

2023

# Elementary Teachers' and Administrators' Experiences of Implementation of Culturally Relevant Social-Emotional Instruction

Sherry Adelekan  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Sherry Adelekan

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Elementary Teachers' and Administrators' Experiences of Implementation of Culturally

Relevant Social-Emotional Instruction

by

Sherry Adelekan

MEd, Bowie State University, 2012

BS, Bowie State University 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

December 2023

## Abstract

Meeting the social-emotional needs of a diverse student body has proven challenging for U.S. school district leaders, leading to considerable research on culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Teachers and administrators have noted challenges in implementing CRP in social-emotional learning (SEL) programs within their existing curricula. In this basic qualitative study, elementary school teachers and administrators shared their experiences of integrating CRP into the SEL curriculum within Title I public schools for Grades 3 through 5. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory informed data collection and analysis. The research questions focused on the participants' experiences and their perspectives regarding the incorporation of SEL and CRP into the curriculum. Purposeful sampling was used to select 10 participants who were familiar with SEL and CRP and were currently implementing both in their school districts and classrooms. Data were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with the participants. The data analysis, which was undergirded by provisional and initial coding methods, revealed two themes: abandoned at sea and look who's not at dinner. Although participating teachers and administrators stated that implementing SEL and CRP is essential, both reported difficulties in applying SEL and CRP with fidelity. Race-related issues and the way biases are communicated with colleagues were described with frustration. The study may lead to positive social change by providing insight into teachers' and administrators' perspectives and experiences of implementing SEL and CRP. With this knowledge, school district leaders may be better able to develop, plan, implement, and modify training and support for teachers who plan to implement SEL and CRP.

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## Dedication

To the young woman who dreamed of becoming a psychologist. Sherry Morris  
Adelekan, remember you are stronger than you ever imagined.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Patricia Loun for guiding me on this journey. Thank you to Dr. Susan Marcus for her methodology expertise. Thank you both for pushing me over the finish line. Thank you to my loving husband, Ahmed Adelekan, and our boys, Makai and Elijah, for supporting me on this journey. I know the sacrifice was hard; I love you more than you could ever know.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study .....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions .....	8
Theoretical Framework .....	8
Nature of the Study.....	9
Definitions .....	10
Assumptions .....	10
Scope and Delimitations.....	11
Limitations.....	12
Significance .....	13
Summary.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	15
Introduction .....	15
Literature Search Strategy .....	16
Theoretical Foundation.....	16
Ecological Systems Theory .....	18
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts .....	21
Social-Emotional Learning.....	21

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy .....	23
Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy .....	26
Summary and Conclusions .....	32
Chapter 3: Research Method .....	33
Introduction .....	33
Research Design and Rationale .....	34
Role of the Researcher.....	35
Methodology.....	36
Participant Selection Logic.....	36
Instrumentation.....	38
Procedures For Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	38
Data Analysis Plan .....	39
Issues of Trustworthiness .....	40
Credibility.....	41
Transferability .....	41
Dependability .....	42
Confirmability .....	42
Ethical Procedures .....	42
Summary.....	43
Chapter 4: Results.....	45
Introduction .....	45

Setting .....	45
Demographics.....	46
Data Collection.....	47
Data Analysis.....	48
Evidence of Trustworthiness .....	52
Credibility.....	52
Transferability .....	52
Dependability .....	52
Confirmability .....	53
Results .....	53
Teacher Theme 1: Abandoned at Sea.....	53
Teacher Theme 2: Look Who’s Not at Dinner.....	56
Administrator Theme 1: Abandoned at Sea .....	58
Administrator Theme 2: Look Who’s Not at Dinner .....	60
Teacher/Administrator Buy-In .....	62
The Findings in Relation to the Research Questions.....	63
Summary.....	64
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations .....	66
Introduction .....	66
Interpretation of the Findings .....	67
Relevance to the Published Literature .....	67
Relevance to the Conceptual Framework.....	70

Limitations of the Study .....	72
Recommendations .....	72
Implications .....	73
Conclusion.....	75
References .....	77
Appendix A: Interview Protocol .....	89
Appendix B: Example of Code Development Into Themes .....	93

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics .....47

Table 2. Themes, Codes, Categories, and Illustrative Participant Responses .....51

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Social and Emotional learning (SEL) programs exist to promote and cultivate a student's social-emotional development and competency. CASEL (2012) defined SEL as the systematic process when children acquire skills that effectively help them understand and manage emotions. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) introduced the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* (CRP) to describe a form of teaching that would focus on and engage students whose experiences and cultures are traditionally excluded or overlooked in the mainstream. CRP is a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students' cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote a sense of well-being, pride, and identity within the world (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings identified three targets that teachers should focus on as they implement CRP. First, they must set high standards for academic success; second, they must use teaching practices to develop positive ethnic and cultural identities; and third, they must support a student's ability to recognize, understand, and critique current and social inequalities. Building on Ladson-Billings' theory, Gay (2002) developed a framework focused on teachers, strategies, and practices. Gay defined CRP as a teacher's ability to use cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of a diverse population of students to provide more effective instruction.

Teachers and administrators play key roles in the overall effectiveness of SEL programming while supporting the academic needs of students, addressing their social-emotional needs, and promoting lessons that are diverse and representative of the schools' culture, the classroom environment, and the students (Cho et al., 2019).

Research has revealed that teacher buy-in and lack of time to implement with fidelity as

challenges. Research indicated that educators who did not fully embrace Social Emotional Learning and integrate it into their teaching saw a decline in their students' SEL abilities (Schonert-Reichl, 2014). Furthermore, Gay and Howard (2000) concurred with Ladson-Billings (1999), affirming that the current pre-service education programs were insufficiently equipping teachers to effectively address the diverse and multicultural requirements of their students. However, teachers continued to express the importance of SEL programming and the benefits for students (Huynh et al., 2018).

In this chapter, I share relevant research related to the scope and background of the study. I also stated the problem and purpose of this study, present the research questions (RQs), and discuss the theoretical framework. Definitions are provided, and limitations are discussed. This study addressed the gap in research regarding implementation of the integration of CRP into SEL. This study had the potential to promote positive social change by giving teachers and administrators a platform to share their experiences and needs concerning the support, training, and materials needed to successfully implement culturally relevant SEL programming in instruction. The identification of specific best practices for implementing CRP into SEL programs provided a framework for teachers and administrators to follow. Educational leaders could also use the study findings to create relevant professional development opportunities.

### **Background**

School district leaders have begun to implement evidence-based SEL programming to meet the many needs of students (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2018). Leaders

had also added more discussions around culture and diversity into their professional developments for teachers and administrators (Hammond, 2015). However, for administrators to provide a plan for teachers to implement CRP in SEL programs with fidelity, they had to first address critical components. Teachers had reported limited training and confidence in responding to student behavioral needs, and they have stated that they find it challenging to implement SEL programs with fidelity (Abry et al., 2013). Implementing CRP in SEL programs with fidelity and producing positive outcomes relied on the decision-making processes of administrators and teachers, their perceptions, their investment in the program, their comfortability level, and the competence of the programs they were implementing (Domitrovich et al., 2016). Educators who felt confident, supported, competent, and prepared were more invested and engaged in CRP and SEL program implementation (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). However, previous research suggested that educators were not properly trained on the skills they needed to support students' cultural and social-emotional needs and did not receive adequate support during the CRP and SEL implementation process (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). There was a need for more research on how to support and prepare teachers and administrators to implement CRP in SEL programming for students.

### **Problem Statement**

School district leaders in the United States are finding it challenging to manage the social-emotional needs of a diverse student population while also promoting the students' academic achievement (Loveless & Griffith, 2014). Some administrators and teachers found it challenging to allocate time toward SEL as their priority was teaching

the curriculum (Oberle et al., 2017). It was also difficult for some district leaders to clearly define SEL and how to implement a program that provided support for teachers and students (Jones, 2017).

Furthermore, for the first time in history, students of color made up the majority of the pupils enrolled in the public-school system in the United States. Despite broad-based efforts since the *Brown vs. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision to build a fair route in education for these students, fairness remains elusive. Teachers and administrators serve many students of color in under-resourced schools that lack access to higher-level academic courses, enrichment opportunities, adequate facilities, and materials (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Although diversity has increased in student enrollment, the teaching profession remains majority White, female, monolingual, and middle class (Muñiz, 2019). Because these students entered the school system with diverse needs, it was vital to build a diverse pool of educators who were prepared to deliver and integrate a culturally relevant curriculum in SEL practices. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2017) advised teachers to embrace diversity in their learning environments, connect students with cultural experiences, and recognize their personal biases. Teachers are the organizers of culturally responsive classroom practices whereas administrators support teachers and reinforce cultural and SEL implementation.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2017) asserted that SEL is how children acquire skills that effectively help them understand and manage emotions. According to CASEL (2017), SEL helps students set goals, understand

how to develop and maintain positive relationships, and understand how to make sound decisions and show empathy for others. SEL has become a focus in education as its principles and practices continue to evolve through interdisciplinary research. Culturally relevant methods provide a framework through which teachers and administrators can integrate CRP.

Research suggested that evidence based SEL programming for children is associated with academic success and showed a decrease in unwanted behaviors that may impede learning in the classroom (Korpershoek et al., 2016). In a study of universal SEL programs for children in preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Durlak et al. (2011) posited that implementing such programs led to significant increases in social-emotional skills, socially-appropriate behavior, academic performance, positive attitudes, and a decrease in conduct problems and emotional distress. Although Durlak et al.'s (2011) research on universal SEL programs demonstrated the programs' success, surveys cited in this same study indicated that many schools were not implementing evidence-based prevention programs. These SEL programs were implemented with reduced fidelity. School district leaders who implemented SEL programs had not focused on a comprehensive mission that involved teaching and learning for all students and coordinated with other school operations components impacting implementation and fidelity (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Using a randomized delayed treatment control design, Graves et al. (2017) examined the efficacy of a culturally adapted version of an SEL intervention program targeted at male African American students. The researchers compared the effectiveness of school based SEL intervention programs for low-income urban youth and rural and

suburban youth. The research data revealed that the interventions with low-income urban youth were not as effective as when implemented with rural and suburban youth.

Outcome measures were analyzed to determine the program's effects by using repeated-measures analysis of variance on student pretest and posttest scores. The study revealed that 55% of the responses conducted with low-income urban youth were classified as ineffective compared to 28% of those in rural and suburban areas. This research suggested that low-income students who live in urban areas may endure contextual stressors more often than students from rural and suburban areas. According to Graves et al., contextual stressors are defined as stress occurring in one's environment (e.g., stress stemming from neighborhood risk, ethnic discrimination, poverty, and poor school climate).

Implementation of CRP is one way to balance the adverse effects of contextual stressors. CRP is defined as a curriculum that empowers students intellectually, socially, and emotionally (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), CRP focuses on three tenets: student learning and achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness/critical consciousness. These tenets allowed students to recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring knowledge of others. Previous researchers studied the need for and implementation of components of culturally relevant SEL programming; however, these studies were quantitative with little input from the teachers and administrators who were asked to implement SEL that include CRP (Greenberg et al., 2003). In a review of the literature, no qualitative studies existed that included CRP and SEL program implementation across diverse student

cohorts and that focused on the experiences of teachers and administrators in implementation. Teacher comments included in Graves et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis suggested that SEL programs were worthwhile; however, more attention to students' diverse experiences and a more culture-specific focus would be helpful. The researchers stated that more participatory culture-specific research should be undertaken to determine the stakeholder's views of the essential components of such interventions.

