Teachers’ Perceptions and Practices Regarding Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies

by

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We accept the Thesis as conforming to the required standard.

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Abstract

As many as 20% of students suffer from anxiety in educational settings. When social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies are well understood by teachers and taught effectively, these competencies are internalized and used by students to reduce their levels of anxiety. In order for teachers to teach these competencies most effectively, it is important to learn and acknowledge what their personal attitudes and beliefs are regarding SEL, as well as their perceptions of the use of SEL programs in the classroom, their confidence in teaching SEL programs, and the feasibility of SEL programs. Yukon teachers who participated in this survey were asked to provide information surrounding factors that could support continual implementation of an SEL program, as it is critical to understand what motivates teachers to continue using a program. The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations that can create a culture of supporting and promoting teaching of SEL competencies to lower student anxiety.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the Study

Researchers have found that as many as 20% of students suffer from anxiety in educational settings (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001; Mychailyszyn et al., 2011). When social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies are understood by teachers and taught effectively (Gueldner & Feuerborn, 2016), these strategies are internalized and used by students to reduce their levels of anxiety (Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, Weissberg, & Schellinger, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to learn what Yukon teachers’ perceptions about SEL and SEL competencies are, as well as their ideas surrounding practices being used to teach said competencies. With these results, I hope to be able to make recommendations to support teachers to develop their learners’ SEL competencies. The overarching goal of the study is to help to reduce student anxiety in schools by gaining an understanding of teachers’ beliefs and practices around SEL.

Justification of the Study

SEL refers to the process of developing a competency skill set which focuses on emotions, self- and social-awareness, self-management, and relationship building (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2012). This creates the foundation on which we are able to teach the whole child, rather than focusing on academic intelligence (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Buchanan et al., 2009; CASEL, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011).

SEL competencies are skills that are necessary for building positive relationships, improving academic performance, and reducing the risk of mental health difficulties such as anxiety (Blum & Libbey, 2004, as cited in Durlak et al., 2011; CASEL, 2012; Gubi &
Bocanegra, 2015). These fundamental skills support growth in the areas of recognizing and understanding emotions, feeling empathy, creating and sustaining positive relationships, as well as making positive decisions (CASEL, 2012).

Research shows that effective SEL programs directly improve students’ social and emotional learning competencies (Durlak et al., 2011; Schonert-Reichl, Hanson-Peterson, & Hymel, 2015) as well as their mental health (Cook et al., 2015), with long-term results (CASEL, 2012). With this understanding, it is the responsibility of educators to ensure the most effective evidence-based practices are being used to teach SEL competencies (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Evidence of teachers’ perceptions of social and emotional learning (SEL). Teachers’ beliefs and attitudes regarding SEL directly impact the effectiveness of teaching the competencies, regardless of the program used (Brackett et al., 2012; Buchanan et al., 2009). Buchanan et al. (2009) add that if there is a negative belief or attitude set, there will likely be resentment and rejection of SEL philosophies and practices.

According to studies (Brackett et al., 2012; Buchanan et al., 2009), teachers believe that SEL programming is a valuable component of education, and it should be taught in the classroom by the classroom teacher. Buchanan et al.’s (2009) research also indicates that teachers do not feel as though they have adequate knowledge surrounding SEL and its competencies. Brackett et al. (2012) add that teachers are affected by their beliefs regarding the school culture’s support of SEL programming. It should be noted that teacher burnout was expressed to be a significant barrier to SEL program implementation (Brackett et al., 2012).
SEL in British Columbia (BC) curriculum. Buchanan et al. (2009) spoke to the fact that SEL curricula is being integrated throughout curriculum in different states and the same can be said for BC/Yukon curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.)

There are relevant SEL links in several subject areas (e.g. Social Studies, Physical and Health Education) throughout all of the grades in the newly redesigned BC/Yukon curriculum. The expectation is that SEL is to be integrated into virtually everything that we teach, yet it is clear that teachers do not always know enough to teach the competencies, don’t feel they have enough time to teach them, or they don’t feel supported by their schools to do so.

Research Question and Hypothesis

What are the perceptions of Yukon teachers regarding social and emotional learning competencies and practices to teach them?

Given the evidence in the literature, I believe that there are inconsistent, and potentially inaccurate perceptions, among Yukon teachers regarding SEL competencies (Butler, Schnellert, & Perry, 2017) and practices to teach them. This leads to inconsistent implementation of various programs, that may not be beneficial to all children. By learning what teachers believe and are willing to receive as support or guidance, Yukon Education can tailor professional development specifically toward those who need and want it most, by the most reasonable method of delivery, ensuring all teachers feel confident and comfortable to teach these critical skills.

Definition of Terms

The key terms used throughout this research study are ‘social and emotional learning’, ‘SEL competencies’, ‘anxiety’, ‘perceptions’, and ‘practices to teach them’. The definitions used for the purpose of this paper are identified in the following paragraphs.
Social and emotional learning: Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as a system through which students gain knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to effectively understand and manage emotions and relationships with self and others, demonstrate empathy, and set and achieve goals (CASEL, 2012; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). This definition can also be assigned to a number of other terms that have been used throughout the research to refer to this same set of concepts, including emotional intelligence (EI), social intelligence (SI), social-emotional intelligence (SEI), and emotional quotient (EQ). This term was initially introduced to deal with mental health needs of children and the schools’ reactions to such issues (Buchanan et al., 2009)

SEL competencies: SEL competencies include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2012).

Anxiety: Anxiety is an emotion characterized by overwhelming feelings of worry or apprehension in response to a perceived threat. The anxiety reaction is directly related to the perceived level of threat and the person’s inherent belief regarding their ability to cope with such a threat. This feeling can result in physical changes such as increased blood pressure, dizziness, tension, and sweating that can resolve quickly or last for minutes, hours, or even days (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.).

Perceptions: Refer to the participants’ personal ideologies regarding a topic, these can be based on their understandings from personal experiences, education, biases, or beliefs. This data was gathered via survey questions such as question 3, “do you think it is important for students to have social emotional skills to be successful in school and life” and question 4 “do you think social emotional learning enhances academic outcomes?”. In addition, participants were provided opportunities to add their own ideas to a number of questions by choosing ‘other’.
Practices to teach them: Refer to the ways in which programs are delivered, or not, within classrooms or schools, and by whom they are taught within the educational setting. Participants provided information regarding this topic by answering questions 6 through 10, which were related to program implementation in their class, school, and by whom. This was also addressed in questions relating to feasibility of program implementation and allocation of preparation time towards program implementation.

Context

I am a grade 6/7 teacher in a small (170 student) K-7 school in Whitehorse, Yukon. There are 28 public schools in Yukon. This includes ten elementary schools, three high schools, one alternate school, and one French First Language school in Whitehorse. Rural areas consist of K-9 and K-12 schools. Yukon Education has approximately 750 teachers servicing about 5300 students.

