

Does Responsive Classroom Experience Influence Teacher Beliefs about Social
Emotional Learning?

By

Michaela L. Johnson

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The members of the Committee approve the thesis of

Michaela L. Johnson presented on July 1, 2021.

Dr. Mary Beth Tusing, Chair

Dr. Jeffrey Goodman

Dr. Barbara Meier

APPROVED: _____
Dean of Graduate Studies

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Michaela L. Johnson

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Mary Beth Tusing

ABSTRACT

Previous research highlights the importance of training in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) practices for teacher commitment, efficacy, and fidelity with the implementation of teacher-directed SEL programs. Implementation of SEL programs, including Responsive Classroom, is associated with positive outcomes for students, including improved academic achievement and positive interactions with peers and teachers. The current research study sought to understand if training in Responsive Classroom practices and years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom were associated with differences in teacher beliefs about SEL programs. Specifically, teachers from a small school district in the upper Midwest were surveyed on their beliefs about the importance of SEL competence in student academic success and their commitment to promoting SEL competence for students. Overall, there was no significant difference in reported teacher value of SEL or commitment to promoting SEL based on previous experience with training or years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices. All teachers in this school district held beliefs indicating that SEL is important and that it is classroom teachers' role to infuse SEL instruction alongside academic content. Limitations of this

current study and implications for future research examining the relationship between training and teacher beliefs were discussed.

Mary Beth Tusing, PhD, NCSP Date

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Elementary teachers are faced with the insurmountable task of planning and implementing high quality instruction in all academic domains, including literacy, mathematics, social studies and science. Yet, recent shifts in the field of education have highlighted the importance of another domain, social emotional learning (Zins et al., 2007). Supporters of social emotional learning (SEL) believe that in order for school systems to develop students who will excel both in the classroom and life, social emotional learning must be considered equally to academic learning (Responsive Classroom, n.d.). However, teaching social emotional learning is a significant role shift for elementary educators. Teachers report that they value social emotional learning (Yopp, 2017) and that it falls within the responsibility of their role as classroom teachers (Reinke et al., 2011), but that they do not feel efficacious in providing SEL instruction (Ee & Cheng, 2016). As schools continue to expand their SEL programming and system-wide practices, it is critical they understand teacher perceptions and beliefs surrounding SEL.

Social Emotional Learning Outcomes

Social-emotional learning is defined as “the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, manage and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible

decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2020). In education there is growing support for the integration of social emotional learning practices into all aspects of education. The incorporation of SEL alongside academics encourages generalization of SEL skills, such as recognizing emotions, perspective taking, empathy, impulse control, cooperation, and effective communication into other aspects of the school day. Peer interactions, student and teacher interactions, and academic activities provide meaningful opportunities for students to practice and develop SEL skills. Generalization of such skills leads to positive classroom and school communities, which should then promote positive academic outcomes as well.

Indeed, research shows that the implementation of SEL programs is associated with social and academic outcomes that last several years. Durlak and colleagues (2011) reported that children who participated in SEL instruction scored up to 11 percentile points higher on standardized academic assessments than their peers who did not participate in such instruction. They also concluded that students receiving SEL instruction reported higher levels of self-confidence and positive views of themselves, others, and school (Durlak et al., 2011). Additionally, SEL participants also had fewer conduct problems and reduced emotional distress when compared to their peers not in SEL programs (Durlak et al., 2011). Similarly, Elias and Haynes (2008) found that students participating in SEL programs outperformed peers not participating in SEL instruction on end of year academic assessments. Further, the benefits of SEL implementation are not limited to students. Haymovitz and colleagues (2018) highlighted that, in addition to student well-being and improved peer relationships, implementation of universal SEL curriculum lead to improvements in staff productivity and a positive school culture.

Teacher Beliefs Related to Social Emotional Learning

Reinke and colleagues (2011) researched the role of elementary teachers in bridging the gap between mental health services and school-based interventions. Specifically, the study closely examined teacher beliefs about their role in mental health interventions. A sample of 292 early childhood and elementary educators responded to an online survey inquiring about their perception of and beliefs on the school's role in mental health services as well as teacher perception and knowledge of evidence-based practices within their schools. Additionally, teachers were surveyed on the role of various educators in supporting mental health services in the school setting. Analysis of the results indicated teachers believed schools played an important role in supporting mental health services for students, but only 34% reported that they agreed or strongly agreed the statement indicating they had the skills and training necessary to respond to the varied mental health needs of their students. Teachers reported that their role in supporting mental health for children includes the implementation of classroom behavior interventions. Teachers did not view providing universal SEL instruction as part of their role, but instead reported that it fell under the role of school psychologists. As a result, the authors conclude that teachers differentiate between their role in teaching academic standards and their role in teaching SEL standards (Reinke et al., 2011).