The problem was the lack of understanding of the experiences of teachers and administrators who integrate CRP in SEL programming. Understanding teachers' and administrators' experiences is an important part of filling the gap in preparing educators to implement culturally relevant SEL programs. According to Jennings (2015), teachers' unexpressed ideas, values, and beliefs may have a greater influence on instruction rooted in SEL than on traditional content-based instruction. In this research, a qualitative approach was used to allow participants to reflect on their experiences and contribute to the knowledge of how to prepare teachers and administrators to integrate and implement CRP in SEL programming.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the experiences of elementary teachers and administrators who integrated CRP in the SEL curriculum within the Title I public school setting for Grades 3 through 5. Teachers and administrators played a key role in planning and implementing programs in schools and classrooms; as such, their experiences, beliefs, and perceptions could affect student outcomes, program effectiveness, and program implementation (Collie et al., 2015). Therefore, exploring

teacher and administrator perceptions could address the identified gap in research regarding implementing the integration of CRP into SEL programming.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What are the experiences of teachers regarding incorporating CRP into the SEL curriculum?

RQ2: What are the experiences of administrators regarding incorporating CRP into the SEL curriculum?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that served as the basis for this study was Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This framework was essential to understanding the experiences and perceptions of teachers and administrators who were involved in the implementation of culturally relevant SEL and how they incorporated CASEL standards during SEL sessions. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlighted the intricate sociocultural world and influences that affected an individual's growth and development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Lewthwaite, 2006; Tissington, 2008). This theory considered the individual within a system of relationships within five different levels of environments. These environments—the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem—were based on a continuum from near to far, relative to individual perceptions and experiences. Perceptions and experiences do not happen independently; rather, they involve personal and environmental interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was a useful framework in exploring teacher and

administrator perceptions and experiences. By using it, there was an opportunity to examine the many environments that teachers were embedded and how their settings affected their experiences during the implementation of the culturally relevant social-emotional programming.

### **Nature of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of elementary teachers and administrators Grades 3–5 who integrated CRP into SEL curriculum. I was particularly interested in their experiences related to implementation. Basic qualitative research focuses on the experience of people and how they interpret and attribute meaning to their experience (Merriam, 2002) Basic qualitative research was used to examine the perspectives, experiences and perceptions of individuals and communities (Jameel et al., 2018). Erickson (2011) explained that employing qualitative research with a narrative design enables researchers to comprehend an individual's experiences in their everyday life and the personal significance behind those actions. Qualitative researchers aim to answer questions related to interpersonal interactions and social behaviors (Jameel et al., 2018). Therefore, a basic qualitative research design was appropriate and consistent with the aim of understanding the experiences teachers and administrators had when implementing culturally relevant social-emotional programming. By using this design and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, I was able to explore the effects of the environment on the experiences of participating teachers and administrators.

## Definitions

The following terms are used in this study:

*Administrator*: A school-based principal, assistant principal, or other educational leader who manages a school creating a professional and supportive community for teachers. This educational leader develops and supports curriculum, instruction, and assessments that promote students' academic success and well-being.

*Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP)*: A theoretical model developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings' work that focuses on multiple aspects of student achievement while supporting students in upholding their cultural identities (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

*Implementation*: The process by which CRP is integrated into SEL programming and lessons are carried out in schools and classrooms (Low et al., 2016).

*Social-emotional learning (SEL)*: The process by which children acquire skills that effectively help them to understand and manage emotions (CASEL, 2017).

*Title I Schools*: Schools with a high percentage of students from families with low-income receive federal funding under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, currently part of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (U.S. Department of Education).

## Assumptions

An assumption is a research supposition that something is true and that one or more conditions essential to a study are justified from a theoretical perspective (Vogt & Johnson, 2016). My initial assumption was that participants would share their personal experiences related to supporting and being supported while implementing a culturally

relevant SEL curriculum. This assumption was necessary because the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of teachers and administrators who had integrated CRP into the SEL curriculum. The second assumption was that there would be various responses from the participants due to their differing levels of professional expertise and assigned duties. This assumption was necessary to the context of this study because, although responses were similar, they were based on each participant's individual experiences and background. The final assumption was that participants understood the purpose of the study and that all information given and collected would remain confidential and would be used for the study's intended purpose.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

I explored the experiences of teachers and administrators regarding the integration of CRP in SEL and program implementation. The educators in the study served students in Grades 3–5 and taught and worked at Title I public elementary schools. Understanding teacher and administrator experiences was important because these professionals played a primary role in implementing SEL programs and had a significant impact on program outcomes (Collie et al., 2015). Understanding teachers' experiences could enhance administrators' ability to provide effective support, while gaining insight into administrators' experiences, could assist school district leaders in equipping and aiding administrators with the necessary knowledge and strategies for successful program implementation (Reyes et al., 2012).

Delimitations narrowed the scope of the study. Therefore, I limited this study to teachers and administrators who serviced Grades 3–5 in Title I public elementary

schools. The theoretical framework for this study was Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This theory highlighted the intricate sociocultural world and the many influences that affected an individual's growth and development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Lewthwaite, 2006; Tissington, 2008). This theory is based on the idea that overlapping contexts of an individual's environments directly influence their perceptions and experiences in life. Therefore, this theory provided insight into the many areas that impact an individual's experiences.

Moreover, the degree to which the results of a study can be applied to other contexts is its transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Choosing a model sample for a study was a strategy that can be used to establish transferability. A model sample is composed of the typical population that could be found in similar settings or contexts of one used in another researcher's study (Malterud et al., 2016). This study was reflective of the teachers and administrators found in elementary schools in the United States. The national percentage of teachers by race in elementary and secondary schools in a year was 79% White, 9% Hispanic, 7% Black, 2% Asian, 2% two or more races, 1% American Indian/Alaska Native, and less than 1% Pacific Islander (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

### **Limitations**

Potential challenges in conducting this study included involving teachers and administrators from multiple Title I schools. Although the teachers in the study were from urban school districts, it is important to note that each urban school setting is unique and faced with its own distinct challenges. Consequently, the participants may have had

varying experiences, and as a result, their perceptions may not have generalized into overarching themes. Second, teacher participants may have provided answers that they perceived as socially acceptable instead of revealing their authentic experience and programming attitudes. A third limitation stemmed from my background as a special educator; remaining unbiased and maintaining my role as the researcher, not the educator, could have become challenging. To reduce the potential misinterpretation of participants' responses, I kept detailed notes that involved voice recordings of participants during interviews. To remain unbiased and to establish credibility, I used member checking to ensure trustworthiness and a clear understanding of participants' responses. Participants were given my interpretations of the data to confirm the credibility of the information and the narrative accounts (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

### **Significance**

The findings of this study provided insight into teacher and administrator perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of culturally relevant social-emotional programming. This knowledge could be useful for training teachers to teach in culturally responsive SEL programs. This research might contribute to social change by providing data that educational leaders can use to create SEL development resources that inform future programming based on teacher and administrative feedback.

### **Summary**

Teachers and administrators have significant roles in SEL programming and the implementation process (Cho et al., 2019). Understanding the experiences of teachers and administrators who implement culturally relevant SEL programs is necessary to

understand how to support and prepare them to successfully implement SEL programs (Domitrovich et al., 2016). I designed this study to address the problem of teachers and administrators who were not adequately prepared to support a diverse student population through a mainstream curriculum. Therefore, the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of teachers and administrators who had integrated CRP in SEL. In Chapter 2, I presented evidence through the literature review that supported the need for this exploration.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The problem this study addressed was the challenge teachers and administrators experienced in managing the social-emotional needs of students through CRP and SEL while meeting expectations for student academic achievement (Loveless & Griffith, 2014). Although SEL and CRP have been studied, it is difficult for some school district leaders to clearly define SEL and implement a program that provided support for teachers and students (Jones, 2017). Oberle et al. (2017) suggested that teachers found it challenging to allocate time toward culturally relevant SEL as their priority was on teaching the curriculum. However, teachers had reported difficulty in handling student behavior as a primary concern contributing to field attrition (Billingsley, 2004). Young (2010) conducted a qualitative study of educators and administrators regarding strategies for defining, implementing, and assessing CRP as a viable tool in the classroom. The study results revealed structural issues related to teacher cultural bias, racism in school settings, and the lack of support to effectively implement CRP into practice. The research further revealed that the gap in research was not the knowledge of SEL and CRP but the lack of understanding how to effectively implement CRP pedagogy.

The gap in the literature had been the lack of research on the perceptions and experiences of teachers and administrators regarding the support they and school districts received to implement culturally relevant SEL programming. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of teachers and administrators who had implemented culturally relevant SEL programming. I examined

the types of assistance teachers look for from administrators, as well as administrators' viewpoints and encounters concerning the support they sought from the school district and the forms of support they viewed as essential for aiding teachers. In this chapter, I explored recent developments and previous research on SEL, teacher and administrator program implementation, teacher preparation programming, the benefits of SEL, and teacher and administrator perspectives of their experiences of implementing culturally relevant SEL programs in their schools and classrooms.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To find relevant literature, I used the following databases and search engines: ERIC, Sage Journals, Education Source, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar. I also consulted Walden University librarians. To obtain recent scholarly publications, I set the research parameters to within five years. The keywords used were *school-based mental health and wellness, teacher barriers/challenges, social-emotional programs, school-based emotional awareness, culture, curriculum, youth mental health, teacher perception, principal perception, teacher roles, principal roles, SEL intervention programs, and culturally relevant pedagogy*. The search process was systematic and comprehensive as I used terms and term combinations in connection with synonyms and modified search terms.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation that underpinned this qualitative study was Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory suggests that a child's cognitive development is cultivated in the environments in which they are

placed. Bronfenbrenner described this research as involving the study of human community relationships and experiences in their natural and manufactured environments. This theory is based on the idea that overlapping contexts of an individual's environments directly influence their perceptions and experiences in life. The ecological systems theory suggests that development is a function of multiple systems and their interrelationship within the various environments, impacting experiences and perceptions. The ecological systems start from the immediate environment, which branches out to environments that influence but are less immediate. The systems are as follows: microsystem (immediate and direct environments in which an individual interacts regularly), mesosystem (highlights how experiences and developments in one microsystem setting can impact and be influenced by experiences in another), exosystem (external environments that indirectly influence an individual's development), and macrosystem (broader cultural, societal, and ideological influences that shape and impact the various lower-level systems microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem). These systems are nested one inside the other, influencing the child in diverse ways. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that although there are variations within the systems across social class, each system forms a structure consistent with similar cultures and subcultures.