Researcher Background

I am in my fifth year of teaching in an elementary setting. My educational background is in Educational Psychology, but my personal passion lies specifically in the area of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and anxiety. I was a student who suffered from anxiety throughout my life, and my academic career has been affected and influenced by this significantly. I have always suffered from anxiety, though it went undiagnosed for most of my life. As a child, I lived as though I had two different lives, my school life and my home life; they were as different as two lives could be.

I struggled greatly with emotional regulation at home. I was reactive and had no coping strategies; these were things that were not taught at school, we focused solely on academics, which allowed me to focus solely on academics - they were easy. Throughout my childhood, my
parents had me see numerous professionals, all of whom had different diagnoses, none of which accurately described me as a person. I was highly motivated, goal-oriented, athletic, but incapable of reacting to social or emotional situations with any level of proportion.

As I reached adolescence, things became worse, I dealt with substance abuse to cope and behaved in ways that caused great stress for those around me. I will always remember the moment that led me to where I am today: grade ten math class. Because of my anxiety (which I did not know was anxiety at the time), I was unable to attend the first couple days of school - it was too difficult to navigate my own stress and feelings of being overwhelmed, while absorbing the feelings from those around me as well - so I did not attend until Wednesday, instead of Monday. Math was the first class of the day. When I showed up, I had not even made it to a desk when I was pointedly told that if I continued to have poor attendance and missed class on Fridays, I would fail the course because tests are done on Fridays. That was enough to make me turn around, walk to the principal’s office and quit school. I could not believe that I could be told within my first moments in the class that if I did not attend on certain days, I would fail - she did not even know my situation or my academic ability. Even worse, she did not care.

Obviously, I eventually graduated and headed off to start my Psychology education career, though I soon found myself in a situation in which I could not continue that route. I had learned enough that year though to know there was something going on. I was told on day one of the Psychology (Psych.) course to not do what every first time Psych. student does and diagnose myself with everything in the book, but I could not bring myself away from reading the personality disorders over and over again. I knew there was a connection, though I did not think it was anxiety at that time, I thought it was manic depression.
It was not until after I had my daughter that I was diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and even later, when I moved to a University with a psychologist that I learned the complexity: Social Anxiety Disorder. It was very clear that this was the demon I had been fighting my entire life.

Once I became a teacher I was naturally advocating for students’ personal and mental well-being over their academic achievement. I realized that I could not teach if they were not emotionally available, although it was a battle because I was often reminded by colleagues of the pressures for teachers to focus their attention on getting through the content. This did not sit well with me, so I focused my language arts instruction around a term I heard while in university: Social and Emotional Learning. This was the most important thing I think I have done as a teacher. As it turns out, the newly redesigned British Columbia curriculum fully integrates SEL competencies throughout the curriculum; full integration means that we as educators have a responsibility to focus on these skills in all aspects of students’ learning.

Overview of the Study

I conducted this mixed-methods survey, adapted from Buchanan et al. (2009), to learn what Yukon teachers’ perceptions about SEL are, as well as their understandings surrounding current practices being used to teach SEL competencies. The survey was completed by ninety-six anonymous teachers from both rural and urban elementary and high schools in Yukon. If SEL competencies are not being taught effectively, or at all, educators are not using empirically supported evidence to assist students with mental health challenges.

The research question I investigated was: What are the perceptions of Yukon teachers regarding social and emotional learning competencies and practices to teach them? Ultimately, the goal of this study was to determine what Yukon teachers believe about SEL and instructional
practices to teach SEL concepts. The purpose is to improve programming and education in schools to reduce student anxiety.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

It is important to acknowledge the previous research and expertise that are the backbone of this paper. There has been substantial research completed in the field of SEL, and regarding the relationship between SEL and education, and more recently, the connections between anxiety and SEL. These issues have been studied to obtain substantive evidence to support learners in their journey to becoming successful lifelong learners. The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of research that has been done thus far and provide rationale and perspective for the present study.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL refers to the process of developing of a competency skill set which focuses on emotions, self- and social-awareness, self-management, and relationship building (Buchanan et al., 2009; CASEL, 2012). This creates the foundation from which we are able to teach the whole child, rather than solely fostering academic intelligence (Brackett et al., 2012; Buchanan et al., 2009; CASEL, 2012; Durlak et al., 2011). The idea of SEL stems from Goleman’s theory of emotional intelligence (Emotional Intelligence, n.d. from http://www.danielgoleman.info/topics/emotional-intelligence/), which was based on Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (Lane, n.d. from http://www.tecweb.org/styles/gardner.html).

Importance of SEL

Research shows that effective SEL program implementation results in mastery of SEL competencies (Durlak et al., 2011). This mastery is associated with positive outcomes for students, “including greater well-being and better school performance whereas failure to achieve
competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social and academic difficulties” (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 406).

**SEL Competencies**

There are five competencies that are referred to under the umbrella term ‘social and emotional learning’. These competencies highlight the specific aspects of the often overgeneralized term SEL. These five competencies are ‘self-awareness’, ‘self-management’, ‘social awareness’, ‘relationship skills’, and ‘responsible decision-making’. The skills related to each are detailed below.

**Self awareness.** Self awareness includes skills such as identification of emotions, and consideration of how such emotions, thoughts, and values affect behaviour. It also relates to creating an accurate self-perception, recognizing one’s strengths and weaknesses, and building self-confidence, a growth-mindset, and self-efficacy (CASEL, n.d. from https://casel.org/core-competencies/).

**Self management.** Self management involves the ability to respond to different situations and environments, and regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. This competency incorporates a number of skills including impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal-setting, and organizational skills (CASEL, n.d. from https://casel.org/core-competencies/).

**Social awareness.** Social awareness is related to one’s ability to understand behavioural norms and recognize available resources and supports. This includes a variety of skills including perspective-taking, empathy, appreciation for diversity, and respect for others (CASEL, n.d. from https://casel.org/core-competencies/).
Relationship skills. Relationship skills build strength in the area of building and maintaining healthy relationships with others. It is important to be able to communicate well, work cooperatively with others, and manage conflict in a positive and productive way (CASEL, n.d. from https://casel.org/core-competencies/).

Responsible decision-making. Responsible decision-making is associated with the identification, analysis and solving of problems and evaluation of the results and consequences of such solutions through a reflective process. It also addresses the need for an understanding of one’s ethical responsibility, or rather, the responsibility to do ‘right thing’ (CASEL, n.d. from https://casel.org/core-competencies/).

Importance of SEL in Relation to Mental Health Issues

Mental health issues are a significant barrier between much of the population and their full potential. These issues affect not only the persons directly involved, but the greater population as well (Greenberg et al., 2003). “These students may struggle academically, while their presence in the schools can be a drain on energy and resources when disruptive behavior demands immediate and chronic attention” (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003).