Ee and Cheng (2016) surveyed teachers to understand teacher perceptions of student social emotional competencies and beliefs about their role as teachers in SEL instruction. Only thirty-three percent of the 76 respondents indicated their current roles as a teacher included providing SEL instruction for students. Seventeen percent of respondents indicated that their role included modeling social emotional skills for students. Of the teachers surveyed, only 47% reported feeling somewhat confident or

confident in their ability to implement SEL instruction. Twenty-six percent of teachers reported they were not confident in their ability to teach SEL. The respondents reported that their ability to deliver SEL instruction was impacted by preparation, relationships with students, and their beliefs about their own abilities to teach SEL skills successfully to students (Ee & Cheng, 2016).

Poulou and colleagues (2018) concluded that teacher beliefs about their own social emotional competencies, beliefs about their efficacy for teaching SEL, and their overall emotional intelligence was predictive of student social, emotional and behavioral difficulties. Researchers studied the interactions between teachers' emotional intelligence and efficacy for teaching SEL and student emotional and behavior difficulties in preschools in the United States and Greece. Teachers in the United States who reported positive perceptions of their own emotional intelligence also reported stronger self-efficacy for their ability to implement SEL programming. Teachers who reported they were not comfortable implementing SEL also reported higher rates of anxiety difficulties among their students. When teachers reported high rates of commitment to teaching SEL, they also reported lower rates of peer difficulties among students. This study highlights that when teachers are committed to and feel efficacious in teaching SEL, their students experience positive social and emotional outcomes.

Goddard and colleagues (2002) explored the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement. Collective teacher efficacy is defined as the beliefs of the group that their actions will positively impact on students (Goddard et al., 2002). The authors measured collective teacher efficacy, or the teachers' beliefs about their skills in supporting student achievement, behavior and motivation, by asking teachers to respond to statements about the collective impact of the staff in their schools.

Measurements of collective teacher efficacy, or group competence in their ability to have an impact on students' motivation, behavior, and learning, were found to be predictive of student achievement in math and reading. The authors highlight that it is critical for school administrators to understand the relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement. That is, when staff report collective efficacy, their students are more successful on standardized assessments of reading and math skills. Goddard and colleagues concluded that reported teacher efficacy had a greater effect on student achievement in reading and math than any of the demographic factors, including gender and social economic status.

If teacher efficacy is predictive of student achievement, does the same hold true for Social Emotional Learning? Several teams of researchers have attempted to add to the research base on this topic. Castillo et al. (2013) demonstrated that teacher training in SEL practices lead to improvements in teachers' ability to provide engaging instruction and to provide classroom environments that supported all learners. Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2012) sought to understand how teacher perceptions of their comfort teaching SEL as well as a school's overall climate influenced teacher stress, efficacy, and satisfaction with their jobs. Six hundred and sixty-four teachers from British Columbia and Ontario participated in the study by completing online surveys. The survey asked participants questions related to school climate, teacher outcomes, and their beliefs about SEL. Results indicated several critical findings. First, teachers' comfort in teaching SEL was negatively associated with stress related to student behavior and discipline. Second, comfort in teaching SEL was positively correlated with teacher efficacy and job satisfaction (Collie et al., 2012).

In addition to having confidence in their ability to teach SEL skills, teacher' beliefs about their personal SEL competence is a critical factor that influences the quality of outcomes achieved by implementation of SEL programs (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) reviewed available research related to factors that influence positive classroom communities. Based on the research, the authors proposed a three-factor model to support the development of prosocial classroom communities. Teachers who rated themselves as having high levels of social emotional competence also reported strong student-teacher relationships, possessed strong classroom management skills, and were more likely to implement SEL programs with a high degree of fidelity. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) suggested that teachers with strong social emotional competence anticipated and were responsive to student needs, demonstrated empathy, and modeled positive ways to self-regulate their emotions and behavior. This model is critical because it demonstrates that teachers with strong social emotional competence are more effective at implementing SEL programs because they skillfully model SEL skills throughout the school day.

Responsive Classroom

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) reports that there are several research-based programs and curricula for teaching Social Emotional Learning skills from early childhood through adulthood (CASEL, n.d.). Responsive Classroom is one of the positively reviewed programs (CASEL: "Responsive Classroom", n.d.). On Evidence for ESSA, (Evidence for ESSA, n.d.) an online warehouse of evidence based-practices that meet the standards for the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Responsive Classroom is rated with promising evidence (effect size = +0.14) in improving reading outcomes for students. Responsive Classroom

is a research-based program intended to integrate social emotional learning throughout the academic school day (CASEL: “Responsive Classroom”, n.d.). Similar to research on the positive outcomes related to implementation of SEL practices, Responsive Classroom implementation is associated with improvements in educator practices, improvements in student social skills and behaviors, decreases in students’ emotional distress, and improvements in student academic performance (CASEL: “Responsive Classroom”, n.d.).