This theoretical framework is essential to understanding the experiences and perceptions of the teachers and administrators who are involved in implementing culturally relevant SEL, as relationships shape teachers and administrators' environments and create frameworks for the development of their perceptions and experiences of how

and why they teach important topics within CRP and SEL. Although Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework focused on children and their environmental interactions and individual impact, it may be adapted to this research about teachers and administrators experiences and perspectives on implementing CRP and SEL because of the overlapping influences within instructional development and school curriculum (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social-ecological theory, teachers' and administrators' experiences are influenced within a nested social system that is the product of complex interactions between teachers, administrators, and their social environments that range from their immediate interactions to the broader influences such as cultural norms and community (Trach et al., 2017).

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's approach highlights the intricate socio-cultural world and the many influences that impact an individual's growth and development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Lewthwaite, 2006; Tissington, 2008). This theory considers the individual within a system of relationships within five different levels of environments. These environments, the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem are based on a continuum from the individual's most immediate background to his/her least immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological systems theory was adapted for this research beginning at the individual levels of the teacher and the administrator, or the microsystem. The microsystem revealed interpersonal interactions in the immediate setting, such as the classroom where proximal processes relied on content and structure to generate and maintain growth

(Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The microsystem allowed a better understanding of how teachers and administrators are socially situated and conscious of events occurring in the larger group, to the degree that a teacher or administrator is incorporated into everyday exchanges of communal information. For this study, the microsystem is how teachers and administrators perceived the CRP and SEL curriculum and how their perceptions translated into applying SEL and CRP into the curriculum. Beyond the microsystem is the mesosystem, and the mesosystem is the relationship that exists between two or more settings. Bronfenbrenner (1999) describes the mesosystem as made up of two or more microsystems. For this study, the mesosystem is the teacher's relationships with students in the classroom and with colleagues at the school. This would also be the administrator's relationship with teachers and his/her relationship with other administrative staff. At the mesosystem, teachers' perceptions of their administrator and their experience and perception of support is found. The expectations of administration for teachers in the teaching and learning environment can be found at this level.

The next level is the exosystem which Bronfenbrenner (1999) describes as the linkages that take place between two or more settings, where at least one setting does not contain the individual, but the events that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in the individual lives. This level is where we discover the teachers' perceptions of communities and social-political movements and administrators' perceptions and experiences with organizations (unions) and mass media. The final level is the macrosystem, composed of a large group that shared common characteristics such as culture and subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The macrosystem consisted of the

patterns and characteristics found within the preceding frameworks (microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem). This level referred to the given culture, belief systems, bodies of knowledge and available resources (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In this study, this level is represented by state policies and district policies that guide SEL and CRP education. This level is where state and district policies influenced teacher and administrator perceptions and experiences on how they taught and implemented CRP and SEL.

In a quantitative study, Hong and Eamon (2012) used the ecological systems framework to study student perceptions of school safety. They identified factors that influence student perceptions using several ecological levels; however, it did not include the microsystem or chronosystem levels. The student perceptions were identified by school environment (microsystem), parental involvement (mesosystem), and community, neighborhood (exosystem). While Hong & Eamon (2012) concluded that interventions for safer school environments and increasing positive perceptions within students should occur at the family, neighborhood, and school levels, their study did not address the macrosystem (district level) which influences the overall school safety policy. Although the present study does not include the chronosystem, it did include the macrosystem level (district) to explore the influences on teacher and administrators' perceptions of implementing CRP and SEL. Adapting Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework to this qualitative study was fitting for the exploration of teacher and administrator perceptions and experiences. It examined the many environments that teachers and

administrators are embedded in and how their settings affected their experiences during the implementation of CRP and SEL.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

#### **Social-Emotional Learning**

SEL is the process by which children acquire skills that effectively help them understand and manage emotions. SEL helps students set goals, understand how to establish and maintain positive relationships, and understand how to make sound decisions and show empathy for others (CASEL, 2012). SEL improved students' aptitude in integrative thinking, handling emotions, and monitoring behaviors to focus on and complete necessary daily tasks (Martínez, 2016). When schools implement SEL intervention programs that incorporate components of the CASEL guide, student academic achievement improved by an average of 11 percentile points (Weissberg, 2019). SEL is a broad concept that includes students' social and emotional competencies while also providing the framework for future SEL programs. CASEL (2012) identified five core standards and three strategies to develop students' social and emotional skills in the classroom: direct instruction, integration with academic content, and infusion with teaching practices. The headings identified in the CASEL guide are as follows:

- Self-awareness: the ability to understand and process personal thoughts and emotions.
- Self-management: the ability to effectively manage personal thoughts, emotions, and behaviors when placed in situations that may require stress management and require self-discipline.

- Social-awareness: the ability to empathize with others and taking others perspectives into consideration.
- Relationship skills: the ability to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts, and demonstrate cultural competency.
- Responsible decision-making: the ability to identify solutions for personal and social problems, the ability to analyze information, data, and facts, and make reasonable judgments.

Although CASEL is a systematic approach that focuses on a broad view of programming, researchers argued that when implementing SEL in the school setting the program should incorporate four elements that are identified as the acronym SAFE: sequence, active, focused, and explicit. (Taylor et al., 2017). Using SAFE ensured that the programming was coordinated, included participation, and built on prior knowledge in order to promote the healthy development of social-emotional skills in students. Kern (2015) suggested three approaches to addressing the social-emotional needs of students in the classroom setting. They included positive supports, mentoring and relationship building, and consistency of interventions. Conversely, Cohen (2006) suggested that when SEL occurred outside of classroom lessons, the interventions and programming had a more significant impact on social-emotional skill development. Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2018) argued that the literature did not reflect cultural differences and diversity making SEL troublesome without the appropriate cultural adaptation, and that engaging SEL in culturally relevant education is significant but a neglected issue in education.

Overall, SEL is a systemic approach that guides in establishing an equitable learning environment. Using the broad framework of CASEL to develop an explicit program that focuses on SEL and CRP, schools can provide a safe learning environment that supports students' social-emotional development. Although SEL and CRP are interconnected, Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2018) argued that the connection has not been made explicitly enough in the field of education. SEL with respect to pedagogy is a familiar idea; therefore, SEL that is embedded within CRP may lead to a better understanding of students as active participants in their personal learning environment (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2018). For this study, the SEL framework was used as a checklist to guide how teachers incorporated the SEL headings and the CRP pillars to guide lessons for students.

### **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

According to Geneva Gay (2002), CRP is defined as the ability to use cultural characteristics, including values, traditions, language, learning styles, communication styles and relationship norms, from a diverse population of students to teach them effectively. By adding CRP to SEL practices, schools could provide a holistic teaching opportunity for children with high-academic and social-emotional needs. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), CRP includes three pillars for success: (1) Students must experience academic success, (2) students must develop and maintain cultural competence, and (3) Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. Geneva Gay continued the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings by developing a framework which focused on teaching strategies

and practices. Gay calls this “culturally responsive teaching”. CRP responds to the cultures in the classroom; Gays’ pedagogy works to connect new information to the student’s background knowledge with a presentation that allows for the student’s natural learning response (Gay, 2002). Although Ladson-Billings focuses on students while Gay focuses on teachers, both emphasized the students’ need in diverse populations to think critically about social norms, world views, and inequities in their communities and homes. Overall, CRP includes students who feel validated as members of the learning community, creating an environment where they feel safe to engage in the learning experience with teachers who have established a trusting, caring, and empathic relationship that values the culture of the classroom community (Ladson-Billings 1995; Gay, 2002).

Understanding how to prepare teachers to implement SEL programs through education training programs and preservice professional development is becoming a topic of interest among educators, policy makers, and school districts. As educators and policy makers seek to find solutions that address mental health and behavioral concerns in the classroom, teachers continue to report increased stress levels leading to high burnout rates and teachers leaving the profession. In 2005, longitudinal research indicated that in children between the ages of 9 and 16, 37-39% of youth were diagnosed with at least one or more psychiatric disorders (Jaffee et al., 2005). U.S. adolescents who reported experiencing a major depressive episode between 2005 and 2014 increased from 8.7 to 11.3% (Mojtabai et al., 2016). SEL skills can be acquired through a nurturing and caring learning environment that allows open conversations between teachers and students and

provides experiences in real-life situations. Although SEL programs have been researched and ready for implementation, Tom Roderick, a developer of many popular SEL programs such as the 4 Rs Program and the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, suggested that teachers struggle with implementing SEL programming because they have not been adequately trained (Bouffard, 2014; Schonert-Reichl & Zakrzewski, 2014; Suttie, 2011). Data from an additional study suggested that teachers who did not buy into SEL and incorporate it into the curriculum made their students SEL skills worse (Schonert-Reichl, 2014). Moreover, Gay and Howard (2000) agreed with Ladson-Billings (1999), stating that the existing preservice programs are not adequately preparing teachers to meet students' multicultural and diverse needs. At the same time, they are noting that multicultural teacher preservice education suffers from poorly developed, fragmented literature, which provides an inaccurate depiction of teachers' preparation to teach in culturally diverse classrooms.

Teachers reported limited training and confidence in responding to student behavioral needs and found it challenging to implement SEL programs with fidelity (Abry et al., 2013). The National Council on Teacher Quality reports that approximately 200,000 teachers graduate each year from teacher preparation programs (E. Woolley et al., 2013). These programs vary in state certification requirements, course work, and GPA. A certification obtained in one state may not be recognized in another. Therefore, a uniformity of training in SEL is necessary for all teachers in the formative stages as states begin to acknowledge the need for SEL training among educators. The need to train and prepare teachers to address their students' social-emotional needs in the classroom

adequately requires specific training and teacher buy-in. In a quantitative study, New America (2019) analyzed professional teaching standards in all 50 states to understand teachers' expectations regarding the incorporation of CRP. The findings suggested that all 50 states started incorporating some aspects of CRP in their professional standards. However, most of these states did not provide a clear and comprehensive description of CRP and lack clarity in supporting teachers and school leaders in continued practice throughout their careers (Muñiz, 2019).

Teachers are the front-line workers that drive SEL programs and practices in schools and classrooms. Therefore, their social-emotional competence and well-being influence their students. Teachers who manage their personal social-emotional development and develop relationships with students foster an environment where children feel comfortable to discuss learning challenges and are willing to persist in the problematic learning task (Jones et al., 2013). Conversely, teachers who report high-stress levels, specifically teachers who lack behavior management in their classrooms, also reported higher classes with students with mental health issues (Reinke et al., 2011). According to the 2007 National Commission on Teaching and American's Future, reported teacher turnover costs the United States up to \$7 billion a year ("The High Cost of Teacher Turnover. Policy Brief", 2007).

### **Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

#### ***Teacher and Administrator Roles in Implementation***

Job role definitions identify job-related duties, guide job responsibilities, and anchor career development (Schein, 1996). Identified job roles impacted how individuals

crafted their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Work roles emerged through adaptive and proactive job-related behavior (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Therefore, an individual's social consciousness after job identification could provide the basis for defining their roles and performing their job duties (Giddens, 1973; Lockwood, 1958). Teachers who educate students in-person or virtually need help and support to identify their roles to succeed in the classroom (Thach & Murphy, 1995). Teachers are essential members of the school community who enhance learners' competence through academic curriculum and SEL. Overall, within a broad perspective, a teacher's role is to provide a safe learning environment for children while providing access to grade-level curriculum supporting students' academic learning. However, many teachers are providing education beyond the academic curriculum. Teachers have the task to conform to the different settings and situations that arise daily. Teachers serve as counselors, mentors, role models, and external parents; specific roles do not define teachers as they must conform to the ever-changing situations they are faced with daily (Shaikh & Khoja, 2012).