Rather than continue to respond in a reactive way to students who are displaying behaviours related to mental health issues, “prevention and the use of empirically supported interventions are essential strategies for reducing mental illness and promoting social and emotional health” (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 407). Importance should be placed on proactive teaching of SEL skills to all students, as there is no way to predict who will need which skills, or when they will need them.

SEL and the New Curriculum
Buchanan et al. (2009) spoke to the fact that SEL curricula are being integrated in different states and the same can be said for BC curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.). I did a quick search for ‘social and emotional’ in the Kindergarten to grade 9 curriculum documents and found relevant curricular links to Social Studies, Physical and Health Education, Career Education, Language Arts, and Applied Designs, Skills, and Technologies, throughout all of the grades. The expectation is that SEL is to be integrated into virtually everything that we teach, yet it is clear that teachers do not always know enough to teach the competencies, don’t feel they have enough time to teach them, or they don’t feel supported by their schools to do so (Brackett et al., 2012).

**Practices to Teach SEL Competencies**

Teaching is a profession that is constantly evolving. As new technologies are created, theories are substantiated with evidence, and practices are proven effective, teachers must adapt. While professional development is readily available, it is often up to teachers themselves to seek out new learning opportunities. They are expected to keep up with new evidence-based practices without adequate preparation time or training to implement said practices or programs most effectively. Greenberg et al. (2003) agrees that interventions could be more productive if implemented in a proactive manner versus being reactive as they usually are. These reactive programs are “frequently fragmented, implemented in isolation, insufficiently coordinated and monitored, and ineffective to meet the mental health needs of our students” (Buchanan et al., 2009, p. 188).

In order to implement new SEL programs in the most successful manner, teachers need to be prepared by being provided the appropriate training and support (Payton et al., 2000, cited in Buchanan et al., 2009). It is also critical for teachers to receive constructive feedback from
someone who understands and supports a specific SEL program (CASEL, 2002, as cited in Buchanan et al., 2009). If these components are all met, “teachers are more likely to implement the program with greater ease, efficiency, and integrity and to avail themselves of opportunities for improvement when indicated” (Buchanan et al., 2009, p. 190).

Unfortunately, if teachers do not receive these supports, they are likely to feel burn-out, which results in poor implementation of programming (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009). Another critical component to effective implementation is the level of personal buy-in to a specific SEL program, and to the idea of SEL in general (Brackett et al., 2012).

Although there are multiple SEL programs available, SEL competencies “can be integrated throughout existing educational curricula as well as delivered via a structured curriculum, e.g., Second Step (Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000, as cited in Buchanan et al., 2009), PATHS (Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, & Quamma, 1995, as cited in Buchanan et al., 2009)” (Buchanan et al., 2009, p. 189), and Strong Kids (Merrell et al., 2007). Durlak et al.’s (2011) research justifies the idea that both classroom teachers and other school staff can effectively implement SEL programs, in both structured programs and by way of integration within routine practices. These programs are effective at all levels of education and do not discriminate between urban and rural populations.

**Teachers’ Perceptions**

Research has shown that most teachers believe social and emotional skills are teachable skills (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). There is overwhelming agreement that SEL skills are necessary for social and academic success throughout life. Interestingly, less than half of the teachers surveyed by Buchanan et al. (2009) reported currently implementing an SEL program in
their classroom. This may be due to the fact that only 15.9% of the surveyed teachers reported being satisfied with their current level of knowledge and skills surrounding SEL programs and 22% felt confident in implementing an SEL program (Buchanan et al., 2009).

**Perceptions of SEL competencies.** SEL competencies are integral to teaching the “whole-child” (Brackett et al., 2012), and teachers agree with this sentiment. Schonert-Reichl et al.’s (2015) review of research found that 95% of teachers believe that it is possible to teach SEL skills. An even greater percentage (97%) believe that these skills are beneficial to students from poor and wealthy backgrounds. Other perceived benefits include having “positive effects on school attendance and graduation (80%), standardized test scores and overall academic performance (77%), college preparation (78%), workforce readiness (87%), and citizenship (87%)” (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 407).

**Perceptions of practices to teach SEL competencies.** Teachers feel the need for a high level of support from leaders in their school, as well as district when it comes to integrating practices to teach SEL competencies most effectively (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). This highlights the need for a systemic change; an approach that is supported and adopted on a wider level (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

When the educational systems adapt to meet this need, there will likely be a stronger emphasis on consistent training and implementation strategies. Buchanan et al.’s (2009) research found that teachers had received a wide variety of training, both formal and informal, including full-day and half-day in-service programs, college courses, workshops, on-site coaching, prior work experience, and self-teaching via reading relevant books and watching video/TV programs. Research shows that teachers who are knowledgeable about child development are better equipped to teach in a way that integrates SEL competencies effectively (Schonert-Reichl et al.,
By creating consistent training protocols and criteria for program implementation across schools, classrooms, and teachers, teachers are more likely to integrate these SEL competencies effectively.

**Conclusion**

Research has shown that the prevalence of mental health issues, specifically anxiety, have only continued to rise, with a current estimate of approximately 20% of people suffering from anxiety in educational settings (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001; Mychailyszyn et al., 2011). When implemented effectively, SEL programs can support the acquisition of skills necessary to increase self-efficacy, provide coping strategies, as well as manage emotions, which will reduce anxiety among students. There is limited research in the area of teachers’ perceptions, and their beliefs regarding program implementation within their school systems. I hope to be able to add to this knowledge base, and inspire others to do the same, while providing valuable recommendations to support program training and implementation to improve SEL skills in Yukon students.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Overview of Research

This mixed-methods research was conducted in order to learn what Yukon teachers’ perceptions about SEL and SEL competencies are, as well as their ideas surrounding current practices being used to teach said competencies. If SEL is not being taught effectively, or at all, educators are not doing everything in their power to support students with mental health challenges.

In order to best understand teachers’ true beliefs, I decided that an anonymous online survey was the most practical tool to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Participants are more likely to provide honest answers when there is no way to tie the information back to them, which would not implicate any individual in any way. I did not want to have teachers feel insecure about any responses or information they provided. With the results obtained in this research, I hope to be able to make recommendations to support teachers to develop their learners’ SEL competencies, as well as provide insight to Yukon Education as to what kind of professional development (PD) Yukon teachers are looking for.

Research Instrument

A survey is an efficient way to reach a large number of participants in a short time period, while obtaining a reasonably large amount of data regarding each persons’ beliefs. An adapted questionnaire (Appendix A) was administered online via Google Forms to all active Yukon teachers with publicly available email addresses. The survey link was available for teachers to access from January 25 to February 16, 2018.

