teachers, during interview responses, as well as in their submitted lesson plans. Themes that addressed RQ1 were: teacher attitudes toward SEL; curriculum, professional development, and support; collaborative planning to support students' academic growth as a result of SEL instruction; and pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement. Themes that addressed RQ2 were: SSES conceptual framework: students' self-development and interpersonal skills growth as a result of SEL instruction; and factors affecting HRM students. A summary of these themes is listed in Table 7.

Table 7*Summary of Themes*

Theme	Representative Example from Interviews	Lesson Plans
1. Teacher attitudes toward SEL	T11 <i>Overall, I think it had a positive effect. I hope we built some lifelong learners along the way. You're not going to catch everyone, but hopefully SEL made a difference or some of them.</i>	Seven of 15, or 47% of participants included activities in their ELAR lesson plans that reinforced the SEL skill set focus for the week (emotional regulation, collaboration, etc.) This implied a favorable attitude toward SEL strategies and opinion they should be used in core content instruction as part of WCIA
2. SEL curriculum, professional development, and leadership support	T10 <i>You've got to have concrete ideas, or a platform to work from. I think with teachers, the most important thing is creating buy-in. If teachers didn't have that growing up, in their home, with their family, in their school, they may not see the value in it. Maybe those of us who understand why it matters can help them see why our students need it so much.</i>	Two of 15, or 13%, utilized materials from the <i>Rethink Ed</i> curriculum, such as scenario cards, where students read and discuss their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about certain situations, during ELAR activities that involved critical thinking and communication.
3. Collaborative planning to support students' academic growth through SEL instruction	T9 <i>Until those needs are met, there is no point trying to teach them their letters, or how to add and subtract, because their mind is pre-occupied with what they need to do in order to survive. The things they learn in school are not what they need to know to survive, but what they need to know in order to thrive.</i>	Eight of 15, or 53%, of participants, included a reflective "exit ticket" activity, in which students were asked to share, verbally or in writing, about their thoughts and feelings when asked to complete a task they had not done before. They were asked to explain how they overcame any negative emotions, such as fear or embarrassment, to successfully complete the assignment, and consider whether those strategies could help them in other stressful situations.
4. Pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement	T6 <i>I try to take opportunities as they arise naturally, because they always do. Someone accidentally bumps into a classmate, who then explodes and yells or shoves in response. I will pull that kid aside and talk about accidents and forgiveness. I ask him what he would think he if accidentally bumped into me and I exploded on him, just like he did to the other student.</i>	14 of 15, or 93%, of participants, included activities on at least three days of the instructional week's lesson plans that necessitated the teacher communicating with students, students communicating with each other, and students communicating with the teacher.

Theme	Representative Example from Interviews	Lesson Plans
5. Factors affecting HRM students	<p><i>Would he think that was fair? We talk about how it is OK to have any type of feeling, even bad feelings, but what matters is what we do with those feelings.</i></p> <p><i>T3 Knowing what a student may be going through when it comes to my content. When I feel helpless, I know they feel helpless. Just the rate of those who are constantly leave and come ... They leave for 4 months, then come back, but I'm responsible for them when they're with me, to be sure that they're okay. I deal with Africans, true Africans, and an Asian population. These families move often--they leave and they return. I know what they do matters to their culture, and what they have to accomplish in their family. It makes it so important for me to ensure that I'm giving them something, even if it means I look up vocabulary words in their language so they can feel comfortable with me. I try to make a connection with them and it makes whatever they're going through at home and in the going back and forth at least okay.</i></p>	<p>Four of 15, or 27%, of participants, specified differentiated instruction in their lesson plans. This included activities such as “step reads” for certain students with a version of the assigned reading intended for those with literacy aptitude below grade level. Although student identifiers were removed from lesson plans, participants’ interview responses to PQ6 indicate HRM students are likely receiving differentiated instruction.</p>

Theme 1: Teacher attitudes toward SEL instruction. According to the interview data, 100% of participants felt that SEL techniques and strategies positively impacted HRM students’ academic growth, including in the area of reading literacy. Four teachers: T4, T7, T8, and T15, stated this was only effective when SEL was implemented with fidelity, during the first 30 minutes of the day, and reinforced during all core content and enrichment (fine arts, PE, etc.) instruction, as well as other routine activities, such as

passing period and lunch. Two participants, T1 and T12, stated that while SEL strategies and techniques could help students develop resilience and persistence skills needed to attempt, and accomplish new tasks, it was not sufficient as a stand-alone intervention strategy.

During interviews, 13 of 15 (87%) teachers discussed the importance of beginning the day with SEL instruction, during or immediately following breakfast, prior to the start of academic classes. Two teachers (13%), T10 and T13, stated the reason for this was because many children do not have a positive start to their day at home, such as waking up alone, hunger, fighting with parents or siblings, arriving at school late, or forgetting to bring something to school that was needed for the day (completed homework, supplies, lunch, etc.). One instructor from SES stated, “[SEL] gives them a safe space to talk about something other than the academics. It starts their day off good. Even if it started off bad before they got to us, when we do this, it makes things better” (T13, personal communication, March 17, 2022).

A participant from MES reported, “I typically know, even as a parent, in the morning when you talk to me, it sets the tone for the day, so I do something to set the tone for them” (T12, personal communication, March 16, 2022). Four teachers (27%): T2, T5, T7, and T15, specifically described the use of “circles” as the format for providing SEL instruction, which typically involves students gathering in a common area of the classroom (often on the floor) to sit in a circle and answer questions by taking turns, through the use of a “talking piece”—a tangible item the teacher gives to a student

to begin the conversation, and is passed from one child to another as they share their responses.

Discrepancies were present in responses by two participants, T11 and T12, who indicated that, although they believed SEL strategies could be useful in managing classroom behavior, they did not feel it was wise to dedicate 30 minutes each day for SEL-specific instruction. They felt the time could be better used to provide additional reading intervention supports for struggling students.

Theme 2: SEL curriculum, professional development, and leadership support. Nearly all participants (87%) expressed that the extent to which they felt comfortable teaching SEL and reinforcing SEL strategies and techniques during core content classes, was directly related to the professional development and training they received from campus or district leaders about how to implement the *Rethink Ed* curriculum during the morning SEL instructional time, or how to address students' social and emotional needs during academic instruction. Three of the 15 teachers (20%): T3, T6, and T8, commented that SEL had been a greater priority for them in previous years, when working at other campuses, because it was clear during staff meetings that it was a priority for campus leadership. However, at their current campus, administration did not emphasize SEL as an important instructional component to promote students' academic growth and overall well-being. "I'll be honest: now I just play the video for five minutes while the kids eat their breakfast, and that's it, because it seems like here it's just about compliance, and that's not doing anything to help the students" (T6, personal communication, March 16, 2022).

Many teachers (67%) stated that SEL training should be required for all instructional staff at the beginning of the year (BOY), but that district leaders should also communicate with campus administrators the purpose of SEL and what it should look like, so school leaders can model it for their teachers throughout the year. They also said that there should be more resources available to teachers after BOY training, because ongoing professional development (PD) is important to implement SEL with fidelity. T12 expressed the importance of different PD offerings for teachers, depending on their level of familiarity and experience with SEL.

Several interview participants (13 of 15, or 87%) felt the most effective form of leadership support was when campus administrators provided teachers with a very clear plan to implement SEL. Participants expressed varying levels of coaching feedback received from district and campus leadership. The reason for these discrepancies appeared to be related to their amount of time working in the district, the campus where they currently work, their campus roles, and what grade levels/subjects they taught.

Five of the 15 participants (33%): T1, T2, T4, T7, and T15 taught at CHES. Their responses indicated they felt the greatest amount of support, and each one gave examples of how SEL was emphasized as a priority by leadership. During the interviews, these teachers cited traveling to off-campus PD within the district, as well as outside ASD. They also mentioned that their principal discussed SEL during each staff meeting, and provided opportunities for teachers to share best practices with each other. The counselor and instructional coach routinely modeled SEL strategies for them to use in class with their students, such as breathing exercises or mindfulness practices.

Four of 15 interview participants (27%): T6, T7, T11, and T13, taught at FES, and three of 15 (20%): T10, T12, and T14, taught at MES. Their interview responses indicated a moderate focus on SEL through professional development and leadership support. One participant from each campus reported they had been designated as their school's SEL lead, and, upon accepting that role, received a 6-hour training from a mental/behavioral health coordinator at the Texas Education Agency (TEA). This PD was a "trainer of trainers" session, in which one representative from each campus receives instruction from an expert in a particular field of education, with the expectation that he/she will return to school and provide a similar presentation of the information learned to their staff colleagues. The SEL lead at MES explained that she was given an opportunity to share the training at a staff meeting with all colleagues, and that her daily schedule enables her to circulate between classrooms to provide SEL instructional support to teachers with limited experience, or who do not feel confident about teaching the *Rethink Ed* curriculum. She expressed the challenge of trying to get into all classrooms where her help is needed, when SEL is only taught for 15 minutes a day, often causes her to feel that what she does is making minimal difference for her colleagues or the students.

The SEL lead at FES reported that the principal at her campus does not consider SEL a high priority, and did not give her an opportunity to share the training in a whole-staff setting. She stated that she feels SEL is not implemented correctly, and generally consists of students watching a 5-minute video while eating breakfast, before teachers immediately begin core content instruction. Her role as SEL lead consists of meeting with

teachers who request support teaching social and emotional strategies during their lunch break, or after school. She indicated frustration that she is unable to go into classes and provide direct support, since she has a full class load during the day. She did ask some teacher to record their SEL lesson, and she reviews the videos to provide more specific feedback and suggestions.

Three of 15 participants (20%): T3, T5, and T9, teach at SES, and these educators indicated there was no SEL coaching or feedback provided by leadership on campus or from the district level. Their responses to interview questions PQ8, PQ9, and PQ11 indicated heavy reliance on PLC meetings to seek support from peers, compared to those at the other three campuses. However, they also expressed that PLCs are often devoted to reviewing quantitative, academic data. One participant (7%), T3, reported that her grade-level team considers SEL important, although it does not seem to be a focus for campus leadership, and this group of teachers eats lunch together multiple days a week in one person's classroom so they can discuss their students' SEL needs and share ideas about how to address those needs.

Another participant, T14, explained that five of her students lost recess privileges for three weeks due to a discipline infraction, and had to report to her classroom during that time. She requested the counselor come to her room and conduct restorative circles with the students. A restorative circle is an SEL strategy in which an adult asks open-ended questions about self-regulation and appropriate interactions with others to prompt student responses with the intent to help students identify their emotions, select calming strategies they can use to manage their emotions in stressful situations, and behave in a

kind, courteous manner toward peers and adults. The counselor came twice and then “got busy” (T14, personal communication, March 18, 2022), so the teacher conducted restorative circles with students for the remaining days of their disciplinary placement. One discrepancy response, from T11, indicated that the participant did not believe coaching, modeling PLCs, or other training and supports from administrators would lead to SEL instruction fidelity.

Theme 3: SSES conceptual framework: Students’ self-development and interpersonal skills growth as a result of SEL instruction. According to interview responses, 13 of 15, or 87%, participants reported positive effects of SEL on students’ self-confidence in their ability to overcome challenges and succeed at tasks they considered difficult were noticeable over time. These teachers reported that when SEL-related concerns occurred in class, such as two students arguing and insulting each other, or a student crying because he/she feels overwhelmed, scared, or sad, pausing ELAR instruction to address students’ SEL needs before continuing with the core content lesson resulted in students who were more engaged in the academic learning afterward than if the concerns were ignored, or postponed, and the teacher attempted to continue with the lesson uninterrupted. This opinion was expressed by teachers in all grade levels, who reported this was true for HRM and non-HRM students alike.

T9 instructs a self-contained, multiple-grade, special education classroom, and several of her students have emotional disturbance disorders, so she stated the ability to address students’ negative feelings promptly is critical to their academic success.

When it is brought up at every staff meeting, we know the principal and assistant principal believe it's important. That gives me permission, as a teacher, to know that when two students have a disagreement, it is OK for me to stop, right then and there, to acknowledge the issue and help them resolve it. If we don't, there is no point in me moving on with the lesson for those kids, because they are just going to be wrapped up in their problems and feelings. It also helps us build a sense of community, because I can bring the other kids into the conversation to share their experiences of when something similar happened to them, how they felt about it, and make suggestions to their classmates about how to fix the problem. We encourage and affirm each other, and we know that our friend is sad right now, so we are going to help him. Maybe next time, it will be you that needs help with something, and then we'll be happy to take good care of you, too. (T9, personal communication, March 15, 2022)

T4 has taught first grade more than 10 years, and said that for young students, it is imperative to integrate opportunities to practice skills such as speaking kindly to others and self-awareness of one's emotions, because they are still learning how to conduct themselves appropriately in a variety of social situations.

I just try to incorporate it throughout the whole day. For example, one day, the lesson was about actions and consequences, so when we were doing different transition times, I talked about how those actions of following directions, like coming to the rug, or getting their books, have positive consequences, like earning Dojo points [rewards for good behavior], based upon whether they do what they

are supposed to, or not. I integrate whatever the lesson is throughout the day, no matter what we're doing. If the child gets angry, if they get upset, we talk about counting down, or breathing exercises. It's important they know we do SEL at a specific time of the day, in the morning, but you try to let them know it doesn't just stop then. It matters throughout the day. (T4, personal communication, March 12, 2022)

T5 has experience teaching Grades PK-5, and reported that taking natural opportunities to reinforce SEL skills is important for any age group, even though the opportunities may look different. For example, a kindergarten student may get frustrated that he can't write the letters of his name correctly, while a fifth-grade student might be sad that a classmate teased her about her hair or clothes.