In kindergarten (K) through Grade 12 (K–12) schools, the role of administrators (principals and assistant principals) has been to focus on instructional leadership (Munro, 2008). Administrators organize and plan for the fundamental workings of the staff, students, activities, and the building budget. School administrators play an integral role in promoting an environment of academic achievement (Hall & Simeral, 2008). Administrators must have a clear vision for their schools while also identifying a clear role as leaders in the school community. School administrators are expected to lead

people and manage the instructional program and the school environment (Cobanoglu, 2018). Given the rising importance of accountability for student achievement and discipline problems resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act, school districts and administrators are increasingly seeking out interventions that promote a positive school climate and reduce discipline problems (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2009). As teachers' social-emotional competence is essential to their work and work environment, an administrator's social-emotional competence is equally crucial. Administrator beliefs and personal well-being are critical to school management (Fisher, 2014). Their thoughts affect their behaviors and teacher commitment (Hallinger et al., 2017). Teachers and administrators have many roles to play while serving students; therefore, they must frame teachers' differences, coach teachers to promote academic success, motivate students, while creating a positive school culture that supports innovative ideas and celebrates breakthroughs (Fullan, 2011).

### ***Program Implementation***

In a quantitative two-phase study, Brackett et al. (2011) developed and validated scores on a set of scales that assessed teachers' beliefs about SEL and their implementation. Phase 1 of the program, RULER (SEL program that integrated core subjects and teaches children how to recognize emotions) involved item development with teacher participants who attended an SEL workshop. The 62 teachers had varying years of teacher experience, varying degrees, and taught students from K–8. Phase 2 involved exploring the validity of the SEL beliefs scales. The scale's domains were connected to a different teacher and school characteristics that included teacher burnout,

teaching efficacy, and perceptions of administrative support. The themes that emerged were comfort, commitment, and culture. Overall, Brackett et al. (2011) found that the implementation and effectiveness of SEL depended heavily on teachers' dedication, knowledge, comfort with the material and perceived support to implement the SEL program.

Kern (2015) suggested that many educators feel that teaching academics (not handling behavior problems) is their primary responsibility. Kern reflected on the challenge's teachers face when tasked with implementing SEL programs that fail to support students and teachers. Kern posited that intervention programs fail because of lack of fidelity, poor program adaptation, and teacher support. Teachers are tasked with multiple demands and have little to no training in social-emotional competence, especially in low-performing or urban school districts, making them suspicious of SEL programming. Therefore, teacher buy-in is essential to the program's success (Humphries et al., 2018).

Both Kern (2015) and Humphries et al. (2018) agreed that teachers are the key figures when implementing classroom-based programs and are responsible for the curriculum and the classroom environment targeting them to implement new classroom programs. Therefore, for teachers to implement CRP and SEL, they should be trained, given support, and programs should be adapted and implemented with fidelity. Moreover, implementing CRP and SEL programming may be perceived as another task or as an intrusion. Therefore, teachers' well-being, social-emotional competence, and

administrative support impacted the learning experience and SEL infusion into their classrooms and daily lessons (Humphries et al., 2018).

When teachers know their own social-emotional needs and can address their issues, they create a healthy work-life balance. These teachers set the tone in their classrooms by providing and developing supportive and welcoming classroom environments that encourage their students daily. Socially and emotionally competent teachers implement behavior guidelines and boundaries that support intrinsic motivation for student learning. These teachers can also better deal with conflict, coaching students through conflict resolutions while encouraging a respectful and cooperative community within the classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Conversely, teachers who lack resources and support to manage their social-emotional challenges effectively become emotionally exhausted teachers (Osher et al., 2007). Research showed that there are many ways in which teachers react more negatively to the unacceptable actions of students with unresolved behavioral problems than similar behaviors of their peers without behavioral concerns (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Teachers who exhibited burnout behaviors may have unknowingly created a learning environment that became hostile and harsh, constructing an unsafe environment for students who were at risk for mental health challenges (Schuck et al., 2017). Teachers who incorporated culture into their teaching practices embraced social justice norms that provided students with a democratic and equitable education (Morrison et al., 2008).

In her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, Zaretta Hammond (2015) suggested that CRP is fundamentally about being in a relationship and having a

social-emotional connection with students. Hammond stated that the classroom environment is an essential element in introducing CRP; simply adding surface-level cultural details to low-level decontextualized activities did not qualify as integrating CRP into SEL or the school curriculum. To implement CRP in SEL, the goal was to create an aesthetically pleasing classroom environment and have a strong feeling and tone that incorporated routines and rituals that reflected collectivist cultural values (Hammond, 2015). A teacher who implemented CRP/SEL did not separate emotion from pedagogy but provided the connection of intellect and emotion in the classroom to promote a creative space for both teacher and students. The goal was to offer students equitable learning opportunities. In short, integrating SEL/CRP into classrooms promoted social justice (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2018).

In a qualitative study, Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) presented and integrated an approach to SEL and culturally relevant teaching to educators in Massachusetts. The study aimed to integrate CRP and SEL in teacher preparation. Through a survey administered through an online portal, participants were obtained through emailed letters sent through teacher education institutions. The participants consisted of 76 professionals in teacher education. Fifty-six (73.7%) were faculty members, 11 (14.5%) were deans and administrators, and nine (11.8%) were supervisors or mentor teachers. Participants from private institutions made up 61.8% of the total, while public higher education institutions made up 34.2%. 3.9% of the participants came from K–12 institutions. The participants indicated high interest and motivation for integrating SEL and CRP; however, the level of implementation and practice was low. The study found recurring

themes related to barriers to SEL/CRP implementation. The themes were constraints of the state curriculum framework, state-mandated licensure requirements, standardized testing, time constraints, lack of teacher buy-in, and lack of SEL/CRP knowledge.

Through teacher preparation, the study used the data obtained from the participants to highlight and guide lessons and workshops that integrate SEL/CRP. While the study found themes related to barriers, this qualitative study will add to this research by exploring current themes related to barrier solutions and perceptions of administrators tasked with guiding teachers in implementing CRP and SEL in their schools.

Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) found that implementing SEL/CRP required a revision of multiple aspects of the current curriculum, teacher preparation programs, and the need for continued professional developments geared toward SEL/CRP. Although there is research on CRP and SEL, current research did not reflect the perceptions of teachers and administrators who implement CRP and SEL in urban Title I elementary schools. This study addressed the gap in literature by exploring the perceptions of both teachers and administrators in Title I elementary schools who implement CRP and SEL programs.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

In this chapter, I reviewed literature relevant to this qualitative study of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of implementing culturally relevant social-emotional programming. The themes that emerged in the literature were adaptation of curriculum, time and support, and teacher buy-in. The research supported that incorporating SEL and CRP is beneficial for students and those who implement the program. However, a lack of

support and continued training does not allow teachers to implement CRP and SEL with fidelity (Morrison et al., 2008). In this study, I address the gap between lack of knowledge and implementation. I also clarified what teachers and administrators can do to better integrate CRP and SEL into school curricula.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

#### **Introduction**

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the experiences of elementary teachers and administrators who served students in Grades 3–5 in Title I public school settings and who had experience integrating CRP in the SEL curriculum. Teachers and administrators are pivotal in supporting students' academic and social-emotional needs. They are critical to the implementation and the overall effectiveness of SEL programming. As the primary planners and implementors of the SEL programs in schools and classrooms, teachers' and administrators' experiences, beliefs, and perceptions may affect student outcomes, program effectiveness, and program implementation (Collie et al., 2015). Therefore, further exploration of teacher and administrator perceptions was needed to address the identified gap in research regarding implementation and the integration of CRP into SEL programming (Humphries et al., 2018). In this chapter, I justify my choice to use a basic qualitative study design, examine my role as the researcher, and describe the methodology used in this study. Chapter 3 also includes a description of the procedures for recruiting participants, an overview of the data collection instruments, and discussion of trustworthiness.

## Research Design and Rationale

Research questions are essential to the research design and are the foundation of a research study (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). I sought to answer the following two RQs in this study:

RQ1: What are the experiences of teachers regarding incorporating CRP into the SEL curriculum?

RQ2: What are the experiences of administrators regarding incorporating CRP into the SEL curriculum?

I used a basic qualitative design to explore the experiences of teachers and administrators who had integrated CRP into SEL programming. According to Merriam (2009), the basic qualitative design was derived philosophically from constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interactions; researchers use this design to study how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and interpret the meaning they attribute to their experiences. Researchers who use the basic qualitative design want to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences.

By using a basic qualitative design, I sought to understand how teachers and administrators interpret and make sense of their experiences throughout program implementation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic qualitative design allowed me to understand teacher and administrator experiences by collecting data through interviews and analyzing the participant responses to identify repeating themes. The basic qualitative design was appropriate for exploring and understanding strategies and practices of

teachers and administrators; as Merriam (2009) noted, this design can be used to explore experiences and the meaning that is ascribed to those experiences and processes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

How I write reflects my interpretation based on cultural, social, gender, and personal politics that I bring to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Richardson (1994), the best writing acknowledges “undecidability” and subtext. Therefore, qualitative researchers should examine their position within their research through reflexivity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A reflexive researcher reflects on the ethical issues in the study, their role in the study, and the personal biases, values, and experiences they bring to the qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Engaging in reflexivity strengthens the integrity of the study while helping the reader to understand how the researcher interpreted data and found specific conclusions; while considering my positionality as a researcher and how it may affect my relationship with the participants, I realized that my role in this study would be an observer-participant. An observer-participant collects data that primarily occurs in the natural setting where participants are located (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My role is critical in qualitative research as it informs data collection and analysis implementation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The benefits of being an insider include having a greater understanding of the culture being studied without unnaturally altering the flow of social interaction; furthermore, this approach fosters a familiar relationship between researcher and participants, promoting an honest dialogue between the two (Adler & Adler, 1994). I have taught students in several grade levels in elementary, middle, and high school as a

special educator. I have worked with students with learning disabilities, written individualized education programs, and have modified the curriculum to fit the needs of my students. As an insider, I was familiar with the curriculum, best practices of teachers and administrators, and data collection practices. The potential bias could have come from my 13 years of teaching experience, including three years spent teaching modified SEL lessons. Although I have taught modified SEL lessons as a special educator, I did not have an affiliation with the participants while collecting data.

### **Methodology**

This basic qualitative research aimed to understand the experiences of elementary teachers and administrators who work within Title I public school settings and integrated CRP into the curriculum for SEL. Using a basic qualitative design, the researcher began to understand how teachers and administrators interpreted their experiences during this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The basic qualitative design allowed the researcher to collect data through interviews and in-depth analysis of participant answers to identify repeating themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this section, the plan, the methodology, and the research design are described and justified. Furthermore, I discuss procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, a data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical practices.