Instrument design. The survey was created by Buchanan et al. (2009) and questions consisted of both specific and general questions. These questions were derived from findings
from literature on SEL programming (Elias et al., 2003; Greenberg et al., 2003; Lopes & Salovey, 2004; Payton et al., 2000; Zins et al., 2004, as cited in Buchanan et al., 2009). The survey questions were intended to learn “teachers’ knowledge regarding SEL, perceived benefits, use, barriers to SEL programming, and general attitudes towards implementation” (Buchanan et al., 2009, p. 193). I decided to use this survey to learn what teachers’ perceptions are regarding SEL competencies and surrounding practices used to teach them in the educational setting, as it was successful in gathering the information sought after by the previous researcher.

I adapted the survey created by Buchanan et al. (2009) which was used to obtain information regarding teachers’ understandings of SEL and current practices being used to establish SEL practices in schools. Specific changes included removing the request for demographic information, as this did not affect the overall goal of this study. As I wanted to learn what teachers’ perceptions and understandings were and not lead them in a specific direction, I removed all examples of specific SEL programs and organizations. In addition, certain terminology had to be replaced by Yukon specific language, for example ‘assistant principal’ was changed to ‘vice principal’, and ‘in-service’ was changed to ‘professional development’ or ‘PD’. Certain questions regarding feedback and follow-up from the consultations were removed because I believed that information should be determined on a case-by-case basis, and the results of those specific questions were not going to impact this research at this time.

To gain the clearest insight to teachers’ beliefs regarding SEL, the survey was comprised of twenty multiple choice and multiple answer questions, which were organized into two sections, each with their own subsections. The knowledge and attitudes section included subsections of social and emotional learning, SEL competencies, and attitudes and beliefs.
Program implementation included the subsections: use of SEL programs, training, satisfaction and confidence, social validity, barriers, responsibility, factors to support re-implementation, and consultation.

Participants were often provided the opportunity to provide their own personalized answer by selecting “other”. The last question on the survey was an open-ended question which requested that participants provide their thoughts on the direction they felt SEL was headed in Yukon Education. The information and ideas provided in this section of the survey were thematized and evaluated qualitatively.

**Participants**

Teachers were recruited as participants in this research study based on the public availability of their teacher email addresses. The recruitment email was sent to 472 (approximately 63%) generalist and specialist teachers from Kindergarten to Grade 12 in Yukon public schools, including urban and rural schools. A total of 96 (20.34%) teachers participated in the online survey.

**Survey Administration**

Participants were sent recruitment emails with a detailed informational cover letter. The survey required a two-step process to begin, one being the link that had to be clicked to get to the survey website, and the other being the acceptance button in the survey itself. There was no requirement for a participant to answer all of the questions, and certain questions were only available to participants based on previous responses. Participants had the option to quit the survey without saving their results at any time, though once the survey was submitted, the responses were fixed.

**Procedures Followed**
**Research approval.** There were many steps that were followed in the months leading up to the onset of this research study. Initially, a literature review was conducted to understand the importance of the research problem, related subject areas, as well as previous research findings. Once this literature study was completed, I submitted a proposal to Vancouver Island University’s (VIU) Research Ethics Board (REB). Following approval from the REB, I was required to submit a research approval request to the Yukon Department of Education.

**Participant recruitment.** Once this educational research request was approved, I compiled a list of potential participants from each of the Yukon schools’ websites and sent out the initial recruitment letter via email. This letter included the purpose of the research, recruitment information, and survey details including platform, format, length of time, and the participants’ ability to opt out at any time. In order to proceed, participants were required to follow the link at the bottom of the email. There were three reminder emails sent to the recruitment email list with hopes of gathering the most data.

**Consent.** If participants chose to take part in this research study, they still had to provide consent within the survey itself. The initial page of the survey was the participant consent form which included contact information for myself and my supervisor, as well as indication that the survey was voluntary and could be withdrawn from at any point prior to submission. Once accepted, participants were provided access to the survey questions.

**Data collection.** As this research is comparable to a study completed by Buchanan et al. (2009), I obtained permission from, and adapted a questionnaire previously used by the fore-mentioned researcher. By using an adapted survey, I was able to compare the research results, while taking into account the differences in geography and sample size.
Participants completed an anonymous survey (Appendix A) online via Google Forms. There was no requirement to answer any question and participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time prior to survey submission. The survey consisted of twenty one questions that ranged from multiple choice, multiple answer, and short answer questions. These questions were arranged by category that allowed for participants to focus on the topic at hand. The survey was available online to participants from January 25th to February 16th, 2018.

**Data processing.** Data processing was managed by Google Forms. Results were available in question-specific format or individually, by anonymous participant. The results were stored in Google Forms, and formatted into tables and graphs, then exported to a password-protected folder on my personal computer, as per REB approval.

**Analysis of data.** Google Forms provided each question with its own set of graphs and tables for data analysis. This made it simple to see obvious commonalities between perceptions of the participants, and also pointedly showed outliers.

While evaluating the results of this survey, I noticed a discrepancy between a number of questions, noting only one outlier amongst many available answers. In addition, there were a number of ‘other’ comments made that made it clear that one participant had tried to skew the results. When I looked back at the individual participant responses, it was clear that participant forty-seven had intentionally miscommunicated their responses, but after evaluating the data, it was determined that the skewed answers were not statistically significant, therefore were not excluded from the sample.
I thematically evaluated all qualitative data, using reoccurring terms provided by participants, as well as grouping similar ideas and making note of any clear opposition amongst ideas. These themes were coded and evaluated so they could be presented succinctly.
Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

Introduction

This research was carried out to learn about Yukon teachers’ perceptions about social and emotional learning and practices that are currently being used to teach these skills in the classroom. The goal is to be able to use teachers’ own perspectives to provide recommendations and a framework to fill perceived gaps and address misconceptions regarding SEL. It is important to consider how evidence has shown that SEL instruction is beneficial for all students, and can significantly support students with mental health issues, such as anxiety.

There were 472 potential participants who had publicly accessible email addresses and of these, ninety six teachers participated in this research study. No demographic information was collected, to ensure the confidence and anonymity of each participant and to hopefully support the acquisition of the most accurate responses.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Social and emotional learning. Out of a possible ninety six respondents, eighty seven (90.6%) reported having heard of the term social and emotional learning or SEL in the past. Eight (8.3%) reported that they had never heard of the term and one participant was unsure about whether they had or not.

Social and emotional learning competencies. Seventy four (77.1%) participants had heard of SEL competencies as a whole, although it is important to mention that other than the original definition of SEL, the competencies themselves were not specified in this question. Seventeen (17.8%) had not heard of the competencies, and five (5%) did not know whether they had heard the term previously or not.
**Attitudes and beliefs.** Ninety five (99%) participants reported they believe it is important for students to have SEL skills to be successful in school and life.

Ninety one (94.8%) participants believed SEL enhances academic outcomes, two believed there was not a relationship between SEL and academic achievement, while three did not know whether SEL improved student academics.

Ninety (93.8%) participants believe SEL skills support the improvement of mental well-being and decreased anxiety, while four (4.2%) did not, and two were unsure.

