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Teachers' Perspectives on Implementing Social-Emotional Learning Standards

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2015

Abstract

Teachers' Perspectives on Implementing Social-Emotional Learning Standards

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Sheila Y. Youngblood

MA, Governors State University, 2001

BS, Andrews University, 1976

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The problem this study addresses is the extent to which social-emotional learning programming is effectively implemented. Since social-emotional learning programming has emerged as a significant aspect of U.S. education, man states have included social-emotional standards and programming as an essential part of the curriculum. Researchers have found that effective reform includes not only emphasis on academic and standardized test scores, but also on social-emotional influences. As a school reform initiative, a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program is being implemented at a Midwestern high school. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive interview study was to explore the perceived effectiveness of the implementation. The conceptual framework was drawn from Fullan's 6 assertions that serve as a guide to monitor school success when implementing education reforms. The study's guiding questions concerned teachers' perceived supports and challenges in the process of implementation, as well as any perceived role changes they experienced during the process. Eight high school teachers who had taught the SEL classes were interviewed. Data were transcribed, coded for themes using Hatch's typology, and thematically analyzed. The key findings included that participants were supported by the counselors and their peers. However, they encountered implementation challenges including the class schedule, lack of student buy-in, and the need for ongoing supports to facilitate social emotional learning. This study contributes to social change by informing school leaders of best practices necessary to ensure the implementation and sustainability of SEL practices. Social-emotional learning initiatives that implemented with fidelity can improve both the academic and personal success of students.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Student academic achievement is a responsibility appointed to policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, students themselves, and members of the larger community. Although each group's contribution is important, what teachers do determines the effects of almost all contributions (Leithwood & McAdie, 2007). Teachers are the pillars of schooling, and the motivation of teachers has an effect on every aspect of the educational process (Houchard, 2005). What teachers do depends not only on their motivations, but also on their abilities, and the setting in which they work (Leithwood & McAdie, 2007). As the nation's public school teachers face ever-increasing expectations for accountability measures, curricular changes are being implemented on a yearly basis. At the same time, teachers are also expected to aid in counteracting many of society's immense problems such as the loss of community, and increasing gaps between rich and poor (Learning to Teach in the Knowledge Society Final Report, 2005).

There are many challenges facing today's educators and students. However, effective schools—those that prepare students not only to achieve in school but also to achieve in life—are finding that there is a relationship between social-emotional competence and academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Taylor, Dymnicki, & Schellinger, 2008). Well-designed, integrated, and coordinated instruction in both areas optimizes the students' potential to be successful academically and throughout their lives (Zins & Elias, 2006).

Some of the most significant impacts on learning were explored by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg in 1997. Their findings included social-emotional influences: classroom management, parental support, student-teacher social interaction, social-behavioral characteristics, motivational-affective characteristics, the peer group, school culture, and classroom climate. In examining student outcomes, they determined that effective change included not only emphasis on academic and standardized test scores but also social-emotional influences (Wang et al., 1997). The two are interrelated; when looking through the developmental psychology lens, student beliefs about themselves (psychological health) and their attitudes toward school (motivation and engagement) are also important contributors to academic achievement (Newell & Ryzin, 2007).

In 2004, a Midwestern state adopted student learning standards for social-emotional learning. Although there is scant exploration of this initiative, researchers have concluded, overall, that in 2007, schools were in the early stages of implementation (Ji et al., 2008; Tanyu, 2007). This high school was selected because it has made a concerted effort to implement social-emotional learning programming. Much is noted about an enthusiastic and confident school community, supportive school leadership, policies, and structures to sustain social-emotional learning work. This study addresses one Midwestern state's teachers' perceptions of the implementation process and the expansion of their roles in implementing SEL programs.

Problem Statement

The role of teachers has grown to include not only teaching specific content, but also mentoring students through social-emotional programming and practices. A number of well-designed research studies have documented the positive impact that social-

emotional learning (SEL) programs have on students (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007; Diekstra, 2008; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). A review of the literature also revealed that such programs are often not implemented well for many reasons. Researchers studying school reforms strongly suggest that it is ineffective implementation, rather than fundamental weakness of programs, that results in school improvement failures (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012). This qualitative descriptive interview study explores the efficacy of the implementation process by listening to the voices and views of high school teachers at one local high school in one Midwestern state in their journey of implementing social-emotional learning programming.

Social and Emotional Learning Standards

As reported in this state's Children's Mental Heal Task Force Final Report, a small group of educational advocates and educational leaders gathered to explore children's mental health in 2001. The following year, the workgroup presented their findings and recommended this state's Violence Prevention Authority to convene a Task Force on Children's Mental Health. In 2003, the Task Force presented its report, Children's Mental Health: An Urgent Priority for this Midwestern state. This report was the catalyst for the adoption of this state's Children Mental Health Act of 2003 (P.A. 93-9485) and the creation of the Children's Mental Health Partnership. This was a collaboration of key government agencies, child advocacy groups, educators, health and mental health providers, and community organizations charged with addressing the social-emotional learning of children in this state. The work of Children's Mental Health Partnership included developing and implementing a Children's Mental Health Plan for

submission to the governor. Short- and long-term recommendations were also designed to provide a comprehensive, coordinated prevention, early intervention, and treatment services for children from birth through age 18.

The state's Children's Mental Health Act is nationally recognized for leading the way for school improvement and student success. Key stipulations called for its State Board of Education to develop standards for social-emotional learning in order to strengthen school-based practices that improve and gauge the inclination and achievement of students (VanLandeghem, 2003). The Children's Mental Health Partnership required school districts to develop policy for incorporating social and emotional learning into educational programming. These SEL standards were: (a) to be a part of the state's Learning Standards (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Physical Development and Health, Fine Arts, Foreign Languages); (b) to address social and emotional skills and measure children's progress in the development of these skills; and (c) to model the state's Academic Learning Standards, which include goal and performance descriptors (DeStefano, Hammer, Fiedler & Downs, 2006).

A collaborative effort of key government agencies and the staff of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) based at one of the state's universities assisted this state's school districts in developing policies as mandated by the new law. The team convened and produced two policies: the Instructional Policy for Student Social and Emotional Development (Children's Mental Health Act, 2003, Policy 6:65) and the Policy for Student Support Services (Children's Mental Health Act, 2003, Policy 7:250). They also drafted a model, "Administrative Procedure outlining a Protocol for Responding to Students with Social, Emotional, or

Mental Health Problems" (Children's Mental Health Act, 2003, Policy 7:250-AP2). In the months following the passage of the law, a number of committees were created, including the School Policy and Standards Committee. This committee, in addition to working collaboratively with the state board of education and CASEL to develop the state Social-Emotional Learning Standards, also helped develop a model policy that districts could adapt in order to be in compliance with the requirement to have school district policies (Gordon et al., 2011).

The new law also required the state board of education to develop SEL standards (Children's Mental Health Act 93:0495). A team of 25 educators from across one Midwestern state, members of the School Polices and Standards Committee, and Roger Weissberg and John Payton of CASEL gathered to draft SEL standards. The work of the team resulted in the development of 3 goals, 10 standards, and 100 benchmarks along with performance descriptors. Each SEL standard includes five benchmark levels that describe what students in grades K-12 should know and be able to do. The SEL goals are as follows: (a) develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success; (b) use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships; and (c) demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.

With the SEL standards, educators in this Midwestern state have a foundation to guide and support them as they address the social, emotional, and academic growth of all students (CASEL, 2006). However, for significant change in social-emotional learning, these standards need to be implemented effectively. With the increased attention on SEL

curricula in schools, it is important to consider teacher feedback about implementation of these programs (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009; Fixen, 2005).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive interview study is to explore the effectiveness of the implementation process by listening to high school teachers' perceptions about factors affecting their implementation of the state's Social-Emotional Learning Standards through school-wide programming. The study will seek teachers' perceptions of their roles throughout the process of implementing the standards. This is not a comprehensive study of the effects of the student development program. Rather, it is an initial investigation of the experiences of teachers in a public school as they function in broader roles in implementing the social-emotional learning standards. It is hoped that educational leaders, administrators, and principals will use the findings of this research to inform organizational structures that support teachers in implementing school initiatives and programs that can advance student learning academically and socially.

Nature of the Study

This descriptive qualitative interview study will be used to investigate eight teachers' perceptions of factors that influence their implementation of the state's Social-Emotional Learning Standards. According to Creswell (2003) and Maxwell (1996), a qualitative descriptive interview study design is used when data are collected to provide descriptions of persons, organizations, settings, or phenomena. This qualitative descriptive interview study will explore teachers' experiences by looking through their eyes and listening to their voices as they describe their roles in implementing and their

perceptions about the implementation of the Social-Emotional Learning Standards through school-wide programming.

Research Questions

The study has been designed to answer the following primary questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the supports and challenges they have encountered and continue to encounter in the process of implementing the state Social-Emotional Learning Standards?

2. What changes, if any, do they perceive in their own roles during the implementation process?

Conceptual Framework

Educational reforms happen quickly, and many theories, models, and strategies have been used to address school improvement. Two conceptual frameworks serve as the bases for this study: (a) Fullan's (2008) secrets of change theory, and (b) social-emotional learning. This study is based on the concepts of teachers' motivation to implement an initiative, as well as the link between social-emotional learning and academic achievement. The study also investigates matters related to both of these topics. Because the target audience includes teachers with a general knowledge of social-emotional learning and who are submersed in implementing a state mandate, these conceptual frameworks are essential in understanding the teachers' perspectives of the social-emotional learning programming implementation process.

Six Secrets of Change

One conceptual framework of this study includes Fullan's (2008) assertions that: (a) teachers must be motivated to implement a mandate, an initiative, or an innovation;

(b) teachers need specific and clearly defined behaviors and practices; and (c) teachers need ongoing supports to facilitate social-emotional learning.

The idea of change can be unsettling and painful. Years of implementation research have revealed that change is a course of action rather than a single event (Fullan & Park, 1981; Fixen et al., 2005; Hall & Hord, 1987; Hargreaves 2004). In order to understand this process, Fullan (2008) laid out key factors for bringing about meaningful organizational change. He states that theories help to make meaning of the real world and are tested against geographically and culturally diverse situations; the best of them are grounded in action. Structuring new innovations, such as the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning Standards, does not translate into a change in student achievement or change in teacher learning and practice (Ancess, 2002). Rather, what is critical, according to Fullan (1991), is being mindful of school organization so that initiatives have a greater capacity to be successfully implemented, resulting in deep and lasting change. The six secrets of change identified by Fullan are: love your employees; connect peers with purpose; capacity building prevails; learning is the work; transparency rules; and systems learn. The goal of the secrets of change is to guide organizations to analyze what actions are likely to work and what actions are likely to hinder the chances of bringing about meaningful and sustainable change.

All of the secrets need to work together in order to build capacity for successful implementation of school innovations (Fullan, 2008). Secret One, love your employees is closely related to McGregor's (1960) theory of human motivation in the workplace, Theory X and Theory Y. Theory X assumptions are that: (a) the average human being has an inherent dislike of work; (b) because of their dislike for work, most people must

be controlled and threatened before they will work hard enough; and (c) the average

human being prefers to be directed, dislikes responsibility, is unambiguous, and desires

security above everything else. Theory Y assumptions are that: (a) if a job is satisfying,

then the result will be commitment to the organization; (b) the average person learns,

under proper conditions, not only to accept but to seek responsibility; and (c)

imagination, creativity, and ingenuity can be used to solve work problems by a large

number of employees. Fullan (2008) stretched this concept to include not only the

importance of caring for teachers, but suggests that it means also creating the conditions

for teachers to succeed. Caring for teachers and creating the conditions for teacher

success mean that school organizations look at what strategies will not only foster

increased skill development, but will also work to get the results that fulfill the goals of

the organization.

Social-Emotional Learning

The second framework is social-emotional learning. The United States has

experienced dramatic changes that have caused increased economic and social pressures

on families, as well as the diminishing capacity of families, churches, and community to

meet the social needs of children (Weisberg & O'Brien, 2004). In response to these

concerns surrounding the social and emotional health and the overall well-being of

children and youth, an increase of public health, mental health, and juvenile-justice

initiatives have flooded schools. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional

Learning (CASEL), 2003 reported more than 200 types of school-based SEL programs in

U.S. schools. School reform advocates recognize the strong association between

emotional well-being and cognitive achievement (Duncan et al., 2007; Wilson & Lipsey,

2007). Emotional learning is a critical element in the goal of providing students with skills that foster an understanding of the emotional and social consequences of failing (Fullan, 2007).

There is a growing body of evaluation literature that showed links between SEL programs and improved outcomes in a wide range of areas including: (a) teacher social and emotional competence (Greenberg et al., 2003; Jennings 2009); (b) improved student behavior (Elias et al., 1997; Zins & Elias, 2006); and (c) increases in student academic achievement (Buchanan et al., 2009; Elias & Arnold, 2006; Hoffman, 2009). However, despite the increasing recognition of the importance of SEL in American public schools, there is a growing debate suggesting that many programs (a) lack large-scale systematic evaluations, (b) indicate serious flaws in the evaluation research, (c) lack experimental design, and (d) have unsubstantiated claims (Institute of Education Services, 2007; Waterhouse, 2006). An additional criticism of school-based SEL programs was that they lack longitudinal and metacontextual studies raising issues of sustainability (Hoffman, 2009).

For some critics of SEL, the use of emotional intelligence (EI) as the theoretical frame for programming is confusing. The aspects of EI that are used to underpin particular programs are often unclear (Qualter, Gardner, & Whiteley, 2007). Hoffman (2009) observed, "the literature on SEL paints for some, a diverse, positive picture of how focusing on social and emotional competencies can benefit students and schools, whereas for others, it is rife with confusion and lack of empirical and evaluative rigor" (p. 537).

A significant theme throughout implementation literature is the necessity of systematic implementation practices to any national attempts to improve the lives of others. Zins and Elias (2006) pointed out the importance of understanding school-based program implementation in a field that is becoming more sophisticated about strategies that promote the social-emotional development of children and youth. Researchers are exploring the influence of school settings on how interventions are adopted, implemented, and sustained (Elias, Zins, Gracyzk, & Weissberg, 2003; Fullan, 2007; Greenberg, Domitrovich, Gracyzk, & Zins, 2001).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this qualitative descriptive interview study, the following terms are defined:

Implementation: Putting into practice an idea, program, or set of activities and structures new to the people attempting or expected to change. The change may be externally imposed or voluntarily sought; explicitly defined in detail in advance or developed and adapted incrementally through use; designed to be used uniformly or deliberately planned so that users can make modifications according to their perceptions of the needs of the situation—what really happens in practice as opposed to what should happen (Fullan, 2007).