#### **Participant Selection Logic**

I selected participants by using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was appropriate because it assumes that the purpose is to discover, understand, and gain insight into the subject explored. This strategy was also appropriate as it selected matched

participants based on a particular criterion (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To continue to build credibility to the study, participants were knowledgeable of the topic and have educational experience (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, participants chosen for the study met the following criteria: (a) be a practicing Title I 3rd–5th grade teacher or administrator, (b) have participated in implementing and planning to integrate CRP into SEL lessons, (c) have participated in SEL training provided by the school district, and (d) have 2 or more years of teaching or administrative experience. Potential participants were sent an invitation with a detailed description and purpose of the study, criteria for participation in the study, and details of consent for their review. Once the potential participant reviewed the forms and replied with “I consent,” it was verified that they met the criteria and were sent a follow-up email with next step instructions.

Using information to guide sample size selection was recommended by Malterud et al. (2016), who describes the study's purpose as narrow and broad. General research requires a large sample, while a narrow study has a more comprehensive objective. As the information samples become more focused, the sample size of participants decreases. Therefore, the aim of study for this research was narrow, focusing on the experiences of participants who had integrated CRP into SEL programming. To acquire information power and narrow the study aim, the researcher must have a focused study topic, select participants based on criteria, and apply planning and analysis based on a specific theory (Malterud et al., 2016). The number of participants for an adequate sample may vary in qualitative research (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Therefore, data for this study was

collected until saturation or redundancy was reached. When the interview question responses begin to repeat, saturation or redundancy is met (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Instrumentation**

Semi structured interviews were appropriate as they allowed me to gather specific information while giving flexibility to participants to respond to their experiences and provide details into their ideas about the topic. Semi structured interviews allow open-ended questions that provide a platform for natural conversation (Malterud et al., 2016). I developed interview questions to answer the RQs by applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory elements, such as school climate and environment, program delivery characteristics, school leadership support, and organizational structures (see Appendix A). Once participants signed into Zoom, I thanked them, reminded them of the study's purpose, reminded them that the session will be recorded, and started the recorded interview. The questions incorporated Patton's (2015) suggestions of experience and behavior, opinion and values, feelings and questions, knowledge questions, background/demographic questions, and sensory questions. Good questions are open-ended, yielding stories about the topic and descriptive data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Procedures For Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Data collection methods and information used as data are driven by the researcher's sample selection, theoretical framework, and the problem and purpose of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers are the primary instrument and may use multiple means of collecting data (Malterud et al., 2016). Researchers using qualitative methods often develop the instrument used in their research as it may be challenging to

find an appropriate tool for their study (Dine et al., 2015). Interviewing is a common form of data collection in qualitative studies using semi structured interviews, where the discussion will be guided by a list of questions that explore the study topic is a common tool to collect data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Choosing the method to analyze data that will answer RQs is essential for researchers (Dine et al., 2015). Thematic analysis was the method chosen to analyze data collected from this study. Thematic analysis systematically identifies, organizes, and identifies themes across a data set, allowing the researcher to understand shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis is flexible and can be applied to many research topics while answering various RQs. Thematic analysis is compatible with qualitative research through coding and systematically analyzing data linked to broader theoretical and conceptual frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Coding is an essential part of data analysis. Codes identify and provide a label for data relevant to answering RQs. I used an inductive and deductive approach to data coding to analyze data from this study. Using an inductive approach allowed the codes to be driven by the data collected. The themes derived from the data's content; in contrast, a deductive system let me develop concepts, ideas, and topics that may be used to code and interpret data.

I used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to process coding and analyze data. Once interviews were completed, I used REV to convert the audio into text. Once a transcript was generated through REV, I uploaded them into

Dedoose's CAQDAS platform to help me manage, organize, code, and analyze the data obtained from the participant interviews (Malterud et al., 2016).

During data analysis, it was essential to look for data that may support alternative explanations to emerging findings while also being aware of discrepant data that may disconfirm and challenge emerging results (Malterud et al., 2016). Through member checking to ensure the accuracy of the data, I provided the participants with an interview transcript and a draft of the findings for their feedback (Creswell, 2014).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

To ensure this study's validity, credibility, and trustworthiness, the data was collected until saturation was reached. Although there are different definitions of saturation, it is defined by Baker et al. (2018) as the point in coding when no new codes occur during data collection. The trustworthiness of a study examines the extent to which the study's findings are reliable and trusted (Korsjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher's quality criteria and the study execution's veracity also determine reliability. Therefore, trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. After the interviews were transcribed, I sent a copy to the participant with instructions, allowing the participant to review responses and examine the collected data for biases and misunderstandings made by the researcher. Member checking allowed sharing of preliminary findings of the participants while providing feedback and validating interpretations. Peer examination was a strategy used to establish the study's validity, allowing a colleague or an individual who has the experience and familiarity

with the study topic to review and give feedback (Malterud et al., 2016). The individual I selected had knowledge and expertise in integrating CRP into SEL and implementation.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is the extent to which the findings of the data collected matches reality. Credibility is the researcher's confidence that the study results are true and accurate (Malterud et al., 2016). I used member checking and peer review to establish credibility in this study. Member checking provided the participants with the opportunity to review their findings, make corrections, and challenge any misunderstandings of the researcher's interpretation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The second strategy I used was peer examination to establish the study's validity, allowing a colleague or an individual who has the experience and familiarity with the study topic to review and give feedback (Malterud et al., 2016).

### **Transferability**

Transferability demonstrates that the study's findings apply to other contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers establish transferability by applying the research concept and using a sample representing a typical population. Researchers may also provide a thick description of the sample size, setting, demographics, and the research process to establish transferability (Malterud et al., 2016). Providing a thick description refers to the researcher's account of detailed field experiences while identifying patterns of cultural and social relationships in context to the study. The researcher's responsibility is to provide a thick (detailed) description of the research process and the participants to

allow the research reader to assess whether the findings are transferable in their setting, making a transferability judgment (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the extent to which the study can be repeated by other researchers with findings consistent with the original research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). A researcher can use an inquiry audit to establish dependability. Allowing a researcher outside of data collection and analysis to examine the study's results confirms the accuracy of the findings and that the results are supported by the data collected (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the neutrality in the research findings. Findings should be based on the participants' responses and representative of the researcher's personal bias or personal motivations. Researchers can establish confirmability by participating in reflexivity. Reflexivity is the researcher's awareness of personal bias and influences on the study. When the researcher engages in self-reflection, explores personal beliefs, and recognizes limitations in the study, he or she practices reflexivity (Malterud et al., 2016).

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethics is based on the standard of right and wrong; a general definition of ethics is not to harm a theory or system of moral values. Ethical practices rely on the researcher's moral values and beliefs systems. Therefore, during the research process, it was vital for the me to self-reflect on my values, biases, and any potential ethical issues that arise while conducting research (Malterud et al., 2016). After reviewing the Research Ethics

Approval Checklist, I engaged in reflexivity and reflected on ethical considerations for this study. There were no Institutional Review Board (IRB) concerns as this study did not involve a vulnerable population. The Walden IRB approval number for this study is 05-19-22-0614451. All participants were treated fairly and respectfully, ensuring that they were well informed before participating in the study. Therefore, participants' communication was through email and phone contact, except for the initial invitation email. Once participants were chosen, their information was uploaded into a spreadsheet and assigned a code to ensure the confidentiality of personal information. The participant's contact information was stored in a numbered file guarded by a password on my computer. Participants and researchers signed confidentiality agreements. Walden researchers and faculty only review raw data. During the recruitment and research process, I answered clarifying questions and advised the participants that they were free to end participation in the study without prejudice or penalty. All data collected was kept confidential, and personal information was kept private and will be deleted five years after the end of the study to maintain confidentiality.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the role of the researcher was described along with methodology, instrumentation, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Using a basic qualitative design, I explored the experiences of teachers and administrators who had implemented CRP into SEL programming, therefore utilizing purposeful sampling by choosing participants based on the study criteria. Using thematic analysis to systematically identify and organize themes across a data set as a data analysis plan was

appropriate for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Chapter 3 also reviewed maintaining confidentiality and the procedure for securing and discarding personal information.

Chapter 4 will discuss the RQs and how they guide this study. I will also describe the study's setting, demographics, and collected data. Chapter 4 will also discuss themes and trends identified from the data during data analysis and the evidence of trustworthiness.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences and perspectives of elementary teachers and administrators who work in Title I public school settings and have a background of integrating CRP into the curriculum for SEL. I sought to answer the following two RQs:

RQ1: What are the experiences of teachers regarding incorporating CRP into the SEL curriculum?

RQ2: What are the experiences of administrators regarding incorporating CRP into the SEL curriculum?

In this chapter, I discuss the study's results, including how the data were collected and analyzed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and a summary of the key findings.

### **Setting**

The participants for this qualitative study worked in Title I schools in urban school districts serving Grades 3–5. The schools were in Philadelphia, Boston, and urban parts of Maryland and Ohio. All schools qualified for Title I funds under federal law according to the U.S Department of Education, as 40% of students enrolled in each school were from low-income families and received free or reduced lunch (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). All the schools were making efforts to address the need for mental health services and SEL after returning to in-person learning after Covid-19 pandemic-related restrictions were lifted. Although all public schools in Maryland had

returned to in-person learning, leaders continued to offer classes to a small number of students through a virtual academy. During this study, there were no school closures, budget cuts, or district changes that could have influenced the research design and interpretation of the study results.

### **Demographics**

I selected participants by using purposeful sampling based on the study criteria. In total, 12 individuals responded to the flyer and completed the questionnaire; one out of 12 individuals answered “no” when asked if their school or district currently implemented CRP and SEL into the curriculum, and 10 of the 12 met all the requirements, including completing the semi structured interview. The 10 participants worked in Title I schools in urban areas within their school districts. As noted in Table 1, of the 10 participants, four were principals, and six were teachers. Combined, the participants had 55 years of educational experience working in Title I schools and 44 years of SEL and CRP implementation experience.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

Participant ID	Position	Years of Experience in Title I schools	Years of SEL/CRP implementation
Participant 1	Principal	2	3
Participant 2	Teacher	18	5
Participant 3	Teacher	7	7
Participant 4	Principal	5	5
Participant 5	Teacher	1	1
Participant 6	Teacher	2	2
Participant 7	Principal	5	7
Participant 8	Principal	6	5
Participant 9	Teacher	4	3
Participant 10	Teacher	5	6

*Note.* SEL = social and emotional learning; CRP = culturally relevant pedagogy.