**Use of SEL programs.** Seventy nine (82.3%) participants believe SEL programs should be taught in the classroom as opposed to four who did not; thirteen (13.5%) participants reported not knowing what they thought regarding whether the programs should be taught in the classroom.

Fifty four (56.3%) teachers claimed to be currently implementing an SEL program, though it was not specified whether this was a structured program or integrated within other subject areas. Thirty eight (40%) were not implementing any type of SEL program within their classroom, and four were unsure about whether or not they were implementing an SEL program.

Fifty five (57.9%) participants said they had taught an SEL program in their class previously. Fifteen (15.8%) said an SEL program has been taught in their class by someone else, and twenty five (26.3%) said that there has not been an SEL program taught in their class at all.

As a follow-up question, participants who specified that SEL programs were implemented in their classroom by someone other than themselves, were asked to specify who currently teaches SEL programs in their classroom. Of the fifteen participants who reported previously having had an SEL program taught in their classroom by someone else, thirteen (86.7%) said the school counsellor, nine (60%) reported another classroom teacher had taught
such a program, five (33.3%) reported that the principal or vice-principal taught the program, four (26.7%) reported a health/PE teacher, four (26.7%) were taught by an educational assistant (EA), three (20%) by a learning assistance teacher (LAT), one (6.7%) by department personnel (consultants), and one (6.7%) by an outside agency.

Training. As displayed in Figure 4.1, thirty two (33.3%) teachers reported having had no training to implement an SEL program. The remainder of the participants were asked to provide information regarding any and all other forms of training they felt as though they had received to implement an SEL program. The majority of teachers indicated that they have read relevant books as a source of training for SEL program implementation, though there were many other methods of training used to inform and guide implementation of SEL programs.

![Figure 4.1. Training to implement SEL programs.](image)

Satisfaction and confidence. Fifty two (54.2%) teachers rated themselves as moderately satisfied with their current level of knowledge about SEL programs and their ability to implement them. Twenty seven (28.1%) teachers reported that they were not satisfied, while only
seventeen (17.7%) teachers reported being satisfied with their level of knowledge and ability to implement programs.

![Figure 4.2. Teachers’ satisfaction with their knowledge and ability to implement SEL programs n=52.](image)

Fifty one (53.7%) teachers reported being moderately confident in implementing an SEL program in their classroom due to their level of training and knowledge regarding SEL. Twenty one (22.1%) teachers reported being not confident in their implementation of an SEL program in their classroom and twenty three (24.2%) reported being very confident.

![Figure 4.3. Teachers’ confidence with their ability to implement SEL programs n=51.](image)
Social validity. Participants were asked to consider the feasibility of SEL program implementation, including prep time, by themselves (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Feasibility of program implementation by teachers themselves per week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Time Devoted to SEL per week</th>
<th>Not Fs</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Somewhat Fs</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Very Fs</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devote 1 class period to SEL program</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devote 2 class periods to SEL program</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devote 15 minutes of prep time toward prepping materials to teach an SEL program</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devote 30 minutes of prep time toward prepping materials to teach an SEL program</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Fs = Feasible; T = Total number of responses
Participants were then asked to consider the feasibility of SEL program implementation, including prep time, by someone other than themselves (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

*Feasibility of program implementation by someone other than teachers themselves per week*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Time Devoted to SEL per week</th>
<th>Not Fs</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Somewhat Fs</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Very Fs</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devote 1 class period to SEL program</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devote 2 class periods to SEL program</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devote 15 minutes of prep time toward prepping materials to teach an SEL program</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devote 30 minutes of prep time toward prepping materials to teach an SEL program</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Fs = Feasible; T = Total number of responses*
Barriers. When asked about barriers they faced when implementing a new program, Yukon teachers responded by rating each barrier as one that they feel applies to their context or not, when considering the implementation of an SEL program (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

*Barriers faced by teachers regarding SEL program implementation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>DN Apply</th>
<th>% S Applies</th>
<th>% VM Applies</th>
<th>% T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time available to prep for teaching the lessons</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time available to teach the lessons</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current level of training regarding SEL</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources to purchase an SEL curriculum</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in my classroom make it difficult to do a “non-academic” activity</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal skepticism regarding, or disagreement with, the philosophy of SEL</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior negative experiences with implementing an SEL program</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* DN = Does not; S = Somewhat; VM = Very much; T = Total number of responses
Responsibility. Fifty one (53.1%) respondents believe teachers should be responsible for implementing SEL curriculum in their classroom. Fourteen (14.6%) do not believe they should be responsible and thirty one (32.3%) do not know whether they should or should not. When asked specifically whose responsibility it should be to implement SEL curriculum the following responses were reported.

Figure 4.4. Teachers’ beliefs regarding responsibility to teach SEL.

Factors to support re-implementation. Teachers were challenged to consider which factor(s) would increase the likelihood of implementing an SEL program for a second time, had they tried it a first time, in other words, what would be their personal measure of program success? They were provided five options, as well as the opportunity to explain other factors that might affect their decision. Figure 4.5 details the responses based on the options provided, while other answers that were given included support from parents (4.2%), accessibility to resources (4.2%), training (2.1%), availability of time (1%), school-wide program (1%), and proof that it is
beneficial (1%).

![Bar chart showing factors for SEL program reimplementation](chart.png)

**Figure 4.5.** Factors to support reimplementation of SEL programs.

**Consultation.** Participants were asked whether they would be willing to receive one-to-one consultation, support, or coaching in order to implement an SEL program. Sixty five reported they would be willing to receive this help (67.7%), while eleven would not (11.5%). Twenty were unsure whether they would accept support (20.8%), answering ‘maybe’ on the survey.

When asked who teachers would be willing to receive support from, the responses were varied (see Figure 4.6). There were references throughout the data, in both comments from questions throughout, and again in the open-ended question at the end of the survey, that regardless of who was providing the support, teachers want to be able to trust that the person is experienced and knowledgeable with the programs, has the mindset to support integration of
programs and concepts, and is willing to work in a collaborative manner.

**Figure 4.6.** Personnel whom teachers are willing to receive support from.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

The last question on the survey was a voluntary open-ended question which asked participants what they think the future holds for teaching SEL to students in Yukon schools. The results were varied, but there were a number of common themes amongst the eighty two responses, including ‘time’, ‘resources’, ‘consistency’, ‘curriculum’, ‘importance’, and ‘parental support’. Each of the themes encompasses a number of different ideas, which will be explained in further detail below.

**Time.** There were many different concerns that were addressed that were related to time. Many teachers expressed feeling pressure because they feel as though there is too much content required to be taught already, and not enough time to teach it. In addition, it was mentioned repeatedly that teachers feel as though they spend too much time managing behaviours, instead of using instructional time to teach content, which results in the feeling that teachers are already spread too thin.
Resources. Teachers indicated their frustration with the way programs are currently implemented, disclosing that they are expected to start teaching programs, sometimes specified by their supervisor, but not always, without adequate resources and training. There are already limited resources to support those who need intensive supports, and when it comes to teaching SEL programs, some students will still need much more explicit, long-term teaching to grasp the concepts. A number of participants suggested feeling disgruntled with the way Yukon Education has implemented programs in the past, only to abandon said programs due to unfavourable results.