The Responsive Classroom approach was created in 1981 when a group of educators consolidated innovative practices to teach social competencies alongside academic learning. These educators believed that strong social skills were equally important to academic skills and that students performed better academically when social interaction was incorporated throughout the school day (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006). The practices associated with the Responsive Classroom approach support educators’ development of learning environments that are safe, joyful and engaging for all students (Responsive Classroom, n.d.). Responsive Classroom is grounded in the core belief that students must learn a set of social emotional and academic competencies in order to achieve success in the classroom and beyond. Social emotional competencies include cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy and self-control. Academic competencies include academic mindset, perseverance, learning strategies, and academic behaviors (“About SEL”, n.d.). The core belief of Responsive Classroom is demonstrated via the framework’s guiding principles. Guiding principles highlight that teaching SEL is as important as teaching academic content, the methods for teaching are equally as important as the content, successful social interaction is necessary to achieve cognitive growth, collective educator efficacy helps to create a safe, joyful and inclusive

school culture, teacher beliefs about students impacts their expectations, attitudes, and reactions, and, finally, that partnering with families is critical to students' academic and social emotional success ("Principles and Practices", n.d.).

Practices within the Responsive Classroom center around on four key domains and reinforce the core belief and guiding principles. The first domain, engaging academics, emphasizes intentional practices to provide hands on and active learning experiences. Examples of practices within this domain include academic choice, hands on practice, and explicit teaching of academic vocabulary. Daily practices such as morning meeting, closing circles, and teacher language are practices that support the second domain, building positive community. Teacher language includes reinforcing language to acknowledge student success, reminding language to help students follow rules and stay on task, and redirecting language to stop misbehavior (Denton, 2018). Developmentally responsive teaching, the third domain, requires that educators know and understand the developmental stages of students in their classrooms, and use this knowledge to plan challenging and enriching lessons. Developmentally responsive teaching also includes an intentional focus on building upon existing student strengths. Practices such as developing rules, routines and expectations as a class and responding to misbehaviors with logical consequences bring to life the final domain, effective management of the classroom (Responsive Classroom: Principles and Practices, n.d.). Taken in their entirety, these principles and practices indicate that SEL is not a stand-alone lesson or activity scheduled during the day, rather an intentional shift in all aspects of the day.

Between 2001 and 2004 researchers from University of Virginia's Curry School of Education (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006) completed a longitudinal study to examine the

relationship between the implementation of Responsive Classroom and the academic and social skills of students. The study closely examined three schools that utilized the Responsive Classroom approach and three that did not implement the approach. All six schools were from one urban school district in the Northeastern United States. This study, known as the Social and Academic Learning Study on the Contribution of the Responsive Classroom Approach, was the foundation to future research on the impact of Responsive Classroom. The study concluded several important outcomes for both students and educators. First, the Responsive Classroom approach was associated with improved student scores on reading and math assessments. Results of the Connecticut Mastery Test for all six schools were analyzed across three cohorts in the six schools. Improvements in reading and math were strongest for students who were exposed to the Responsive Classroom approach for two or three years (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006). Second, teachers reported improvements in students' social skills, including assertiveness and problem solving, and lower ratings of fear and anxiety even after just one year of utilizing the Responsive Classroom approach. Third, children in classrooms utilizing the Responsive Classroom approach were more likely to report positive views of school, their peers, and their teachers and (Rimm-Kaufman, 2006).

Similar to the broad research on outcomes associated with implementation of SEL curriculum, implementation of the Responsive Classroom approach was also associated with important outcomes for educator practices. First, teachers implementing the Responsive Classroom approach with a high degree of fidelity for three years also provided higher quality instruction by demonstrating more emotional support to students, higher rates of feedback, and a more positive classroom culture when compared to teachers not trained in or implementing the Responsive Classroom approach. Responsive

Classroom teachers were observed to be more sensitive to individual student need and to spend more instructional time engaged in critical thinking activities than in classrooms not implementing Responsive Classroom practices (Rimm-Kauffman, 2006). Another vital finding of this study indicates that teachers implementing the Responsive Classroom approach engaged in more collaboration with their fellow teachers than was reported by teachers in the control schools (Rimm-Kauffman, 2006). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, teachers implementing Responsive Classroom approach reported higher teacher efficacy related to discipline and creating positive learning environments for all students. Teachers in Responsive Classroom Schools reported more positive views on the teaching profession than others in the study (Rimm-Kauffman, 2006). These findings indicate that Responsive Classroom training and implementation is associated with important changes in educator practices.

The Responsive Classroom Efficacy Study (RCES), completed between 2008 and 2011, also yielded several crucial findings. The RCES examined outcomes for 3rd through 5th grade students and teachers in 24 schools over a three-year longitudinal study. This study was the first experimental study on the effectiveness of Responsive Classroom practices. The aim of the study was to understand the effect of Responsive Classroom practices on the quality of instructional practices and student achievement in the domain of math. Schools were assigned to either the treatment group (Responsive Classroom) or the control group. The findings of this study were summarized in three publications, Curby, et al. (2013), Rimm-Kaufman, et al. (2014), and Banse et al. (2018). Curby and colleagues (2013) established a relationship between well-developed emotional support, defined as observations of positive relationships, teacher reactions to student needs, and incorporation of student strengths and ideas into instruction, early in the school year and

improved instructional support in the later months of the school year. These findings support the importance of time dedicated to developing safe, supportive classrooms in order to provide high-quality instruction.