Advisory program: An advisory program is an arrangement whereby one adult and a small group of students has an opportunity to interact on a scheduled basis in order to provide a caring environment for academic guidance and support, everyday administrative details, recognition, and activities to promote citizenship (National Middle School Association, 2000).

Social-emotional learning: is a process for helping children and even adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. SEL teaches the skills we all need to handle our relationships, our work, and ourselves effectively and ethically. These skills include recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring, and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. They are the skills that allow children to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts, and make ethical and safe choices (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (http://www.casel.org/standards/learning.php).

Delimitations and Scope

This qualitative descriptive interview study is delimited with regards to sampling. The participants in this study are confined to teachers from only one high school in one district in the United States. The sample includes only teachers who teach grades 9-12. Participants will respond to questions regarding their experiences with implementing the social-emotional learning standards.

Limitations

The data in this qualitative descriptive interview study are subject to several limitations. First, participants work in their own unique urban settings and may reflect attitudes that may not generalize to other groups of teachers. A second limitation is that the participants' responses may be influenced by what is socially acceptable instead of their revealing their true attitudes, which may be perceived as judgmental. Finally, the study is bound by time and does not take into account any changes that may occur in the participation of teachers and the structure of the social-emotional practices over time.

Assumptions

I assume that the participants will respond openly and honestly to interview questions concerning their experiences with implementing the Social-Emotional Learning Standards and their engagement with social-emotional learning practices. Because there are no standardized tests associated with social-emotional learning standards, I also assume that teachers may not recognize social-emotional learning standards as having value and that they may not teach these standards in a manner equal to the other major academic learning standards.

Significance of the Study

Much of the research on school change over the past decades strongly suggests that lack of implementation, rather than weakness of the model in question, can result in failed school reform efforts (Brackett et al., 2012; Goodman, 1995; McCabe & Oxley, 1989; Muncey & McQuillan, 1993; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1992).

The existing literature provided considerable evidence that teachers enter teaching for reasons that have to do with the intrinsic nature of the work, including: making a difference, doing work they will enjoy, and enhancing lives of children (Farkas et al., 2000; Shipp, 1999; Spear et al., 2000). However, with the trend to implement more complex and comprehensive school reform, teachers may lose passion and enthusiasm for what they do (Fullan, 2007). They may also lose the motivation for personalizing relationships with colleagues and students and going that extra mile to make a difference.

This qualitative descriptive interview study will explore eight teachers' perceptions of and the supports needed for implementing the state Social-Emotional Learning Standards. A rigorous investigation of these teachers' experiences could

generate strategies for improved implementation practices and ultimately serve to provide students with the skills and knowledge that prepare them for optimal performance, human connection, and relationship effectiveness (Fullan, 2007). The study hopes to reveal the school-level opportunities, resources, and supports that teachers need throughout the implementation process.

<div align="center">**Social Change**</div>

Social-emotional learning programs have been found to improve students' social-emotional skills, personal and interpersonal attitudes, school connectivity, positive social behavior, and academic achievement (Brackett et al., 2012; Durlak et al., 2008; Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004). They are also associated with reductions in conduct problems and emotional distress (Payton et al., 2008). The research suggests that SEL is a critical part of academic and social success for children (Greenberg et al., 2003; Payton et al., 2008). This qualitative descriptive study concerns teachers' perceptions of implementing the state Social-emotional Standards. This study may contribute to social change in schools by using the findings of this research to make stakeholders aware of best practices that are necessary to ensure the implementation and sustainability of SEL programs. Given the increasing acknowledgement of the potential importance of social-emotional learning and the strong link to student academic performance, it is critical to consider teacher feedback related to the use and implementation of SEL programs.

The schools, faculty, and students may see increased learning, student achievement, and school climate in relation to implementing the state Social-Emotional Learning Standards. The implementation lessons learned may be a roadmap to other schools that face similar implementation challenges. The exchange of knowledge

between teachers at local campuses and within districts may develop purposeful professional development, allowing teachers to increase their knowledge base and identify the strategies that best fit the schools when implementing programs.

Summary and Transition

Teachers are frequently asked to expertly implement social-emotional learning innovations. They need to feel confident in their abilities to implement a program by receiving adequate training and support to deliver the program as designed. Researchers have strongly suggested that teachers be given adequate and regular support when implementing an SEL program (Brackett et al., 2012; Greenberg et al., 2003; Payton et al., 2008). Previous studies have also confirmed the positive impact that social-emotional learning has on academic achievement (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007; Durlak et al., 2008; Newell & Van Ryzin, 2007). This study uses a qualitative descriptive qualitative approach that will examine eight high school teachers' perceptions about implementing social-emotional learning standards, as well as their perceptions of their roles throughout the implementation process. The following sections will address the literature guiding the study as well as the collection and analysis of data.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review introduces some of the development and research focusing on social-emotional learning as well as literature on change theory and implementation. Benefits of social-emotional learning including whom social-emotional learning affects and how will be explained. Literature that supports social-emotional learning and literature that questions its benefits will be explored. The literature review will discuss change theories that focus on teacher needs in implementing an initiative or innovation and will examine factors that bring about meaningful organizational change. Because this study explores teachers implementing social-emotional learning standards, previous studies that implemented or evaluated social-emotional programming will be examined.

Literature for this review was located by using three strategies: (a) online journal search, (b) review of relevant book chapters, and (c) published manuscripts and book reviews. I used the terms social-emotional learning, emotional intelligence, character education, school reform, organizational change, implementation research, my subjects and keywords, then combined them with terms such as academic achievement, teacher perspectives, effective, and change to unveil journal titles on social-emotional learning programming using online databases such as Academic Search Premier, ebrary, EBSCO, Education Research Complete, ERIC, Proquest, PsychINFO, SAGE, and Teacher Reference Center. I synthesized the findings from the journals and used the bibliographies to locate relevant books and chapters. I then used the strategy of comparing journal articles, books, and book chapters to connect past and present research. This study addresses a gap in the literature given the limited number of recent

empirical studies on social-emotional learning standards and teachers' perspectives on whole school implementation of those standards.

Social-Emotional Learning: Can it Support Learning?

In this section, I will review previous social-emotional learning studies that explore how social-emotional learning affects students, teachers, and schools as well as research on implementing school-wide initiatives.

Social-Emotional Learning Benefits

Today's educational institutions face the challenge of serving students from increasingly diverse cultures, and varied abilities and motivations for learning (Learning First, 2001). Many students lack the necessary social-emotional capacities and become less engaged with school as they advance from elementary through high school—an absence of connection that negatively influences their academic achievement (Durlak, 2010). However, considerable previous research indicates that children's behavioral, emotional, and academic performance is positively affected with properly implemented evidence-based prevention and intervention school-based social-emotional programs (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003; Zins & Elias, 2006).

Social-Emotional Learning

Durlak et al. (2011) stated that the framework for social-emotional learning researchers and program designers came from Waters and Sroufe's (1983) description of competent people; these are people who have the abilities "to generate and coordinate flexible, adaptive responses to demands and to generate and capitalize on opportunities in the environment" (p. 80). Daniel Goleman (1995) described social-emotional

intelligence as the ability to be effective in every critical arena of life, including school. Elias et al. (1997) defined SEL as the process of acquiring competencies in managing emotions, setting and achieving goals, appreciating others' perspectives, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling interpersonal situations in socially and emotionally skilled ways. Plainly put, it is what some may refer to as social intelligence.

The primary goals of SEL programs are to further the develop five interrelated competencies that include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2005). These competencies can lead to a variety of personal, social, and academic successes and a transformation from being influenced by external factors to behavior that represents internalized values of empathy, wise decision-making, and personal accountability (Durlak et al., 2011).

Relevant Research on Social-Emotional Learning

The growing body of evaluation literature showed links between SEL programs and improved outcomes in a wide range of areas including: academic performance (Brigman, Villares, & Webb, 2011; Cohen, 2001; Durlak et al., 2011; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997; Zins et al., 2004), antisocial and aggressive behavior (Losel & Beelman, 2003; Wang, Iannoti, & Nansel, 2009; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007), depressive symptoms (Horowitz & Garber, 2006), drug use (Domitrovich, Cortes, & Greenberg, 2007; Tobler et al., 2000), mental health (Domitrovich et al., 2007; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001), problem behaviors (Domitrovich et al., 2007), and positive youth

development (Durlak et al., 2011; Catalano et al., 2002). While these studies differed greatly in intervention strategies, student population, and behavioral outcomes, they have similarly concluded that school-based interventions are effective (Durlak et al., 2011).

However, despite the emergence of SEL as a popular "thematic and programmatic" approach in many school districts and schools, there is a growing concern suggesting that many of programs lack large-scale systematic evaluations and make unsubstantiated claims (Institute of Education Services, 2007; Waterhouse, 2006). Additional criticism of school based programs note few longitudinal and metacontextual studies causing concerns about the sustainability of these programs (Hoffman, 2009). Others have questioned the degree to which fostering children's social and emotional skills will actually positively affect their behavioral and academic performance (Duncan et al., 2007; Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2002).

For some critics of SEL, the use of emotional intelligence (EI) as the theoretical frame for programming is confusing. It is not clear as to what aspects of EI are used to underpin programs (Qualter, Gardner, & Whiteley, 2007). Hoffman (2009) observed, "the literature on SEL paints for some, a diverse, positive picture of how focusing on social and emotional competencies can benefit students and schools, whereas for others, it is rife with confusion and lack of empirical and evaluative rigor" (p. 537). One significant theme throughout SEL literature is the necessity of systematic implementation practices in any attempts to improve the lives of others (Zins & Elias, 2006). They also pointed out the importance of understanding school-based program implementation in a field that is becoming more sophisticated about strategies that promote the social-emotional development of children and youth. Researchers are exploring the influence of

school settings on how interventions are adopted, implemented, and sustained (Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, Zins, Gracyzk, & Weissberg, 2003; Greenberg, Domitrovich, Gracyzk, & Zins, 2001).

SEL and Student Behaviors

Student behavior plays a significant role in schools. It can be an asset to a teacher when good, and detrimental when bad. Poor behavior also has a negative effect on other students in terms of academics and extracurricular activities. Other studies have found that poor behavior by students may influence other students to cut classes or even retaliate violently (Scarpaci, 2006).

A natural occurrence in many classrooms is helping students develop self-management and introspection. When students misbehave, teachers want them to experience and learn from the consequences of inappropriate behaviors. The hope is that students will be aware of the consequences and this will lead to a decline in those misbehaviors. However, the literature has indicated that approximately 25% of students in schools will struggle with school adjustment at some point (Weissberg, 2005), and that as many as 15-22% of students will develop serious social-emotional problems to warrant treatment (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001).

Schools are beginning to offer an increasing number of social-emotional learning programming, teaching students how to manage their emotions and learn other necessary skills in order to have relationships that are more meaningful, personally and professionally (Goleman, 2008; Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2011). In a national sample of 148,189 eighth to twelfth graders, Benson (2006) found that only 29-45% of surveyed students reported having social competencies such as empathy, conflict resolution skills,

and decision making skills. In addition, only 29% reported that their school provided a caring, supportive environment.

Wilson and Lipsey (2007) in their meta-analysis study of two hundred forty school-based programs for preventing aggressive and disruptive behavior such as fighting, bullying, name calling, intimidation, acting out, and unruly behaviors occurring in school, found that overall positive intervention effects were obtained. They also concluded that the most common and most effective approaches are universal programs delivered to all the students in a classroom or school, and targeted programs for selected children who participate in programs outside of their regular classrooms.

Another study conducted by researchers at the University of Illinois and Loyola University (Durlak et al., 2011), which analyzed evaluations of more than 233,000 students across the country, discovered that social-emotional learning helps students in various way. Their findings revealed that students improved on every dimension of positive behavior such as classroom behavior, attendance, and being more engaged with learning. These students were also less likely to engage in anti-social behaviors from bullying, violence, or substance abuse. The study also revealed that these students had also improved academic achievement and standardized tests score by 11 percentile compared to students that did not participate in SEL programs. These effects were noted at least six months after the programs ended. Unlike previous studies that explored one major outcome, this was the first large-scale meta-analysis of school-based programs to promote students' social and emotional development across multiple outcomes.

Educators, policy makers, and the public share a growing agreement that schools play an important role in developing and graduating students who are academically

proficient, are able to work collaboratively with others from diverse backgrounds, practice healthy behaviors, and make responsible and respectful choices (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007; Greenberg et al., 2003). In response to these concerns surrounding the social and emotional health and the overall well-being of children and youth, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2003) provided examples of more than 200 types of school-based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs in U.S. schools.

Schools that promote an agenda for social-emotional learning encourage a family school culture. They emphasize practices that will allow students to develop the skills necessary to increase positive engagement in learning at school and skills that enhance social and interpersonal relationships.

Teachers and Social-Emotional Programming

Successful implementation of SEL curriculum is dependent on the teacher's ability to function as a positive role model, facilitate interpersonal problem solving, and foster classroom environments that promote social and emotional learning (Jennings, 2007; Riggs, Greenberg, Kusché, & Pentz, 2006). The literature not only portrayed the benefits of social-emotional learning for students, but it also discusses the benefits to teachers. Lewkowicz (2007) noted that teachers who promote SEL activities in the classroom can expect to see benefits, such as diminished student frustration, improved interpersonal relationships and behavior, and an environment that supports academic achievement.

Although a wealth of research supports the positive effects of promoting SEL programming, many teachers feel overstressed and poorly equipped to implement SEL

programming with fidelity (Bierman et al., 2008). In their 2008 Head Start Impact Study, Bierman and collaborating researchers examined the impact of the Head Start REDI (Research-based, Developmentally Informed) intervention to promote academic and social-emotional school readiness. Teachers delivering the intervention received a well-specified curriculum, along with a year of mentoring in implementing the curriculum and teaching practices. Teacher participants answered ten questions, using three-point scales to describe the quality of their implementation. The results revealed that from the teachers' perspective, the curriculum was being delivered with high constancy, and the students were engaged in the activities and lessons. In addition, there were significant differences favoring the students in the intervention classrooms on measures such as improved vocabulary, literacy skills, and social-emotional development.