Consistency. The most commonly addressed theme was that of consistency. Comments were made regarding consistency between teachers, schools, and even between new principals that come into a school. Because there is no set SEL program to use, each individual can decide for themselves what to use, unless they are directed to teach something specific by their supervisor. In addition, there are inconsistencies between programs, and amongst teachers’ understandings of what SEL is specifically. Throughout comments teachers had made on the survey, the terms ‘self-regulation’ and ‘SEL’ were often used interchangeably, whereas self-regulation is only a small part of SEL. This inconsistency promotes difficulties across the use of language, strategies, and expectations. Teachers revealed they seem to have a lack of understanding themselves and it seems there are inconsistent understandings and beliefs by teachers across the territory regarding whether SEL should be fully integrated into all subjects, or taught as a program, even though it is now a part of the BC/Yukon curriculum.

Curriculum. As Yukon Education is in the initial stages of implementing new BC/Yukon curriculum, it is not surprising that comments and concerns regarding curriculum were disclosed in this section. There were two clearly different perspectives when it came to
TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF SEL

One side suggested that because we were implementing a new set of curricula, it is a great time to pick a program and stick to it, ensuring all students across the Yukon will eventually be taught these SEL concepts. Those with this mindset attempted to take advantage of the novelty of the recent changes, and make the best of the situation educators in Yukon are dealing with. It is important to note that not all of these teachers seemed to be aware that SEL is now a mandatory aspect of BC/Yukon curriculum’s Core Competencies.

Alternatively, there were also teachers who expressed being overwhelmed, feeling as though they are overworked and expected to take on more and more as time goes on. They detailed tasks such as toiletting support, administration of medications, handling of social issues, expectations of daily communication with certain parents, and keeping up to date on research as tasks that they should not necessarily be expected to routinely perform. This is not surprising given the fact that with the change of curriculum comes increased tension and stress, however many of these teachers appeared to be unaware that SEL skills were part of the new curriculum, as some comments insinuated they should not be expected to implement new curriculum and SEL programming.

**Importance.** Results of the questionnaire showed most teachers feel SEL skills are a crucial component for both academics and daily life. There were comments that highlighted the link between SEL skills and learning, emphasizing students need to be able to self-regulate, make decisions, understand social situations, and have positive relationships in order to engage in the learning process. Some teachers accepted that it was important, but again stated that it should not be the school’s responsibility to teach all things of importance to children, the parents need to be held accountable as well.
Parental support. When it came to parental support, educators took many different positions. The first was that parents are not adequately preparing children for school, therefore they arrive ill-equipped to handle not only the academic challenges, but the social and emotional challenges ahead of them. Some added further to this, expressing frustration that many parents do not have these skills, or sets of competencies themselves, so they obviously cannot equip their children. This led to the question, how can this cycle be changed and propelled forward in a positive manner?

Additionally, it was explained that when these students arrive at school, teachers are not feeling the level of support from parents they feel is necessary. They are expected to teach students the academics, but do not feel they can because there are too many other areas that students need support in. The other troublesome aspect was that teachers felt as though parents were not buying-in to the idea of spending time on social and emotional education; parents want their children to be taught to read, write and increase their math skills.

Summary

The data collected from this survey highlights teachers’ perceptions regarding social and emotional learning and the practices being used to teach them in Yukon schools. The quantitative data provides insight to teachers’ beliefs about the importance of SEL, whose responsibility it is and should be to teach SEL concepts, and typical barriers teachers feel impact their ability to teach SEL. Information gathered from the qualitative data is a valuable contribution to Yukon Education, as it discloses what teachers feel the future is for SEL programming and instruction.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Research Overview

This mixed methods research study was conducted to provide awareness about Yukon teachers’ perceptions regarding social and emotional learning and practices to teach them in an educational setting. The research question I investigated was: *What are the perceptions of Yukon teachers regarding social and emotional learning competencies and practices to teach them?*

Ultimately, the goal of this study was to determine what Yukon teachers believe about SEL and instructional practices to teach SEL concepts. The purpose is to provide recommendations in order to improve programming and education in schools to reduce student anxiety.

The results of this research were derived from a two-part online survey (Appendix A), which was adapted from a survey designed by Buchanan et al. (2009). This survey consisted of twenty multiple choice and multiple answer questions, that also offered participants the opportunity to personalize their answers by choosing ‘other’ and adding their own thoughts. These questions were organized into two sections, ‘Knowledge and Attitudes’ and ‘Program Implementation’, and each had their own subsections. The knowledge and attitudes section included subsections of social and emotional learning, SEL competencies, and attitudes and beliefs. Program implementation included the subsections: use of SEL programs, training, satisfaction and confidence, social validity, barriers, responsibility, factors to support re-implementation, and consultation. The survey finished by asking participants to respond to an open-ended question regarding what they believe the future holds for SEL instruction in Yukon Education.

The survey was sent to a total of 472 potential participants, and of those, ninety-six (20.3%) participated. There was no demographic information collected from the participants, but
the recruitment email was sent to all generalist and specialist teachers in rural and urban elementary and high schools in Yukon.

Instead of continuing to react to mental health related issues, there should be systemic change towards proactivity, which means preventatively teaching SEL skills to all students, as there is no way to predict who will need which skills, or when they will need them (Greenberg et al., 2001). This can be done by taking into consideration how and what teachers feel about the way the implementation of programs has occurred in the past, and making practical changes to the way it is done moving forward. Most importantly though, it is vital to ensure the teachers themselves, schools as well as entire districts are using effective, empirically-supported SEL programs (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

The five competencies taught within SEL programs, often referred to as “the CASEL Five” (Elias & Moceri, 2012, p. 424) are ‘self-awareness’, ‘self-management’, ‘social awareness’, ‘relationship skills’, and ‘responsible decision-making’. Effective program implementation is determined by mastery of a skillset (Durlak et al., 2011). When this level of mastery is achieved, it is associated with positive outcomes for students, “including greater well-being and better school performance whereas failure to achieve competence in these areas can lead to a variety of personal, social and academic difficulties” (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 406).

SEL competencies can be taught effectively in both structured programs and by being fully integrated throughout other curriculum by either classroom teachers or other staff (Durlak et al., 2011). This instruction is effective at all levels of education and does not discriminate between urban and rural populations. Acquisition of SEL skills in students is vital to being able to teach the “whole-child” (Brackett et al., 2012). Schonert-Reichl et al.’s (2015) review of
research found that 95% of teachers believe it is possible to teach SEL skills and an even higher percentage (97%) believe that these skills benefit students from all socio-economic statuses.