Data examined by Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014) concluded that assignment to treatment or control group did not have a significant impact on student reading or math achievement. That is, there was no significant difference in academic achievement of students in the control or test schools. However, the authors concluded that training in Responsive Classroom practices was associated with changes to teacher practice. Teachers who received Responsive Classroom training self-reported high fidelity of implementation. In turn, this implementation was associated with improved student achievement after a span of three school years. The authors of this study concluded that Responsive Classroom training alone was not sufficient to change students' academic achievement, but rather increases in student academic achievement are the result of principles and strategies being implemented over a period of time.

Finally, Banse et al. (2018) were able to predict the quality of instruction provided by fifth grade mathematics teachers from the presence of Responsive Classroom practices early in the school year. When researchers observed the presence of high-quality implementation of Responsive Classroom practices, including interactive learning structures and academic choice, they also observed higher student engagement in mathematics instruction later in the school year. Student engagement in mathematics instruction included active participation in class discussions, instruction, and learning activities. These findings suggest that intentional focus on building classroom routines, procedures and community early in the school year contributes to academic engagement later in the school year.

Arby (2013) and a team of researchers examined the relationship between Responsive Classroom professional development, teacher implementation of Responsive Classroom practices, and the quality of interactions between students and teachers. The researchers examined cross-sectional data from 239 third and fourth grade teachers that was collected over the first two years of a larger three-year longitudinal study. Student-teacher interactions were assessed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System which evaluated three domains: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Implementation fidelity of Responsive Classroom practices was assessed using the Classroom Practices Observation Measure and teachers reported their perception of their own implementation of Responsive Classroom via the Classroom Practices Teachers Survey and the Classroom Practices Frequency Survey. Results indicated that Responsive Classroom training alone was associated with higher rates of teacher use of Responsive Classroom practices. There was no direct relationship between training in Responsive Classroom practices and the quality of student-teacher relationships. However, there was an evidence of a significant, indirect effect between Responsive Classroom training and student-teacher interactions. That is, there was an association between improved quality of student-teacher interactions when teachers previously attended responsive classroom training and self-reported high implementation fidelity (Arby et al., 2013).

Responsive Classroom and Teacher Beliefs

Given the findings from Ransford and colleagues (2009) concluding that teacher efficacy is related to the quality of SEL implementation, it is important to better understand how training in Responsive Classroom practices impacts teacher beliefs. However, beyond the conclusions from Rimm-Kaufman's findings in the Social

Academic Learning Study, less research is available on the relationship between teacher training in Responsive Classroom and its impact on teacher beliefs about the importance of Social Emotional Learning. Research that has been conducted (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2006; Center for Responsive Schools, 2020) suggests that training has an impact on teacher beliefs, values and efficacy.

Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues (2006) developed a valid and reliable measure of teacher beliefs, the Teacher Belief Q-Sort (TBQ). The TBQ was developed to assess teacher beliefs about children, discipline, behavior management, and classroom practices. Responses from the TBQ indicate that teachers trained in Responsive Classroom report different beliefs related to discipline and behavior management compared to the educators in the three other groups, in-service teachers without training in Responsive Classroom practices, pre-service elementary teachers and preservice high school and middle school teachers. Thus, the authors conclude that training in Responsive Classroom practices was associated with a change in teacher beliefs about discipline and behavior management. Teachers with Responsive Classroom training prioritized student self-regulation as a strategy for responding to misbehavior. Further, responses from the educators in the Responsive Classroom group were more closely related to the foundational principles and practices of Responsive Classroom than educators in the other groups (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2006).

In order to understand the relationship between attending four-day Responsive Classroom professional development and teacher beliefs about Responsive Classroom practices, the Center for Responsive Schools (2020) completed a two-year Teacher Belief Study. The study utilized pre- and post-test data to examine teacher beliefs on eight domains. The Teacher Belief Survey focused on the following critical areas of educator

practice: conditions for learning, conditions for effective teaching, goal of discipline, goodness of student intentions, nature of learning, purpose of education, role of SEL in learning, and role of school and classroom environment. Results from 690 educators in year one and 402 educators in year two with pre- and post-test data were included in the study. As a result of professional development on the Responsive Classroom and approach, teachers reported an increase across all eight domains assessed, indicating that the professional development had a significant impact on teacher beliefs. This research study demonstrates that four-day professional development courses are an effective tool in changing teacher beliefs about SEL practices (Center for Responsive Schools, 2020).

Research Questions

This study sought to contribute to the research base on Responsive Classroom by further examining how training in and implementation of Responsive Classroom Practices are associated with teacher beliefs about the importance of Social Emotional Learning for one school district in the upper Midwest. Teacher responses to a school district administered survey examined differences in teacher beliefs based on training in and years of experience in implementing Responsive Classroom. Two research questions were examined. First, is there a significant difference in how two groups of teachers, those who have attended Responsive Classroom training and those who have not, responded to survey items examining teacher beliefs related to SEL competence's role in students' academic success and teachers' commitment to promoting SEL competence for students? Second, is there a significant difference in how teachers with various years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices report their beliefs about their commitment to promoting SEL competence and their beliefs on the relationship between students' SEL competence and academic success?