The findings suggested that many current practice strategies are lacking (Bierman et al., 2008). They pointed to the specific and scripted REDI curricula that provided teachers specific strategies, a scope and sequence of skills that reduced teacher preparation time, and mentoring and coaching throughout the day. Skills may provide critical scaffolds to improved practice, helping teachers by organizing skill presentation along a scope and sequence, reducing teacher preparation time, and providing teachers with the opportunity for skill coaching throughout the day. Given the limited time that teachers have within the school day, they may feel that they do not have enough time to meet the high demands of their jobs. This study validated the dual-focused strategy of enhancing best practices curricula with research-based curriculum materials and teaching strategies. The results of this study should be encouraging to stakeholders seeking to implement or evaluate social-emotional learning programs. Teachers should also favor

this model because they would no longer have to choose between focusing on providing high-quality academic instruction, or meeting the social-emotional needs of the students (Bierman et al., 2008).

In another study, Raphael and Burke (2012) evaluated a new middle school's reform initiative. The focus of the reform was on academic achievement. However, interviews with the participants (teachers, coaches, and principals) revealed that they perceived students' social-emotional needs influenced implementation of the reform. The participants reported that there were challenges in following the reform as prescribed. At grade level meetings, the teachers spent most of the time discussing the social-emotional issues students faced. In addition, the participants reported that components of the reform prevented them from successfully meeting the social-emotional needs of the students. The participants stated that they needed additional support in order to meet their students' social-emotional needs.

From the data, one issue they observed was the need for teachers and administrators to be trained with grade level approaches so they can address both the academic and social-emotional needs of the students (Raphael & Burke, 2012). The results of this study also reveal the need to understand how social, emotional, and academics interface with school reforms in order to improve the success of reform efforts.

Wigelsworth, Humphrey, & Lendrum (2012) investigated the implementation of the SEAL program. Based on Goleman's (1995) model of emotional intelligence, SEAL was designed to develop the social-emotional capacity of students. The researchers used a mixed method design to provide data relevant on the impact of SEAL and to gain

insights into the implementation process. For the quantitative component, 22 SEAL schools and a matched group of 19 comparison schools were recruited to take part in a quasi-experimental study. The target cohort was composed of 8,630 Year 7 students. For the qualitative component, nine of the 22 SEAL schools from the quantitative strand were recruited to participate in longitudinal qualitative case studies. Data collection in the case study schools included observations of lessons, interviews and focus groups with members of the school community (e.g. pupils, teachers, SEAL leads, and head teachers) and analysis of school documents (e.g. SEAL self-evaluation forms, policy documents).

The findings revealed that the nine case study schools were extremely disunited and divided in how they embraced a school-wide approach to implementing SEAL (Humphrey et al., 2012). Because the SEAL design is a loose framework for school improvement that can be tailored, some of the nine schools interpreted the SEAL guidance in such a way that they purposively selected activities or development as the focus and lost sight of the 'bigger picture.' The participants reported that SEAL did not offer them something new. In addition, sustaining the effort and energy required to drive SEAL forward was also a problem for some, especially in the face of competing pressures. Alongside this, the research team found that some staff believed that things would begin to change in the short-term. When this did not happen, staff became disinterested which led to a loss of energy (Humphrey et al., 2012).

Analysis of the data also revealed barriers to implementation process relating to preplanning and foundations, implementation support systems, implementation environment, implementer factors, and program characteristics (Humphrey et al., 2012). The factors identified were clearly connected with the conditions for effective (or

ineffective) implementation of SEAL. One factor open for consideration, but of interest in the present study, was the teachers' will and skill that the researchers claim is crucial in driving or holding back implementation efforts. The researchers also found little statistical evidence that SEAL had a meaningful effect on the development of social-emotional skills of students. The data did show evidence that the school climates indicators showed reductions in exclusions and a significant increase in pupils' feelings of autonomy and influence, and this was supplemented by anecdotal examples of positive changes in general as well as improvements in behavior, interpersonal skills, and relationships (Humphrey et al., 2012).

The researchers concluded that the data was not congruent with the broader literature on school-based SEL programming, which suggest that such programs can lead to improved achievement in a wide range of outcomes (Humphrey et al., 2012). The data from this mixed-method study recommends that schools seeking to implement social-emotional initiatives should explore the research to find out the context in which they are effective, and provide the time and resources for staff in order to implement the reform.

Delegating the implementation of SEL programming can be a daunting task for teachers. They have to temper their time between meeting the academic expectations and the additional requirements of SEL programs. Asking teachers to combine social-emotional learning activities into their already full teaching loads can take a toll physically, mentally, and emotionally (Ransford et al., 2009). As we see an increased intensity in providing social-emotional learning as part of school reform, concern of the importance of effective implementation practices is clearly more complex and becomes even greater. Given these views, this study is designed to discover to what extent

teachers notice the benefits or concerns discussed. These findings will help determine the value of social-emotional learning programs on teaching and learning.

Change Theory

This study is concerned with teachers' perceptions of implementing social-emotional learning standards through school programming (Fullan, 2008). Not only is it important to consider the effects of such programming on students, but also how schools can succeed at bringing about meaningful and sustainable implementation of school initiatives. Organizational change cannot be left to chance. Teachers need to be developed and nurtured. Opportunities for learning must be offered it order to have school systems that experience meaningful change (Fullan, 2008).

One conceptual framework for change were Fullan's (2008) six assertions that serve as a guide to monitor school success when implementing educational reforms. Broadly, Fullan asserted that successful implementation can occur when teachers are motivated, given clearly defined behavioral practices, and ongoing supports. Creating the conditions for teachers to be successful helps them to find meaning in their work and their school. These assertions were a contribution to the growing body of ideas on managing the challenges of change. A consideration of this study was whether these assertions will be factors affecting the implementation process. This study explored teachers' perceptions of implementing a school initiative, and the supports and challenges they encountered or continue to encounter as they implement social-emotional learning standards through school-wide programming (Fullan, 2008).

In contrast to Fullan's (2008) assertions that promoted organizational change, much research had been documented on the implications of teacher efficacy and change.

Bandura (1977, 86) defined self-efficacy as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance" (p. 391). He also recognized that people do not work in insolation and that people formulate beliefs about the collective capacities of the group to which they belong. Bandura (1997) defined collective efficacy as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p. 477). When applied to teachers, it is a belief about how confident a teacher feels in being able to influence student outcomes, and their beliefs about the collective capabilities of fellow teachers to help students learn. Furthermore, self-efficacy has many dimensions and the local context must not be ignored (Cheung, 2008; Gabriele & Joram, 2007).

A review of teacher efficacy research conducted from 1991 to 2009 (Klassen, Tze, Betts & Gordon, 2011) found that most teacher efficacy research focused on teachers' self-efficacy, and there was a need for more studies examining how teachers' collective efficacy beliefs influence student and teacher outcomes. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) concluded that relatively little research examined teachers' collective efficacy and called for an increase in studies directed at the interrelationship between teachers' self- and collective efficacy, as well as between the organizational culture in a school and teachers' collective beliefs. Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and collective efficacy beliefs are related, and do emerge as group property that influence how teachers cope with a variety of challenges (Klassen et al., 2011).

Organizational Change and Implementation

Years of implementation research have revealed that change is a process, rather than a single event (Fullan & Park, 1981; Hall & Hord, 1987; Hargreaves, 2004; Fixen et al., 2007). Change takes time and the success of any mandate, initiative, or innovation becomes the responsibility of the group's willingness to accept the change (Andrews & Rothman, 2002; Craine, 2007; Hargreaves, 2004; Fullan, 2007). Educational change includes both technical and social aspects. Fullan (2007) described educational change as "technically simply and socially complex" (p. 84). Hernandez and Hodges (2005) described the "recorded theory of change" as paper implementation, but real change involves people and a change in practices and beliefs. With continued awareness of people-related problems in implementation, researchers have gained greater knowledge as to what constitutes success.

Research on school change has identified a small number of key factors that causally influence implementation. Effective implementation requires combining and balancing these factors, while avoiding use of the factors in isolation (Fullan, 2007; Hall & Hord, 1987). The first four factors are directly related to the nature of innovations of change. These are need, clarity, complexity, and quality.

Many innovations have been attempted without a careful examination of whether or not the needs within the organization have been met. Several large-scale studies confirm the importance of relating need to decisions or change directions. The Rand Change Agent Study (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977) determined that programs designed or selected to meet an agreed upon specific need within a school were more likely to be successfully implemented. In the Experimental School project, Louis, Molitor, and

Rosenblum (1979) found that "the degree to which there was a formal recognition within the system of unmet needs" (p. 12) was one of the "four readiness factors" associated with subsequent implementation of an innovation. Other studies have determined that implementation is more likely to be successful when priority needs are identified (Emrick & Peterson, 1978; Loucks & Melle, 1980). However, Datnow (2000) found that despite a majority vote by teachers to adopt a New American School model, "this was not a genuine vote, nor was it based on a process of critical inquiry into current practices at the school and what might need to change" (pp. 167-168). The need to change may not be clear to people at the beginning of the process, and they often gain more clarity about their needs during the implementation process (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2010; Huberman & Miles, 1984). Successful implementation of an innovation will not occur unless there is a fit between the new program and school needs. People involved in the implementation process will likely make modifications and become clearer about their needs as they start working within the process.

Clarity is essential in the implementation process. Even when a school community has agreed to make a change, as when teachers want to make a school-wide improvement, the issue of program clarity begins to surface. Teachers may not be clear about how to do things differently. Teachers need to have a clear understanding of the essential components of the proposed change.

In their early implementation study, Herriott and Gross (1979) found that the majority of teachers were unable to identify the essential features of the innovation they were using. A review of the implementation literature found that there was a lack of common definitions or standardized vocabulary of what constitutes full implementation

(Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Fixen et al., 2007; Fullan & Pomfret, 1977). Lack of clarity about goals and means represents a major cause of failed implementation efforts (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2010; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Leithwood, 1981; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1987).

In their study of curricular change in the classroom, Kirst and Meister (1985) found that for a new program to be successfully implemented it must contain specific and clearly defined behavioral terms so teachers and other participants can understand what to do. There is little doubt that in order to support the implementation of a new program, it is essential to provide teachers with specific description as to what the innovation is, as well as what it looks like in practice (Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves, 2010; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1987).

"Even the best program in education will fail to have the intended impact if its essential elements are not implemented properly" (Ruiz-Primo, 2005, p. 2). In 2006, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the research arm of the Department of Education, required intervention researchers to describe how treatment fidelity will be measured, how often it will be assessed, and the degree of acceptable variation during an intervention study as part of the application process (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Without reliable evaluation of implementation, decision-makers would not be able to draw valid conclusions on program outcomes (Fixen et al., 2009; Fullan, 2009; Hargreaves, 2010).

In an attempt to solve the clarity problem, some organizations utilize prescribed solutions. Hargreaves (2003) opposed the use of prescriptions found to be applied mainly in districts serving poorer communities. These poorer communities do not then have the

opportunity to explore richer and deeper learning goals. Fullan and others (2006) recommended that it is possible to become precise without losing flexibility or becoming rigid. The key is to provide and revisit issues of program clarity with teachers all through the implementation process.

Complexity refers to the difficulty of change and the extent of effort required of the individuals responsible for implementation. Any innovation can be examined with regard to issues with difficulty skills required; and the extent of alterations in beliefs, teaching strategies, and use of materials as determined by any individual or group (Fullan, 2007). Innovations such as open education (Bussis et al., 1976), effective schools (Sammons, 1999), and parent involvement (Epstein et al., 2002) necessitate sophisticated activities, structures, diagnoses, teaching strategies, and philosophical understanding to achieve effective implementation. Fullan (2007) suggested that there is a relationship between the amount of complexity and the degree to which an innovation is implemented.

Although the degree of program complexity tends to problematic for implementation, it may result in a greater degree of change because more change is actually being attempted (Crandall, Eiseman, & Seashore-Louis, 1986; Fullan, 2007). Berman and McLaughlin (1997) found that "ambitious projects were less successful in absolute terms of the percent of the project goals achieved, but they typically stimulated more teacher change than projects attempting less" (p. 88). The changes that did take place were more significant and thorough because of the extra effort the innovation required.

Context factors, such as feelings of inadequate administrative support, professional isolation, the level of disorder within the learning environment or school culture, may negatively affect the way teachers interact within the organization (Harris, 2004). In summary, the evidence suggests that complex changes accomplish more change, but they also demand more effort on the part of teachers and others.

Teacher Resistance to Program Implementation

According to Hargreaves (2004), "change and emotion are inseparable" (p.278). Hargreaves pointed out that some change is submerged in the nature of teachers' work while others are dictated. The beginning and endings of the ritual aspects of school life, may be familiar but they are still an emotional aspect of school life (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1983; as cited in Hargreaves, 2004). Many teachers acknowledge that changes in school organizational structures—class, role, or job—does affect their feelings. Feelings of loss can result in feelings of anxiety, abandonment, and insecurity. This response tends to happen when there is deep dependency on the leader (Fink & Bryman, 2006). Frequent changes of leadership and too many initiatives can create a toxic climate of paranoia that may result in teachers becoming cynical and oppose all changes (Hargreaves & Fink, 2012). Some pain is associated with change (Hargreaves, 2006) but "poorly conceived and badly managed change can inflict excessive and unnecessary emotional suffering" (p. 288).

Olsen and Sexton's (2009) study of teachers examined the current federal and state policy influences on schools, and the tendency of those schools to adopt reforms that impact teachers' work. They found that during an educational crises, "an organization responds in identifiable ways: structures tighten; centralized control

increases; conformity is stressed; accountability and efficiency measures are emphasized; and alternative or innovative thinking is discouraged" (p. 8). The attempt to implement change created "teacher hostility and disenfranchisement," and implementation failed to be successful.

Recognizing the factors that can inhibit or facilitate change is essential if teaching practices are going to change. Control, teacher conformity, and restricted opportunities for feedback, are predictors that can create an "us-versus-them" culture and climate that makes teachers mistrustful and insecure (Olsen & Sexton, 2009). The significance of context cannot be under acknowledged. Variations within school districts and even within schools affect teacher resistance to change and implementation (Reeves, 2006). This is why support systems and resources for making meaning clear to teachers and others must be in place before attempting to implement an innovation. Teachers must understand the need for change as well as the activities that will facilitate achieving the desired outcome (Chirichello, 2008).