**Discussion of Findings**

Inspiration for this research study arose from my experience with anxiety and the challenges I faced navigating the current education system. Additionally, in my experience as a classroom teacher, I have found that there are inconsistencies in teachers’ beliefs regarding how SEL should be taught and by whom, as well as the level of support they receive to implement programs. Teachers believe that SEL skills are teachable (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015), and there is overwhelming agreement that these skills are necessary for social and academic success throughout life. To provide direction and clarity, this discussion will be organized into four parts: ‘knowledge and attitudes’, ‘program implementation’, and ‘future of SEL in Yukon’.

**Knowledge and attitudes.** Social and emotional learning is not a newly coined term, though it is often confused with parts of its components (e.g., self-regulation). It is important to recognize the distinction, and one of my hypotheses throughout this study was that many teachers do not know the difference. This theory was reinforced a number of times throughout the survey. Teachers often made comments related to ‘emotional regulation’ and ‘self-regulation’, but this is only a small part the self-awareness competency.

There seems to be a disconnect between teachers’ expectation of student performance and behaviour, and the competencies which are being taught, or not. Teachers expect students to be regulated and well-adjusted, although assumptions cannot be made that children are being taught these skills outside of school, and teachers responded in ways that suggest they do not want this responsibility themselves. Research has shown that strong SEL skills are related to lower anxiety in students, as well as a stronger sense of self-efficacy (Brackett et al., 2012; Srikanth &
Sonawat, 2014). It is important to note though, each competency skill set must be being taught in order for a student to be fully engaged in SEL.

The data derived from the ‘knowledge and attitudes’ section is confusing, because some participants had previously indicated they were unsure about SEL skills and competencies, then proceeded to make a judgment regarding whether they believed the skills were important or not. It leads me to question the authenticity of some of the responses, as well as teachers’ judgment regarding levels of importance.

Another noteworthy concern is related to teachers’ attitudes regarding SEL. This encompasses different aspects such as whose responsibility it should be to teach it, use of programs, time management and a troublesome sense of resentment from teachers towards parents.

Teachers reported they believe they should be responsible for implementing SEL curriculum in their classrooms, and then in the next question seemed to pass the responsibility to other personnel, including educational assistants, outside agencies, principals or vice principals, the health or PE teacher, and the counsellor, by reporting that those are the professionals who should be responsible for teaching it. There is an argument to be made for school counsellors to do SEL intervention on high-risk students, but the reality is that the classroom teacher knows the students best, and should be able to meet their SEL needs better than any other individual. If someone else is delivering this information to students, it can depersonalize the instruction, therefore proving not to be the most effective method.

There were many issues raised by teachers regarding time constraints and curriculum loads. This is obviously a concern because it is a reality; there are only so many hours in a day and days in a school year. The facts are though that “SEL implies more than a set of skills’
implies a pedagogy for building those skills and an intervention structure to support the internalization and generalization of the skills over time and across contexts” (Elias & Moceri, 2012). This would indicate that the messages being put forth by SEL programs must be consistent, and that these programs should not be taught in isolation, rather SEL should be instructed as a way to navigate situations such as planning, problem solving, reflection, critical thinking, and social situations. This can all be taught in conjunction with mandated curricula.

The feelings expressed in this survey by teachers about parental involvement, support, and responsibility were worrisome. There was significant frustration expressed by many teachers throughout the survey relating to parents not preparing their children appropriately for school, then getting upset when the school tried to make up for it. Teachers claimed to have tried to teach students SEL concepts, only to be shut down by parents and told to ‘teach reading, writing, and math’. Currently though, SEL is a part of Yukon’s mandated curriculum, so it is appropriate and expected to be teaching such skills.

**Program implementation.** Brackett et al. (2012) poses an interesting thought regarding the relationship between teacher attitudes and program success.

Students perform better when their teachers believe they will succeed, in part because teachers treat students differently when they hold high expectations for them (Rosenthal, 1994). The same may be said for the relationship between the success of newly adopted pedagogical approaches to curricula - including SEL programs - and the expectations teachers hold for them. (p. 230)

Just over half of the respondents indicated that they taught an SEL program in their classroom, though when asked what barriers they faced when considering a program, 81% (n=77) of respondents declared that personal skepticism regarding, or disagreement with the philosophy of,
SEL were not barriers for them. In other words, they would not be deterred from implementing a program based solely on personal skepticism of the program itself or disbelief in the philosophy of SEL. This data contradicts effective practice because if a teacher does not believe in a program, they are not going to elicit the best results from such a program. I would be interested to learn what aspects of programs might be deterring teachers from them.

Interestingly, very few participants (n=17 out of 96) admitted to being satisfied with their level of knowledge about SEL. There were more participants (n=23) who indicated being confident in their program implementation, given their level of training and knowledge. This indicates teachers are more comfortable picking up a program and instituting it without being comfortable with the concepts surrounding the topic. "Teachers’ beliefs influence the type of learning environments they create, as well as their students’ academic performance and beliefs about their own abilities” (Fang, 1996 & Kagan, 1992, as cited in Brackett et al., 2012, p. 230), therefor, if we want to see success in our students, we must receive buy-in from teachers, and in order to do this, they need to see success elsewhere.

Yukon teachers want to be able to trust that any person who may be providing training or support is experienced and knowledgeable with the programs, has the mindset to support integration of programs and concepts, and is willing to work in a collaborative manner. This is a positive step, as it means these teachers are willing to receive support, and they want it to be the most effective support possible. Where the problems lie, is finding the appropriate programs, resources and training personnel to provide this support to Yukon teachers.

**Future of SEL in Yukon.** If we want to see SEL skills improve and competency skill sets grow in Yukon, we must take into consideration the expectation that teachers have about it. There appears to be a general understanding that SEL is important and needs to be taught, as
99% (n=95 out of 96) of teachers responded this way, though there is some disagreement about whose responsibility it should be. The reality is that Yukon Education has mandated curriculum that very clearly articulates that SEL competencies must be addressed in some way. It would be helpful for teachers if they were provided resources and adequate training to not only feel comfortable teaching said programs, but also to believe in the program itself and the potential success of it.

**Limitations**

There are three major limitations to this study. The first being that there is a lack of prior research studies in this area. SEL itself has been thoroughly researched, but research on the link between teachers’ perceptions and implementation of SEL programs is limited. Next, collecting demographic data could have provided more information and allowed the recommendations to be more specific to certain populations (e.g. urban/rural, elementary/highschool, male/female). Finally, I would be inclined to say there was a limitation related to personal bias on the part of the researcher. When there is a substantial personal investment in the subject area, and strong opinions related to such, this needs to be acknowledged.