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

The aim of this study is to examine two research questions. Specifically, the first research question examined if there was a statistically significant difference in how teachers who attended a four-day Elementary Core course on Responsive Classroom practices and teachers who did not receive the specific training rated two survey questions assessing their perceptions of the role of student SEL competence in academic success and their commitment to promoting SEL competence for students. The second research question explored whether or not teachers responded to the two survey questions differently based on years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom.

Setting and Participants

The study was completed at a school district in rural town in the upper Midwest. The district included six schools, a high school, middle school and four elementary schools. According to information from the 2018-2019 school year (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [Wi DPI], 2019) approximately 2,300 students were enrolled in 4-year-old Kindergarten through 12th grade. Of the total enrollment, 51.4% of students were classified as economically disadvantaged, 0.1% of students were English Language Learners and 12.6% were students with disabilities. The demographics of the student population include: American Indian or Alaskan Native (2.5%), Asian (0.6%), Black or African American (1.7%), Hispanic/Latino (2.8%), and White (90.9%). At the

start of the 2020-2021 school year, the district employed 134 teachers in 4-year-old kindergarten through 12th grade. Of those teachers, 67 are full-time elementary teachers.

Participants completing the survey included 45 educators employed in the school district during the 2020-2021 school year. Respondents included classroom teachers, specials area (art, music, and physical education) teachers, and special educators. Educators included in the study worked in one or more of the district's four elementary schools serving students in 4-year-old kindergarten through fifth grade. Ten participants worked with students in all grades 4K through 5th grade. Thirteen educators taught in grades four-year-old Kindergarten, Kindergarten, or first grade, ten respondents were second or third grade teachers, and twelve were fourth or fifth grade teachers. Participant years of experience in education ranged from 0 to 36 years ($M = 13.95$, $SD = 9.4$) and years of employment by the school district also ranged from 0 to 36 ($M = 10.07$, $SD = 9.4$).

Responsive Classroom Training

In the previous three school years, certified educators employed by the school district were able to participate in an on-site, four-day Elementary Core course on Responsive Classroom practices. The Elementary Core courses were facilitated by certified Responsive Classroom educators and who followed the training curriculum developed by Responsive Classroom. The first of three courses was offered in August of 2019 and two additional courses were offered in August of 2020. In addition to these professional development courses, the district also provided ongoing professional development on foundational practices of Responsive Classroom, such as Morning Meeting, teacher language, and responding to misbehavior, to all staff via district lead

professional development seminars offered at staff meetings by administrators, school psychologists, school counselors, and lead teachers.

Measure

Staff, Family, and Community Partner Survey of SEL Implementation. Data was collected via the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's Tool: Staff, Family, and Community Partner Survey on SEL Implementation (CASEL, 2019). This survey allows school leaders to collect information on stakeholders' perceptions related to SEL Implementation (CASEL, 2019). The school district administered the entire portion of the survey intended for staff and analyzed the results to assess various aspects of ongoing implementation of Social Emotional Learning. CASEL does not currently report any psychometric information related to the tool's reliability or validity. The 55 items of the staff survey are distributed across 4 sections: Foundation Support, Adult SEL Competencies and Capacity, Promote SEL for Students, and Continuous Improvement (CASEL, 2019). For the purpose of this study, two items from the Foundation Support section were examined. It was estimated that participants needed 10 minutes to complete the entire survey (CASEL, 2019).

Staff were asked to read each item and rate their level of agreement with the statement from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). The first survey item "I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students' academic success" served as a measure of teacher beliefs about the importance of student SEL competence in academic success. The second survey item, "I am committed to promoting social and emotional competence in my students" served as a measure of teacher commitment to supporting SEL competence in students.

Experience in Responsive Classroom. Questions were added to the beginning of the survey to collect demographic information, including the participants' experiences related to training in and implementation of Responsive Classroom Practices. First, respondents were surveyed as to whether or not they had attended a four-day Elementary Core Responsive Classroom course offered by the school district. Respondents were able to select "yes" or "no" to answer the question. Second, respondents responded to the following question: "Following training on Responsive Classroom, for how many full school years have you implemented Responsive Classroom Practices?" Respondents selected from the following choices: 0 years, 1 year, 2 or more years, or I have not received training in Responsive Classroom.

Procedures

Data was collected at the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Surveys were electronically disseminated to staff by administrators during a virtual staff meeting on a professional development day. Staff responded to seven demographic items and all 55 survey items via a Google Form. Responses were collected anonymously. Participants self-reported demographic information including position, attendance at an Elementary Core Responsive Classroom course, years of experience in education, and years of employment with the school district, and years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices. Due to the small sample size and in order to maintain participant anonymity, participants were not surveyed on their age, gender, specific grade level or role (e.g., art teacher, PE teacher, reading interventionists).