Teachers with low levels of efficacy may be more likely to have ineffective instruction skills, diminished classroom management skills, and lower student achievement (Woolfolk, 2007). On the other hand, teachers with high efficacy tended to implement instructional strategies, employ new methods of teaching, and be more persistent in addressing the needs of struggling students (Boyd, 1994; Fullan, 2007). Researchers have been paying significant attention in measuring teacher efficacy and exploring factors for increasing it. Guskey (1988) as well as Fuchs and colleagues, (1992) linked teacher efficacy to enthusiasm, successful program implementation, and adoption of innovations. Teachers' high levels of efficacy seem to influence greater

effort in program implementation, more successful experiences with new practices, and greater opportunities for improved student achievement academically and social-emotionally. In summary, the research on teacher efficacy suggests that it is an important predictor for school improvement efforts and can influence how well all students learn.

Teachers and Mandatory Implementation

Teachers tend to better accept school improvement changes in management or changes that are temporary (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Schools are increasingly facing pressure to reform by federal and state mandates and resistance can be found both at the principal level and the teacher level. A number of researchers have identified the behaviors that principals must take in order to build school capacity for change (Duke, 2004; Greenberg & Baron, 2000). Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) found that high school conditions make teachers more likely to resist change, and less likely to implement successful change than their counterparts in elementary and middle schools.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) found that in order to implement changes effectively, principals must not only be knowledgeable as the instructional leader, but lead as a visible and viable change agent. Principals must also recognize that change takes time. A key factor that school leaders must consider is that change is a result of individual and collective participation in the change process (Craine, 2007). Change can be successfully implemented when pressure to action is balanced without threats, and teachers feel a sense of trust and support, both individually and collectively from the principal (Kalin & Zuljan, 2007).

Zimmerman (2006) pointed out that administrators should employ incentives that encourage the efforts of teachers as the work toward achieving change. Principals should

remove any barriers that might hinder implementation, including decreasing the workload so that teachers are not distracted from the primary focus of the change processes. As teachers build their capacity, and become more empowered by their leadership, they are more likely to take direction from and join in the change process because they feel ownership of the change. Fullan (2007) suggested that teachers are more likely to embrace change when they are actively involved at the initiation of change rather than mandated to change.

Literature Related to the Method

Qualitative researchers seek answers to questions that emphasize the participants' perspective of how social experience is created and given (Merriam & Associates, 2002). The nature of the researcher's role and the researcher's questions determined that a qualitative design is the appropriate approach for this study. Qualitative research emphasizes the "socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry" (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 14). Qualitative descriptive research includes the perceptions of the participants (Hatch, 2002) and seeks "to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences; that is, how do people make sense of their experiences" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). In this study, the researcher's goal is to understand the perceptions of teachers as they implement social-emotional learning standards through school-wide programming. Creswell (2007) recommended using qualitative methods because it allows the researcher to hear the voices of those experiencing the phenomenon. Utilizing qualitative descriptive research allows the retelling of the participants' experiences. These distinctions are important in the current

study because it seeks to understand the experiences of the teachers implementing the social-emotional learning standards. Therefore, exploration of the topic utilizes face-to-face interviews (Creswell, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Janesick, 2004; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin et al., 2005).

<div align="center">**Literature Related to Other Methodologies**</div>

In contemplating the research design, a quantitative or mixed methods design was considered. However, quantitative or mixed methods research would not yield the descriptive data that answers the research questions specific to this study.

Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is associated with the formal evaluation of numbers and often involves experimental methods using numerical data or a numerical explanation to say with a certain degree of confidence, that under the same circumstances a causal relationship will exist, or something that has been systematically measured actually represents a larger number of people, or that something actually caused a change in something else (Creswell, 2003; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Encyclopedia of Public Relations, 2004; Hatch, 2002; Yin et al., 2005).

This design would not be the appropriate approach to conduct this study since the focus of this study is to discover the teacher perception on a topic. This study is not aimed at quantity, amount, intensity, frequency, or the testing of theories. Instead, this study explores the perceptions of the teachers on their role in student development. Qualitative researchers seek answers to questions that emphasize the participants' perspectives of how social experience is created and given (Merriam & Associates,

2002). The nature of the researcher's role and the researcher's questions determined that a qualitative design is the appropriate approach for this study.

Mixed Methods

Mixed method procedures use both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Connelly (2009) suggested that a researcher should use a mixed method design when both types of data would be used to address the research questions. A mixed method design uses three general strategies for collecting data: qualitative sequential, quantitative sequential, and concurrent. In a sequential study the researcher chooses to first, collect quantitative data; then using the results, collect qualitative data from a few participants to gain a more extensive understanding of the research problem. The researcher can also, first, collect qualitative data; then using the results, collect quantitative data to test the results of the qualitative findings. In a concurrent mixed methods design, the researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously in order to provide a combined analysis of the research problem.

Since this study seeks to describe participants' experiences and perceptions, a quantitative approach would not provide data that would answer the research questions. Therefore, a mixed method design would not be appropriate for this study.

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Summary and Transition

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Given the need for further research concerning teachers' perceptions of implementing the social-emotional learning standards, this study was designed to analyze 12 teachers' experiences with implementing social-emotional learning activities through school-wide programming. The study will examine whether and how they were able to implement social-emotional learning activities on a school-wide basis. The purpose of

this study is not to recommend that social-emotional learning will improve scores on high-stakes standardized tests, rather, it seeks to determine whether social-emotional learning programming is being implemented effectively or non-effectively. In the next section, I will outline the methods I used to collect and analyze data, as well as the strategies I will use to protect the participants and establish trust.

Section 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive interview study is to explore teachers' perceptions of their roles and of the factors that affect their implementation of the state Social-Emotional Standards. To accomplish this purpose, the study will investigate (a) teachers' perceptions regarding the supports and challenges they have encountered and continue to encounter in the process of implementing the state Social-Emotional Standards, and (b) what, if any, changes they perceive in their own roles during the implementation process.

The methodology is designed to conduct a descriptive qualitative study of high school teachers who implement the state Social-Emotional Standards at City High School (pseudonym) through school-wide practices. The descriptive data will be collected by conducting semi-structured, open-ended, audio-taped interviews of the eight participants. Patton (2002) suggested that the selection of a research design should be informed by the design that best answers the research question. Sandelowski (2000) concurred, explaining that a "qualitative descriptive study is the method of choice when straight description of phenomena are desired" (p. 334). This qualitative descriptive design allows for teachers' perceptions of the implementation process and may be a means to improve the implementation process within the district. This chapter describes the research method, strategies for data collection, research questions, and a plan for data analysis.

Qualitative Design

The history of qualitative research reveals that it has its origins in anthropology and sociology (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Both of these disciplines seek to understand the "other" and are committed "to an understanding of self" (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 24). Furthermore, qualitative work is grounded in a number of core assumptions that will serve this inquiry. The assumptions and values that characterize qualitative inquiry cross disciplines and paradigms (Morrow, 2007). These core qualities include studying people in the natural world, learning how individuals make meanings of their experiences, investigating individuals in social interaction and in context, and reporting the results of research in the everyday language of participants (Hatch, 2002; Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Patton (2002) recommended using a descriptive study when investigating participants' experiences of a process for the following reasons:

1. depicting process requires detailed descriptions of how people engage with each other,

2. the experience of process typically varies for different people so their experiences need to be captured in their own words,

3. process is fluid and dynamic so it can't be fairly summarized on a single rating scale at one point in time, and

4. participants' perceptions are a key process consideration (p. 159)

Patton's criteria serve as the basis for choosing descriptive qualitative methods because the study involves participants' experiences with the implementation of the social-emotional standards.

Educational research designs can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods with several strategy or approach models that provide specific direction for procedures in a research design (Creswell, 2009). There were several approaches that had to be considered in conducting this study including: (a) ethnography, (b) grounded theory, (c) case studies, (d) phenomenology, and (e) narrative. Ethnography research was not appropriate because this study's participants are not an intact cultural group. Ethnographic methodologies require the researcher to become immersed in the culture as an active participate in people's lives for extended periods and to collect data in the forms of participant observations, informant interviewing, and artifacts from within the culture (Hatch, 2002). The focus of this study is not intended to describe nor interpret the shared patterns of a cultural-sharing group or to spend extended time in the field. Grounded theory research was not appropriate because this study is not seeking to develop a theory grounded in the views of the participants. In addition, grounded theory research involves generating theory from data that explain people's actions regardless of time and place (Hatch, 2002). This study seeks to describe teachers' perceptions and experiences with the implementation of the state Social-Emotional Standards, not to build a substantive theory about their perceptions and experiences. Case study research was not appropriate, because this study is not investigating a bounded group, system, or other unit of analysis. Case study methods also involve an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The focus of this study is not an intensive, in-depth analysis of a case, such as a particular school, but rather on individual teachers' perceptions and experiences. Phenomenological methods were inappropriate to answer the research questions. The purpose of this study does not seek to understand the lived

experiences of the teacher participants. Instead, it explores teachers' perceptions of their roles, and of the factors affecting their implementing the Social-Emotional Standards. Narrative research was considered but rejected, because this methodology focuses on the first-person accounts of experiences that are told in story format (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Instead, this study is designed to explore the perceptions and experiences of the teachers, and not the story of an individual teacher. After careful deliberation, I decided that the study design should not be aligned with any of these approach models. The literature on qualitative methodology supported this decision (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 1996; Merriam & Associates, 2002). The collection of interview data to answer research questions can be done "without working explicitly with a particular theoretical, pragmatic, or philosophical perspective" (Patton, 2002, p.145).

A quantitative design would not be the appropriate approach to conduct this study, since its focus is to discover teacher's perceptions about a topic. This study is not aimed at quantity, amount, intensity, frequency, or the testing of theories. Instead, it focuses on participants' experiences with implementing the state Social-Emotional Standards. According to Merriam and Associates (2002), qualitative methodology is the best choice for researchers seeking to determine participants' experiences at a "particular point in time and in a particular context" (p. 4). All of the teachers in this study are implementing the Social-Emotional Standards.

Research Questions

The primary research questions that will guide this study are:

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the supports and challenges they have encountered and continue to encounter in the process of implementing the state Social-emotional Standards?

2. What, if any, changes do teachers perceive in their own roles during the implementation process?

Contexts for the Study

Identifying research contexts is a key decision feature of qualitative design (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Hatch (2002) described contexts as the physical setting of the study, participants and their relationships with one another, and the activities these participants share. Understanding their complexity, dynamics, political and historical frameworks are essential in conducting a study. Careful planning for how to negotiate access and entry is paramount in generating the necessary data to answer the research questions. The context for this study is one high school in the Midwest. The population for this study is teachers who teach grades 9 to 12 at this public school, and are implementing the social-emotional learning program practices.

High School Overview

The school, founded in the mid-1970s, is a public high school in a city in the Midwestern United States. It offers a variety of rigorous college preparatory academic and enrichment programs. One of the programs is aimed at providing students with the necessary social-emotional skills, helping them create and sustain a culture of respect and harmony.

The site and the participants were selected because the educational focus has included implementing social-emotional learning as an essential part of teaching

practices. The social-emotional program is school-wide. However, it is of particular importance in the Freshmen Academy as a vehicle for helping students understand and learn the values of the school's culture. There are ample opportunities for staff professional development and training to give teachers critical skills in implementing the practices of the social-emotional program as well as other supports and resources. The school has had consistent leadership and has been involved in a variety of activities and practices throughout the implementation process since 2010. The SEL team and the staff seems to have a great awareness of the SEL plans, adoption of specific SEL curriculum, and opportunities for SEL professional development. This descriptive interview study seeks to understand teachers' perspectives of their roles in the implementation process. The teachers at this site are a good fit for exploring this topic

Public Schools and SEL Standards

With the passage of the state's Children's Mental Health Act in 2003, this Midwestern state has become one of the first to establish social and emotional learning standards. The legislation was supported by 60 major organizations, including the state's largest school district. Within months following the passage of the law, the state's Children's Mental Health Partnership was formed, leading to the creation of several committees that included the School Policy and Standards Committee. Working collaboratively with the state board of education and CASEL, this committee developed the state's Social-Emotional Standards. This committee also worked with the state's Association of School Boards to develop a model policy that districts could adopt. In 2004, this Midwestern state's School Board of Education adopted the SEL Standards and a plan for professional development and technical assistance to support implementation

of the Standards. The state board and the Children's Mental Health Partnership also worked to establish the SEL Professional Development Project, which worked to develop a regional infrastructure. This provided training and coaching to these schools in Midwestern United States.

The project used a request for proposals (RFP), which identified and funded a lead Regional Office of Education (ROE) for each of the six ROE regions of the states that included this site. Another RFP process identified a cohort of 75 schools, reaching 46,000 students who received small grants over a three-year period to engage in a SEL Standards planning and implementation process.

A rubric was developed by CASEL to measure the quality of SEL implementation in the schools that were part of a three-year pilot project from 2007 to 2010. At the end of year three, 90 percent of schools reported high ratings in the implementation process. Of concern was that there were a small number of schools, 5 percent, reporting low ratings for their implementation process. These schools can receive support to determine why progress has been impeded and what can be done to improve their implementation.

From 2008 through 2010, a team from the Center for Prevention Research and Development (CPRD) at one of the Midwestern universities conducted in-depth case studies. The case study results revealed that schools are at various stages of implementation, but they continue to move forward to full implementation. Most school staff reported that they have a way to go before full SEL implementation and that they have only laid the groundwork. The case study also revealed that several SEL schools withdrew, some closed or were consolidated, administrators and staff have retired or left, among other challenges. These dynamics reflect the contextual, leadership, staff, and

resource factors that influence the challenges to SEL programming and implementation (Gordon, Ji, Mulhall, Shaw & Weissberg, 2011).

Measures for Ethical Protection

Several strategies will be used to protect the participants in this study. First, I will seek approval from the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study. Upon approval, I will complete the state's Board of Education Research Review Board Application, and the study will not be conducted until it is fully cleared by the Research Review Board. Second, I will send potential participants an introductory e-mail (see Appendix A) that describes the nature of the study, motivations for recruitment, steps taken to ensure confidentiality as well as to encourage them to review the consent form (see Appendix B), and demographic information questionnaire (see Appendix C). Finally, I will use pseudonyms for the school and names of the faculty. All consent forms, demographic questionnaires, and data will be maintained in a locked file cabinet, in my password-protected computer and travelling drive. I will further protect the confidentiality of the participants by destroying all data once the study is completed.