### **Data Collection**

I recruited participants from educational Facebook groups and the LinkedIn platform (A web based professional platform primarily used for business and career-related purposes). Using snowball sampling, I posted flyers to social-media sites along with the link to the participant questionnaire and informed consent form. The Google form consisted of preliminary qualifying questions and the consent to participate in the study. Questions included “How long have you been in education?”, “Are you a teacher

or administrator?”, and “Do you currently work in a Title I school serving Grades 3–5?” Thirteen individuals completed the informed consent and questionnaire, and 10 of the 13 followed through. After receiving consent from each participant, I contacted them to schedule a time to interview. Each participant was assigned a number to ensure confidentiality and was sent a Zoom link the day of the interview. Each interview lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Before each session, I informed the participants that the interview would be recorded and transcribed. I reminded them of the consent process and explained that the process would be confidential and that they could stop participation at any time. I then explained the purpose of the study and began the interview. During the interview, I asked questions from the interview protocol based on the participant position, either teacher or administrator. I used follow-up questions to clarify statements. After each interview was completed, I thanked the individual for their participation and documented my observations in a journal. I conducted interviews with six teachers and four administrators. There were no variations in the data collection plan presented in Chapter 3.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from the Google form and interviews were collected and analyzed simultaneously. Once the interviews were completed, they were assigned a number that was used as an identification code, and data was entered into the Dedoose platform (Salmona et al., 2019). By reading each transcript and listening to the audio recordings, I gained knowledge of the data by pre-coding, highlighting, circling phrases, paragraphs,

and words; this process allowed me to systematically start to analyze data through coding and identifying themes across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

I began the analysis by using a deductive coding process with predetermined codes from the literature and framework (Saldana, 2021). The deductive codes used were *administrative support, time, teacher buy-in, and staff diversity*. Using inductive analysis, I identified new codes from the data that did not fit the predetermined codes. I could compare similarities and differences within the transcripts. During this process, broader themes emerged, and more inductive codes were established. The codes that I found common across transcripts of both teachers and administrators were as follows: inadequate professional development, need for individual support, request for trainings by knowledgeable professionals, request for monthly follow-up, request for lesson models, establishing school climate and culture, request for resources, lack of staff to student diversity, and a safe space to have diversity conversations. During this cycle of coding, the codes became more specific. Once the codes and excerpts were organized, I arrived at about 75 codes. I applied a frequency count for each code. From there, I combined codes that had similar meanings into categories. I was able to place the codes into categories to identify data that fit the predetermined codes that derived from the interview questions. The following categories were used: *administrative support, lack of resources, diversity, preparation time, teacher buy-in, training by knowledgeable staff, professional development, administrative buy-in, teacher bias and administrator bias*.

The next cycle of coding consisted of code mapping and frequency counts. I analyzed the code list that was generated during the first cycle. I organized the codes by

placing them into categories and analyzed how each code related to another (Saldana, 2021). During this process, I looked for patterns in phrases, words, and codes. This process allowed me to transform the codes into themes that were representative of teacher and administrator perspectives regarding their experiences and perceptions of implementing CRP and SEL within the curriculum. These categories reduced into two themes, as shown in Table 2 (see Appendix B for an example of the progression of raw data into themes).

Two themes—frustration with barriers to implementation (abandoned at sea) and inequity in diversity and resources (look who’s not at dinner)—emerged as themes for both teachers and administrators. I identified the themes by analyzing the participants' interview responses in relation to the literature and theoretical framework.

**Table 2***Themes, Codes, Categories, and Illustrative Participant Responses*

Theme	Code	Category	Participant response
Theme 1: Abandoned at Sea	Inadequate professional development	Professional development	“They basically just gave us a book as a guide, and told us to like, read the book. And then, if you had any questions, just let them know and then you were expected to implement it.”
	Lack of follow-through	Administrative support	“I think sometimes the administrators don’t see the value of the class because there’s just a lot going on in the kiddo’s environment.”
	Lack of teacher and administrator buy-in		“I do believe, there isn’t sufficient training. Sometimes it’s one professional development, that’s it, and then you have to figure it out.” “I think that there is no real program. It was very piece meal, very reactive, and because there is no program nobody’s doing the same thing. Frankly I feel a little discouraged, on a scale of 1-10 I would say I feel supported at 4.”
Theme 2: Look Who's Not at Dinner	Lack of staff to student diversity	Diversity in staff and resources	“There is diversity in my classroom, the students who are enrolled in our schools and classrooms are diverse. However, the teachers and the curriculum are not” “Look at the racial, linguistic, and economic discrepancies between our students and our staff, look at the cultural differences.”
	Lack of meaningful resources	Teacher-administrator buy-in	“Admin does not have buy in for CRP and SEL therefore teachers don’t have buy in.”
	Need for parental support		

*Note.* SEL = social and emotional learning; CRP = culturally relevant pedagogy.

I discuss the themes in the Results subsection of this chapter. I did not find any discrepant data or cases that contradicted the overall findings of the study.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness, I followed the guidelines provided by the IRB at Walden University and shared in Chapter 3. These steps ensured that I maintained the criteria and integrity of this study (Malterud et al., 2016). While collecting data and conducting this research, I maintained practices that established credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Credibility**

To enhance credibility, I used member checks to verify statements while reviewing transcripts and while listening to the audio, I looked for data discrepancy. During the member checking process, I shared the transcript with the participants and a summary of my findings to support the data found during the interviews. All participants confirmed the accuracy of my summaries, and none reported corrections, so there was no need to revise.

#### **Transferability**

To enhance transferability, I was able to provide a description of participants, sample size, demographics, the research process, and provide findings. The detailed description of the participants allows the reader to determine if this study is transferable.

#### **Dependability**

To enhance dependability during the data analysis, I shared raw data with participants and asked them to review transcripts, evaluate and correct, or add if anything

was unacceptable. All participants confirmed that the raw data and findings were consistent and accurate. I had a principal with over 20 years of experience in education and 15 years of experience with SEL and CRP to review the summary of the findings. She stated “Your findings are consistent with my experience with SEL and CRP and proof that we need more consistency around education and implementation.” I have ensured dependability in my findings by ensuring that the data is credible by keeping records of audio recordings, transcripts, and Journal entries.

### **Confirmability**

The strategies that I used to enhance confirmability included reflexivity. Because I work in the school system, I took notes of my observations and assumptions throughout the data collection process. I conducted member checks to ensure that data was accurate and had a peer review to check for bias. In addition, all the raw data transcripts and audio recordings will be archived and saved for five years as required by the IRB at Walden University. This process was implemented to strengthen confirmability.

## **Results**

### **Teacher Theme 1: Abandoned at Sea**

#### ***Professional Development***

According to the experiences and perspectives of the teachers interviewed, all six teacher participants (TPs) shared that the training was minimum and inadequate. When asked to describe the barriers and challenges teachers faced with implementation, all the teacher participants stated that although SEL and CRP are important, they found it challenging to integrate SEL and CRP because of the lack of specific training, follow-up

with administration, lack of resources, time constraints, and Covid-19. When asked about professional development, TP5 shared “They basically just gave us a book as a guide, and told us to like, read the book. And then, if you had any questions, just let them know and then you were expected to implement it.” TP10 classified the training as a crash course, with no guidance of implementation in the classroom. TP10 shared the following:

I would classify it as a crash course for myself and other teachers; we just go over classroom preparation and talk about the saliency of social-emotional learning.

We also talk about teaching styles, growth mindset vs. fixed mindset, and student trauma. However, we don’t discuss how to use it in the classroom or what it looks like for students.

TP9 shared the following:

I think sometimes the administrators don’t see the value of the class because there's just a lot going on in the kiddo’s environment. I do believe there isn't sufficient training. Sometimes it's one professional development, that's it, and then you have to figure it out. Some teachers do their research outside of the school hours to make sure they're doing it well, or getting more updated, and others just kind of do it on the fly.

The teachers stated that they wanted professional development specific to SEL and CRP in order to feel comfortable with implementation. TP6 shared the need for more training and the lack of follow-up: “I believe I need more training. It’s not hard, however, implementation according to the guidelines of the school is complex, and no one comes to check to make sure it’s done correctly.” TP3 discussed the lack of fidelity and the

need to have a program or guide for everyone to follow “I think that there is no real program. It was very piece meal, very reactive, and because there is no program, nobody’s doing the same thing.” Teachers also noted that training conducted by someone who is knowledgeable of the topic along with lesson models would be beneficial to their professional development and would provide a framework to make implementation easier.

### *Administrative Support*

According to the experiences and perspectives of the teachers that were interviewed, in addition to the insufficient training, there was a desire for more support from the administrative team. Five out of six teachers stated that teachers were given a book to read without professional development, materials, or time for preparation. The teachers stated a need for hands-on training with direction and frequent check-ins from an administrator. TP10 shared the feeling of discouragement and being minimally supported:

Administration should provide adequate examples of classroom management plans and lesson plans and adequate resources and demonstrate lessons, teach for 30 minutes, show me hands-on especially for new teachers. The professional development that is given is a crash course and frankly I feel a little discouraged, on a scale of 1-10 I would say I feel supported at 4.

TP 2 and TP6 stated that the lack of administrative support stems from the lack of buy-in and training at the administrative level. TP2 shared “Admin does not have buy in for CRP and SEL therefore teachers don’t have buy in.” TP6 shared “They should have

trainings themselves to uncover their biases, I don't think administration can properly support teachers without specific training in the area of SEL and CRP." TP3 and TP9 echoed the sentiments of the other teacher participants, who identified lack of support and follow-up as barriers. When TP3 was asked if the administrative support was sufficient, she stated "No, but I also think that they are stretched by the level of what they have to do, you know." TP9 shared the following:

Once we are given the book and told to read it. No one comes into the classroom to check to see how implementation is going, no one checks in to ask or answer questions, so it's hard to apply strategies or to see if what you are doing is working.

All the teacher participants expressed a lack of administrative support regarding classroom check-ins, lesson modeling, strategy conversations, and book review follow-ups. TP2 stated that there are times when she can talk to someone other than the administrator i.e., Counselor or staff development teacher to gain insight on how to implement SEL; however, the two mentioned did not have specific training of CRP. TP2 stated "I mean I have spoken to the counselor; you know someone like the staff development teacher and they sometimes come in to support around issues of trauma but not specific to implementing SEL and cultural into the curriculum."

### **Teacher Theme 2: Look Who's Not at Dinner**

Participants agreed that in addition to training, there is a need to show more diversity in staffing and the curriculum. TP5 shared "I can teach the same standard using another book that represents my students. There is diversity in my classroom, the students

who are enrolled in our schools and classrooms are diverse. However, the teachers and the curriculum are not.” TP9 shared the following experience of working in a low-income school:

Working in a Title I school is hard because of the inequity of resources, the low economic status of some of the families, low parent engagement, and student behaviors. Unfortunately, our staff does not look representative of the student population.

TP3 and TP9 agree in that although the staff do not physically look like the diverse group of students in their classes, it is important that teachers are aware of their students’ lifestyles and cultures and should try to recognize them and integrate them into the lessons they teach. TP3 stated, “Even though my students don’t look like me and we come from different cultures and experiences, I try to make sure that they feel seen in our classroom”. TP9 shared “Most of the teachers I work with don’t look like me or the students we serve but I think we try to integrate diversity within the lessons when we can.” All the teacher participants stated that there is a lack of diversity in the classrooms, stating that most of the teachers are not representative of the student population and although teachers try to make lessons more culturally relevant, it is difficult for some students to relate to teachers and for some teachers to relate to students when they have different cultures, views, and a different understanding and connection to the community and the world.

## **Administrator Theme 1: Abandoned at Sea**

### ***Professional Development***

The four administrator participants (APs) who were interviewed stated that more training specific to SEL and CRP is needed in order to properly support teachers with implementation. When asked about administrative professional development and if the professional development is specific to SEL and CRP, AP7 stated that the administrators received training; however, it was not specific to how to incorporate SEL and CRP into the curriculum. AP7 said, “So, we did equity and anti-bias antiracist work. Pretty much every time we met monthly. We didn't do culturally relevant pedagogy. Specifically, we didn't practice strategies to the response to teaching CRP and SEL.” TP4 discussed the need for professional development that models implementation:

We talk about equity, and then we do a whole workshop on equity. But we don't think about what that looks like, and even culturally relevant teaching, we don't discuss what that looks like. You don't think about what that looks like in the moment we so it's fragments of many pieces. So, during professional development it's let's talk about this, if you know, let's talk about this, but we never bring it all together, and show how it works, it is important to show how it all is intertwined with everything that we do.