When I'm thinking through my lesson plans, I want to anticipate the situations that might happen that would cause frustration, or just being scared about something new. I know that frustration can lead to a lack of motivation, so I have to be careful about knowing when they are likely to be scared, and that they're scared to ask for help, because if that happens, they're going to shut down and they're not going to learn the content. Keeping those lines of communication open and being comfortable asking for help, and just the empowerment of letting them know that, "You can do hard things," so I know that I might have to slow things down in this lesson plan. We might not hit that goal for that day because we might have hit a roadblock. Maybe everybody's frustrated and upset, and some of them are not going to care, and they're not going to do it. Some of them are going to

cry, and some of them are going to be angry, so there's going to be lots of feelings that we might just have to stop and take some time to work through and slow down. We might have to remind each other that, "We can do hard things." (T5, personal communication, March 12, 2022)

Theme 4: Collaborative planning to support students' academic growth through SEL instruction. Teachers who worked in ASD schools that followed the district-issued elementary master schedule (33%) stated they felt starting each morning with prescribed SEL lessons began everyone's school day on a strong note. They also mentioned that because each week's lesson set was pre-determined, all classes established a common language of social expectations that became universal terms. This meant any teacher could talk to any student about those shared norms, regardless of the situation (monitoring the lunchroom, art or PE, in the hall), and those topics could be reinforced by the counselor or principal during restorative discipline conversations, if a student was sent to the office for a discipline infraction.

Consistency across the campus is really important, because if everyone is just doing their own thing, then whatever your thing is doesn't really go outside your classroom. If everyone is on the same page, then I can talk to the third grader making a mess in the bathroom about what it means to be respectful, and show respect for other people's things and common spaces we share, because I am going to know that his homeroom teacher was talking with his class that morning about respect and what it looks like in our school community. (T7, personal communication, March 14, 2022)

The regular meeting of professional learning communities (PLCs) was considered very important to effective SEL instruction by eight of 15, or 53% of participants. They stated that discussing students' academic status in the context of WCIA, in which the student's SEL needs, behavior, attendance concerns, and home life were considered, was helpful in creating a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) plan for intervention to close learning gaps. Teachers explained that vertical or horizontal alignment was valuable for these conversations, because students do have different relationships with adults, and PLCs create a time when teachers can share that information with each other, to help colleagues gain better understanding of students, and share ideas on how to support each child, based on their individual needs, background, and motivating factors.

Two responses to the questions related to this topic indicated discrepant perspectives. One participant stated they would not attend training outside of the required work day hours. Another felt that upper-grade elementary students had passed the life stage in which SEL could be learned and used effectively to manage emotions to be more successful academically.

Theme 5: Pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement. Most teachers interviewed (12 of 15, or 80%) currently instruct SEL daily at a designated time (typically at the beginning of the school day). Each of those 12 participants said that SEL strategies and techniques were revisited daily during core content instruction, including reading literacy. Lesson plan data revealed that most learning activities pre-determined by teachers for academic instruction reinforce task performance, engagement with others, and compound skills, respectively.

All but one of the 12 teachers (73%) stated during the interviews that they reinforce SEL strategies and techniques during core content instruction on a daily basis, although they are not always prepared as part of the lesson plans teachers develop in advance.

I try to take opportunities as they arise naturally, because they always do.

Someone accidentally bumps into a classmate, who then explodes and yells or shoves in response. I will pull that kid aside and talk about accidents and forgiveness. I ask him what he would think he if accidentally bumped into me and I exploded on him, just like he did to the other student. Would he think that was fair? We talk about how it is OK to have any type of feeling, even bad feelings, but what matters is what we do with those feelings. (T6, personal communication, March 13, 2022)

Nearly half of the participants (seven of 15, or 47%) mentioned specific situations that occurred during reading literacy instruction which were not part of the planned lesson that provided an opportunity for the teacher to model, and students to practice, emotional regulation or collaboration. Some situations involved one, or a few, students, while others pertained to the entire class. These teachers all believed addressing the SEL needs of the students resulted in a more positive and productive learning environment for the rest of the class.

One teacher mentioned that she believes SEL integration, over time, becomes instinctive during lesson planning. She gave an example of when students were learning about informational text elements, and she wanted them to create a class graph of

“Favorite Fruits.” The teacher loved figs, but when planning the activity, she (correctly) assumed that most of her students would be unfamiliar with figs. She purchased figs and brought them to school on the day students were going to create the class graph. She passed them around so students could look at the figs closely, touch them, and smell them. She then cut the figs open so students could see inside the fruit, and distributed pieces so students could taste figs. She facilitated a discussion in which students described figs, gave their opinions about whether or not they liked figs, and talked about how different people like different things, and how to share opinions respectfully, because everyone’s opinion is equally important.

I never wrote anything about “open-mindedness” in my lesson plans, but it had been our SEL topic a few weeks earlier, and these were things we talked about: the importance of being curious and trying new things. It’s OK to not like everything, but you can’t be afraid to try something just because it’s unfamiliar, or you might miss out on something amazing. (T15, personal communication, March 18, 2022)

Theme 6: Factors affecting HRM students. The interview data confirmed that more than half of the participants (eight of 15, or 53%) are concerned that students are unable to achieve their full potential as learners because their emotional needs, such as feeling safe, and social needs, such as a desire to feel they belong somewhere or to someone, are not being met. Several participants mentioned that HRM students show evidence of emotional trauma from creating connections to others in the past, and

developing distrust or aversion to building relationships, due to fear the connections will continue to be severed.

Until those needs are met, there is no point trying to teach them their letters, or how to add and subtract, because their mind is pre-occupied with what they need to do in order to survive. The things they learn in school are not what they need to know to survive, but what they need to know in order to thrive. (T1, personal communication, March 11, 2022)

Several teachers (five of 15, or 33%): T3, T8, T12, T13, and T14 discussed the challenge of helping HRM students feel safe, or a sense of belonging at school, because of factors, beyond their control, which created a pattern of instability in their lives.

You see a lot more behavior concerns with these students who move a lot, and if you really take time to drill down and ask, “What is causing these behaviors?” you realize that a lot of it is motivated by task avoidance. People don’t want to do things that are hard, because they are afraid of failure. High mobility kids learn, “If I engage in behaviors that distract from what I am being asked to do, I probably won’t have to do it because I am just going to move again before it matters,” and they are usually right. (T1, personal communication, March 11, 2022)

Participants who recounted success with HRM students’ reading literacy growth believed that establishing a positive relationship with those students, and fostering their sense of self-worth and confidence, played a large role in their academic improvement.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases in qualitative research emerge when data collected are different from, or contradictory to, identified themes (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Reporting discrepant cases that deviate from the identified themes is necessary to ensure the reliability of findings, prevent misinterpretation of the data, and contest researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I did not find any data that presented information unrelated to the identified themes; therefore, I did not report discrepant cases.

Evidence of Quality

The quality of the study was evidenced by measures to address internal and external validity of the findings. Members of my doctoral committee reviewed interview protocol questions to ensure they were aligned to support my research questions. I further addressed internal validity by triangulating data from interview transcripts and lesson plans to determine alignment of teachers' perspectives and intent with their actual instructional practices (Fusch et al., 2018). Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and lesson plan review.

The data described how ASD elementary educators implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum for social emotional learning (SEL) instruction with their students during the daily SEL instructional block designated on the master calendar, and reinforced those skills during core content reading instruction. It also addressed K-5 teachers' perceptions of how SEL strategies and techniques influenced high residential mobility (HRM) students' reading literacy development. I used thick description to address the external

validity of the study by documenting K-5 teachers' thoughts and perspectives (Aksikas, 2019). Data were analyzed through open and axial coding.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. The conceptual framework selected for the study was SSES. The models and theories of action for SSES were built on work by John and De Fruyt (2015), who developed the *Framework for the Longitudinal Study of Social and Emotional Skills in Cities*. The OECD expanded on John and De Fruyt's study to develop a comprehensive set of metrics for cognitive, social, and emotional skill development among children and adolescents. These metrics were organized into six domains: (a) compound skills, such as critical thinking and self-efficacy; (b) engagement with others, including sociability and assertiveness; (c) open-mindedness, which is evaluated by a person's curiosity, tolerance, and creativity; (d) collaboration, including empathy and trust of others; (e) emotional regulation, such as stress resistance and optimism; and (f) task performance, including persistence and self-control.

The framework also examined family, school, and community factors that promoted, or hindered, students' development of these skill sets. The findings showed that participants used SEL strategies during core content instruction, including reading literacy, to help students develop skill sets in multiple domains. The participants accomplished this by previewing the SEL lesson plans provided by the district when

developing their core content instructional lesson plans. They implemented student activities for group work and independent learning in the core content lesson plans that provided students with opportunities to practice skill sets related to the SEL topic for the week, and reinforce skill sets associated with prior weeks' topics.

Domain 1: Compound skills. Most teachers (10 of 15, or 67%) interviewed during this study stated that the skill sets for which students had the most opportunity to practice during instruction were collaboration and task performance, and activities which incorporate both domains met the definition of compound skills.

Domain 2: Engagement with others. Most participants (12 of 15, or 80%) demonstrated evidence in their lesson plans of pre-planned "We Do" learning activities designed to reinforce engagement with others, by encouraging discussion with a partner, small group, or whole class. These activities include: "Turn and Talk," "Think-Pair-Share," and "Circle Time."

Domain 3: Open-mindedness. Several interview participants (10 of 15, or 67%) stated that open-mindedness skills are frequently reinforced in class as real-time situations occur that the teacher feels need to be addressed promptly to help students identify, express, and manage their feelings appropriately, and treat others with kindness and respect. One teacher mentioned that open-mindedness is more instinctive than explicit in lesson plans. She provided an example of when students learned how to take surveys and graph data as text features. She brought her favorite fruit, figs, for students to touch, smell, and taste. The teacher stressed the importance of trying new things to develop personal preferences, and respect others' preferences.

Domain 4: Collaboration. Although collaboration is often confused for engagement with others, collaboration activities are specifically designed to foster teamwork between students in an effort to achieve a single goal (John & De Fruyt, 2015). One teacher described a collaboration activity he routinely incorporates into his lesson plans called “rally coaching,” in which students are paired with a classmate and take turns solving problems. On each problem, one partner gives directions to the other student, and the other student follows the partner’s instructions. They alternate, so each student takes multiple turns practicing each role.

Domain 5: Emotional regulation. Nearly all participants in this study (14 of 15, or 93%) described the importance of strategies related to emotional regulation, particularly stress resistance, and perseverance, when working with HRM students. “Most of the time, when they come to a new place, they are scared. It takes them a while to learn to trust anyone. They don’t want to get close, because they are probably just going to leave again” (T9, personal communication, March 15, 2022).

Domain 6: Task performance. Most teachers interviewed (12 of 15, or 80%) currently instruct SEL daily at a designated time (typically at the beginning of the school day). Each of those 12 participants said that SEL strategies and techniques, including task performance, were revisited daily during core content instruction, including reading literacy. Lesson plan data revealed that most independent ELAR learning activities offer students the opportunity to practice task performance, such as reading a developmentally-appropriate text aloud with 80% accuracy, or successfully answering retention and comprehension questions after a teacher reads a book.

Elementary Teachers Use SEL Techniques to Improve HRM Students' Reading Literacy

Lesson plans supported interview statements as evidenced by use of the gradual release of responsibility (GROR) model in the structure of their lessons over the course of one school week. The GROR model includes three stages of a lesson: “I Do” (when the teacher lectures, explains, and models concepts for the students, who may be passively engaged in learning through note-taking or answering “check for understanding” questions from the teacher); “We Do” (when students are actively engaged in learning by participating in whole-class discussion, group work, or partner activities such as “Think-Pair-Share” or “Turn and Talk”); and “You Do” (when each student completes independent practice of the skill or objective taught during the lesson to demonstrate their retention, comprehension, and/or mastery of the topic). Over the course of a five-day instructional unit, there is a shift in the amount of time devoted to each segment. On the first day of the week, the lesson involves “I Do” direct instruction from the teacher for a majority of the class time, with some time allotted for “We Do,” and a very brief “You Do” activity, which might involve a task such as answering three questions related to the lesson before dismissal, sometimes referred to as an “exit ticket.” Over the remaining four days, the time shifted from primarily “I Do” to more “We Do” and “You Do,” until the final day of the week, when most of the class period involved “You Do,” often in the form of a summative assessment, such as an exam, which each student should complete, independently, at the end of an instructional unit.

Teachers explain and demonstrate the core content topic skills, as well as SEL skills needed to master the student learning expectations, during “I Do” instruction. Many model “think-aloud,” the process of verbalizing one’s thought process when considering how to solve a problem. Teachers often include intentional errors during “think-aloud,” which can accomplish several functions. It provides formative data about which students are paying attention to the demonstration and know the material well-enough to recognize when a mistake has been made.

If a student alerts the teacher of the error, the teacher can model how to receive corrective feedback graciously, without embarrassment or defensiveness. If the student’s approach is disrespectful or condescending, the teacher can also offer guidance on how to give feedback with kindness and empathy. If students do not realize a mistake has been made, the teacher can model self-reflective practices, such as reviewing each step in the problem-solving process until the mistake is found and corrected. This instructional practice teaches task performance strategies and compound skills, including perseverance to check one’s work, identify errors or misconceptions, and persisting with the assignment until the correct answer is determined.

Teachers’ Perceived Influence of Leadership Support on Classroom Practices

Several teachers (seven of 15, or 47%) stated that the degree to which they prioritized the use of SEL strategies during core content instruction was directly related to the emphasis placed on SEL by school leaders (principal, assistant principal, counselor, etc.), and reinforcement in all school settings: classroom, cafeteria, hall, playground, etc. T6 changed schools in ASD after three years at the same campus, and

discussed the stark contrast between leadership attitudes toward SEL instruction at her prior school compared to her current campus. She expressed frustration about the apparent discrepancy between district leadership's vision for SEL and her current school supervisors. T6 was appointed as the SEL lead for her campus, and provided training by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) on implementing restorative circles; however, her school leadership implemented a daily master schedule different from the one issued by district administration.