To gain access to the participants, I will meet with the administrators or designee at this site. During this meeting, I will describe the nature of the study, steps taken to ensure the ethical protection of the participants, and the nature of anticipated findings. I will obtain a list of the faculty and confirm the names of teachers working with the implementation of the social-emotional standards. I will send an introductory email to teachers, describing the nature of the study and inviting them to participate. I will clearly communicate my background and interests via the introductory email when I contact the actual participants, and again during the introductions for each interview.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research is also characterized as interpretive—the researcher is the "primary instrument" (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 5) for collecting data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted the characteristics that make humans the ideal "instruments of choice" for naturalistic inquiry. Humans are responsive to personal and environmental signals, and are able to interact with or adapt to situations; they have the capacity to collect information about multiple factors and multiple levels simultaneously; they are able to grasp situations holistically; they can process data immediately and provide verification of the data; and they can explore unusual or unexpected responses.

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is placed in a "distinctly different position" than that of the "objective scientists" (Hatch, 2002, p. 10) usually associated with quantitative research activities. Qualitative researchers are a part of the world they study, and cannot disappear from the world in order to study it (Hatch, 2002; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Morrow, 2007).

According to Creswell (1998), the qualitative researcher does incorporate his or her own experiences along with the experience of the phenomenon into the research process. Being reflexive, which is to acknowledge and monitor one's biases, emotional responses, motivations, and assumptions is essential to the integrity of qualitative research. By using reflexivity, I will use my own understanding of the experience of implementing the state Social-Emotional Standards to enhance awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity and ultimately discover the teachers' perceptions of the implementation process.

I will use a reflexive journal to keep aware of my perspective. The journal will help to document how the research is affecting me, or how I am affecting the research. Gilgun (2008) viewed reflexivity as an ethical issue with regard to the participants and an accountability issue in terms of quality.

Since readers of the study need to know the instruments used to investigate the phenomenon, qualitative researchers make public their own stances, biases, motivations, assumptions, values, and personal interests. Researchers may use a protocol—a data collecting instrument—but the researchers are the human instruments who actually gather the information (Creswell, 2003; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Morrow, 2007). The qualitative researcher should present full disclosure about a range of issues, including negotiating entry, explaining the purpose of the study to participants, reciprocity, and any ethical concerns surrounding the research investigation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Reflexive journaling is a strategy that will be used in this study to enhance the quality of the research process and increase awareness of the participants' concerns. Gilgun (2008) viewed reflexivity as an ethical issue with regard to the participants and an accountability issue in terms of quality.

As I search to understand the implementation experience from the teachers' perspectives, I acknowledge prior experience with the implementation process, and with the consultant overseeing the site's social-emotional program implementation. My perceptions of implementing the Social-Emotional Standards have been shaped by personal experiences.

From September 2003 to June 2007, I served as Student Development Coordinator on the campus of a small high school. In that role, I worked closely with

administrators, faculty, and students developing a plan for implementing the Social-Emotional Standards. This is a specific bias that will be monitored in my journal.

To establish a research-participant relationship, an introductory e-mail (see appendix A) will be sent to potential participants. The message will include a description of my experience as Coordinator for implementing the state Social-Emotional Standards. Subsequent researcher-participants contact and opportunities to build relationships will take place when they are asked to participate in the interview.

Participant Selection

The criteria for the selection of participants in a qualitative investigation depends on many factors including, what the researcher wants to learn, the research paradigm, the kind of study, the context, method of collecting data, and the type of generalization needed (Creswell, 2003; Hatch 2002; Merriam & Associates, 2002). The rationale for choosing particular individuals to participate in a study is essential to the strength of the study's rigor (Leech, 2005; Morris, 2007).

The population to be recruited for this study will be teachers who handle grades 9 to 12, and are involved in implementing the Social-Emotional Standards in a Midwestern public high school in the United States. These teachers should be able to provide insight and understanding in answering the research questions. A purposeful sample (Maxwell, 1996; Patton, 2001) of eight teachers will be selected. Patton (1990) noted that sampling decisions are important in obtaining the richest possible source of information to answer the research questions. The most applicable strategy for this study's approach is criterion sampling.

The criterion for selecting this site is based on the implementation of the Social-Emotional Standards through school-wide practices that engage all students. Schools in this Midwestern state are in various stages of implementation, with schools adopting either research-based curriculum, designing their own SEL program, integrating school-wide practices, and some shaping organizational changes (Gordon et al., 2011). The SEL team at this site is designing SEL program activities and is integrating through school-wide practices.

Criterion sampling is a specific type of purposive, nonprobability sampling technique that involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001, p. 238). For this study, I will select teachers who meet the following criteria: (a) teachers of grades 9 to 12 and (b) teachers who are implementing the Social-Emotional Standards through school-wide practices. Using these criteria, I will able to generate a list of teachers who fit the profile from the initial staff information obtained during the meeting with administrators or their designees, and send those teachers an invitation to participate along with the consent form by email.

I will purposefully select eight teachers to participate in the study. Some methodologists recommended sample sizes of six to eight participants to achieve information-rich descriptions of the participants' experiences (e.g., Creswell, 2003; Maxwell, 1996). Likewise, Sandelowski (1995) noted that the qualitative researcher should collect data that reaches data saturation, theoretical saturation, or informational redundancy. At the same time, the sample should not be too large that it is difficult to manage data that will come from the extensive details about the participants' experiences. The study will utilize this selection strategy in order to obtain qualified participants who

will supply the most credible information to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2007).

Participants will complete three interviews of approximately one hour. This design will advance the research on the topic of implementation of the Social-Emotional Standards.

Data Collection Strategies

I plan to use interviewing as the data collection strategy. The qualitative interview is a technique researchers use to learn about the world. Qualitative interviews are conversations used by researchers for exploring participants' experiences and uncovering the meanings that participants use to make sense of their worlds (Janesick, 2004; Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), the researcher and the interviewee develop a conversational partnership that influences the interviewing process. The qualitative researcher is the instrument used in data collection. The qualitative researcher is able to get close to the experience, and connect to the participants, factors that lead to a trusting and comfortable environment in which to conduct the study (Janesick, 2004). With trust having been built, the participants are more likely to be involved and willing to tell their stories. When the researcher is seen as honest, open, fair, and accepting, the interviewee is likely to feel more protected and less exposed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

I will conduct the interview using guiding questions. These formal interview-guiding questions will be developed to assist the participant in talking about the phenomenon (see Appendix D). As Hatch (2002) described, these questions will be prepared in anticipation of the interview and designed to guide the anticipated

conversation. The hour-length interviews for this study will consist of open-ended

questions to determine the teachers' perspective and experiences in implementing the

social-emotional standards.

The works of Rubin and Rubin (2005), Janesick (2004), and Hatch (2002) were

used as guidelines in developing questions for the study. Rubin and Rubin (2005)

recommended three kinds of questions that will elicit depth, detail, vividness, nuance, and

richness: main, follow-up, and probes. Janesick (2004) relied on descriptive, contrasting,

and structural questions for eliciting various responses. Hatch (2002) suggested open-

ended questions, framed in ways that do not lead the participants.

I will collect data by conducting semi-structured, open-ended, audio-taped

interviews with each of the eight participants. According to some scholars, single

interviews, which are the most prevalent, may be used when access to participants is

difficult (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). However, Knox and

Burkard (2009) specifically suggested a minimum of two interviews for the following

reasons: (a) to increase the chance of understanding the context, and thus the meaning, of

participants' experiences; (b) to help participants feel a sense of safety with the

interviewer; (c) to allow examination of additional content that may have been stimulated

by the first interview; and (d) to enable either party to clarify any potentially confusing

elements of a first interview (p. 8). In this study, an interview of approximately one hour

will be conducted with each participant. Many researchers posited that the number of

interviews depends on several factors, including on the kinds of phenomenon being

explored, research questions, and the proposed methodology to be used (Adler & Adler,

2012; Baker, 2012; Becker, 2012).

In the first round, I will gather information about the participants' past and current experiences with education and teaching. I will then inquire about their personal exposure to social-emotional learning in their past, specifically any personal experiences with teaching character development or school-based preventive interventions that promote social competence and prevent problem behaviors. In the second round, I will probe deeper into their professional experiences with the implementation of Social-Emotional Standards and the perception these experiences have created. I will ask open-ended questions about their experiences with implementing these standards specific to their roles as teachers. These questions will elicit descriptions of their perceptions and experiences of implementing the Social-Emotional Standards.

The main goal of the second round will be to provide a means for respondent validation (Maxwell, 1996), also called member checking (Creswell, 2003; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2002). The final round will provide an opportunity for the participants to review the research data and give feedback on how well the findings correspond to their experiences. Participants may have the option of conducting the second participant review either by phone or by email.

Data Analysis

As data collection and data analysis are simultaneous in qualitative research, I will transcribe the audio-taped interviews immediately following each interview, searching the transcripts for additional questions that could potentially be asked during subsequent interviews (Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 1996). During this reading and listening, I will keep track of my impressions, reactions, and reflections in notes and research

journals, which will serve as forms of informal data analysis and help me develop additional typologies and themes.

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) defined typological as "dividing everything observed into groups or categories on the basis of some canon for disaggregating the whole phenomenon under study" (p. 153). According to Hatch (2002), the data is divided into categories or groups based on predetermined typologies. Choosing the typologies that are going to be used to frame the rest of the analysis is a key step in this process. Hatch (2002) recommended his typological strategy as being useful in helping analyze data from interview and focus group studies.

When a study is designed and implemented well, the data should provide ample evidence related to the participants' perspectives regarding topics of interest (Hatch, 2002). This study will utilize Hatch's framework for designing data analysis. This process allows the researcher to organize and question data so that patterns, themes, and relationships can be revealed. In this study, the data will be analyzed and coded for important themes using Hatch's (2002) nine-step Typological Analysis. Hatch (2002) suggested that this model of analysis is useful when "initial groupings of data and beginning categories for analysis are easy to identify and justify" (p. 152). The research question underpinning this study asks for descriptions of teachers' perceptions regarding the supports or challenges they encountered in the process of implementing the Social-Emotional Standards, and what, if any, changes do teachers perceive in their own roles during the implementation process. The descriptive interviews will provide rich data to support a number of findings.

First, I will identify typologies to be analyzed. Because I am aware of the topics that will be addressed in the data, they will be the logical place to begin looking for typologies. For this study, the first two typologies identified for analysis are "teachers' perceptions" and "teachers' experiences." Other typological areas identified for analysis in this study include "teacher roles," and "perceived supports." Second, I will read each individual transcript with one typology in mind. I will mark in a particular color places in the data where evidence to that specific typology is found. Third, I will read entries by typology, recording the main ideas in each entry on a summary sheet. The goal is to have summaries that can be easily located, identified, and manipulated. In the fourth step, I will look for patterns, relationships, and themes within typologies.

In the fifth step, I will go back to the data marked for inclusion in the typology under investigation, coding entries according to patterns identified and keeping a record of what entries align with what elements of my patterns. The sixth step is to decide if patterns are supported by the data and search for data that contradicts the findings. In the seventh step, I will look for relationships that might exist among and between categories. Eighth, I will write the patterns as one-sentence generalizations exemplifying the typological analysis process. The ninth and final step is returning to the data, and selecting powerful examples that support the generalizations for the research report. This allows the readers to go inside the contexts and hear the voices of the participants.

Validity Threats

I will use several strategies to improve validity, reliability, credibility, and trustworthiness. First, because I was a coordinator for implementing the social-emotional standards through school-wide practices, I shared my biases towards the implementation

process before collecting data. I will be careful not to allow this experience to define the experiences of the participants. In order for qualitative researchers to build trustworthiness, they "explore their own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of their own prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions" (Merriam, 2002, p. 94). I will use bracketing as a strategy to combat my personal biases. Keeping and making frequent entries in a research journal is another strategy that is recommended to improve validity when conducting qualitative research (Hatch, 2002). In my research journal, I will record and reflect on my thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, preconceptions, and feelings about conducting this study. With continual self-reflection, I will be aware of potential assumptions or biases that may influence my objectivity.

Second, I will use member checking (Creswell, 2007) as a strategy to ensure credibility. Participants will have an opportunity to review their transcripts and verify the accuracy of the description. There will also be several opportunities during the series of interviews in which I can verify and clarify whether the transcripts adequately represent their experiences. This is critical, because the focus of the study is on teachers' perceptions. Therefore, they must verify that the findings are truly their perceptions.

Finally the use of thick descriptions will improve the trustworthiness of the findings. The teachers' voices are a final check in data analysis. It is important for a researcher to make sure that the findings are indeed supported by the data (Hatch, 2002).

Summary of the Methodology

Section 3 has described the methodology that will be used in this research study. The chapter begins with a discussion of qualitative research design and the use of

descriptive qualitative study as the strategy. Next, the research questions and their relevance to the study were discussed. Also discussed in this chapter are the roles of the researcher, participant selection, and anticipated ethical issues. Lastly, the data collection and data analysis were discussed along with a discussion of the validity of the research study. The next section will present the details of data analysis and findings.

Section 4: Presentation of Data and Results

Introduction

This section presents the study's data and results. First, a description of the data collection process, including the strategies used for analyzing data in this descriptive interview study, will be presented. Next, I provide the findings, relationships, and themes, and how they address the research questions. Finally, I describe the quality control methods used.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive interview study was to examine teachers' perspectives on implementing social-emotional learning standards. The participants were eight high school teachers who are implementing the social-emotional learning standards via activities in the advisory classes, an arrangement where one teacher and a small group of students interact on a scheduled basis, in order to develop teacher-student relationships and foster student academic guidance and personal success.

Data Collection Process

In this subsection, I will outline the strategies I used to generate data and explain the strategies I used to strengthen the integrity of the data.

Generating Data

I chose this site, City High School, because the educational vision and focus includes social-emotional learning activities as part of the teaching practices. The teachers at this high school are in the early stages of implementation, and they have had consistent leadership throughout the process. The participants for this study were high school teachers who are involved in implementing social-emotional learning activities.

I met with the principal and SEL project director. I discussed the purpose of the study and the reasoning for selecting this particular site. I explained that the inclusion criteria for the study would be teachers implementing social-emotional learning activities. The principal was interested in the study and signed a letter of cooperation and the community partner form (see Appendix A).

I began data collection by asking the project manager at City High to contact potential participants. I provided a summary of the study so that she could help clarify any initial questions potential participants might have about it. The project manager identified a group of teachers who would be willing to participate in the study. The introduction e-mail was sent (see Appendix A), and the potential participants were given the consent and demographic questionnaire to review and return to me if they were interested in participation. Eight teachers met the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate in the study.