In order to analyze the research questions for this study, the lead researcher accessed and analyzed a sub-set of the data from the school district's larger survey. This research project was completed with approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB)

of the University of Wisconsin Eau-Claire in May of 2021. This research project fell under the category of exempt. With permission from the local school district, the lead researcher accessed information on two demographic questions and two survey items. Primary demographic variables of interest included whether or not staff had previously attended a four-day Elementary Core Responsive Classroom course and teacher years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices. The primary dependent variables of interest included how teachers responded to two items from the survey. The first item, “I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students' academic success” served as a measure of teacher perception of the importance of SEL. The second question, “I am committed to promoting social and emotional competence in my students.”, served as a measure of teacher commitment to SEL practices. The lead researcher received data related to these variables from the school district in an Excel spreadsheet. The data was stored in a password protected Excel spreadsheet on a USB drive and kept locked in the primary researcher's desk.

Data Analysis

The data was entered into an SSPS database for further analysis. The lead researcher examined the data for missing responses or outliers in the data. The data did not contain missing data or outlier responses; thus 45 complete responses were analyzed to examine the research questions. In order to analyze how groups of teachers with and without professional development responded to these questions, Mann-Whitney U test was performed. The Mann-Whitney U test was performed because the sample size ($n = 6$) for participants who had not attended Responsive Classroom training was small. The second research question of focus explored whether or not teachers responded to the survey questions differently based on years of experience implementing Responsive

Classroom. A one-way ANOVA was completed to examine this research question. The ANOVA examined how teachers with 0, 1 or 2 years of experience responded to the two survey questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

This chapter describes the analysis procedures utilized to explore the two research questions. First, a Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine if there was a significant difference between how teachers with and without Responsive Classroom professional development responded to two survey questions inquiring about teacher beliefs about the importance of SEL in student academic achievement and commitment to promoting SEL for students. Second, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if there were statistically significant differences in how educators with 0, 1 or 2 years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices responded to the two survey items.

Responsive Classroom Training

The first research question examined differences in teacher ratings of survey questions examining their commitment to promoting SEL practices and the degree to which they rate the importance of SEL in student academic success based on whether respondents previously attended a four-day Elementary Core Responsive Classroom course. Of the 45 teachers included in the sample, thirty-nine (86.67%) of the participants attended a four-day Responsive Classroom professional development course; whereas, only six of the forty-five participants (13.33%) had not attended a four-day Responsive Classroom professional development course.

Importance of SEL. A Mann-Whitney U test was performed to determine if there was a difference in how teachers with and without training in Responsive Classroom practices responded to the survey question “I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students' academic success.” Results of the Mann-

Whitney U test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between how groups of teachers who participated in Responsive Classroom training ($Mdn = 4$) and who did not participate in Responsive Classroom training ($Mdn = 4$) responded to the question, $U (N_{\text{training}} = 39, N_{\text{no training}} = 6) = 100.00, z = -.817, p = .41$.

Commitment to SEL. A Mann-Whitney U-Test was also performed to determine if there was a significant difference in how the same groups of teachers responded to the survey item “I am committed to promoting social and emotional competence in my students.” Results of the Mann-Whitney *U*-Test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in how teachers who participated in Responsive Classroom training ($Mdn = 4$) and teachers who did not participate in Responsive Classroom training ($Mdn = 4$) rated this survey item, $U (N_{\text{training}}=39, N_{\text{no training}}=6) = 90.00, z = -1.531, p = .13$.

Years of Implementation Experience

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) calculations were completed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in how educators responded to the two survey items examining their beliefs related to SEL’s relation to student academic success and teacher commitment to SEL practices, based on their years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom Practices. Three participants (6.67%) had implemented Responsive Classroom practices for two or more school year, 10 participants (22.22%) had implemented Responsive Classroom practices for one full school year, and 26 participants (60%) reported no years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices.

Importance of SEL. Results of the ANOVA indicate that years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices was not associated with significant

differences in how teachers rated the importance of SEL in academic success, $F = (2, 42) = 0.09, p = 0.913$.

Commitment to SEL. Results of the ANOVA indicate that there was not a statistically significant difference in how group of educators with 0, 1 or 2 years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices responded to the survey item measuring their commitment to promoting SEL for students, $F = (2, 42) = 0.41, p = 0.412$.

Table 1

One-Way Analysis of Variance in Importance of SEL and Commitment to SEL by Years of Implementation Experience

	0 Years		1 Year		2 Years		F (2, 42)	η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Importance of SEL	3.78	0.49	3.80	0.42	3.67	.058	0.09	0.004
Commitment to SEL	3.89	0.34	3.80	0.42	4.00	0.00	0.41	0.019.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesize results of this research study, outline important implications for practice for the local school district and discuss the limitations of the study and future research recommendations. This research project examined a subset of data from a larger survey administered in one school district that focused on teacher beliefs about SEL implementation. Two survey items from the Foundational Support section of CASEL's Staff, Family, and Community Partner Survey of SEL Implementation were analyzed to examine if there were differences in how teachers responded to survey items examining their beliefs about the importance of SEL in student academic success and their commitment to promoting SEL competence for students based on both their years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices and their previous attendance at a Responsive Classroom training.