The alternative master schedule directs teachers to spend approximately five minutes providing SEL instruction each morning as students are entering the classroom for breakfast. T6 reported this practice was highly ineffective, since many students are late for school frequently, and therefore receive no SEL support to frame the beginning of their day. She also stated that although counselors meet with all classes each week as part of the enrichment rotation, along with classes like art and computer science, school administration directed counselors to spend their scheduled meeting with students monitoring their participation in an online test practice program, rather than talking about their social and emotional needs. T6 stated that this directive communicates to instructional staff that SEL is not important, and she feels there are few opportunities for her to implement the techniques she learned in the training the district leadership organized for her to attend.

Lesson Plan Evidence of SEL Techniques Reinforced During Core Content

Instruction

When I reviewed the lesson plans submitted by interview participants, I observed several activities related to reading literacy and TEKS learning objectives for ELAR that confirmed teachers' deliberate planning to build collaboration and emotional regulation skills during core content instruction. These included "Think-Pair-Share" or "Turn and Talk" activities, when students are assigned a partner to discuss a question posed by the teacher; performance-based assessments that involved group projects; and warm-up or transition activities that typically involved the use of a breathing technique or other mindfulness exercise for 2-3 minutes at the beginning of class, and/or between segments of the lesson. Inherent within lesson plans were additional evidence of activities that help students build compound skills and task performance, particularly over the course of the full instructional week. Typically, this was accomplished by students mastering the daily objective, and adding each subsequent day's learning to their knowledge base so they could demonstrate comprehension and successful completion of the unit content in a summative task, such as a test or cumulative project. The only SSES conceptual framework domain that did not appear in lesson plans was emotional regulation, with the exception of an occasional "brain break" involving a breathing exercise. Based on participants' interview responses, it appeared that teachers discuss emotional regulation during the morning SEL lesson, and reinforce it during naturally-occurring opportunities, such as when a student becomes frustrated or two students argue with each other, rather than as a scheduled activity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single case study was to explore how K-5 educators implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students, and determine teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. The research questions guiding this study were used to examine SEL instructional practices of ASD elementary teachers, by providing information about how teachers use SEL curriculum with their students, as well as teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influence HRM elementary students' reading literacy development.

Data revealed that participants instruct SEL during morning block and reinforce SEL strategies during ELAR lessons, through pre-determined activities and unplanned situations in class between students and peers or adults. John and De Fruyt (2015) stated that effective SEL increases academic achievement and positive social interactions, and decreases negative outcomes later in life. This statement was supported by interview responses in this study. According to transcripts, 13 of 15, or 87%, participants reported positive effects of SEL on students' self-confidence in their ability to overcome challenges and succeed at tasks they considered difficult were noticeable over time.

The research provided understanding of how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. Research findings revealed that teachers used *Rethink Ed* curriculum during the daily SEL period allotted on the district elementary master schedule, and reinforced SEL practices during

ELAR instruction, through activities developed during lesson planning, and when impromptu opportunities to use SEL strategies arose in student interactions with themselves, peers, and adults. Participants perceived a positive impact on HRM students' reading literacy development when SEL was instructed each morning, and reinforced during ELAR instruction. Most of the participants (9 of 15, or 60%) stressed the importance of training and support for teachers to implement any program successfully.

I am very comfortable teaching SEL and integrating it into my core content instruction, but I have noticed that my colleagues who are new, or worked at other campuses in the past, do not know how to teach SEL, and so most of them just don't do it. Training is essential, because knowing how to implement daily SEL instruction, and reinforce it throughout the day when opportunities arise to practice sharing, or being kind, or identify feelings and appropriately manage emotions, will give teachers confidence to actually put it in to practice, which is exactly what we know we should be doing with our kids if we want them to be successful. (T15, personal communication, March 18, 2022)

Several participants (six of 15, or 40%) also discussed the value of PLCs and mentors to learn from one another, offer suggestions, and share ideas about implementing various SEL strategies in their classes.

There is no coaching and feedback from leadership where I work, but I am so blessed to have an amazing team. We meet three or four days a week, and we are able to talk about what is happening in our classrooms with our students, and exchange ideas. PLCs are really the social and emotional time for the teachers. It

meets our needs by letting us know that we aren't alone, be able to put so many heads together with different perspectives, and take helpful suggestions away that we can try with our high-needs students. (T3, personal communication, March 12, 2022)

The findings support that teachers who receive training and support are more likely to implement SEL with fidelity, as an instructional priority, than those who are not trained, and do not work with colleagues or supervisors who prioritize addressing students' social and emotional needs before, and alongside, academic instruction.

Section 3 offers a description of the capstone project that was developed from the study findings. The goals for this project are to increase knowledge about implementation of *Rethink Ed* curriculum by K-5 teachers for ASD leaders, and provide teachers with information about how SEL techniques can be used to reinforce HRM students' academic growth, particularly in the area of reading literacy development. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) recommends that school district and campus leaders establish a framework to provide professional development and ongoing support for teachers when adopting an SEL initiative (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). This project supports that recommendation, based on participant interview responses, and provides practical ways district and campus leaders can provide these resources.

According to the findings of this study, implementation of SEL during a daily designated time, and reinforcement of SEL strategies and techniques during core content instruction, is conducted with varying levels of fidelity among K-5 teachers in ASD. The

differences in these processes appeared to depend primarily on the campus at which the teachers work, and school leadership emphasis on SEL at each of those campuses. In addition to the *Rethink Ed* curriculum, ASD leadership's adoption of a districtwide master schedule in which SEL instruction is mandatory at the beginning of each instructional day facilitate means and opportunity for teachers to effectively implement SEL in its elementary schools. Appendix A outlines the proposed recommendations and evaluation for this project, in addition to supporting resources for implementation. Section 3 concludes with project implications at the local level and within a larger context. It also addresses positive social change that may occur as a result.

Description of the Project Deliverable

My project deliverable is a white paper. The data indicated a need for training and support to help teachers implement SEL instruction daily with fidelity, and reinforce SEL strategies during ELAR instruction, to help students grow academically. Based on the data, I addressed the needs by writing a white paper. The white paper describes how I will address the issues I discovered. For example, several teachers mentioned that the training on *Rethink Ed* was not sufficient for them to feel confident teaching SEL. Many participants also mentioned they did not feel knowledgeable about reinforcing SEL strategies during ELAR instruction, and felt that coaching or support from school or district leaders could help guide them to valuable resources to assist in acquiring familiarity with these practices.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. In this section, I presented the qualitative approach to analyzing the data collected from the interviews with 15 participants, and their lesson plans. Data revealed that teachers interviewed do implement *Rethink Ed* during the daily SEL block, and reinforce SEL strategies during ELAR instruction. They perceived that HRM students who learned emotional regulation strategies were more successful in their reading literacy development than students who did not acquire those resilience skills. This reinforced the research by Kankaraš and Suarez-Alvarez (2019), who presented evidence that social-emotional learning helped at-risk students, including HRM, improve academic growth by up to 11 percentile points in a single academic year. The data also affirmed the ESSA objectives of implementing WCIA and incorporating 21st century skills, which include metrics from the SSES conceptual framework, into school performance measures, to better prepare students for success as adults (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018).

I discovered six themes that answered the RQs. For RQ1, four themes addressed how teachers implement *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily SEL instruction to support reading literacy for HRM students: teacher attitudes toward SEL; curriculum, professional development, and support; collaborative planning to support students' academic growth as a result of SEL instruction; and pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement. For RQ2, two themes addressed the perceptions of ASD elementary

teachers about the influence of *Rethink Ed* curriculum on HRM students' reading literacy development: SSES conceptual framework—students' self-development and interpersonal skills growth as a result of SEL instruction; and factors affecting HRM students. This section presented the qualitative data to answer the research questions gathered through interviews and lesson plans. The procedures included collecting perspectives of 15 participants through semi-structured interviews using interview protocol questions (Appendix B). The interviews were followed by thematic analysis of participant responses and their lesson plan data submitted for one week of ELAR instruction. This study clarified the perceptions of K-5 teachers in ASD, and supported the white paper project I developed as a result of the study findings with recommendations to provide initial training and ongoing support to help teachers provide SEL instruction and reinforcement during ELAR lessons to help HRM students develop SEL strategies, including resilience skills.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

This qualitative case study explored how Adoniram School District (ASD) elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, as well as their perceptions of how social and emotional learning (SEL) techniques influenced high residential mobility (HRM) students' reading literacy development. The findings were that the extent to which SEL positively impacted reading literacy depended on the fidelity and consistency with which SEL was implemented in the daily schedule and reinforced during core instruction. Additionally, participant responses indicated teachers were less likely to focus on SEL instruction with students when campus administration or district leadership, including ongoing professional development and coaching, did not communicate SEL as a priority to address student learning needs. Based on these findings, ASD administrators realized the importance of building a districtwide plan to implement SEL instruction at all campuses, provide appropriate training to teachers and school leaders of what SEL should look like during classroom instruction, and ensure campus staff had appropriate contacts to seek ideas, feedback, suggestions, and additional training from as student needs change over time. According to the study results, ASD administrators, elementary campus leaders, and K-5 teachers would benefit from training, and ongoing support, including coaching, feedback, and professional learning communities (PLCs). These practices could help teachers effectively implement *Rethink Ed* curriculum during daily SEL instruction, and reinforce SEL strategies during core content classes, including English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR), as part of a

whole-child instructional approach (WCIA) to improve reading literacy among HRM students.

In response to the study findings, I developed a white paper (Appendix A), also called a position paper, that describes recommendations to help stakeholders expand SEL training and ongoing support for teachers. The study findings and literature review provided the foundation for the recommendations, which address research-based practices related to effective curriculum implementation and improved student achievement. Recommendations include “trainer of trainers” professional development for ASD district administration and campus leaders, as well as providing ongoing support for teachers to gain increasing familiarity with and knowledge of effective SEL instructional practices through coaching and feedback from school administrators. I also recommend resources for teachers to use independently, or collaboratively in PLCs, to gain deeper understanding of the SSES framework and SEL strategies to incorporate in reading literacy instruction to increase academic growth with HRM students.

Description and Goals

A white paper is appropriate for this project because it is a position paper through which a researcher can offer potential solutions for an area of concern (Treiblmaier, 2020). My suggestions address the concerns of this study for ASD leaders and K-5 teachers. The concerns identified in this study were a lack of consistency implementing SEL districtwide, insufficient training and support for teachers on instructing SEL daily with reinforcement during core classes, and contradictory messages from district and campus leaders about the importance of SEL as part of a WCIA to improving HRM

students' reading literacy. The goals for this project were to increase knowledge about implementation of *Rethink Ed* curriculum by K-5 teachers for ASD leaders and provide teachers with information and resources to reinforce SEL techniques during reading literacy instruction to promote HRM students' academic growth.

Most interview participants (11 of 15, or 73%) stated that training on how to use SEL curriculum and reinforce SEL strategies during core content instruction are very important if ASD hopes to see the desired effect of WCIA on academic outcomes, particularly around reading literacy. Additionally, eight of 15 teachers (53%) discussed the importance of ongoing support with SEL implementation through coaching, feedback, and PLCs. Training district and campus leaders how to guide teachers through the process of SEL implementation during the assigned "morning meeting" time could build teachers' confidence to facilitate conversations with students about their feelings, how they communicate with others, persisting in difficult tasks, and working as part of a team. The limitations of the white paper include the narrow scope of this research, particularly because the participants were selected from one school district. Incorporating SEL as part of a WCIA to address academic growth, reading literacy included, is critical in closing academic gaps that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic that led to school closures and remote instruction for extended periods of time (Mason & Grover, 2020). Recent research suggests that recovering from this learning loss is only possible if schools prioritize resources to address the social and emotional needs of students, and help children overcome tendencies to avoid challenging situations so they can persist to achieve success (Ferren, 2021).

Rationale

A white paper describes study findings and conclusions and offers recommendations based on those findings (Treiblmaier, 2020). The white paper in Appendix A includes specific suggestions in response to my interview participants' statements and lesson plan review. I discovered that interview participants believed training and support from leadership or colleagues were the most important factors affecting how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development.

Based on the study findings, I believe professional development for district and campus leaders to understand how teachers should be trained and supported in implementing SEL would benefit K-5 educators and their students (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Interview data revealed 13 of 15 (87%) participants stated their comfort level instructing SEL and reinforcing the strategies and techniques during core content lessons, including reading literacy, was largely dependent on the amount of training and professional development provided by district or campus leaders. Another critical factor for teachers designated instruction and reinforcement during reading literacy core content lessons were how their campus prioritized SEL as a learning community. The amount of time administration spends discussing SEL or coaching staff how to use SEL practices, along with collaborative lesson planning between colleagues in settings such as PLCs, are considered by teachers when they develop lesson plan activities and prepare to discuss *Rethink Ed* curriculum topic(s) with students during the daily SEL time.

In reviewing the lesson plans submitted by participants, I found substantial evidence of activities that created opportunities for students to develop collaboration, task performance, compound skills, emotional regulation, engagement with others, and open-mindedness skill sets, particularly among teachers who indicated they are extremely comfortable instructing SEL and do so on a daily basis. Participants who indicated they were not comfortable using the *Rethink Ed* curriculum each morning or did not consider how to reinforce SEL strategies and techniques during their core content instruction, included fewer activities in their lesson plans that addressed the six skill domains of the SSES framework. In response to the data, I developed a white paper that outlined how ASD elementary teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum in their daily instruction, and their perceptions of how SEL techniques influenced HRM students' reading literacy development.