Participants

The recruitment efforts for participants yielded eight female teachers across Grades 9 to 12 who are implementing the social-emotional learning activities in advisories. Table 1 includes (a) an individual description of the teachers, (b) grade levels

that they teach, (c) their years of teaching experience, and (d) their years involved in the

implementation of social-emotional learning activities.

Table 1

Participants Grade Level, Years of Experience, and Years Implementing SEL Activities

Participant	Grade	Experience	Implementing
Amy	9	3	3
Bernice	9–12	10	3
Carmela	10	10	3
Delores	11	8	3
Eleanor	10–11	15	3
Francis	12	12	3
Giselle	9	3	2
Henrietta	10	4	3

Collecting and Recording Data

I began collecting data in April 2014. Collection of data began with an individual, in-depth semi-structured interview designed to engage participants in a conversation about implementing the social-emotional learning standards through advisory activities. The teachers were asked about supports and challenges they have experienced and continue to experience and about their roles during the implementation process. During the course of the study, I kept a research journal and documented all forms of communication in the journal. E-mail responses were saved, printed, placed in color-coded folders, and locked in the file cabinet in my home. These included the interview guide, potential participants' questions, demographic questionnaires, and consent forms. All documents were saved in my password-protected computer and backed-up on an external drive in anonymous folders with anonymous file codes.

The project manager negotiated meeting times with the participants, and a meeting was scheduled according to the times indicated. The meeting included reviewing the consent form and verifying that identified participants still wanted to participate in the study. Once each participant signed the consent form, each one was

interviewed. The interviews were audio-recorded and additional notes were made on the participants' interview guides. I transcribed the interviews, and saved copies on my password-protected computer and external drive. All transcripts were printed and placed in color-coded folders, then secured in a locked file cabinet in my home.

Each transcript was audio-recorded and replayed to check the accuracy of the transcription. Each participant received an e-mail that included an attachment of her transcribed interview and a request to review the transcript for accuracy. Two participants requested changes in their transcripts. Both of the participants wanted to clarify what they said because they felt that their descriptions might be misunderstood without additional information. I called these participants to verify the corrections. I made and saved the requested changes and reprinted the transcripts. I added these transcripts to participants' color-coded folders and noted the original transcripts as inaccurate.

Cataloging

The goal of the study was to capture the teachers' perceptions about implementing the social-emotional learning standards. Because the study was designed with a focused purpose, a limited set of research questions and a specific data set organized around the guiding questions. I used Hatch's (2002) model of typological analysis, which recommends that the researcher's first step is to identify typologies or categories based on the topics that the researcher had in mind when the study was designed. The research questions provided the initial categories that I wanted to explore: (a) what were the teachers' perceptions regarding supports and challenges they encountered and continued to encounter in implementing the Social-Emotional Learning Standards; and (b) what

changes, if any, did the teachers perceive in the roles during the implementation process.

I catalogued participants' responses that were directly related to the research questions

anchoring the study. Each statement that was related to the typologies remained marked

for future analysis. I also reviewed each transcription line-by-line in preparation for

further cataloging and coding.

Another area that I cataloged was related to my conceptual framework. I

identified and color-coded statements related to Fullan's (2008) assertions that: (a)

teachers must be motivated to implement a mandate, an initiative, or an innovation; (b)

teachers need specific and clearly defined behaviors and practices; and (c) teachers need

ongoing supports to facilitate social-emotional learning.

Coding

Utilizing suggestions made by Hatch (2002), I hand-coded the data instead of

using an electronic coding system. In this step, I used open coding. I carefully reviewed

the data line-by-line searching for and highlighting groups of sentences, phrases, and

paragraphs that contained references related to the topic. Next, I selected a term to best

code the topic and to distinguish that data topic from others. For example, teacher

motivation, perceived supports, and supports needed were terms selected for coding. I

continued the process, placing a color-coded term after each occurrence of that data unit.

In the next phase of coding, I copied and pasted all data units with the same code

into a new Microsoft word document creating a data set organized by categories. After

reviewing each data set, I looked for relationships across the data then summarized the

main points and these became the findings for the study. I printed and saved the data sets

using an anonymous name to my password-protected computer and on my external drive.

Findings and Themes

The purpose of this qualitative description interview study was to capture the perspectives of teachers implementing the state's social-emotional learning standards through advisory classes. To gain an understanding of the teachers' perspectives, the study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design, and I gathered interview data to address the research questions anchoring the study. I did not directly use the research questions. Instead, I used a series of guiding questions designed to provide an opportunity for teachers to discuss their perceptions about implementing the social-emotional learning standards through their advisories. The study utilized typological analysis, which provided an initial set of data. The findings relating to specific research questions were immediately apparent. The early analysis also provided the foundation for further analysis of the data. The next section discusses the findings and emerging themes for each interview question.

Findings Related to Research Questions

Coding resulted in several key findings that addressed the research questions. These key findings were consistently evidenced throughout the study. Because I analyzed the data using Hatch's (2002) typological analysis strategy, I was able to identify categories and data related to each category efficiently for further analysis. I included specific data excerpts associated with my findings in order to hear the unique voices of the participants as they share their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). The key findings were:

1. The participants perceived that they had received contextual support in implementing the social-emotional learning standards through the advisory activities

2. The participants continued to encounter challenges in implementing the social-emotional learning standards through advisory and need ongoing supports to facilitate social-emotional learning

3. The participants perceived changes in their own roles during the implementation process

4. The participants perceived an increased awareness of the value of building student-teacher relationships within advisory and content area classes

Interview question 1. I found that the teachers perceived four broad factors as being valuable in supporting the implementation of the social-emotional learning activities. They were (a) instructional delivery, (b) importance of implementation practices, (c) teachers' philosophy about social-emotional learning, and (d) teachers' motivation.

Instructional delivery and importance of implementation practices. Many participants reported that they did not feel they needed specific support with instructional delivery, and only three provided a specific advisory activity where they described needing support.

Gisselle, Bernice, Eleanor, Henrietta, and Amy in recounting their experiences all stated that the counselors and their colleagues provided support. Gisselle commented that the counselors do an "awesome job" in explaining the activity during the grade-level meetings. These teachers praised the counselors for doing an "awesome job" and

described the support that the counselors provided as being, in Henrietta's words, "invaluable." They also noted that the advisory teachers often get together and talk informally about what went well or did not go well in delivering the social-emotional activity.

Three of the other participants also shared their experiences. Carmela, who teaches 10th Grade, Delores, who teaches 11th Grade, and Francis, who teaches 12th Grade all described specific activities where they felt they needed support.

Carmela described this particular lesson:

One challenge is when the activity is related to credits and tracking their own progress—then it's overwhelming. Sometimes they [students] don't always…they think they may have taken all their classes but some of them find out they failed a class…or they transferred in from another school and they think they have credits but they don't. I try to help them the best I can, but I am limited in the information and I don't always have accurate transcripts.

Delores shared a specific challenging advisory activity. She related that the advisory lesson focused on helping students calculate their GPAs. She clarified that the challenge was not that she did not know how to calculate GPAs, but that she "did not know the students and the particular academic deficiencies they had." She described how students were not aware of how many credits they had earned or what classes they may have failed. Delores said that helping students who were "unaware of their academic progress," and helping them deal with the fact that some of them would have to attend evening or summer school in order to be on track for graduation, was "emotional for them and me." She revealed that she "wished they had had someone who knew them

prior to me to sit down and talk with them in a warm, welcoming, and understanding way about their academic progress."

Francis recounted her experience needing support with a specific lesson:

When I first had to teach the Eagle Social Skills, it was a bit different for me. At first, I felt uncomfortable giving the scripted activity. I felt that I needed more time in introduces those school-wide behavior. Not that I didn't believe in the value of them [Eagle Social Skills] but I felt a little intimidated knowing that I was expected to hold that standard school-wide. So, speaking to other students was intimidating at first but I am glad that I had some time to practice with my advisory students. On paper, it looks great, but it doesn't always work out as planned.

Teachers' perceptions about social-emotional learning. All of the participants in the study stated that they believed in social-emotional learning, and felt that it was beneficial to students. Henrietta explained that she often talks about "the social-emotional learning piece." She described how she and her students talk about knowing the difference between things that they can and cannot control. She pointed out that "students tend to get very emotional…so we talk a lot about how to move forward with the things they can control." Henrietta credits the training she has received in the Social Justice Program in helping her to build relationships with her advisees, develop techniques that can be used to "de-escalate or even prevent a situation from escalating," and for the increase in her awareness of social-emotional learning.

Another participant, Amy, commented on her feelings regarding social-emotional learning. She indicated that because of the advisory sessions, she was able to "develop

positive relationships with my students whether I have them in one of my classes or not." Amy described the social-emotional benefits that the program provides to students. "What I like…is that it helps students resolve conflicts. It teaches them certain social skills that transcend from the classroom into the home—into social settings. That training has been beneficial for me and the students."

During the interview, Delores described that the social-emotional advisory lessons help her know how to "better talk with all of the students;" and that although she teaches a certain subject, sometimes students "need more than just academics." She added that teachers still have to know "how to talk to students" and "how to address certain issues." Delores indicated that the having conversations about social-emotional related issues in the classroom can help her get the students "back into the subject and keep them focused."

Teacher motivation. Most of the teachers in this study indicated that they feel competent in their role as an advisory teacher and in their ability to deliver the activities. Fullan's (2008) assumptions were one conceptual framework of this study, and the findings seem to indicate the teachers are motivated. Fullan asserts that the key to meaningful and successful school reform is to place teachers and students at the core. This requires the alignment of program goals and the essential motivation of the participants according to Fullan, and both motivation and capacity building are essential to implementing any reform. Although all teachers stated the need for more ongoing support, some teachers specifically named the need for the Restorative Justice Program, an alternative program that replaces policies like suspensions and expulsions. The teachers that were interviewed for this study cited the counseling department as a

significant resource, providing clear and specific practices and opportunities for further development.

One theme throughout implementation literature is the need for organizations to build the capacity for effective implementation (Brackett et al., 2012; Fullan, 2008; Hargreaves, 2004). The teachers reported that the counseling department is building the kind of contextual capacities that will lead to more meaningful and effective implementation. Raphael and Burke (2012) concluded in their research on school reform that teachers reported the need for support in order to meet the students' social-emotional needs. The teachers participating in my study perceived the counselors as their major resource in the implementation of the advisory activities—providing the clarity of language and behaviors that support the teachers in the implementation of the advisory activities.

Interview question 2. When asked to describe challenges they have faced or continue to face in implementing the social-emotional learning activities, all of the participants indicated that social-emotional learning was valuable. All participants expressed that building teacher-student relationships was an important factor in implementing the social-emotional learning activities. The participants reported that the concept of advisory classes provided the opportunity in which to foster teacher-student relationships. Through the individual discussions, it was clear that the participants perceived challenges in two areas: (a) the once-a-week 45-minute advisory schedule and (b) student buy-in.

Advisory schedule. Bernice recognized the challenges of the advisory schedule as she related her experience. Although she feels confident in teaching the advisory

activities, she points out that "it [advisory] would be more beneficial if advisory class was more than a once-a-week 45-minute class. If we had a more consistent [advisory] schedule, we might be able to see better results with what we are trying to do through the advisory classes."

Henrietta commented about her experience:

It would be nice to have advisory for 45 minutes at least twice a week…what can we really do with students. It would be nice if students could also work on some type of learning project, where that lesson…those objectives we need to implement can happen over time in an active setting, in a real-world situation."

Eleanor provided a detailed description of her experience:

One of the goals of advisory and this awareness of social-emotional learning is that at the end of the day for students to have a teacher that they interact with. But sometimes since I only see them one a week, it can be challenging. When you only see the students once a week, to get the kind of rapport development needed—that's not a lot of time to develop the relationships with students…just getting to know the students can be challenging. Some teachers have never worked with the advisory students before…we don't have the kind of system where the advisory teachers and students move together to the next grade level.

Both Amy and Giselle shared similar perceptions. Amy stated that she wished she "had more than a once a week advisory class." Giselle added, "Some days it's a challenge just to settle students into the advisory mindset, and by the time that happens, half the period is gone." The teachers perceived the advisory schedule as an on-going challenge within the process.

Student buy-in. Four of the teachers participating in the study felt that student-buy-in was a challenge in implementing the social-emotional learning activities and they were detailed in their accounts. Amy noted that "We are given plans, suggestions all of that, but with advisory these students have a different understanding…it's like their down time…there's nothing to hold them." Delores stated that, "the rapport that you would have is not there as a whole" and she goes on to explain, "What gets accomplished is because I have had a relationship with some of them as previous [classroom] students." Giselle indicated, "Although I can implement the activities, it is a challenge getting the students to think of the lessons as relevant." Francis explained that students do not take advisory seriously, and many of them think that this should be "down time." Another participant, Eleanor, described her experience. "I think advisory has taken this negative association that it is a free period. I feel like sometimes I have these great ideas—but it takes so much some days to get students to get serious."

The other participants indicated difficulty with student buy-in. They all used the phrasing "at the beginning of the year" [however] "things are getting better" to describe this aspect of the implementation process. The teachers perceived the advisory schedule and student buy-in as ongoing challenges in implementing the advisory activities.

Interview question 3. Although six of the participants described no changes in their roles as teachers during the implementation of the advisory social-emotional learning activities, all of them described an increased awareness of the importance of building relationships with not only advisory students, but also with their classroom students. Both Carmela and Bernice reported that they treated the advisory class as another class. Carmela said that she had the "same expectations" for the advisory

students as she does for her content area students. Bernice added that she did not see a difference between how she conducts the advisory class when compared to her regular classes.

Henrietta commented that she finds herself using strategies from her advisory sessions with her classroom students. She described some of the conversations she has with her classroom students that mirror what happens in advisory. She talked about using the same language with her classroom students and challenging them to also "plan what you are going to do today and tomorrow." She reported that she also has discussions with them about what they "can and cannot control." Her advisory and classroom students hear similar language about her real-world personal challenges and she models think aloud strategies of how she comes up with solutions to those problems. She described her feelings toward her students, "I challenge all of my students to find solutions for the situations they are facing…it's important that we send these type of school-wide messages because everyone benefits not just the advisory students."