When examining the first research question, teachers who had previously attended Responsive Classroom training and those who had not previously attended Responsive Classroom training responded similarly to both survey items. Thus, there was no statistically significant difference in how teachers in both groups responded to the survey items representing the importance of SEL in student academic success or teacher commitment to promoting SEL. Teachers in both groups either agreed or strongly agreed that student SEL competence is associated with student academic success and that they are committed to promoting student SEL.

The finding that teachers value SEL is similar to the findings presented by Yopp (2017), concluding that teachers reported valuing SEL. This finding differs from the findings of Reinke and colleagues (2011), who concluded that most teachers they

surveyed did not believe they had the skills or training necessary to promote SEL wellness and that SEL was not the responsibility of the classroom teacher. Results of the current study suggest that teachers in the local district are committed to promoting student SEL and understand that a student's SEL competence is related to their academic success. One reason for this difference may be due to shifts in the field of education over the 10 years between Reinke et al. (2011) and the current study.

The lack of significant findings in this analysis may also be attributed to training the participants in this research study received at the district level. Due to the district provided training and large percentage of teachers who did participate in Responsive Classroom training, it is possible that even those who did not attend the Elementary Core Responsive Classroom courses may have been exposed to the foundational principles of Responsive Classroom. As a result, even those who had not attended an Elementary Core Responsive Classroom course may have reported favorable beliefs on the importance of and their commitment to SEL as a result of this exposure. Regardless, it indicates that teachers in this study strongly believe that teachers play an important role in the development of student social emotional competence. It also highlights that teachers understand that time spent dedicated to teaching SEL in the classroom is associated with positive academic outcomes.

When examining the second research question, was there a difference in how teachers with zero, one, or two years of experience responded to the two survey items, there was also no statistically significant difference between the groups. Teachers with varying years of experience implementing SEL reported similar beliefs. Regardless of experience in using Responsive Classroom practices, all teachers in this school believed SEL instruction is important for student academic success and were committed to

promoting student SEL competence. This finding also differs from previous research reviewed. As an example, Arby and colleagues (2013) concluded that teachers previously trained in and implementing Responsive Classroom practices reported higher self-efficacy for discipline and creating learning environments that support all students. In this study, years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices did not appear to shift teacher beliefs about SEL.

An additional consideration that may be related to the differences in findings in this study relative to previous research is the research methodology used. Previous research reviewed the relationship between training in Responsive Classroom have examined differences in the beliefs and perceptions of teachers based on groupings of Responsive Classroom schools and non-Responsive Classroom schools. The current study examined teacher commitment to promoting student SEL success and the importance of SEL at only one point in time and at four schools within one district. During the 2020-2021 school year, implementation of Responsive Classroom practices, such as morning meeting, was a district-wide initiative. As a result, all teachers, regardless of previous experience with Responsive Classroom training, may have had some exposure to Responsive Classroom principles and practices. These methodological differences may contribute to the lack of significant findings.

Implications for Practice

Overall, it can be concluded that teachers in this specific district believe that, not only is it part of the classroom teachers' role to infuse SEL instruction alongside academic content, but that teachers are committed to promoting SEL competence for students. It can also be concluded that teachers in this district believe SEL competence is important in student academic success. Though the findings of this research study

indicate that teacher beliefs about SEL did not vary based on training or years of experience with implementation, these outcomes have meaning for future practice in this school district. First, when considering teacher commitment to promoting student SEL, there are several implications. Poulou and colleagues (2018) concluded that when teachers are committed and feel efficacious in teaching SEL, their students experienced positive social and emotional outcomes. The participants in this study reported strong commitment to promoting SEL competence for students, though not directly assessed, this may serve as a proxy for teacher efficacy for promoting student SEL. The teacher beliefs reported in this study may support future endeavors to build SEL programs in this district.

Second, Ransford and colleagues (2009), concluded that teacher self-efficacy for SEL is associated with implementation quality for SEL programs and that teachers with low self-efficacy for implementing SEL programs were more likely to implement SEL programs with lower fidelity. If teachers are committed to promoting SEL competence for students, they may be more likely to implement the practices of Responsive Classroom with higher fidelity. These conclusions also have important and practical applications to the local school district's planning for future SEL and Responsive Classroom professional development. The findings that suggest that strong teacher commitment to SEL means that the district may consider moving on from recruiting teacher buy in to SEL and Responsive Classroom and instead focus on application of practices and refinement of implementation.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are several important limitations to consider for this study, including the sampled population, sample size, potential bias in teacher ratings, study design, and

generalizability. By including a sample of teachers from one local school district a number of challenges exist in the diversity of the sample, generalizability of the results, and potential biases in teacher responses. By examining a sample from one school district, the results of this study are not generalizable or representative of the beliefs of all teachers. Additionally, this study primarily relied on teacher-reported information for data collection. This assumes that teachers accurately reported their beliefs on the survey, which is a possible limitation. Because the data was originally collected by the school district, employer of the respondents, it is possible that teachers may have provided more favorable responses to the district rather than their true beliefs.