The white paper includes an evidence-based training module, timeline to implement the proposed recommendations, an evaluation measure, and supporting resources for teachers. The training module is geared toward district and campus leaders who will serve as "trainers of trainers" to share methods for instructing *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their instructional staff how. Leaders can also model ways to incorporate SEL strategies and techniques during core content instruction to help students develop resilience and persistence skills needed for reading literacy achievement. The training module was developed to help teachers ultimately meet the needs of their students, so learners can achieve self-efficacy and develop persistence to work through challenging tasks to mastery of a fundamental skill set or knowledge base. It offers educators and

administrators an evidence-based resource grounded in universal best practices for WCIA and child development.

Review of the Literature

Six themes were identified during the data analysis: (a) teacher attitudes toward SEL instruction; (b) SEL curriculum, professional development and leadership support; (c) SSES conceptual framework: students' self-development and interpersonal skills growth as a result of SEL instruction; (d) collaborative planning to support students' academic growth as a result of SEL instruction; (e) pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement; and (f) factors affecting HRM students. A review of scholarly literature, focused on recommendations for this study, was conducted through the Walden Library, using the ERIC and ProQuest databases. Search terms included *SEL professional development, teacher coaching and feedback, whole-child PLCs, and learning gaps*. The literature review provided structure for the white paper as my capstone project. This section includes discussion of the following topics: (a) white paper, (b) SEL professional development for teachers, and (c) WCIA to address reading literacy learning gaps among HRM students.

White Paper

White papers are used by many organizations to inform stakeholders about the processes used in their daily operations (Vanover et al., 2021). These documents are routinely used by corporate businesses and marketing firms (Campbell, 2021). According to Bardach and Patashnik (2019), a white paper is an effective method to support and recommend changes to existing programs. White papers are intended to concisely inform

readers about a complex issue, and present the organization's philosophy regarding the issue (Howlett & Tosun, 2019). A white paper is a method used to recommend program changes and support the implementation of those changes (Duxbury et al., 2021).

Stearns (2019) conducted a study on the effectiveness of utilizing Responsive Classroom (RC) strategies, an SEL program similar to *Rethink Ed*. Based on the results he observed among students, he developed a white paper to provide training and support for teachers facing classroom management challenges. Another study sought perspectives of teachers and students on whether social-emotional learning had an impact on student behavior and learning (Coady, 2021). The white papers, in both studies, included the researchers' findings, their goals, and recommendations to those seeking to effect positive change in their professions. Reviewing their work helped understand how my qualitative case study supported the development of a white paper to make recommendations for this project.

Reflective Practices

Slade et al. (2019) proposed that reflective practices can be used to help teachers enhance their instructional performance and encourages them to become more open-minded in their classroom methodology. This enables them to continuously adopt new, effective practices, and build their reservoir of teaching strategies over time. Reflective practices include teacher mentoring, coaching feedback, recording a lesson and playing back to view the instruction from an outsider's perspective, PLCs, and book studies (Hamel & Viau-Guay, 2019). According to Froberg (2022), reflective practice is an individual process that facilitates teaching, learning, and understanding.

Facilitating group reflections during PD can help new teachers, and those who lack experience using reflective practices to see the process modeled, which will enrich their understanding, while promoting communication and encouraging the group participants to commit to shared actions (Lysberg & Rønning, 2021). One of the most critical areas for reflected practice is DI. A study conducted by Rodham et al. (2020) revealed teachers struggle to identify alternate instructional methods when a student fails to understand and resists performing an assigned task. However, teachers who routinely completed reflective practices, such as journaling observations at the end of the school day, built their capacity to come to a lesson with DI strategies planned out in advance, which increased the success of their students (Power et al., 2022).

Adult Learning

Educating adults is an ongoing topic of debate. Many adults believe learning is a formal process that ends upon graduating from school, when, in reality, it is a lifelong, continuous process. According to Merriam & Baumgartner (2020), the three foundational learning theories are andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformative learning. In their book, the authors stated that adult educators should familiarize themselves with the knowledge base to effectively meet the needs of adult learners and improve the responsiveness of their practices.

In education, pedagogy, the *art* of teaching children, is often central to developing age-appropriate knowledge and skills with practical lesson plans and activities. Andragogy is the *science* of teaching adults, implying that more practice, precision, and calculation are required to master the craft. Loeng (2020) suggest that intrinsic

motivation is often critical to an adult learner's success; for example, if a person is promoted to a new job that requires they become adept at using a particular software program previously unfamiliar to them, they are more likely to be eager about learning the program because they are excited about the promotion. Martello (2018) also observed that adults seek to understand why they should learn something, and are problem-focused, rather than subject-centered, so professional development should focus on strategies that address challenges adults frequently face in their work.

PLCs provide opportunities for teachers with varying levels of experience to develop and promote respect for differing opinions, shared learning agreements, and the ability to see things from others' perspectives (Martello, 2018). According to the andragogy theory, PD that is strategy-driven and solution oriented, rather than focused on a topic and its content will help adults learn best, and transfer their learning into instructional practices (Richter et al., 2021).

Social Emotional Learning

SEL is associated with differentiated pedagogy in an effort to build capacity for emotional regulation and appropriate social behavior, to achieve greater comprehensive success with all students, compared to a focus solely on academic content (Ramirez et al., 2021). According to Crandall et al. (2020), SEL addresses fundamental needs all children have that must be met, in addition to physical needs for basic survival, if they are going to acquire new skills and achieve self-efficacy. Many children's SEL needs are not adequately met by their family, including those raised in foster care, single-parent homes in which the mother or father works long hours, and those with parents who are

emotionally disconnected from their children. It is therefore critical that educators ensure these needs are adequately met in the school setting, to avoid negative long-term effects on children, including depression, substance abuse, and suicide ideation (Pierre, 2021).

SEL was pioneered by a team of educators and researchers from 1987-1992, led by Timothy Shriver and Dr. Roger P. Weissberg, who started the New Haven Social Development Program (Weissberg, 2019). This was based on earlier work by Dr. James Comer from Yale University's Child Study Center, who started a program in 1968 to practice "whole child" instruction in two New Haven, Connecticut schools. By the early 1980s, both schools reported a decline in behavior challenges and academic performance that exceeded the national average (Darling-Hammond et al., 2018). Shriver and Weissberg built on the program and its findings by bringing together leading experts to create a framework intended to promote social and emotional skills in schools. This was followed by a multidisciplinary collaboration of educators, researchers, child advocates, and practitioners that became known as Collaborative for Advancing Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a worldwide leading organization in SEL research, frameworks, and training resources for educators.

Research shows that incorporating SEL instruction improves academic achievement an average of 11 percentile points (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019). Using SEL as part of a WCIA in urban schools, such as ASD, may yield even higher growth percentages (Barnes, 2019). A study of children attending Grades 1-6 in a Chicago elementary school where SEL instruction was introduced revealed statistically significant growth in reading and mathematics achievement on the Northwest Evaluation

Association (NWEA) Measure of Progress (MAP) scores in one year (Lyman, 2021). Study participants indicated that SEL strategies increased student focus and stamina, as well as improving children's level of self-confidence and internal positive monologue, replacing defeatist attitudes with encouraging phrases, such as "You've got this!" when attempting new skill acquisition or challenging tasks. The white paper written for this project study contains recommendations for teachers to implement SEL instructional strategies that will reinforce students' resilience during academic instruction.

Project Description

The data analysis from this project study suggested the need for a structure and framework to support implementing daily SEL instruction at a designated time each morning on the master schedule, and lesson planning to incorporate SEL strategies into reading literacy instruction. Analysis of participant interviews and review of lesson plans indicated that teachers would benefit from additional supports to implement SEL with fidelity. A white paper, with recommendations, also referred to as a position paper, was selected for this project as a result of the study findings. The local problem this study addressed was the uncertainty about how teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students, or teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. The first recommendation is to provide 18 hours (three days) of initial training on using *Rethink Ed* curriculum during a daily 30-minute SEL block, and reinforcing SEL strategies during academic instruction, including reading literacy. The second recommendation focuses on

the need for ongoing support after the initial training, through follow-up PD and coaching from campus or district leaders, to help teachers improve their SEL instructional skills.

The white paper includes data analysis results to clarify the six themes that emerged from the interview analysis and lesson plan review. The themes for this project study are teacher attitudes toward SEL; SEL curriculum, professional development, and leadership support; SSES conceptual framework: students' self-development and interpersonal skills growth as a result of SEL instruction; collaborative planning to support students' academic growth as a result of SEL instruction; pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement; and factors affecting HRM students. Both research-based recommendations were developed to assist teachers in using SEL instruction daily as a stand-alone curriculum, and reinforcing the skills during reading literacy instruction. First, teachers need training to effectively implement SEL instruction into their daily routine as a practice to support academic growth. The white paper addresses recommendations for 18 hours (three days) of initial training to help teachers learn how to navigate *Rethink Ed*, reinforce SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction, and monitor student data in order to adjust practices and interactions as needed.

The second recommendation discusses the need for ongoing support to give teachers helpful feedback and encouragement on implementing SEL strategies successfully. This will help them continuously grow and improve as educators. My recommendations are based on elementary teachers' perceptions of how SEL influenced academic growth. ASD is one district in the United States. However, this proposed model

of training and supporting teachers to implement SEL may be considered for use by other school districts experiencing academic achievement stagnation or decline, and are considering the adoption of an SEL program.

Implementation

School district leaders should consider required resources necessary to carry out the recommendations for training and providing ongoing support to teachers in implementing SEL instruction, as well as obstacles to completing both recommendations. The initial 18-hour (3-day) adult learning can occur during the normal staff development sessions that teachers must attend at the beginning of each school year. The CASEL website is recommended as a tool that can help provide resources for teachers on implementing SEL instruction. This will enable teachers to receive the training and support they need, without having to commit additional time outside of the school day or academic year.

CASEL

CASEL is associated with five major universities and humanitarian organizations, including Special Olympics and The Urban Assembly (Ross & Tolan, 2018). The CASEL website offers free resources for SEL instruction to be used by teachers, school leaders, district administrator, PD instructors, and other adult learners. CASEL collaborates with nationally recognized education experts and child advocates to develop case studies, activities, and frameworks that provide research-validated information about meeting the social and emotional needs of children to help foster their academic growth.

Resources, Existing Supports, and Obstacles

Resources and existing supports. The most important resource required to fulfill the recommendations of intensive SEL initial training, and ongoing support to help teachers implement SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction successfully, is time. This commodity is often the first to be sacrificed when it comes to adopting new initiatives. Curriculum or software arrives late, legal updates require additional discussion for compliance with new regulations, and different departments compete for how much time they can spend instructing the educational staff whose role pertains to their goals and objectives. PD often ends up feeling like a “drive-by” experience, which leaves teachers feeling all they took away were several new buzzwords and checklists to fill out, but nothing they feel confident walking into their classes and successfully implementing to help their students.

Although beginning-of-year staff development days would allow teachers to receive training without asking them to give their personal time, there is an alternative that could help districts avoid several problems, including teachers who would miss the initial training because of a timing conflict with another beginning-of-year requirement, such as state-mandated PD for teachers of English learners. Scheduling the 18-hour training in several weeks of the summer would enable teachers to choose a three-day session from the list of offerings that did not interfere with their family time, vacation plans, etc. Districts choosing this option should consider providing compensatory time during the teachers’ normal contracted days as well.

Obstacles. One potential barrier to effective implementation of this project is resistance from ASD teachers and campus leaders to support SEL recommendations, which include a daily 30-minute instructional block following breakfast, in which academic content is not taught. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) proposed that teachers who resist change often do so because they do not understand the reasons behind the change, or the potential benefits to their students in both the short term, and long term. Explaining the reasoning for 30 minutes of daily SEL instruction, and reinforcing SEL strategies during academic instruction, including reading literacy, may help mitigate the “push back” from teachers who are leery of adopting SEL instruction and *Rethink Ed* curriculum. The findings of this study, and rationale for making changes to the master schedule and approach to teacher-student relationships may increase willing, and eager, teacher participation. I will work to establish a positive and supportive relationship with ASD staff to facilitate the change process (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Another obstacle may be the commitment to provide ongoing support for teachers to implement SEL instruction with fidelity. Not long after the school year begins, administrators and leaders are busy with handling discipline incidents, monitoring halls, coordinating state assessments, and facilitating data meetings. Though well-intentioned, they may find themselves, after a few weeks, looking for what they can “remove from their too-full plate.” Since SEL is not graded or tested in any way, its importance may fall at the bottom of the stack in the mind of a leader who does not see the full value of providing SEL instruction to support academic growth. Strategies that could be used to overcome this perception by administrators include sharing qualitative and quantitative

research showing the academic growth of students who receive SEL instruction, compared to those who do not, despite attending similar schools. If leaders see evidence that investing time into helping children learn to manage their emotions, develop resilience, and interact positively with peers and adults will pay off in higher math and reading scores, they may be willing to commit the time necessary to coach teachers on effectively using the SEL strategies.

Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Administrators

Teachers. As is the case in any adoption of new curriculum, opportunities for collaboration, and continuous communication is key in supporting teachers as they learn new materials and strategies, to prevent frustration and burnout with a new initiative. Teachers must believe in the hierarchy of needs proposed by Maslow in order to commit to giving up 30 minutes of academic instruction daily to focus on children's social and emotional development at that time (Crandall et al., 2020). Research indicates that when teachers feel they have a voice during a transition period, to collaboratively discuss challenges and potential solutions, they are more open-minded, actively engaged, and willing to take leadership roles in facilitating the change with co-workers (Rincón-Gallardo, 2019). Therefore, teachers should attend training and coaching sessions with a growth mindset and willingness to voice their concerns and ideas.