Amy shared that she does not perceive any changes in her role as a teacher except that her advisory sessions makes her consider "all of my students." She added that teaching the advisory classes "forces" her to ensure that she is providing "a quality and effective lesson to all of my students." She goes on to say that it makes her "want to be a better teacher." She is more "self-reflective" and "more aware" of how she communicates with all of her students. Amy also acknowledged that the advisory lessons that focused on attendance and behavior made her feel "more responsible in modeling those behaviors for all students."

While Eleanor and Francis indicated that their roles have not changed, they also noted that because of the advisory activities, they are increasingly aware of the importance of social-emotional learning for all students. Eleanor reported that having advisory class has "heightened my awareness of the need for social-emotional learning for all of content area students." Francis disclosed that it is "almost impossible to teach the content without building relationships with students." She added that the advisory activities develop skills that are "necessary for the success of all students whether they are in school or other real-world settings." Both teachers felt a responsibility to support the advisory activities on a school-wide basis.

In contrast to Henrietta and Amy, two of the other teachers described what they considered negative shifts in their practice directly connected to their teaching in the advisories. Delores expressed that she sometimes felt "a bit overwhelmed" and "unprepared" to deliver the advisory activity. She further elaborated that it was not because of the materials or a lack of support from the counselors, but that she does not always "have the time to prepare" for the advisory class. Another teacher, Giselle, described feeling more "stressful" due to the implementation process. Giselle reported that although she sees the value in implementing social-emotional activities, there are times she perceived advisory classes as an "additional preparation."

The descriptions that most of the participants provided during the interviews indicated that they did perceive changes in their roles as teachers. Surprisingly, the data showed that teachers found the social-emotional skills development activities not only important for their advisory students but for their classroom students as well. Even those

teachers who felt some uncomfortable shifting in their practice, still acknowledged the value of social-emotional learning for all students.

Interview question 4. There did appear to be a relationship between the years of teaching experience and the teachers' confidence in their ability to provide instruction on social-emotional learning (see Table 1). The one exception was Henrietta, who has three years of teaching experience, but expressed that "not being familiar with the advisory lesson topic" and "not having enough planning time" as factors that influenced her confidence and ability to provide instruction on social-emotional learning. She added that although the counselors and grade level meetings are valuable resources, sometimes she receives the advisory packet "right before advisory." She went on to describe that she does not always have adequate time to "really deep dive into the objective" and that her competence level has a lot to do with "the time that I need to plan or just think about what that lesson is going to be that day." Similarly, Amy, who also has three years of teaching experience, shared her story on her ability to provide instruction. She reported that she still "has challenges" but she feels "more confident now than at the beginning of the year." Giselle, who has four years of experience as a teacher, responded that she felt competent in her ability to deliver social-emotional lessons. However, she perceived the lack of student buy-in as a factor in her ability to deliver the advisory lessons. The other participants with eight or more years of experience described feeling competent in their capacity to deliver the advisory lessons, but they also specified factors that did negatively influence teaching the lessons. Eleanor commented that she felt competent in providing the instruction but the challenge that she faces is "student buy-in." Delores revealed that she feels competent in delivering the advisory lessons and that it is her need for

"perfection" that influences her confidence. She admitted that she "thinks too much" and that she needed to "relax and go with the flow." Francis (12 years), Carmella (10 years), and Bernice (10 years) all used exactly the same language to describe their feelings about delivering social-emotional learning lessons. They described feeling "very confident" in teaching the advisory lessons.

Discrepant Cases and Nonconforming Data

There were slight discrepancies in the data when teachers were asked about perceived changes in their roles as teachers. Six teachers reported no changes in their roles as teachers. However, two teachers described some variance in their roles during the implementation process.

The two teachers who felt that their roles had shifted in a negative direction were Delores and Giselle. When I asked Delores what changes she perceived in her role as a teacher during implementation, she stated that she "sometimes feels overwhelmed and unprepared." She was quick to add, however, that the cause of these feelings was her need for perfection. Likewise, Giselle described that "sometimes" she feels she has an "additional preparation" when it comes to advisory classes.

Outlying Responses

The central focus of this study was to evaluate the perceptions of teachers implementing the state's social-emotional learning standards through advisory lessons and activities. All participants perceived feeling support during the implementation process, with the greatest resource being the counseling department. The participants all described student buy-in and the advisory schedule as challenges they experienced and continue to experience. There were slight differences in the teachers' perceptions of changes in their roles during

implementation, as well as in their competency in delivering the social-emotional lessons and activities. However, there were no truly outlying responses.

Evidence of Quality

To ensure quality throughout the study, I audiotaped and recorded notes about my own perceptions before, during, and after each interview to check for any biases I may have had while conducting the interviews. I also used transcript verification, member checking, and thick, rich descriptions of the teachers' experiences implementing social-emotional learning activities (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). To ensure quality, I carefully read my notes and then compared them to the transcribed audiotaped interviews. In order to ensure member checking and validation of my findings, I invited each participant to verify that her transcript was accurate (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). Six of the participants accepted transcripts as written, while two of the participants wanted to make changes for clarification to their transcripts. Finally, in writing this document, I selected the rich descriptions provided by the participants about their perceptions about implementing the social-emotional learning activities whenever possible throughout the study.

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Summary

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This section discussed the process of data collection, the methods of quality control, as well as the findings and themes related to the research question. Participants reflected on their perceptions about implementing social-emotional learning activities within their advisories. The study found that participants perceived contextual support in implementing the social-emotional learning standards through the advisory activities. However, the participants continue to encounter challenges in implementing the social-

emotional learning standards through advisory. Additionally, I also found that the participants needed ongoing supports to facilitate social-emotional learning.

The teachers all reported that there was value in social-emotional learning. Several teachers stated that social-emotional learning was not only important in the school setting, but also beneficial in the work place and the students' daily lives.

One of the more surprising findings was that most of the participants perceived what they considered positive changes in their own roles during the implementation process. Additionally, teaching experience did seem to influence competency in teachers delivering the social-emotional lessons or activities. All of the participants perceived an increased awareness of the value of building student-teacher relationships within their advisory and content area classes. In Section 5, I will provide a summary and interpretation of my findings, and suggest the implementations for social change. Additionally, I will recommend specific actions and further study, and then reflect upon my experience in conducting this study.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview

The list of issues facing today's educators and students is daunting. However, genuinely effective schools are finding that there is a link between social-emotional competence and academic achievement (Durlak, Weissberg, Taylor, Dymnicki, & Schellinger, 2008). Findings from a Midwestern state's exploration of children's mental health became the catalyst that led to the adoption of the Children's Mental Health Act. The Children's Mental Health Act is nationally recognized for leading the way for school improvement and student success.

Among the key stipulations was the mandate that the State Board of Education develop standards for social-emotional learning to strengthen school-based practices that will enhance and measure students' school readiness and academic success. Standards were developed and educators in the Midwest have a foundation that guides and supports them as they address the social, emotional, and academic growth of students throughout the state (CASEL, 2006). However, for significant change in social and emotional learning of students to take place, the standards have to be implemented effectively. With an increased attention on SEL curricula in schools, it is critical to consider teacher feedback about implementation of these programs (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009; Fixen, 2005).

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive interview study was to explore teachers' perceptions about implementing the state's social-emotional learning standards through activities in the advisory classes of one school. The study provides

insights into the teachers' experiences about factors affecting their implementation of the social-emotional learning standards through school-wide activities.

In order to explore the teachers' perceptions about implementing the social-emotional learning standards, I used a qualitative description study design, using only interviews as a means of eliciting responses regarding students' perception about implementing the social-emotional learning standards. To do so, I engaged the participation of eight high school teachers who implement the SEL standards in their advisory classes, asking open-ended   questions to generate data to answer the research questions.

Interpretations of the Findings

In this section, I summarized and interpreted the study's findings using the participants' perceptions, as they relate to the research question and to the conceptual framework of the study. Then, I reviewed the findings and made my conclusions.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were: "What are teachers' perceptions regarding the supports and challenges they have encountered and continue to encounter in the process of implementing the state Social-Emotional Learning Standards?" and "What, if any, changes do they perceive in their own roles during the implementation process?"

As I interviewed participants, my primary concern was the expressed effects of the implementation process on each participant, and how the experience affected her capacity to implement the social-emotional learning standards activity. I listened

actively as participants spoke, emphasized, and expressed their experiences with implementing the social-emotional learning standards activities in their advisories.

In answering the research questions, I found that all participants reported that there was contextual support in implementing the social-emotional learning standards through the advisory activities in one school. Additionally, they indicated an increased awareness of the value of building student-teacher relationships within advisory and content area classes. Participants stated that they continue to encounter challenges in implementing the activities through advisories, and need ongoing supports to facilitate social-emotional learning. Lastly, most of the participants reported that they did perceive role changes while implementing the social-emotional learning standards.

Implementation Support

All of the participants cited the counselors as the most significant contextual support. The participants used similar phrases to describe the counselors' support such as, "awesome job," "great job, and "a fantastic job." Participants expressed their satisfaction, with great appreciation, as did Gisselle who described herself as "more confident" in delivering the activities because the counselors had provided the lessons and the opportunity for teachers to review the lessons and ask questions before introducing the activities to the students. Amy reported that the counselors "lay out the focus of the lesson and recommendations of how to implement it." The participants also reported that they received support from their colleagues. Henrietta expressed that anytime she needed support, she has "always been able to go to my colleagues." Gisselle stated that the grade level meetings and additional feedback and tips from colleagues were "invaluable." Some participants stated that the teachers

often met informally to discuss and get feedback on teaching the activities. Throughout the interview discussions, it was clear that the participants perceived the counselors and their colleagues as the primary support in the implementation process.

Challenges

Although the participants reported contextual support from the counselors, they described challenges in implementing the social-emotional learning lessons in their advisories. All of the participants indicated that social-emotional learning was valuable in their interviews when asked to describe challenges they face. In addition, they all reported that there are benefits in building teacher-student relationships, and that their advisory classes did provide an opportunity for them to build those relationships. However, through the individual interviews, the participants consistently reported the weekly advisory schedule and student buy-in as the two challenges they face.

In describing her challenges with the once-a-week 45-minute advisory schedule, Bernice stated that advisory would be more "beneficial" if the class met more than once a week and that they might get "better results" with the program. Amy indicated that sometimes she does not get through the lesson and that "we have to keep it moving with something new next week." All of the participants expressed the need for more than one advisory class session a week, and indicated their feelings that advisory would be more beneficial to the teachers and students.

To describe student buy-in, various participants used words such as "challenging, hard, and difficult," as did Giselle, who described her experience as "challenging and not easy." Francis explained, "it's hard trying to teach the lessons

because the students believe that advisory is down time." Henrietta reported, "it is difficult some days to get the students to get serious." Other participants indicated that student buy-in was a challenge, but they used similar phrasing to describe their experience such as "at the beginning of the year" or "things are getting better." Although some participants reported making progress with student buy-in, all stated that student buy-in is, and continues to be, a challenge in implementing the social-emotional activity.

Role Changes

Although six participants described no change in their teaching roles during the implementation of the social-emotional learning activities, all of them reported positive shifts in their awareness of the importance of building teacher-student relationships within the advisories and content area classrooms. Participants credited the concept of advisories as "providing an opportunity in which to build positive teacher-student relationships," as did Amy, who expressed the thoughts of many participants as she indicated that without advisories, it would be "difficult" to build relationships with all of the students. Advisories offer an opportunity for the teachers to focus on and build relationships that are more meaningful. With each advisory, the teachers build personal relationships with a target group of students. Teachers are accountable for building personal relationships with their advisees, because it is a place for all students to have at least one adult that he or she can build a safe and caring relationship. Amy explained that although she was accountable to her advisees, the advisory activities have improved her sensitivity to building improved teacher-student relationships with all of her students.

In contrast to the six participants, two of the other participants described what they considered negative shifts in their practice directly linked to handling an advisory class. Delores reported feeling "overwhelmed" and "unprepared" to teach the lesson. She elaborated that she had materials and support, but that she "did not have the personal time to prepare" for the advisory class. One participant, Giselle, described feeling "stressed" during the implementation process. Giselle indicated that she understands the value of implementing social-emotional learning activities, but she describes teaching advisory as "an additional preparation." The descriptions that most of the participants provided during the interviews reveal that they did perceive changes in their roles as teachers. Even those participants who felt some contrary shifting in their practice, still acknowledged the value of social-emotional learning. The participants reported the importance of the social-emotional learning skills not only for their advisees, but also for all students.

<div align="center">**Analysis**</div>

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks underlying this study are Fullan's (2008) secrets of change theory and social-emotional learning. Fullan asserted that: (a) teachers must be motivated to implement a mandate, an initiative, or an innovation, (b) teachers need specific and clearly defined behaviors and practices, and (c) teachers need ongoing supports to facilitate social-emotional learning. He advocates that being mindful of school organization is essential in order for initiatives to have a greater capacity for successful implementation resulting in deep and lasting change (Fullan, 1991). During the analysis, I searched through the emerging themes for perceptions of motivation,

specific and clearly defined behaviors and practices, and ongoing supports in implementing the social-emotional learning activities. Analysis of participants' transcripts indicated compelling data in favor of Fullan's theory. Two interrelated themes emerged from the data: support and motivation.

First, all participants indicated that they experienced significant contextual support. Specifically, they felt significant and ongoing support from the counselors. The participants also felt support from one another, and many of them described informal meetings and impromptu conversations around the social-emotional activities they taught. The participants also reported the need for ongoing professional development with all the social-emotional programs and activities currently in place.

Another aspect of support that participants perceived was clearly defined expectations and practices. The interviewees describe their appreciation for the counselors for creating the materials for the advisory lessons, providing an opportunity to get clarity on the lesson before teaching it, and having the grade level meetings where they can continue the conversation and receive further clarity as needed. All of the participants reported that lessons were clearly written, and the counselors planned weekly meetings with teachers to review the objectives and how best to teach the activity.

Social-Emotional Learning

The ever-increasing body of evaluation literature shows links between social-emotional learning programs and improved outcomes in a wide range of areas that include teacher social and emotional competence, improved student behavior, and increases in student academic achievement. Findings from Bierman and collaborating researchers' Head Start Impact Study (2008), which examined the impact of the Head

Start Research-based Developmentally Informed intervention, revealed that from the teachers' perspectives, the social-emotional programming was being implemented successfully. The teachers in this study cited well developed lessons/activities, along with mentoring in implementing the lessons/activities and grade level meetings that helped to enhance their capacity to implement the social-emotional learning curriculum. Much of the research suggests that there are effective implementation practices and strategies. Three best practices implementation strategies recommend: (a) choosing a research-based specific and scripted curricula that provides teachers specific strategies, (b) providing teachers a scope and sequence of skills that reduce teacher preparation time, and (c) mentoring and coaching.