AP1 shared the need for professional development around coaching teachers and building relationships with teachers to help them with discussing their personal emotional intelligence. AP1 shared the following:

Training, um sensitivity training, understanding how to identify trauma, even from teachers right? Because they've experienced it, too. We need coaching, not counseling. I don't know necessarily what to call it, but it's something where I'm able to unpack with teachers what's going on, on that social level, that emotional level, not necessarily always professional. You know, building those relationships things like that.

### *Administrative Support*

The administrator participants stated that there are no specific resources that are given that provide models or steps to implementation. Instead, many times they are left to find resources that may or may not fit the needs of their schools, and because of this, all the administrators stated that they provide their own version of training through conversations and book studies. The administrator participants stated that many times when teachers are asked to implement SEL and CRP, the request is met with resistance and push-back with an overwhelming sense of more district demands. AP1 stated, "It's hard to train staff when I am not properly trained myself." This sentiment of frustration was shared among all participants. AP7 stated that the administrators received training; however, it was not specific to how to incorporate SEL and CRP into the curriculum. AP8 shared that implementation in practice and real time are different: "I think for me you know you practice, and then you're thrown into the real thing, and the real thing can be so much different than anything you practice."

**Administrator Theme 2: Look Who's Not at Dinner**

All the administrative participants spoke to the inequity of staff diversity. However, AP7 spoke directly to his experience as a European American in a diverse school district as an administrator at a Title I school. AP7 shared the following:

For me as a European American administrator, the mass majority of our teachers are European American. I'm always going to speak to my whiteness in every single space I possibly can, because I must own that that's my lens. That's how I see everything and through that and modeling that vulnerability with other teachers who identify as European American. I mean, look at the racial, linguistic, and economic discrepancies between our students and our staff; look at the cultural differences. We got, what, eight White kids or something like that you know, maybe 15 Black or Brown for every kid that identifies as European American. 70% of our teaching staff are coming from that European lens. I believe unless we unpack how we view the world, we will perpetuate the same things, and we do the same thing.

AP1 discussed the need to support teachers who may find it difficult to have conversations around race when some teachers and students do not share the same cultural lens. AP1 shared the following:

I will never say that just because I am Black that I know more than a White teacher, right? But, in some cases there are some white teachers who need support, so there are times when I will send the Black counselor to come in to help, with the culturally relevant part of it, because there are some issues of

racism, and I don't care unless you are just the antiracist White teacher of the world. There are some things that they can't touch on, and some topics that are easier coming from a person of color. So sometimes those staff members and counselors are called in to help support the teachers in dealing with some of the sensitive topics. Unfortunately, the White teacher by themselves, are sometimes not that not equipped to handle questions or comments that might arise, but just because there's perception right with that. So, it's easier to have a balance in the room to be able to have an open discussion. These ways the students are hearing both sides, or at least there is a valid African American opinion, or a person of color opposed to you know it being a White teacher that's giving that information, in terms of cultural part. We lean on each other to help support those areas of concern. Like when George Floyd was killed. Those types of issues must be unpacked, and so sometimes, in talking about racism and things like that, it's easier to have a mixture of folks in the room to make sure it's discussed from multiple viewpoints. It also helps to have another person in the room. When you're a person of color, you may to feel uncomfortable, you know, having those conversations. This way maybe there's somebody else in the room that can help balance that out.

Based on discussions with teachers and administrators, the importance of diversity in staffing became evident when reflecting on the student population and current social issues.

### **Teacher/Administrator Buy-In**

Both teachers and administrators discussed barriers to implementation due to specific training of SEL and CRP. Teachers and administrators desire support with implementation through time for preparation, modeling, and conversations that will allow more adequate conversations around personal bias. Both teachers and administrators spoke about the lack of buy-in and the feeling of the district leaders not understanding the needs of Title I and urban school districts. When asked about the support and buy-in from the administrators, AP1 discussed her belief that the district did not truly buy-in to changing the culture of the curriculum and supporting high need schools. AP1 shared the following:

I believe the words antiracist and culturally relevant are “token words”. These are words that are thrown around without significant meaning, especially after the pandemic and George Floyd. I don’t believe there is a true buy-in from the district and policy leaders who see through the lens of privilege which is a lens that is not representative of my school and my students.

Many of the teacher participants stated that they felt SEL and CRP was important and that they would benefit the students; however, the teachers discussed the minimum amount of time that is given during the day to incorporate the practice and with the demands of the district, the feeling of another task to incorporate is overwhelming to teachers. TP9 stated that her administration did not show great interest in the idea of incorporating CRP and SEL and there was a lack of dedication in finding resources, therefore many of the teachers did not buy-in to the idea of the great culture shift.

AP7 explained that teachers are expected to use the first 15 minutes of class to discuss pre-selected SEL lessons. Further explaining that with late arrivals and late busses it is hard for teachers to implement lessons to all students daily with fidelity, which leads to teachers using the 15 minutes to check in students or focus on other non-structured activities such as homework, make-up work, or breakfast for students. When asked if the pre-selected topic was a planned lesson that was given to the teachers, AP7 stated “No, we provide the topic and the teachers find the materials to implement the lessons; this is also a reason why we don’t get much buy-in from teachers, because they are expected to plan mini lessons on top of the grade level lesson plans.” TP10 stated “It’s hard to really buy-in to a concept when you don’t feel supported and when the people who expect the demand don’t appear to be fully vested themselves.”

### **The Findings in Relation to the Research Questions**

Teachers are frustrated. Many teachers feel abandoned at sea, as they are given books to read and then asked to implement strategies in the classroom without clear instruction or follow-up from administration. Their experiences have included trying to build relationships with students that they may not understand, while attempting to build a culturally diverse and centered classroom environment while also understanding their personal bias. Teachers share the sentiment of feeling incapable of implementation with fidelity because of the lack of training, while also expressing the need to have knowledgeable staff provide professional development and follow-up so that they would have access to resources and the assurance of the correctly implementing strategies.

Each administrator expressed frustration, as they felt that the training they received needed to be more adequate and specific to the needs of the teachers and students they serve in their community. They are "flying a plane and building it simultaneously." Administrators revealed that they need more training specific to coaching teachers and modeling how to incorporate SEL and CRP into the curriculum. However, without this, they are trying to figure it out throughout the school year, and as situations arise, they do their best to make the best decision for the circumstance. The administrators experienced a feeling of abandonment as they were provided with professional development that did not adequately address the needs of their schools. When given strategies, they received little to no feedback or follow-up. Administrators are asked to lead the mission of SEL and CRP in their schools and train the teachers without being fully trained and prepared.

### **Summary**

The following key findings summarize the findings discovered in this qualitative study:

1. Both teachers and administrators felt that SEL and CRP should be integrated into the daily curriculum for students.
2. Teachers encounter challenges in implementing CRP and SEL within the curriculum based on the academic standards that they are mandated to teach.
3. Administrators encounter challenges supporting teachers with implementation based on school and district demands and lack of adequate professional development.

4. Both teachers and administrators experience challenges in their roles and deal with personal biases during the implementation process.
5. Both teachers and administrators stated that the impact of Covid-19 pushed the conversation of SEL and the realization that the current curriculum does not meet the needs of the current diverse student population.

These findings are discussed in Chapter 5, where I summarize the research findings. I further describe the meaning of these results in terms of the prior literature and conceptual framework. Chapter 5 also includes a discussion of the study's limitations, and how the study findings might be applied to research and professional settings.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences and perspectives of elementary teachers and administrators who work within Title I public school settings with Grades 3–5 and who have a background of integrating CRP and SEL into the daily curriculum. This study may potentially fill the gap in research regarding the experiences and perceptions of teachers and administrators in Title I schools at the elementary level. I conducted a total of 10 interviews with four administrators and six teachers to obtain their perceptions of their experiences of implementing and embedding SEL and CRP into the curriculum. After coding the data, I identified two themes for both teachers and administrators: abandoned at sea and look who's not at dinner.

The study findings support that both teachers and administrators need training specific to SEL and CRP as well as models of how to incorporate them into the curriculum. The teachers and administrators in the study stated that the training received was minimal, nonspecific, and inadequate compared to the expectations of the standards of implementation. The issues of race, racism, and how to communicate among colleagues and with students were described with great frustration and anxiety, and the lack of adequate guidance, feedback, and support was felt by all. As a result, there was an expressed need from both teachers and administrators to see more diversity in staff and to have guidance in supporting necessary, challenging questions.

## **Interpretation of the Findings**

### **Relevance to the Published Literature**

Analysis of the interview data yielded themes that answered both RQs. These themes were aligned with those identified in the literature review in Chapter 2. In this section, I discuss the ways in which this study contributes to, confirms, and extends findings from existing research-

#### ***Theme 1: Abandoned at Sea***

Teachers and administrators expressed a clear need for specialized professional development in SEL and the seamless incorporation of CRP into the curriculum. This aligns with the research by Abry et al. (2013), which underscores the importance of specific training for effective implementation of SEL and CRP.

Both teacher and administrator participants wanted more inclusive trainings provided by staff members who are familiar with SEL and CRP and who have experience with implementation. Both teachers and administrators expressed that training provided by someone who is experienced in SEL and CRP would better prepare them for their implementation experience. The previous literature review confirms the findings of this study, namely that teachers struggle due to inadequate training (Schonert-Reichl & Zakrzewski, 2014; Suttie, 2011). According to Abry et al. (2013), teachers have reported limited training experiences and low confidence levels when responding to student behavioral needs, making it difficult for them to implement SEL programs with fidelity. Additionally, as part of a qualitative study conducted by Young (2010), CRP was evaluated as a viable tool in the classroom. Young's results revealed structural issues

related to teachers' cultural bias, racism in school settings, and the inability to effectively implement CRP. Furthermore, the research showed that the research gap was not a lack of knowledge of SEL and CRP, but rather a lack of understanding of how to effectively implement CRP pedagogy. Administrator beliefs and personal well-being play a crucial role in effective school management and are essential in guiding the implementation of programming (Fisher, 2014). However, previous researchers focused on teachers and their ability to implement SEL programs and understand CRP (Muñiz, 2019).

This study extended the research by incorporating the experiences and perspectives of administrators who are considered as leaders in the schools and are tasked with leading the mission of incorporating SEL and CRP within the curriculum. Administrators look to the district for guidance in training teachers, and teachers look to the administrators for guidance. Administrators in the study stated that they received inadequate professional development and lacked specific training to create culturally responsive, inclusive environments. The administrator participants discussed a sense of misguided confidence and an assumption that administrators can read the provided book and create an SEL and CRP environment based on the information in the book without practice. This is not the case, as the administrator participants expressed that they want and need more training that includes practice and application. All of the administrator participants expressed a similar sense of abandonment from the district and lack of confidence with implementation and practice.