Administrators. Like the teachers they support and coach, instructional leaders must believe in the ultimate value of devoting 30 minutes each morning to help children develop awareness of their emotions, strategies to manage those emotions when they feel overwhelming, and interact appropriately with other children and adults. I will meet with

ASD leaders, at their convenience, to establish buy-in for this concept. I will provide them with an overview of the findings from my research. Following the overview, I will make myself available to answer additional questions they may have about the research or white paper recommendations. In addition, I will share success stories of schools who have implemented SEL with fidelity from our comparative region (districts in our geographic area, with similar enrollments, demographics, socioeconomic status, etc.) so we can learn from them.

After meeting, ASD leadership should develop a plan for implementing SEL instruction, protecting the daily 30-minute block from being used for academic content, and providing initial training and ongoing support to teachers who need assistance teaching, or reinforcing, SEL strategies during the academic instructional block.

Administrators should familiarize themselves with *Rethink Ed* curriculum to become helpful resources for teachers who struggle or would like input on how to incorporate certain lessons and strategies. Campus leaders should document changes observed during the SEL instructional block as teachers become more familiar and comfortable using the strategies, and monitor data regarding student behavior, compared to district benchmark reading achievement scores.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Following acceptance of the doctoral study by the University, I will discuss implementing recommendations of the white paper. Implementation can occur quickly, although it is advised the initial 18-hour (three-day) training be scheduled during the summer, if possible. I developed a timeline intended to increase the comfort and

familiarity of instructing SEL each morning, and to reinforce during reading literacy instruction, over a period of one semester (18 weeks). The timeline shows a gradual implementation of SEL instruction, and principles to help teachers successfully adopt SEL strategies throughout their academic instruction. Table 8 displays the recommended timeline for administrators and instructional leaders to guide teachers through implementing SEL instruction and incorporating SEL strategies in reading literacy instruction consistently, to build buy-in and confidence.

Table 8

Social Emotional Learning Implementation Timeline

Week	Social emotional learning instructional supports description
1	Teachers receive 18 hours of introductory training over three days. They learn to navigate the <i>Rethink Ed</i> platform, review the calendar of instructional topics, and explore resources beyond the curriculum that are available through the <i>Rethink Ed</i> and CASEL websites. Rationale is provided for the project by discussing classroom behavior concerns, evidencing those challenges in video clips of students acting in a way voiced among the group, and contrasting it with classrooms in which SEL is used with fidelity, and interviews of success stories with teachers and educational leaders at other skills.
2	Campus leaders complete walkthroughs during the morning SEL instructional block and meet together to review notes. They develop a preliminary “tier” list, in which teachers who appear naturally strong and confident teaching SEL curriculum are classified as Tier 1, and teachers who struggle to discuss SEL with students successfully are classified as Tier 3. Administrators are assigned coaching roles to Tier 2 and Tier 3 teachers.
3	Campus leaders review ELAR lesson plans, complete walkthroughs during daily ELAR blocks, and meet together to review notes. They consider whether any revisions are needed to their tier list, based on observations of how teachers reinforce SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction. Instructional coaches develop plans to support Tier 2 and Tier 3 teachers learn to incorporate more SEL strategies into their reading literacy lesson plans and instruction.

Week	Social emotional learning instructional supports description
4	PLC to reflect on beginning-of-year SEL implementation in the daily morning block and using the strategies during core content instruction. Teachers are encouraged to prepare for the PLC by bringing success stories, questions, and struggles. Campus leaders make notes to follow up during individual coaching sessions.
5	Campus leaders match Tier 3 teachers to a Tier 1 mentor, based on personality fits and availability to observe, and confer, during the school day. Instructional coaches gather resources, based on gaps voiced during the reflective PLCs, and begin teaching strategies that address these struggles during individual and teach coaching sessions.
6	Data-driven PLC to compare student discipline referrals from the beginning of the year to present with academic performance on beginning-of-year screeners and scores on district benchmarks from the first grading period. Teachers are asked to review the results and identify possible correlations.
7	Administrators continue conducting walkthroughs during SEL and ELAR instruction, and meeting with Tier 2 or 3 teachers to offer coaching support. Tier 1 mentors meet with Tier 3 teachers to provide additional guidance and collaborative problem solving. Instructional coaches confer with administrators, and conduct their own walkthroughs to identify SEL strategies that need to be reinforced with teachers so they can use it effectively with their students.
8	PLC to reflect on progressing SEL implementation in the daily morning block and reinforcing the strategies during core content instruction. Tier 1 teachers offer suggestions, based on their experiences implementing SEL with fidelity that may assist colleagues in their struggles.
9-10	Campus leaders complete walkthroughs during the morning SEL instruction and ELAR instructional block. They meet together to review observation notes and determine whether any teachers should be assigned a different tier classification. Administrator coaching roles are reassigned, if needed.
11	Instructional coaches and mentors gather resources, based on gaps voiced during the reflective PLCs, and observation notes from administrators. They model and role play strategies to address these struggles during individual coaching sessions.
12	PLC to reflect on progressing SEL implementation in the daily morning block and reinforcing the strategies during core content instruction. Tier 1 teachers offer suggestions, based on their experiences implementing SEL with fidelity that may assist colleagues in their struggles.

Week	Social emotional learning instructional supports description
13	Data-driven PLC to compare student discipline referrals from the beginning of the year to present with academic performance on beginning-of-year screeners and scores on district benchmarks from the first and second grading periods. Teachers are asked to review the results, identify any changes over time, and formulate a hypothesis about the reason for any changes they observe.
14-15	Administrators continue conducting walkthroughs during SEL and ELAR instruction, and meeting with Tier 2 or 3 teachers to offer coaching support. Tier 1 mentors meet with Tier 3 teachers to provide additional guidance and collaborative problem solving. Instructional coaches confer with administrators, and conduct their own walkthroughs to identify SEL strategies that need to be reinforced with teachers so they can use it effectively with their students.
16	Middle-of-year PLC to reflect on first semester SEL implementation in the daily morning block and reinforcing the strategies during core content instruction. Staff revisit reflective statements made earlier in the year about SEL and consider how their perceptions, confidence level, and attitudes have changed. They share success stories, and ask questions to gain collaborative input from colleagues.
17	Teachers are asked to complete reflective forms identifying their greatest strengths at SEL instruction and reinforcement during academic content. They are also asked to determine three things they need most in the spring semester to gain confidence teaching SEL and connecting strategies to reading literacy instruction.
18	Administrators, instructional coaches, and mentors meet to review reflective forms and develop a plan for second semester PD, mentor partnerships, instructional coaching sessions, and make recommendations to district administration for additional support, as needed.

By using the CASEL resources, teachers will be able to seek specific training and ongoing support to address the unique needs in their personal classrooms. Administrators can also examine the resources to find strategies and suggestions they can provide to help teachers during coaching and feedback sessions. The findings of this study revealed several teachers felt the training they received on *Rethink Ed* curriculum, or SEL in

general, were insufficient to help them feel confident teaching these skills to their students, or modeling strategies for emotional regulation to help children learn to handle difficult situations appropriately. Therefore, I recommend district and campus administrators become well-versed in SEL teaching, and *Rethink Ed* in particular, to provide the most needed support for teachers.

Project Evaluation Plan

To determine the success of my project, I will complete a goal-based evaluation. Goal-based evaluations are intended to evaluate whether the goals of a project were reached by the conclusion of the project, and, if so, to what extent (Lyle, 2019). The goal of the project evaluation is to gather information that can be used to determine whether teachers benefit from the training and coaching models, as well as to guide efforts and revise activities, as needed, in subsequent implementation of the project (Elwy et al., 2020).

I will evaluate the extent to which the project goals are reached by reviewing responses to questionnaires completed by ASD campus or district leaders, who are the key stakeholders. In Texas, teachers cannot lose their jobs for poor student performance; however, administrators' contract renewal may be based on assessment scores and other academic achievement metrics. Campus and district leaders may benefit from increased teacher familiarity with SEL and routine use of strategies during instruction through improved academic achievement by students. They may also benefit from ongoing support by building positive relationships with the teachers they coach, and developing a personal sense of reward when they see teachers' SEL teaching practices improve over

time. The evaluation process will provide useful information that may lead to changes in the training, resources, or ongoing support provided for the teachers.

A goal-based evaluation will be used to evaluate this white paper. The intent of a summative evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of the project (Elwy et al., 2020). According to Elwy et al. (2020), a project evaluation can help a researcher identify potential weaknesses in effectively reaching participants and achieving program goals, so alternate solutions can be developed as part of a continuous improvement approach. I will use the feedback from ASD administrators to determine the effectiveness of SEL training with teachers.

The summative evaluation process will comprise a questionnaire containing a series of open-ended questions for campus and district leaders to complete at the end of the project implementation, at the conclusion of the first semester, after initial SEL training and ongoing support is provided to teachers. Open-ended questions facilitate open sharing of thoughts and opinions by participants (Decorte et al., 2019). Eight ASD campus and district administrators will be asked to give their feedback on the SEL training and support process. They will respond to questions about their perspectives and input on the intensive SEL initial training, and the process of offering frequent coaching and feedback to teachers throughout the first semester to refine their SEL instructional approaches and reinforcement of SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction. The administrators will receive the evaluation electronically, which will provide an easy method for them to answer the questions and return them to me upon completion.

I will consider the project a success if the evaluation shows that administrators observed 25% increase in consistent daily SEL stand-alone instruction and reinforcement during ELAR classes, following implementation of the white paper recommendations. Moreover, if student achievement on reading assessments increases by 8% from the beginning of the year to the end of the first semester, after ASD leaders have provided ongoing support and coaching feedback to teachers, I will consider the white paper recommendations successful.

Key Stakeholders

The intended audience of key stakeholders for this white paper is the ASD leadership, including campus and district administrators. These individuals are responsible for coaching teachers to gain proficiency in new instructional practices, and whose professional success is substantially determined by student achievement and academic growth, as evidenced by their performance on state and national assessments. Secondary stakeholders are teachers, who may benefit from receiving substantive SEL training, and ongoing support, to develop confidence in WCIA practices and experience academic growth among HRM students, as a result. Tertiary stakeholders are HRM students, who may benefit socially, emotionally, and academically from receiving daily SEL instruction and opportunities to practice SEL strategies during reading literacy lessons, by developing resilience skills to persist in challenges until success is achieved.

Project Implications

Potential Social Changes

According to Gheysens et al., 2020, all educators are expected to use DI and WCIA to instruct classrooms of children who possess a wide range of abilities, interests, and self-regulation aptitudes. Implementing the recommendations of this white paper will provide teachers with additional SEL training and ongoing support to use the strategies during the morning SEL instructional block to meet students' social and emotional needs, preparing them to acquire new skills and develop self-efficacy throughout the remainder of the instructional day. The training and support will also offer practical ways and suggestions to reinforce the SEL strategies during academic instruction, including reading literacy. Teachers will help students learn emotional regulation and resilience techniques that may increase their ability to focus, persist in task performance for new or challenging activities such as learning to read. This should lead to improved academic achievement on reading assessments among ASD elementary students. Social changes, such as development of literate, critical thinking children, may occur as a result of teachers embracing SEL as an integral portion of the education process, not an extracurricular activity disconnected from learning academic content. By providing a better understanding of the purpose, tools, and outcomes of SEL, educators can gain insight into WCIA and the importance of meeting their students' social and emotional needs before, and during, their focus on reading literacy instruction.

Local Stakeholders

A white paper summarizes data into concise and relevant recommendations addressing the local problem (Treiblmaier, 2020). This is preferable to reading a lengthy dissertation or study, as it enables readers to understand the key findings from the research that pertain to the local problem and summarizes recommendations for solutions (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). White papers enable stakeholders to implement actions to address the problem quickly, relying on the summarization of the findings and recommendations to develop an action plan (Howlett & Tosun, 2019). This is especially valuable in education, where early intervention is critical to address, and correct, problems to help students achieve developmental goals at the appropriate stage of life (Fisher & Crawford, 2020).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how ASD elementary teachers instructed SEL, and their perceptions of how SEL influenced academic growth. ASD stakeholders include district administrators, campus leaders, and teachers of students in Grades K-5. Evidence of positive social change at the local level should include improved climate and culture among ASD elementary campus staff and students, as well as lesson plans that include SEL strategies as part of the reading literacy instructional activities. In turn, this should lead to improved academic achievement on reading assessments among ASD elementary students.

Broader Context

Research shows that many teachers learn new strategies through training, but resist implementing them into their instructional practices (Richter et al., 2021). Even

though ASD leadership adopted *Rethink Ed* curriculum, interview participant responses indicated that many did not receive adequate training or support to implement SEL instruction, and few used SEL strategies with fidelity in their classrooms. As a result, ASD is not experiencing the academic growth that other schools did after adopting SEL curriculum as part of their WCIA. Examining the influence that SEL has on reading literacy development among HRM students is not a topic that has been widely researched. This project study would add to the body of research literature related to SEL and academic growth among HRM students. The desired outcome of this project study is that teachers would understand the benefits of SEL, so they will routinely use SEL instructional strategies to help students develop emotional regulation and resilience, as well as the ability to persevere in challenging situations, such as frequently changing schools and being around unfamiliar people, in order to thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the semi-structured interviews and lesson plan review, a white paper was developed to address the gap in practice between the academic improvement students can make when they receive SEL instruction (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019), and the regression in student achievement after ASD adopted the *Rethink Ed* curriculum. Currently, ASD leadership does not have evidence of how ASD elementary teachers instruct SEL, and their perceptions of how SEL influences academic growth. This qualitative case study shares the study results, and recommendations based on the findings, with administrators and teachers. A white paper was an effective method

to communicate significant findings, and influence SEL instructional planning and practices in ASD elementary schools. Section 4 includes reflections and conclusions drawn from this doctoral study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this final section, I present the strengths and limitations of the project, scholarship, and project development. I analyze myself as both a scholar and developer of the project. Implications of the study and applications of the project will be discussed in this section. Additionally, directions for future research will be provided.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Project Strengths

The greatest strength of this project is that it recommends a framework to provide appropriate initial training and ongoing support for teachers to effectively implement SEL instruction. Educators will be able to immediately incorporate the teaching practices learned during the initial training in their 30-minute morning SEL block. They can also begin developing lesson plans with activities that reinforce SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction. Eighteen hours (three days) of initial training, followed by ongoing coaching and support from campus leaders, instructional coaches, and mentor teachers, may be an effective way to help teachers implement SEL instruction with fidelity, which could lead to districtwide changes (Schiepe-Tiska et al., 2021).