Another limitation of this research study includes the timing of data collection. At the time data was collected, the majority of staff had already completed the four-day Core Responsive Classroom professional development, this created unequal distribution across the groups and limited the statistical power of analyses. This unequal distribution, in addition to other district lead initiatives, including implementing a new K-5 reading curriculum and student engagement, also may have impacted staff responses to the target research questions. The district's new reading curriculum incorporates habits of character into every lesson, which infuses SEL into literacy instruction for every K-5 student. School district initiatives over the past three school years had also focused on student engagement in learning, based on Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2009). Considered together, even though part of the sample in this research study had not been exposed to the four-day Core Elementary Responsive Classroom training, all staff had participated in other SEL focused initiatives over several years. It is possible that those who had not previously attended the Responsive Classroom training may still hold positive views based on information shared from

colleagues, observing practices, prior knowledge or personal beliefs, or previous initiatives.

The school district may be further down the road with SEL implementation than schools in previous research, thus impacting how the participants responded to the survey items. As a result, the implications of this research study are primarily applicable to the local school district. In order to obtain more robust results in the future, researchers may consider the methodology. In this study, teachers were surveyed only after training had occurred and within the same district where others had already received the training. If the primary goal of future research is to determine the impact of training, it would be effective to use a pre- and post-test assessment before and after training. This methodology would allow researchers to directly determine the effect of training on teacher beliefs. In the future, researchers may also expand their data collection to various sites or schools where all staff belong to the same condition.

This study sought to understand the relationship between training and teacher beliefs but did not address change in teacher practices as a result of training. Though it is important for the district to understand teacher beliefs about and commitment to teaching SEL, it is ultimately change in practices that lead to positive outcomes for students and staff. Future researchers may consider research design methods that move beyond sampling teacher beliefs to include observations of teacher practices.

The measure used in this study to assess staff beliefs about the importance of SEL and their commitment to promoting SEL using a tool available from CASEL that allows for school leaders to measure SEL implementation over time. The tool has not been studied to understand its reliability or validity, which limits the generalizability of the

results from this research study. Future research by the school district or other researchers may consider studying these variables with a tool validated for research purposes.

Summary

The current research study sought to understand if training in Responsive Classroom practices and/or years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom was associated with differences in how staff responded to survey items about the importance of SEL competence in student academic success and staff commitment to promoting SEL competence for students. Overall, there was no significant difference in reported teacher value of SEL or commitment to promoting SEL based on previous experience with training or years of experience implementing Responsive Classroom practices. Limitations of this current study and implications for future research examining the relationship between training and teacher beliefs were discussed.

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APPENDIX A

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning’s Tool: Staff, Family, and Community Partner Survey on SEL Implementation (CASEL, 2019)

Role:

- Classroom Teacher
- Specialist
- Music, Art, or Physical Education Teacher
- Teaching Assistant

How many years have you worked as an educator?

How many years have you worked as a teacher for the School District?

Which grade do you teach?

- 4k-1st Grade
- 2nd or 3rd Grade
- 4th or 5th grade
- 4k-5

Have you attended a 4-day Elementary Core course for Responsive Classroom?

- Yes
- No

Following training on Responsive Classroom, for how many full school years have you implemented Responsive Classroom practices in your classroom?

- 0
- 1
- 2 or more
- I have not received Responsive Classroom Training

Please rate the extent to which you agree with each statement below.

Section 1: Foundational Support and Planning for SEL	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I regularly receive communications from my school’s SEL team.	1	2	3	4
I regularly have opportunities to provide feedback or input to my school’s SEL team to help move our work forward.	1	2	3	4
My school provides opportunities for me and others in our school community to learn more about SEL at least once a year.	1	2	3	4

I believe that social and emotional competence is related to students' academic success.	1	2	3	4
I am committed to promoting social and emotional competence in my students.	1	2	3	4
I understand my role in promoting schoolwide SEL.	1	2	3	4
My school has developed a vision for schoolwide SEL.	1	2	3	4
I was involved in developing my school's vision for schoolwide SEL.	1	2	3	4
My school collected information about our current SEL practices, policies, resources, and needs within the last year.	1	2	3	4
My school has shared a strategic plan for schoolwide SEL.	1	2	3	4
I know how my school is measuring success when it comes to implementing schoolwide SEL.	1	2	3	4
I have the resources I need (training, materials) to implement SEL at my school.	1	2	3	4
(Teachers only) I have sufficient planning time to prepare to effectively implement the SEL approach adopted by my school.	1	2	3	4
(Teachers only) I am able to find the time needed to provide explicit SEL instruction to my students.	1	2	3	4