***Theme 2: Look Who's Not at Dinner***

The theme across teachers and administrators was diversity. The participants stated that with the increasing diversity within students in the classroom, increasing diversity within staffing would allow students to identify with the adults who teach them daily, helping the students to feel comfortable in expressing themselves and using their voice to be a contributor to the school community. These statements confirm the data according to the National Center of Education Statistics (2022), which states that between 2009 and 2018, most students attending public schools shifted from White to non-White students and many from families who live in poverty. These statements also confirm Muñiz (2019) who stated: “For the first time in history, students of color make up the majority of students enrolled in public schools” (p. 6). Although *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) attempted to create a fair education route for these students, fairness continues to elude them. Moreover, students of color are often served by under-resourced teachers in under-resourced schools that lack adequate facilities, materials, and academic courses. Despite growing diversity in student enrollment, the teaching profession remains dominated by monolingual, middle-class White women (Muñiz, 2019). Therefore, diversifying hiring practices would allow teachers and administrators from all backgrounds to bring their experiences into the school districts and classrooms which would allow deeper conversations around culture and inclusivity. Equity in resources would give schools the materials needed and provide access for students to receive resources that allow them to be successful in and outside of the classroom. In sum, the themes that emerged from this study confirm previous study findings while extending the

research with the voices of teachers and administrators who currently work to implement CRP and SEL and Title I schools.

### **Relevance to the Conceptual Framework**

This research was guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Based on the concept of overlapping contexts, this social-ecological theory describes the interactive nature between the different levels or systems of relationships, and how an individual's environment affects and is affected by their perceptions and experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this research, teachers' and administrators' experiences were influenced by the nested social systems of students, teachers, and administrators in their classrooms, common areas, and with local and district decision-makers. The influence varies from the immediate interaction of teachers to the broader influences of culture and community (Trach et al., 2017). The microsystem is where the interpersonal interactions take place in the immediate setting, the school, and the classroom. As stated in Chapter 2 for this study, the microsystem is how teachers and administrators perceive CRP and SEL and how those perceptions translate into implementation. All the participants, both teachers and administrators, felt that including CRP and SEL was an important component that should be embedded in the curriculum and used daily. However, the participants stated that the current demands of the curriculum, added tasks from the district, and dealing with difficult behaviors in the classroom make it difficult to implement SEL and CRP with fidelity.

The mesosystem administrator's relationship with district leaders, teachers, staff and students and teacher's relationships with administrators and students is included in

this context. At the mesosystem, teachers' perceptions of their administrator and their experience and perception of support is found. The expectations of administration for teachers in the teaching and learning environment can be found at this level. At this level, both teachers and administrators stated that they try to maintain and build positive relationships with coworkers; however, they felt limited in being supported by the district and administration. The exosystem perspective revealed the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of communities, social-political movements, and administrators' perceptions and experiences with organizations (unions) and mass media. Both teachers and administrators discussed the impact of the murder of George Floyd, Covid-19, and the insurrection on the Capitol in Washington, D.C. Both teachers and administrators discussed the importance of community involvement and the lack of parent participation in their schools, and frustration and anxiousness about having these relevant conversations. The final level is the macrosystem, and this level is composed of a large group that shares common characteristics, such as culture and subculture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The macrosystem consists of the patterns and characteristics found within the preceding frameworks (microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem). In this study, this level is represented by state policies and district policies that guide SEL and CRP education. Through interviewing teachers and administrators, patterns developed which allowed the two themes, Abandoned At Sea and Look Who's Not At Dinner, to emerge.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations to this study included the personal bias in my role as the researcher and an educator. I maintained a journal for writing notes during interviews and for writing a reflection after. Participating in reflexivity allowed me the time to reflect on my role as the researcher and the assumptions and beliefs that I brought to the interview and study. However, despite the strategies used there is always a possibility the results of this study were affected by my own assumptions, biases, and previous experiences, therefore creating limitation for this study.

The study may be limited in dependability. One participant was eliminated from the participation pool because although they worked in a Title I school, they did not work in elementary, they worked in high school. Out of the remaining 11 participants, 10 met the criteria and committed to participate in the study. Although it appeared that thematic saturation was reached, the lack of discrepant cases and the number of teachers and administrators who participated in the study may have not resulted in a sufficiently broad array of responses to confidently justify saturation and dependability.

### **Recommendations**

To further understand the perspectives and experiences of teachers and administrators working in Title I schools, I recommend that this study be replicated with a larger sample size using Title I elementary schools Grades K–5. The expansion of sample size and grade level would allow the possibility to gain insight into the experiences and perspectives of additional teachers and administrators who may have greater diversity in students and staff. I would also recommend interviewing the parents

or members of the school's PTA (Parent teacher Association) in order to obtain the perspectives of parents and their experiences with the administrators and teachers who serve their children. The study might also be replicated in non-Title I elementary schools serving elementary school's Grades 3–5 with teachers and administrators to determine if their perspectives and experiences are similar or different from this study's participants.

### **Implications**

This study highlights the voices of teachers and administrators and provides insight into their experiences of SEL and CRP implementation, contributing to the field of education. Positive social change may be demonstrated through SEL and CRP resources and professional development based on educators' input. The implications for practice based on the findings of this study concerning the perspectives and experiences of teachers and administrators who implement SEL and CRP within the curriculum are as follows:

- Teachers and administrators need professional development specific to SEL and CRP given by professionals who are experts on the topic.
- Administrators need professional development specific to teaching teachers how to implement SEL and CRP within the curriculum.
- Professional development should be ongoing, program/school specific, led by expert staff and should offer opportunities for lesson models, questions, and conversations.

- Teachers and administrators need professional learning communities (PLCs) that allow staff to have courageous conversations about race and their personal bias.
- Teachers and administrators need SEL and CRP strategies that align to the state standards curriculum.

Supporting teachers and administrators by supporting these recommendations may help school districts better develop, plan, implement, and modify training to support the schools and school districts who plan to implement SEL and CRP. Additionally, teachers and administrators discussed the need for a safe space to speak about their experiences freely and have deeper conversations that require them to reflect on their beliefs and backgrounds and how these influence their contributions to the school community. Based on the findings from this study, schools can create safe spaces by establishing an environment that is free of judgment, fosters ground rules for speaking and listening, and allows for self-exploration. School leaders should start creating safe spaces at the beginning of the year and meet monthly to allow for better communication among staff, support teachers with understanding, and connect with the school community. This study contributes to positive social change by hearing the voices of teachers and administrators and creating safe spaces for teachers and administrators to have open conversations about culture and diversity in schools and examine their personal biases to better serve the students they teach.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to a better understanding of the challenges educators and administrators face when attempting to implement SEL and CRP. Hearing teachers and administrators' perspectives and listening to their experiences contributes to social change and gives insight into how to better serve and support educators with implementing SEL and CRP. Teachers and administrators in this study indicated that they need (a) training that is specific to how to implement SEL and CRP in the curriculum, (b) training that is on-going, (c) consistent follow-up with support, (d) safe spaces to discuss experiences and personal bias, and (e) and trainer models. The insight that was gained from the teachers and administrators who participated in this study can be used as a tool by school districts and leaders to better support teachers and administrators by adding to or modifying professional developments and tailoring them to the specific needs of their schools and staff. This will create an environment that has more buy-in from the stakeholders and may allow for SEL and CRP implementation systemically and with fidelity. In conclusion, although students need to see themselves in their learning environment, it is essential for the teachers and administrators who teach those children to feel supported, have a clear understanding of their personal biases and beliefs, and examine how they present lessons based on their experiences to educate the student holistically. Inspired by the research of Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneve Gay and their work on culturally responsive pedagogy, this research is a reminder that education is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Embracing diversity, fostering inclusive environments, and providing teachers and administrators with the tools they need to navigate the

complexities of SEL and CRP are essential steps towards ensuring everyone's success. Social-emotional learning and culturally relevant pedagogy should empower, uplift, and celebrate the uniqueness of every learner, which fosters a brighter and more equitable future for all.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

### Teacher and Administrator Protocol

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

Before the interview, I will send an email to participants to inform and remind them that:

- The interview will be recorded.
- The information and data obtained from participants will be kept confidential, and confidentiality for participants will be upheld throughout and after the completion of the study.
- Participants may choose to stop the interview at any time and stop participation without any repercussions.

#### A. Introduction

- Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research study and for taking the time to speak with me. I understand how much work and effort it takes to adapt the curriculum to fit the needs of your school and students, So I would like to begin by saying thank you for your dedication and service.
- My research study focuses on teachers' and administrators' perspectives and the preparation and support needed to incorporate and implement CRP and SEL programming in the curriculum. My goal is to learn about the experiences teachers and administrators have during implementation while also learning more about the resources, training, and other supports educators feel they need to prepare to implement CRP and SEL programming. This

research study aims to understand how teachers and administrators can be supported throughout program implementation to implement a program in uniformity and fidelity.

#### B. Participant's Background

How many years working title I elementary schools?

How many years of teaching experience do you have?

How many years have you been teaching Grades 3–5?

#### C. Interview Questions

RQ1: What are teachers' experiences incorporating CRP into the SEL curriculum?

1. What type of preparation did the school district offer teachers prior to CRP and SEL implementation?

Who delivered the training or professional development?

2. How long before implementation was the training offered? ( if multiple meetings, what was the time frame?)
3. How would you describe your experience implementing CRP and SEL in the classroom?
4. During the CRP and SEL training, what did you perceive as the main challenges to implementation?
5. Describe any barriers/challenges you have had with implementing CRP and SEL into the current curriculum?

How do you deal with any frustrations related to the barriers/ challenges you experience?

6. Describe the level of support you receive from your administration to implement CRP and SEL in your classroom.

Do you believe the support you receive is sufficient? Why? Why not?

7. How would you suggest your administrative team support you during the training, implementation, and challenges of implementing CRP and SEL in the Classroom?

8. How does collaboration with others influence your instructional practice when implementing CRP and SEL in your classroom?

9. What skills do you need to implement CRP and SEL into the curriculum?

10. What specific resources or training do you think would be helpful and would adequately prepare teachers to implement CRP into the SEL curriculum with fidelity?

RQ2: What are administrators' experiences incorporating CRP into the SEL curriculum?

1. How many years of administrative experience do you have?

2. How many years have you been in an administrator in Elementary school?

3. Did you receive Pre-service CRP and SEL training?

4. How did the school district support you in supporting teachers to implement CRP and SEL programming?

5. How do you support teachers with the implementation of SEL programming?

6. How would you describe the teacher climate for SEL implementation?

7. What type of support do you think administrators need to help teachers with SEL implementation?
8. What are other staff members in your building used to support teachers with implementation in their classrooms?
9. Describe how you believe administrators and teachers can be supported effectively to incorporate CRP into SEL curriculum efficiently?

#### D. Conclusion

- Thank you for interviewing with me today. I will send you a copy of the findings to review, along with a set of instructions to follow. If I need to schedule a follow-up call, I will email you to coordinate a date and time. The purpose of the follow-up call will be to clarify any information and obtain more information to supplement incomplete pieces of data if needed.
- Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you very much for your time, I appreciate your participation.

## Appendix B: Example of Code Development Into Themes