The format of a white paper provides teachers and leaders in ASD with a summary of the relevant findings and recommends longer-reaching strategies than a one-hour PD session to help teachers navigate the *Rethink Ed* website. The interview participants communicated that they did not feel they were provided with adequate training to implement SEL instruction or reinforce SEL strategies during their reading

literacy instructional block with fidelity. Teachers who do not feel confident using new instructional practices often resist trying them in the classroom, for fear of failure and losing authoritative rapport with their students (Richter et al., 2021). The proposed recommendations offer extensive initial professional development to increase teachers' level of comfort instructing SEL, as well as provide ongoing support and coaching so teachers feel they have resources to ask questions and seek input from as new situations arise.

The recommendations of implementing 18 hours of initial SEL training, followed with coaching, support, mentoring, and feedback throughout the first semester, is a strength of this white paper. This approach promotes change within ASD that facilitates the achievement of district goals to foster students' academic growth. In addition, it provides teachers with the training they need to feel confident introducing SEL instruction as a daily lesson and reinforcing SEL strategies during core content instruction (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). This white paper is a summary report that can be used by ASD leaders to understand the study, data analysis, and recommendations.

Project Limitations

One potential barrier to effective implementation of this project is resistance from ASD teachers and campus leaders to support SEL recommendations. Some educators do not consider SEL the responsibility of the school, believing it reduces the amount of academic content students will be able to grasp. Another limitation may be the amount of ongoing support teachers receive from administrators, mentors, and instructional coaches to implement SEL instruction with fidelity. Additionally, teachers may have difficulty

learning to navigate the *Rethink Ed* and CASEL websites, to find relevant resources they can apply in their classroom practices.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem in this study was that ASD leaders did not have data about how teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students, or teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. The local problem could have been addressed in several ways. I could have conducted a mixed-methods study to research the local problem. Data collection could have included classroom observations of reading literacy instructors in Grades K-5, and surveys for teachers to complete on how they implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students, or their perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. The observations would have enabled me to collect data about how teachers reinforce SEL strategies during reading literacy to support HRM students' growth. This outcome may have resulted in developing a program evaluation, rather than a white paper.

An alternative solution to address the local problem may have been to contract *Rethink Ed* coaches to conduct in-person or remote trainings on implementing SEL instruction, and to check in with Tier 3 teachers periodically throughout the first semester to offer individualized coaching, feedback, and support. However, this approach would have impacted the district budget because of the cost associated with consulting support, which is not included in the price of the curriculum. Fees for these services can range from \$50-\$80 per hour, per person. Alternately, I could have designed an 18-hour

training on SEL and *Rethink Ed*. I did not create the initial training session because teacher buy-in will be more likely generated if the training is provided by ASD leaders who can speak not only to the general rationale of using SEL as a WCIA, but also to the specific needs of ASD students, particularly those who are HRM. District administrators can provide an explanation of why decisions were made to adopt *Rethink Ed* curriculum, designate 30 minutes each morning on the master schedule, and instruct teachers to reinforce SEL strategies with HRM students during reading literacy instruction.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change Scholarship

I learned a great deal about qualitative research while working toward this degree. The process of conducting this study helped me to grow as a scholar. I gained new appreciation for the importance of properly training and supporting teachers when adopting new initiatives or programs. I learned that teachers have different attitudes toward SEL that can affect their level of “buy-in” and classroom culture. As a researcher, I discovered how to identify a problem within the local school setting and find literature, theories, and current research about educational practices. These skills are essential to my own reflective practices and professional growth. I learned that conducting research necessitates specific steps be followed to safeguard the researcher and willing participants. Working to meet the IRB requirements for study approval was a meticulous process. Determining the best approaches for collecting, organizing, and analyzing the interview and lesson plan data challenged me to learn new skills and consider how to protect my participants and facilitate the data collection process for them, reducing their

time commitment and extra work to the extent possible. Learning the process of open coding data analysis resulted in many revisions to my study findings presentation.

Attending the Walden University residency was a positive experience that helped me narrow my focus of the local problem and discover many strategies for finding relevant literature. I appreciated the opportunity to consult with professors, and the feedback my committee provided during the writing, revising, and editing processes.

Project Development

Prior to conducting this study, I was unfamiliar with white papers as a method for communicating a summary of findings and proposed recommendations in response to the data. In designing the project study, I sought to accurately depict the perceptions of teachers, based on interview responses, and advocate for positive social change. I determined that providing 18 hours of initial training on SEL instruction was an appropriate solution because teachers communicated the need for substantial PD to feel comfortable utilizing the new curriculum and reinforcing SEL strategies in reading literacy instruction. I also felt that ongoing support and coaching feedback would meet the needs interview participants expressed about having a person they could go to and discuss what was going well in SEL instruction, as well as what they felt they needed help or coaching support in to improve the effectiveness of SEL strategies with their students. With these supports, I think teachers will be less likely to resist teaching SEL during the morning 30-minute block, and will actively seek opportunities to incorporate SEL strategies in their reading literacy lesson plans.

Leadership and Change

Conducting this research process instilled me with confidence and desire to continue striving for positive social change. I want to continue supporting teachers in understanding that children's physical, social, and emotional needs must be met, before learning how to read, write, or add can happen in their minds. I believe I can effect change throughout the field of education, through the knowledge and skills I developed while completing this qualitative case study. The number of HRM students in public schools increase each year, and adopting SEL curriculum may help these students develop resiliency skills that are critical when they move frequently and need to overcome gaps in their learning.

As a scholar-practitioner, I will continue researching best practices and help others acquire new skills to meet the DI needs of their students, which change with each year and over long periods of time. I am available to assist ASD leadership in training and supporting teachers in the process of implementing SEL instruction with fidelity. I will continue to serve as a resource for the elementary teachers, and teachers of other districts seeking to meet the SEL needs of HRM students to help them achieve academic growth. As a scholar-practitioner, I understand how important student literacy development is to help them succeed in school and as adults.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Changing instructional practices in response to student needs is essential to effective teaching. However, research shows that teachers are often resistant to implementing new curriculum, especially when they lack the confidence to instruct

unfamiliar content (Richter et al., 2021). My findings revealed that teachers in ASD perceive SEL positively impacts HRM students' reading literacy development. Data from interview transcripts and lesson plan review indicated that teachers would benefit from robust initial training when adopting *Rethink Ed* curriculum, followed by ongoing support, coaching, and feedback throughout the first semester. This support would be most effective if provided in a variety of ways, through mentors, instructional coaches, and administrators. Teachers who lacked training and experience with SEL were unlikely to instruct relevant strategies during the designated morning time, or reinforce it during reading literacy instruction. This resulted in low student reading achievement levels.

As an outcome of this study, I created a white paper that recommended a plan to provide adequate training, and ongoing support, to teachers when adopting *Rethink Ed* curriculum and SEL practices. These recommendations do require multiple resources, primarily in the form of time and leadership commitment to coaching teachers. With appropriate training and support, teachers will develop confidence teaching SEL and reinforcing SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction. This will lead to increased academic achievement that has been observed in similar school districts where SEL was taught with fidelity.

Society has much to gain from a new generation of students who possess resilience, emotional regulation, and task performance skills. These, and other, SEL skills help students prepare for adulthood as well. This project has the potential to positively impact HRM students who struggle when changing homes or schools, which is often a traumatic experience. I am optimistic that if these children can learn how to regulate their

emotions, and persevere in completing difficult tasks, they will become successful students and productive citizens as adults. I believe the findings of this study, and the white paper recommendations, will be useful to ASD leaders in supporting their teachers to increase the effectiveness of SEL instruction. The result of this research, my project, has the potential to bring about positive social changes in the local school district, surrounding community, across the nation, and around the globe.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

If teachers can learn to implement SEL instruction with fidelity each morning, students who are socially and emotionally prepared to engage in learning are more likely to increase their reading literacy development and academic achievement. When schools create a culture that prioritizes compound skills, engagement with others, open-mindedness, collaboration, emotional regulation, and task performance, the results can lead to student self-efficacy and the acquisition of new skills. These benefits will result in academic growth and continuously increasing student achievement. This equity of education to support the unique learning needs of all students is the purpose of SEL instruction. As for future research, there may be a need to study HRM students over time, through secondary education and into adulthood, to determine the long-term effects of SEL instruction on their achievements and self-perception.

Conclusion

Education is a complex, ever-changing field. The key findings of this study were a need for substantive initial training on SEL instruction and ongoing support for teachers to help them develop confidence in teaching *Rethink Ed* curriculum to meet students SEL

needs each morning, followed by integration of SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction. These findings were shared during semi-structured interviews with participants, and review of their lesson plans. First, teachers must understand the rationale of SEL instruction, and become familiar with the *Rethink Ed* content through navigating the online platform. Additionally, campus and district leaders must provide ongoing support to teachers through the first semester of SEL instruction, to offer feedback and suggestions, as well as serve as a sounding board for teachers to share frustrations, concerns, and seek guidance on responding to new situations or finding ways to increasingly reinforce SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction. Teachers expressed the importance of extensive training when adopting new curriculum, and the need for ongoing support to implement it with fidelity. Finally, this training and support must be offered in a way that teachers can process the information, apply it to the unique needs of their students so they can build positive rapport, and integrate the strategies into academic instruction, thereby providing all children with the ability to develop reading literacy skills, regardless of their residential mobility or stability.

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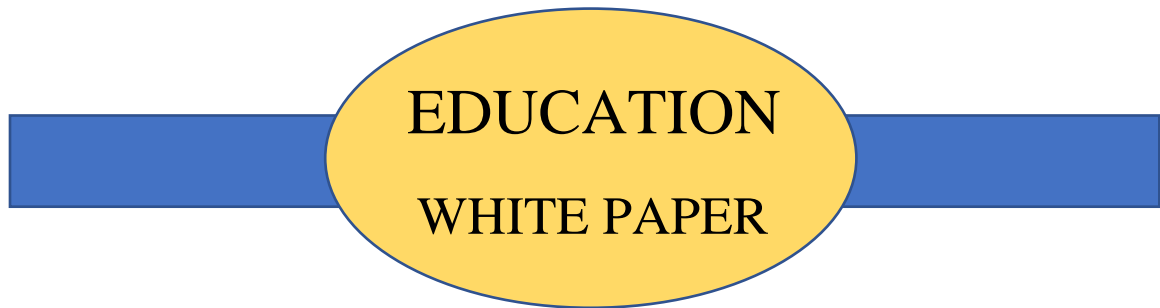
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Teachers' Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning
Instruction and High Residential Mobility Students'
Reading Literacy

Mrs. Janel D. Morris

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Teachers' Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning Instruction and High Residential
Mobility Students' Reading Literacy

Introduction

From 2013-2019, the passing rate of students in Grades 3-5 on state reading assessments in Adoniram School District (pseudonym), a large urban public school district in north Texas, declined from 67% to 36% (director of communications, personal communication, September 17, 2019). During that time, the number of students in foster care placement in the north Texas county where Adoniram School District (ASD) is located, increased from 2,500 (Blow, 2014) to more than 11,000 (Garrett, 2020). High residential mobility (HRM) students, including children in foster care placement, lack the cognitive resilience skills needed to overcome learning gaps that result from frequent school changes (Clayton, 2018). Research shows social emotional learning (SEL) helps students develop resilience skills, and mediates poor outcomes among HRM students (Jones & Kahn, 2017). I sought, through this research study, to fill the local gap in practice between what improvements research asserts SEL instruction can make (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019), and the lack of improvement in student achievement scores in ASD since adopting *Rethink Ed* SEL curriculum.

The Local Problem

ASD leaders did not have data about how teachers implemented *Rethink Ed* curriculum with their students, or teachers' perceptions of how SEL instruction techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. Research shows that incorporating SEL instruction improves academic achievement an average of

11 percentile points (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019); however, in ASD, despite adoption of the *Rethink Ed* curriculum, 2021 passing rates were 8% lower than in 2019 (Texas Education Agency, 2021). This study sought to identify the gap in practice between the findings presented by Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez (2019) and the assessment scores achieved by ASD students since the implementation of SEL instruction.

Summary of the Study

Methodology

The problem focus is that despite providing elementary teachers with *Rethink Ed* curriculum, a trauma-informed SEL program, and designating time in the master schedule for SEL lessons as part of WCIA to improve reading literacy, ASD leaders were unsure how K-5 educators implemented the *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and their perceptions of how it influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. This study investigated how K-5 educators at four elementary schools in ASD implemented the *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and their perceptions of how it influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. I explored teachers' background in education; experiences implementing *Rethink Ed* curriculum; comfort level, and techniques used when, incorporating SEL strategies into reading literacy instruction; and perceptions of how SEL strategies influenced HRM students' reading literacy progress.

The study on social and emotional skills (SSES) was the conceptual framework used to analyze and interpret findings for this study (Chernyshenko et al., 2018). SSES provides a comprehensive set of metrics for cognitive, social, and emotional skill development among children and adolescents. The framework also examined family,

school, community, and other extrinsic factors that promote, or hinder, students' development of these skill sets.