During the analysis, I examined the emerging themes, looking for perceptions of the three best practice strategies. Findings from this study concur that these best practice strategies are being used as part of the social-emotional learning implementation strategies. All of the participants reported the significant support from the counseling department in providing the lessons and activities, grade level meetings to discuss the objectives and how best to implement the lesson, and receiving mentoring and coaching.

These discoveries are of critical importance to the research questions, in order to inform stakeholders and to guide ongoing review of the factors that will support school-wide efforts in social-emotional implementation. The participants described their experiences with the implementation process, and identified areas in which this campus can create plans and activities to advance the implementation process. I concluded, based on Fullan's (2008) assertions and the research on best practices for implementing social-emotional programming,

that the school's implementation plan includes an effective method for supporting participants in implementing the lesson and activities. Additionally, the participants reported social-emotional learning and programming as valuable school-wide practices.

Implications for Social Change

Prior to this study, the literature contained minimal information about teachers' perceptions of implementing the state's social-emotional learning standards through programs and activities delivered in advisories. This study adds to the growing research on social-emotional program implementation, as well as on how it can effect social change. Social change involves a process of purposefully creating and applying ideas, strategies, and explicit actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, cultures, organizations, and other entities (Walden University, 2009).

As proposed in Section 1, and in accordance with Walden's mission for social change, this study explored teachers at one high school who are implementing the state's social-emotional learning standards through advisory lessons and activities. These social-emotional learning standards, if implemented with fidelity, can promote the development of the teachers, students, parents, and community.

Firstly, the findings indicate that this study may contribute to social change by promoting "development of individuals," specifically, the development of teachers and educators at this high school and at sister schools in the community that are implementing the social-emotional learning standards. I believe that social change will occur; as teachers' voices are recognized and local evaluation and future planning are based on the feedback of those intimately involved in the process. Having this

type of data from teachers is useful in the planning and execution of implementation strategies. Feedback about advisory schedules, lessons, delivery of instruction, and program outcomes all inform implementation procedures. I believe that social change can occur when teachers share their stories of the implementation process, providing others with lessons learned that would bring more clarity to the said process.

Secondly, this study may affect social change by "promoting the worth, dignity, and development of organizations." An extensive body of research supports the broad array of academic and behavioral benefits of social-emotional learning for students when schools successfully implement social-emotional learning programs. All of the participants in this study cited the counselors as a key factor in the implementation process. I believe that school leaders who read this study will consider the value of the teachers' voices as an important factor in shaping and refining any implementation initiatives, and those leaders will consider the value of administrative support as an essential factor in implementation endeavors. Social-emotional learning initiatives that are implemented with fidelity can bring about real and lasting changes—changes that are linked to the academic and personal success of students. The problem addressed in this study was the efficacy of the implementation process. This study, like others (Bierman et al., 2008; Raphael & Burk, 2012), indicated that social change can occur when social-emotional programming is effectively implemented and program evaluations indicate that students are mastering social-emotional competencies.

Recommendations for Action

One reason for conducting this study was to identify teachers' perspectives on implementing social-emotional learning programming. To achieve the goal of implementing social-emotional programming, teachers need ongoing supports, clearly defined practices and skills, research-based scripted curriculum, policies that foster intrinsic motivation, and methods that will build capacities to accomplish the reform (Fullan, 2008).

This study evaluated teachers' perspectives about implementing social-emotional learning standards in the advisories and what, if any, their roles during the implementation process. The findings indicated that all participants found the concept of social-emotional learning significantly valuable for students, and believed that the concept of advisories is beneficial in building teacher-student relationships. The findings confirm that although the teachers believed there was significant support from the counselors, they continue to encounter challenges with specific aspects of the implementation process. The findings of this study can inform school leaders and teachers so they can transform their current practices into strategic actions. Fullan (2011) cautioned that the transfer of feedback into action can only happen where there is a culture of learning. Relentless pursuit of capacity building and a culture where everyone is part of the solution are key components in effectively implementing school initiatives that are focused on closing the achievement gap and improving the quality of lives for all students.

After receiving notification of completion of this study from Walden University, I will first disseminate the findings of the study to the Board of Education

Research Department, which is the protocol prior to sharing findings with other entities. Additionally, I will present my findings to the administration and teachers at the study site during an arranged staff meeting. I will then disseminate copies of the findings to all participants of the study and to area public and charter schools, universities, and alternative education networks. Finally, I will disseminate copies of the findings to CASEL, an organization that provides extensive training, resources, and evaluation of the district's implementation of the social-emotional learning standards.

On a personal level, as an additional career goal, I will use the knowledge and practice that I gained during this research study to design and facilitate professional development and workshops that will enhance implementation initiatives and reforms. To accomplish this goal, I will submit a prospectus to the Board of Education and to area charter schools and colleges, thus encouraging them to offer these strategies as part of the continuing professional development and workshops offerings by the school district.

Recommendations for Further Study

The findings of this study describe the experiences of eight advisory teachers at a local high school in the Midwestern United States, who are implementing a social-emotional learning program that incorporates the state's social-emotional learning standards. Although only a small sample of the population was involved, the findings revealed several factors that can guide the school in making strides in its social-emotional learning implementation. Although I believe a larger sample would reveal similar

effects, I recommend further studies with a larger sample of participants including participants from multiple local schools.

Reflection

During this study, I was a member of a team of teachers that successfully planned and opened a small high school within the district. All of the urban small high schools were commissioned to create an advisory program for the students that would include the state's social-emotional learning standards. I was asked to coordinate and develop the advisory program for our campus.

As an urban educator, I am acutely aware of the social-emotional needs of many of the students that we serve. I was excited that the state realized the connection between academic performance and social-emotional learning. Having academic and social-emotional learning standards equally valued set the standard that led to other states developing and implementing social-emotional learning as part of the curriculum.

I was passionate about the opportunity to coordinate the development of the advisory program. I was also confident that with the support of our external partner, our team would be able to develop and implement this program. During the first year of the program implementation, I observed a clear level of frustration about the advisory program from the teachers. Some of the frustration I heard centered on the roles and responsibilities of the advisory teachers, feeling incompetent in developing relationships with the students and in delivering the advisory activities. I was also feeling frustrated about the process, and I had limited knowledge of research-based best practices in implementation.

My passion for improving the implementation of the social-emotional learning program continued to grow especially after my enrollment at Walden University. Being immersed in the social-emotional learning and implementation research, especially Fullan's theory on best practices for implementation, was a major influence in improving my interactions with the teachers in implementing the advisory program. My experience at Walden has been invaluable and has changed my perspective as an educator. It is quite amazing to reflect on my personal development, and the new skills set I have learned as part of this journey. I have developed a deeper respect for the research process; and I have learned to interpret quantitative and qualitative data, which has helped to improve my instruction in the classroom. I have also deepened my own personal strength, perseverance, persistence, and discipline in order to complete this doctoral program.

As I reflect on the experience of completing this research study, I recall my initial concerns regarding my position as a former teacher in the district, as well as my personal biases as they relate to my perception of implementing the social-emotional learning standards program. To prevent any possibility of polluting the data and findings with my personal biases, and to ensure accuracy, I kept a journal and disclosed my concerns to all participants. Additionally, I utilized transcript verification as well as member checking as strategies for accurate reporting of the findings. Lastly, I utilized the participants' personal voices to provide rich, deep descriptions of their experiences and their individual perspectives.

As an educator, I have had previous experience with implementing various school initiatives, and I have heard teachers express their frustrations regarding the

implementation process. As such, I began the study, cognizant that participants might have negative, neutral, or positive/supportive responses to the research questions. Based on the participants' responses, I discovered that the teachers perceived an "increased awareness" of the value in social- emotional learning along with building teacher-student relationships in advisories, and I was surprised that the teachers reported what they considered positive changes in their roles during the implementation process.

Although the teachers perceived the counselors as the most significant support in the implementation process, they reported that they needed ongoing supports. They reported that they continue to encounter challenges in implementing the social-emotional learning standards in advisories.

In reflecting on how my life has forever changed from having gone through this experience, I think of my motivation for becoming a doctoral candidate. Not only the students my workplace, but also all of the students in our nation's classrooms were motivating me to seek more knowledge. Because of this amazing journey, I found myself being more insightful in my role as an educator, and I have developed an increased awareness of building authentic relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and other stakeholders. The pathway to completing this program began at Walden University, and I am especially grateful to Dr. Carol Philips, my chairperson, who guided me through every milestone. I feel equipped to apply these new skills, and I am ready to contribute what I have learned as the state continues to work of ensuring that all students master the social-emotional learning standards throughout the district.

Conclusion

This study explored teachers' perceptions about implementing the state's social-emotional learning standards through activities in the advisory classes and what, if any, changes they perceived in their own roles during the implementation process. I used a qualitative descriptive interview study and interviewed eight advisory teachers to discover their perceptions about implementing social-emotional learning activities and lessons in the advisory classes. This study adds to the body of literature suggesting that for social-emotional learning to take place in our schools, coordinated strategies for implementation and sustainability factors must be a part of the model.

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Appendix A: Introduction E-mail

Dear City High School Faculty,

Hello, my name is Sheila Youngblood and I am a doctoral student at Best University. I am conducting a research study entitled "Teachers' Perspectives: Implementing Social-Emotional Learning Standards Through School-wide Programming." If you are a 9-12 classroom teacher implementing the Social-emotional Standards, I would like to invite you to be part of my study. Please take a minute and review the attached consent form, which explains my study in more detail. If you decide you would like to volunteer to participate in my study, please sign the attached consent form and complete the attached demographic questionnaire and send them to me at sheila.youngblood@waldenu.edu or sheila-youngblood@sbcglobal.net and if you have any questions please contact me at (773) 471-1770.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sheila Youngblood

Doctoral Candidate

Walden University

Appendix B: Consent Form

Your name will not be used in this study, however please sign this form as a record that you volunteer to participate in the study. This form will be locked in the researcher's safe for five years. Please read the information below. Your completion of this consent form indicates your agreement to the terms below. If you do not wish to participate, please discard this page.

You are invited to take part in a research study on implementing social-emotional standards. This study seeks to discover teachers' perceptions of the social-emotional standards implementation process. You were invited to participate in this study because you are implementing the state Social-Emotional Learning Standards through school-wide programming. Your participation in this study will help understand teachers' perspectives of the implementation process. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be part of the study.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Sheila Youngblood, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. The researcher is an English teacher at a K-11 School, in Indiana. She has been an English teacher for the past 15 years.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to discover teachers' experiences with implementing the state Social-Emotional Learning Standards through school-wide programming. Participants' descriptions of the implementation process will help the researcher propose ways to improve implementing the social-emotional standards through a school-wide program.

Procedures:

If you would like to volunteer to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Sign the consent form

- Complete a demographic questionnaire

- Participants will also be asked to:

- Complete a 60 minute audio recorded interview concerning your experiences with implementing the social-emotional standards.

- Complete a 60 minute audio recorded follow-up interview to:

review the data and give feedback on what parts of the interview transcript were inaccurate

- Further explain your experiences with implementing the social-emotional standards to clarify the findings

- Review an e-mail attached interview transcript for accuracy

    Verify the finding of the interview by e-mail member-checking

Duration of the Study:

The study will begin in

The researcher may collect data until

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later and you may stop at any time without consequences. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no direct benefits to you from being in this study. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in this study.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

All information you provide will be kept confidential and locked in the researcher's file cabinet and password protected computers. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, your name or anything else that could identify you will not be included in any reports of the study. After five years, all of the information you provided the researcher will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Sheila Youngblood. The researcher's faculty chair is Dr. Carol Philips. You may ask any questions you have now or later by contacting the researcher at (773) 555-5555 and/or sheila.youngblood@waldenu.edu or the chair at _____and/or carol.philips@waldenu.edu.

The researcher encourages you to print a copy of this form to keep and to use if you need to contact her

with any questions or concerns.

Thank you.

Researcher's Written or Electronic Signature

sheila.youngblood@waldenu.edu

If you would like to volunteer to be part of this study please:

1. Type your name and e-mail address below to indicate your consent to participate

2. Save this form as your first and last initial

3. Send this form with your signature as an attachment to sheila.youngblood@waldenu.edu.

Name:

E-mail address:

Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: Please read the consent form. After reading the consent form, if you would like to volunteer to participate in the study "Teachers' Perspectives: Implementing Social-emotional Standards," please answer the questions, save your responses, and send your responses as an e-mail attachment to sheila.youngblood@waldenu.edu. If you need any help completing the questionnaire, please contact me at (773) 555-5555.

I, the researcher, will keep your personal information locked in my file cabinet, and password protected computer, and your personal information will not be shared with anyone. No real names will be used in my study.

If you are invited to be a participant in this study, and you accept, you will be asked to complete two 60-minute interviews about your experiences with implementing the state Social-emotional Standards through school-wide programming.

Demographic Questionnaire

Directions: Please type and save your responses as DQ and your first initial and last initial (For example John Doe would save his responses as DQJD) and attach to an email to sheila.youngblood@waldenu.edu

1. Name

2. Gender

3. Preferred telephone number

4. Preferred time to call

5. Grade level(s) taught

6. Subject area(s) taught

7. Total years of experience teaching

8. Total years of experience involved in implementing the social-emotional standards through school-wide programming

9. Please briefly describe your school's position in regards to the importance of implementing the state Social-Emotional Learning Standards and what, if any relationship those standards have in improving student academic achievement

10. Other information (optional)

Appendix D: Interview Guide

<u>Main Research Questions</u>

1. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the supports and challenges they have

   encountered and continue to encounter in the process of implementing the state

   Social-emotional standards?

2. What, if any, changes do teachers perceive in their own roles during the

   implementation process?

<u>Interview Checklist</u>

- Ask the participant if he or she has any questions about the study or about me.

- Ask the participant if he or she would still like to volunteer to be part of the study.

- Remind the participant that the interview will take approximately 60 minutes and

  ask the participant if this is a good time to conduct the interview.

- Remind the participant that he or she may stop the interview at any time or

  withdraw from the study without consequence.

- Remind the participant that he or she may skip any questions that are too

  personal.

- Ask participant if he or she would like to choose a pseudonym before we begin

  the study.