**Recommendations**

Further research needs to be conducted in order to learn which specific programs are of greater quality, yielding most positive results in students with mental health issues, specifically, anxiety. In addition, teachers need support in terms of training, resources, and feedback to implement such programs. They also need to feel supported by their supervisors and colleagues, which would be less of a challenge if there were consistency in program use and expectation of program delivery.
There are a number of programs available that have been empirically supported as reliable and valid that address many, if not all aspects of SEL. Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Jacobson, & Small, 2009) for example, is an evidence-based universal social-emotional intervention that is widely used. Other programs worth mentioning are Second Step, and StrongKids. There are also a number of programs that address specific aspects of SEL such as MindUP, which targets mindfulness and self-awareness. As stated earlier, further research needs to be conducted to determine which program would be of best fit within the Yukon context.

Teachers need to be provided resources to implement within their classrooms, and training to do so adequately. They are often asked to implement a number of different programs with limited training. Teachers likely intend on implementing programs the way in which they were prescribed, though without adequate training, the success of implementation falters (Buchanan et al., 2009).

Teachers would also benefit from support and feedback in regards to implementation of SEL programs. Regardless of who is providing the support, Yukon teachers want to be able to trust that the person is experienced and knowledgeable with the programs, has the mindset to support integration of programs and concepts, and is willing to work in a collaborative manner. Additionally, they want to feel as though they are supported by their administrator, which improves quality of instruction and allows teachers to feel as though what they are doing is important.

**Conclusion**

SEL concepts and competencies are not well understood by teachers who are expected to implement such programs in their classrooms. There is a general understanding that this set of
skills and ideas is important and necessary, though without the knowledge and support behind them, teachers are ill-equipped to teach students to the best of their ability.

By equipping students with SEL skills, we are better serving them, not only academically, but by providing them with the skills necessary to cope with adversity and challenges that they may face as adolescents and adults. We are supporting them to feel comfortable in their choices, because they have developed strong self-efficacy through learning the skills involved in responsible decision-making, self- and social-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills.
References


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Appendix A

Survey

Teacher Survey (adapted from Buchanan)

Please complete the following information. This survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Information provided on this survey will not be associated to you or your school. Thank you for your time.

********************************************************

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) refers to the process of developing of a competency skill set which focuses on emotions, self- and social-awareness, self-management, and relationship building.

Knowledge and Attitude:

1. Have you ever heard of the term “social emotional learning” or SEL? (Yes, No, Don’t Know)
2. Have you heard of SEL competencies? (Yes, No, Don’t Know)
3. Do you think it is important for students to have social emotional skills to be successful in school and life? (Yes, No, Don’t Know)
4. Do you think social emotional learning enhances academic outcomes? (Yes, No, Don’t Know)
5. Do you think social emotional learning skills improve mental well-being and decrease anxiety? (Yes, No, Don’t Know)

Use of SEL Programs:

6. Do you think SEL programs should be taught in the classroom? (Yes, No, Don’t Know)
7. Are you currently implementing a SEL program? (Yes, No, Don’t Know)
8. Referring to this definition of social emotional learning: **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)** refers to the process of developing of a competency skill set which focuses on emotions, self- and social-awareness, self-management, and relationship building.

Please indicate whether a social emotional learning (SEL) program has been:

- taught in your classroom by you
- taught in your classroom by someone else
- not taught at all in your classroom

9. Who currently implements SEL programs in your classroom/building? (Mark all that apply)

- Classroom teacher
- Health/PE Teacher
- School Counsellor
- Principal or Vice-Principal
- Educational Assistant or other staff member
- Other _________________________________

10. Please indicate the kind of training you have had to implement SEL programs: (Mark all that apply)

- None
- 1/2 day school PD
- Full day school PD
- Off-site PD
o Out of territory PD

o Read relevant books

o Prior work experience

o College/University course

o On-site coaching or consultation

o Other________________________________

11. How satisfied are you right now with your current level of knowledge about SEL programs and ability to implement them?  (Not Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Satisfied)

12. Given your level of training and knowledge about SEL, how confident are you in implementing a program in your classroom?  (Not Confident, Somewhat Confident, Very Confident)

**Social Validity:**

13. Given your current teaching responsibilities, how feasible would it be for you to implement a program such as the following example:  □(Not Feasible, Somewhat Feasible, Very Feasible)

   a) Devote one class period per week to implement an SEL program
   
   b) Devote two class periods per week to implement an SEL program
   
   c) Devote 15 minutes of prep time toward preparing materials to teach an SEL program
   
   d) Devote 30 minutes of prep time toward preparing materials
14. How feasible would it be for someone other than you to implement a program such as the following example: □(Not feasible, Somewhat Feasible, Very Feasible)

   a) Devote one class period per week to implement an SEL program
   b) Devote two class periods per week to implement an SEL program
   c) Devote 15 minutes of prep time toward preparing materials to teach an SEL program
   d) Devote 30 minutes of prep time toward preparing materials

15. The following are typical barriers that teachers often face when considering implementing an SEL program. Please indicate how these apply to you:

   It would be difficult for me to implement a SEL program due to:

   Reason:

   - Time available to prep for teaching the lessons (Does not apply, Somewhat applies, Very much applies)
   - Time available to teach the lessons (Does not apply, Somewhat applies, Very much applies)
   - My current level of training regarding SEL (Does not apply, Somewhat applies, Very much applies)
   - Resources to purchase an SEL curriculum (Does not apply, Somewhat applies, Very much applies)
   - Students in my classroom make it difficult to do a “non-academic” activity (Does not apply, Somewhat applies, Very much applies)
TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF SEL

- Personal skepticism regarding or disagreement with the philosophy of SEL (Does not apply, Somewhat applies, Very much applies)
- Prior negative experiences with implementing an SEL program (Does not apply, Somewhat applies, Very much applies)

16. Should teachers be responsible for implementing a social emotional learning curriculum in their classroom? (Yes, No, Don’t Know)

17. If not, who should implement it? (Mark all that apply)

- Classroom Teacher
- Health/PE Teacher
- School Counsellor
- Educational Assistant
- Principal or Vice-Principal
- Outside agency
- Other ____________________________

18. Which factors would increase the likelihood for you to implement an SEL curriculum again? (Mark all that apply)

- Observed noticeable changes in your students’ behaviours
- Observed noticeable changes in your students’ academic performance
- Received support from administration
- Received useful/helpful consultation
Belief that SEL concepts are important for students to know

Other ________________________________

Consultation:

19. Would you be willing to receive one-to-one consultation support or coaching in order to implement an SEL program? (Yes, Maybe, No)

20. Please indicate from whom you would be willing to receive support:

○ Classroom teacher (colleague)

○ School Psychologist

○ School Counsellor

○ Educational Assistant

○ Vice Principal or Principal

○ University researcher

○ Department personnel (consultants)

○ Other: ________________________________

21. What do you think the future holds for teaching social emotional learning (SEL) to students in school? ________________________________

_____________________________________

_____________________________________

___________________________