Understanding how children acquire social skills, and the importance of adults teaching and modeling appropriate behaviors and emotional regulation, is critical to WCIA. Intangible "soft skills" can be challenging to observe, assess, and measure. The categorization and metrics set developed by the OECD can assist educators, and others who work with children, in this challenging task. The metrics also provide connections between SEL and students' aptitude for success in life skills needed in, and outside, the classroom. For HRM students, this is important because the nature of their home and family instability creates hardships that are often traumatic for children. Learning resilience skills to help adapt in difficult situations can help mitigate the negative impact of frequent relocation, transition more easily into new environments, and build confidence to control personal emotions, rather than focusing on what they cannot control.

The focus for this study was to determine how K-5 educators at four elementary schools in ASD implemented the *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and their perceptions of how it influenced HRM students' reading literacy development; therefore, a qualitative research approach was appropriate to understand the participants' perceptions. According to Yin (2017), a qualitative exploratory single case study is appropriate when the study focus addresses current situations, and seeks to answer questions that begin with *how*. The research questions, which determined the appropriate design, scope, and methodology, addressed (a) *how* K-5 educators in ASD implemented SEL in their daily reading literacy

instruction, and (b) teachers' perceptions of *how* SEL techniques influenced HRM elementary students' reading literacy development. To answer the research questions, detailed, in-depth data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, and lesson plans were collected and analyzed.

Participants selected for this study were K-5 teachers in ASD. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select 15 participants who use the *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and teach elementary reading lessons daily (Spaulding, 2013). The 15 teachers were selected from different grade levels and different elementary campuses within the district. I sought participants with varying years of experience as a teacher, and those with experience teaching grade levels other than elementary students. Choosing participants with these differing backgrounds and attributes resulted in data from multiple perspectives, further validating the results of the study. Interview data revealed that teachers' implementation of *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and perceptions of how SEL instruction influences HRM students' reading literacy development, varied across the district. Teachers who did not use *Rethink Ed* curriculum, or did not teach reading, were not selected for this study.

I sent an email invitation to potential participants that explained the purpose of my study, and relevant details. The email invitation explained the purpose of the study, participant expectations, ethical considerations, contact information, voluntary nature of participation, and directions for completing and returning the informed consent form. Potential participants were asked to return the completed informed consent form, if interested in volunteering for the study.

Data collection consisted of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, and reviewing lesson plans submitted by the same teachers. The interview questions focused on participants' perceptions of how SEL strategies influenced HRM students' reading literacy development. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Participants were provided with a summary of the interview transcript for their approval. Lesson plans were reviewed for evidence of activities in ELAR instruction that reinforced SEL skills from the six SSES domains: compound skills, engagement with others, open-mindedness, collaboration, emotional regulation, and task performance.

Data Analysis Results

Themes were constructed from interview participants' perceptions, based on responses to the semi-structured interview questions and review of the lesson plans. Findings from the interview transcripts were compared to the lesson plan review for triangulation. This analysis resulted in six main themes.

Theme 1: Teacher attitudes toward SEL instruction. According to interview data, 100% of participants felt that SEL techniques and strategies positively impacted HRM students' academic growth, including in the area of reading literacy. Most teachers (87%) discussed the importance of beginning the day with SEL instruction, during or immediately following breakfast, prior to the start of academic classes. This is because many children do not have a positive start to their day at home, such as waking up alone, hunger, fighting with parents or siblings, arriving at school late, or forgetting to bring a needed item (completed homework, supplies, lunch, etc.).

Theme 2: SEL curriculum, professional development, and leadership support.

Nearly all participants (87%) expressed that the extent to which they felt comfortable teaching SEL, and reinforcing SEL strategies and techniques during core content classes, was directly related to the professional development and training they received from campus or district. Many teachers (67%) stated that SEL training should be required for all instructional staff at the beginning of the year (BOY), but that district leaders should also communicate with campus administrators the purpose of SEL and what it should look like, so school leaders can model it for their teachers throughout the year. They also said that there should be more resources available to teachers after BOY training, because ongoing professional development (PD) is important to implement SEL with fidelity.

Theme 3: SSES conceptual framework--Students' self-development and interpersonal skills growth as a result of SEL instruction. Most (87%) participants reported positive effects of SEL on students' self-confidence in their ability to overcome challenges and succeed at tasks they considered difficult were noticeable over time. According to Welsh (2017), 55% of HRM students in foster care are diagnosed with emotional or behavioral disorders, compared to 7.9% of students who experience residential stability and consistency. The ability to address the emotional needs of these students promptly when they experience negative feelings is critical to their academic success. Teachers reported that when SEL-related concerns occurred in class, pausing ELAR instruction to address students' SEL needs before continuing with the core content lesson resulted in students who were more engaged in the academic learning afterward than if the concerns were ignored, or postponed.

Theme 4: Collaborative planning. Teachers who worked in ASD schools that followed the district-issued elementary master schedule (33%) stated they felt starting each morning with prescribed SEL lessons began everyone's school day on a strong note. They also mentioned that the *Rethink Ed* calendar ensured all classes established a common language of social expectations that became universal terms. This meant any teacher could talk to any student about shared norms, and those topics could be reinforced by the counselor or principal during restorative discipline conversations. The regular meeting of professional learning communities (PLCs) was considered very important to effective SEL instruction by eight of 15, or 53% of participants. Discussing students' academic status in the context of WCIA, in which the student's SEL needs, behavior, attendance concerns, and home life were considered, was helpful in creating a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) plan for intervention.

Theme 5: Pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement. Most teachers interviewed (80%) said that SEL strategies and techniques were taught daily at a designated time each morning, and revisited during reading literacy core content instruction. Lesson plan data revealed that most learning activities pre-determined by teachers for academic instruction reinforce task performance, engagement with others, and compound skills, respectively. Nearly half of the participants (seven of 15, or 47%) mentioned that unplanned situations frequently occurred during reading literacy instruction, which provided an opportunity for the teacher to model, and help students practice, emotional regulation or collaboration. They also stated that the more they turned

unplanned incidents into SEL teaching opportunities, the more they thought about ways to incorporate SEL strategies into their lesson plans.

Theme 6: Factors affecting HRM students. Interview data confirmed that more than half of the participants (53%) are concerned that students are unable to achieve their full potential as learners because their emotional needs, such as feeling safe, and social needs, such as a desire to feel they belong somewhere or to someone, are not being met. Many participants mentioned that HRM students show evidence of emotional trauma from creating connections to others in the past, and developing distrust or aversion to building relationships, due to fear the connections will continue to be severed. Some teachers (33%) stated that helping HRM students feel safe, or develop a sense of belonging at school is very challenging because of factors beyond their control, which created a pattern of instability in their lives. Participants who recounted success with HRM students' reading literacy growth believed that establishing a positive relationship with those students, and fostering their sense of self-worth and confidence, played a large role in their academic improvement.

Recommendations

Provide Training and Ongoing Support for Teachers to Implement SEL

Instruction

The data analysis showed that teachers need substantive training and ongoing support to successfully implement daily SEL instruction using the *Rethink Ed* curriculum, and reinforce SEL strategies during the reading literacy core content instructional block. Teachers would also benefit from increased familiarity with additional resources at the

Rethink Ed and Collaborative for Advancing Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) websites to help students learn SEL strategies that will facilitate emotional regulation and prepare them to be successful in acquiring new academic skills. Therefore, I recommend that ASD leaders provide teachers with 18 hours (three days) of initial training on SEL instructional practices, prior to the beginning of the school year, and ongoing support throughout the first semester to offer coaching feedback, suggestions, and modeling or role-playing to help teachers gain familiarity with SEL strategies and how to incorporate them into reading literacy lesson plans.

Primary Recommendation

It is recommended that ASD leadership consider providing 18 hours (three days) of initial training prior to the start of the school year to provide teachers with familiarity using *Rethink Ed* curriculum and incorporating SEL strategies into reading literacy lesson plans. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) proposed that teachers who resist change often do so because they do not understand the reasons behind the change, or the potential benefits to their students in both the short term, and long term. Explaining the reasoning for 30 minutes of daily SEL instruction, and reinforcing SEL strategies during academic instruction, including reading literacy, may help mitigate the “push back” from teachers who are leery of adopting SEL instruction and *Rethink Ed* curriculum. SEL teaching strategies should be modeled for teachers, and time should be built in for attendees to role play with these strategies in various classroom settings. In addition, helping teachers navigate *Rethink Ed* and CASEL websites to find SEL instructional resources may build their self-confidence in being able to guide their students to learning these strategies.

Secondary Recommendation

Additionally, I recommend that ASD district and campus leaders provide ongoing support throughout the first semester to assist teachers in becoming increasingly comfortable instructing SEL daily and reinforcing SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction. This support may include individual coaching feedback from administrators, modeling and role-playing SEL practices with instructional coaches, mentoring by teachers who are confident in using SEL strategies in their reading literacy instruction, and reflective practices during professional learning communities (PLCs). The following table proposes a suggested timeline of activities that will provide teachers with ongoing support to increase the fidelity of their SEL instructional practices.

Social Emotional Learning Implementation Timeline

Week	Social emotional learning instructional supports description
1	Teachers receive 18 hours of introductory training over three days. They learn to navigate the <i>Rethink Ed</i> platform, review the calendar of instructional topics, and explore resources beyond the curriculum that are available through the <i>Rethink Ed</i> and CASEL websites. Rationale is provided for the project by discussing classroom behavior concerns, evidencing those challenges in video clips of students acting in a way voiced among the group, and contrasting it with classrooms in which SEL is used with fidelity, and interviews of success stories with teachers and educational leaders at other skills.
2	Campus leaders complete walkthroughs during the morning SEL instructional block and meet together to review notes. They develop a preliminary “tier” list, in which teachers who appear naturally strong and confident teaching SEL curriculum are classified as Tier 1, and teachers who struggle to discuss SEL with students successfully are classified as Tier 3. Administrators are assigned coaching roles to Tier 2 and Tier 3 teachers.

Week	Social emotional learning instructional supports description
3	Campus leaders review ELAR lesson plans, complete walkthroughs during daily ELAR blocks, and meet together to review notes. They consider whether any revisions are needed to their tier list, based on observations of how teachers reinforce SEL strategies during reading literacy instruction. Instructional coaches develop plans to support Tier 2 and Tier 3 teachers learn to incorporate more SEL strategies into their reading literacy lesson plans and instruction.
4	PLC to reflect on beginning-of-year SEL implementation in the daily morning block and using the strategies during core content instruction. Teachers are encouraged to prepare for the PLC by bringing success stories, questions, and struggles. Campus leaders make notes to follow up during individual coaching sessions.
5	Campus leaders match Tier 3 teachers to a Tier 1 mentor, based on personality fits and availability to observe, and confer, during the school day. Instructional coaches gather resources, based on gaps voiced during the reflective PLCs, and begin teaching strategies that address these struggles during individual and teach coaching sessions.
6	Data-driven PLC to compare student discipline referrals from the beginning of the year to present with academic performance on beginning-of-year screeners and scores on district benchmarks from the first grading period. Teachers are asked to review the results and identify possible correlations.
7	Administrators continue conducting walkthroughs during SEL and ELAR instruction, and meeting with Tier 2 or 3 teachers to offer coaching support. Tier 1 mentors meet with Tier 3 teachers to provide additional guidance and collaborative problem solving. Instructional coaches confer with administrators, and conduct their own walkthroughs to identify SEL strategies that need to be reinforced with teachers so they can use it effectively with their students.
8	PLC to reflect on progressing SEL implementation in the daily morning block and reinforcing the strategies during core content instruction. Tier 1 teachers offer suggestions, based on their experiences implementing SEL with fidelity that may assist colleagues in their struggles.
9-10	Campus leaders complete walkthroughs during the morning SEL instruction and ELAR instructional block. They meet together to review observation notes and determine whether any teachers should be assigned a different tier classification. Administrator coaching roles are reassigned, if needed.

Week	Social emotional learning instructional supports description
11	Instructional coaches and mentors gather resources, based on gaps voiced during reflective PLCs, and administrators' observation notes. They model and role play appropriate strategies during individual coaching sessions.
12	PLC to reflect on progressing SEL implementation in the daily morning block and reinforcing the strategies during core content instruction. Tier 1 teachers offer suggestions, based on their experiences implementing SEL with fidelity that may assist colleagues in their struggles.
13	Data-driven PLC to compare student discipline referrals from the beginning of the year to present with academic performance on beginning-of-year screeners and scores on district benchmarks from the first and second grading periods. Teachers are asked to review the results, identify any changes over time, and formulate a hypothesis about the reason for any changes they observe.
14-15	Administrators continue conducting walkthroughs during SEL and ELAR instruction, and meeting with Tier 2 or 3 teachers to offer coaching support. Tier 1 mentors meet with Tier 3 teachers to provide additional guidance and collaborative problem solving. Instructional coaches confer with administrators, and conduct their own walkthroughs to identify SEL strategies that need to be reinforced with teachers so they can use it effectively with their students.
16	Middle-of-year PLC to reflect on first semester SEL implementation in the daily morning block and reinforcing the strategies during core content instruction. Staff revisit reflective statements made earlier in the year about SEL and consider how their perceptions, confidence level, and attitudes have changed. They share success stories, and ask questions to gain collaborative input from colleagues.
17	Teachers are asked to complete reflective forms identifying their greatest strengths at SEL instruction and reinforcement during academic content. They are also asked to determine three things they need most in the spring semester to gain confidence teaching SEL and connecting strategies to reading literacy instruction.
18	Administrators, instructional coaches, and mentors meet to review reflective forms and develop a plan for second semester PD, mentor partnerships, instructional coaching sessions, and make recommendations to district administration for additional support, as needed.

Conclusion

The purpose of this white paper was to explore how ASD elementary teachers instructed SEL, and their perceptions of how SEL influenced academic growth. The white paper was a method to summarize the data collected and analyzed during the study. Data collection consisted of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, and reviewing lesson plans submitted by the same teachers. According to study results, ASD teachers would benefit from training, and ongoing support, including coaching, feedback, and PLCs. These practices could help teachers effectively implement *Rethink Ed* curriculum during daily SEL instruction, and reinforce SEL strategies during academic core content classes, including reading literacy, as part of a whole-child instructional approach (WCIA) to improve reading literacy among HRM students.

Goal-Based Project Evaluation

1. How did the initial 18-hour training help teachers understand the purpose of SEL; the benefits of using SEL strategies before, and during literacy instruction; and how to effectively implement *Rethink Ed* daily through SEL instruction and reinforcement during ELAR blocks?
2. How did you incorporate SEL strategies in your coaching interactions with teachers?
3. How did you use *Rethink Ed* and CASEL resources recommended in the white paper to alter your coaching practices with teachers for ongoing support after their initial SEL training?
4. What changes did you see in teachers' instructional practices during the daily SEL block after the initial 18-hour training?
5. What changes did you see in teachers' reinforcement of SEL strategies during ELAR instruction through lesson plan activities and response to impromptu situations in class where students could practice social and emotional skill development?
6. What changes did you see in HRM students' reading literacy achievement over the course of the semester when you provided coaching support and feedback to teachers?

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol

(self-developed)

Date of Interview:

Location:

Time of Interview:

Interviewer: Janel Morris

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Please answer each question to the best of your ability, in your own words, and elaborating as needed to fully respond. All interview participants' identities will remain confidential, so you are able to speak freely. You will be provided with a summary of your responses to review for accuracy prior to publication.

Questions for K-5 Teachers:

1. Please describe your background in education (number of years, positions held, other school districts, etc.)
2. Please describe your experiences implementing *Rethink Ed* curriculum into your daily social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction.
3. Please describe your comfort level incorporating SEL strategies and techniques into your ELAR core content instruction.
4. Please describe how you reinforce the SEL techniques and strategies taught in the morning SEL block during your ELAR core instruction block to provide your students with opportunities to develop open-mindedness, engagement with others, emotional regulation, collaboration, task performance, and compound skills.
5. Please describe the ways you consider activities that reinforce the following SEL strategies and techniques: open-mindedness, engagement with others, emotional

regulation, collaboration, task performance, or compound skills, during the development process of creating your ELAR lesson plans.

6. Please describe your HRM students' reading literacy achievement, and how it compares to your non-HRM students' reading literacy achievement.
7. How do you perceive the following SEL skills: open-mindedness, engagement with others, emotional regulation, collaboration, task performance, or compound skills, are influencing your HRM students' reading literacy development?
8. Please describe the professional development and coaching feedback you were provided with for implementing *Rethink Ed* curriculum this year by ASD leadership.
9. How do you feel the professional development from campus and district leadership has equipped you to effectively teach the *Rethink Ed* curriculum and integrate SEL in your core content instruction?
10. Based on your experiences with SEL, what do you feel are the strengths and weaknesses of *Rethink Ed* curriculum?
11. Please describe how PLCs and coaching feedback would influence the decisions you make regarding SEL instruction.

Possible Probing Questions:

Could you please tell me what you meant when you said ____?

Can you tell me more about ...?

Can you give me an example of...?

When do you think you would use ... during SEL/ELAR instruction?

Appendix C: Lesson Plan Review Protocol

(self-developed)

Lesson Plan Review Protocol	
Participant's name (pseudonym):	Grade:
Does the ELAR lesson plan provide evidence of activities using SEL strategies in the whole-group setting? Yes No	
Explanation:	
Does the ELAR lesson plan provide evidence of activities using SEL strategies in small group settings? Yes No	
Explanation:	
Does the ELAR lesson plan provide evidence of activities using SEL strategies with individual students? Yes No	
Explanation:	
Does the ELAR lesson plan provide evidence of activities that promote development of the following skill sets: open-mindedness, engagement with others, emotional regulation, collaboration, task performance, or compound skills? Yes No	
Explanation:	
Does the ELAR lesson plan provide DI evidence of specific SEL strategies with MTSS Tier 2 or Tier 3 students, or as an IEP/504 plan accommodation within a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)? Yes No	
Explanation:	

Appendix D: Sample Lesson Plan

(ASD K-5 Template)

Subject: ELAR	Grade: 1
Unit Title: Rhyming, Repetition, and Alliteration	
Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills: 1.9B Discuss rhyme, repetition, and alliteration in a variety of poems	
Learning Objective: Students will decode words with initial and final consonant blends, digraphs, and trigraphs	
<p>Warm-Up/Bellringer</p> <p>Time: 5 minutes</p> <p>Materials: Pencil, paper</p> <p>Activity(ies): The word “mat” will be posted on the board. Students will be asked to write as many words that rhyme with “mat” as they can think of, in five minutes.</p>	
<p>“I Do” Direct Instruction</p> <p>Time: 15 minutes</p> <p>Materials: Board/Projector, marker</p> <p>Activity(ies): The teacher will discuss decoding words with initial and final consonant blends, digraphs, and trigraphs, and provide three examples of each decoding type.</p>	
<p>“We Do” Cooperative Learning</p> <p>Time: 15 minutes</p> <p>Materials: Paper, pencil, word cue cards</p> <p>Activity(ies): Students will compare their rhyming word lists with their table partners. They will work together to decode words with initial and final consonant blends, digraphs, and trigraphs, using word cue cards.</p>	
<p>“You Do” Independent Practice</p> <p>Time: 10 minutes</p> <p>Materials: Pencil, paper, word cue cards</p> <p>Activity(ies): Students will decode words with initial and final consonant blends, digraphs, and trigraphs independently, using word cue cards provided. They may refer to the teacher models, and group activity notes.</p>	
<p>Exit Ticket</p> <p>Time: 5 minutes</p> <p>Materials: Pencil, paper</p>	

Activity(ies): Word cues will be posted on the board. Students will create a table on their paper, and indicate which items on the board represent initial consonant blends, final consonant blends, digraphs, and trigraphs.
DuFour's Success Criteria
<p>What should students be able to do by the end of this lesson?</p> <p>Students will generate short rhyming lists.</p> <p>Students will decode words with initial and final consonant blends, digraphs, and trigraphs independently, with at least 50% accuracy, when referencing teacher models, and group activity notes.</p>
<p>How will you assess whether they are successful?</p> <p>Independent practice and exit ticket responses</p>
<p>What will you do for students who are unsuccessful?</p> <p>Whole-group: re-teach challenging component(s)</p> <p>Few students: small-group or individual interventions for extra practice, with step-down activities as needed</p>
<p>What will you do for students who master the learning objective?</p> <p>Provide challenge tasks, such as generating their own word cues, or higher-rigor stem words for rhyming lists.</p>
Accommodations: SE, 504, LPAC, MTSS Tiers 2 and 3
<p>Tier 2/Tier 3, SE, 504, and EB (LPAC) students will practice the objective using a set of cards to match. LPAC and SE students may also receive visual aids.</p> <p>Advanced (GT) students will generate their own examples, using the teacher's models and word cue cards for reference.</p>

Appendix E: Development of Themes

Initial Codes:

Natural, unplanned opportunities to reinforce SEL; Classroom management; Whole-child instructional approach; When SEL is taught; How SEL is taught; Comfort level/attitude toward instructing SEL; Lesson plan activities to reinforce SEL

Collapsed Code:

Instruction

Evidence:

T8 Teaching the SEL concepts is something that flows easily across the whole learning environment. It helps us to have cohesive groups, and really to balance out a lot of unnecessary disagreements. This is how all learning should be for children as soon as they begin coming to school.

T10 When you really listen to what those SEL lessons are about, and you take it in, I think it has a calming effect, and I think it helps the child become more well-rounded in any activity, subject, even the hallway or the lunchroom. When they can learn those skills and apply them, I think it really helps them.

Theme:

Teacher attitudes toward SEL instruction

Evidence:

T9 I'm relatively comfortable incorporating the strategies when we are doing the core content instruction.

T12 I want to incorporate real life into everything I do with my students. We always talk about how what we are learning in the classroom can be used in daily situations. For example, at lunch, I can talk to them about how they are sharing a fraction of their chips with each other. If you're a good teacher, those reinforcement opportunities just happen naturally.

Initial Code:

Professional development; SEL instructional materials; Leadership coaching, feedback, and support; Strengths of *Rethink Ed* curriculum; Weaknesses of *Rethink Ed* curriculum; Challenges to implementing SEL; PLC and teacher/staff collaboration

Collapsed Codes:

Professional development; Support

Evidence:

T11 I think some of us need more training on how to have a circle time, and how to reinforce it throughout the school day. We need to get to a point where it is evident in everyone's lesson plans, in all core content areas.

T2 PLCs and Coaching will always make our learning experience as teachers much better. It helps to foster better relationships. For myself: It helps me to grow as a person, a teacher. Coaching helps because it is a constant reminder of a better way to establish relationships. The more exposure you have the more you are going to teach the SEL lessons.

Theme:

SEL curriculum, professional development, and leadership support

Evidence:

T6 I've received training, but it's not district-wide; it's not for all teachers. It's for the leads, who are supposed to carry it through, but then we're not being given the opportunity directions to carry it out.

T3 Coaching is not happening. I thank God for the team that I have. Honestly, you know that if you have a good core with those that teach your content, then at least your babies are going to be good. You know they're going to be okay, but it takes an entire campus.

Initial Codes:

Self-awareness and emotional regulation; Open-mindedness; Compound skills; Goal setting and task performance; Engagement with others; Collaboration; Compassion and empathy

Collapsed Codes:

SEL skills; Relationships

Evidence:

T7 We talk about needing to be kind to everybody. Some of my students are already that way. They are naturally very encouraging, very nurturing to everyone. Some of them are not used to it, so we had to address that you need to be nice to everybody: on the playground, inside the classroom. I try to be neutral and not put my own emotion into that discussion.

T5 When I think about core content, I ask myself, "How are going to meet our goals?" Even at this age, I'm starting them off and I have the board and all our goals. We're building a love of learning, and self-management, of setting goals for yourself.

Theme:

SSES conceptual framework: students' self-development and interpersonal skills growth as a result of SEL instruction

Evidence:

T13 Students are able to talk to what they think about or how they solved the problem. I like the kids to be in groups and bounce ideas off of each other.

T14 Sometimes I like to give them the opportunity to choose the people that they want to work with, but I always try to give them a specific role in the group so that everyone is contributing.

Initial Codes:

Problem-solving; Overcoming obstacles to learning; Students' self-efficacy; Thought process

Collapsed Codes:

Self-management; Efficacy

Evidence:

T4 I have to consider that they are working on compound skills when I ask them to move around the room to find things. There are also opportunities for open-mindedness, because two students may hear the same directions and interpret them differently, but if we all end up in the right place, it can be valuable to see that there is more than one way to think about something, or to do something.

T1 At first, I put them with students they get along with, but over time, I would change it up to where it was a bit uncomfortable. It's so important that before we do that, we have a little SEL quickly and I tell them I just want to see how they work together, and it's amazing to see the growth of students that would never have done it at the beginning of the year.

Theme:

Collaborative planning to support students' academic growth through SEL instruction

Evidence:

T5 I think it is the positive impact because when we meet the child and find out their needs first, you are building a strong collaborative relationship between the educator and the child. So then they come to school every day and know what to expect. They have procedures, they have rules, and I think that students respond well to that. Those things help them feel safe and secure. When they are safe and secure, they are more willing to try hard things, and not as likely to give up, or be too afraid to make an attempt.

Initial Codes

Communication; Teacher-student rapport; Diversity appreciation

Collapsed Code:

N/A (none)

Evidence:

T1 I really want to check in and ask, "How was the day for you? Was there something— Did I do something to make you unhappy, or did I do something to change your mood in a negative way?" because I want them to tell me.

T8 When I model, sometimes I make a mistake on purpose to see, 1) if they're paying attention, and 2) how to self-correct, as well as the appropriate way to offer correction to others. I'll tell them, there's nothing wrong with correction, and thank you for the feedback, but if they just try to embarrass me, then I will say, "Your correction is needed, but this is how we do it." We will restate the correction so we create an environment where everyone can be comfortable, and we talk about how to accept correction, because we don't need to be embarrassed by it.

Theme:

Pre-planned vs. naturally occurring SEL reinforcement

Evidence:

T2 It's reminding students that we've learned how to express ourselves. So during reading, they are turning and talking to their partner, they are being respectful; they are looking their partner in the eye, they are waiting their turn, they are remembering to say thank you for sharing, they are learning from them.

T6 My door is always open, I don't even usually leave for lunch, so I have about three or four students who know if they need to come talk about what's going on in your life, or get a hug, they can.

Initial Codes:

Impact of SEL strategies with HRM students; Developing resilience/perseverance skills; Home/family factors affecting student achievement; Negative effects of high residential mobility; Emotional trauma

Collapsed Codes:

Transience; Instability

Evidence:

T1 Relationships are really important for these kids, but hard to build because they get used to this three months or so cycle of moving and everything being broken again and having to start over. It does it does have a major impact in reading. I see it and I know it's pretty devastating.

T9 For the most part, what I do find with those kids is that they lack, a lot, in the social and emotional areas. They've suffered trauma, and they bring I with them everywhere, no matter how you treat them. I think it goes back to the point they don't they don't feel comfortable, they don't feel safe, they don't know if they're moving next month, so that's what I'm worried about, when I'm sitting in class, not my letters, not reading.

Theme:

Factors affecting HRM students

Evidence:

T4 For most of my students who move around a lot, their reading level is not as high because they don't have that solid foundation, and usually they don't have people at home working with them on their reading. With them, it increases that gap, especially with COVID. I just try to use my time wisely, and try to incorporate tutoring in the extra time, so they don't miss learning opportunities because of things that are beyond their control.

T12 One of the things with the high residential mobility students is you don't always get the opportunity to assess where they are at—academically, socially, or emotionally. You just have to kind of work with what you've got.