

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING**

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Abstract

Numerous studies demonstrate the many benefits of Social Emotional Learning (SEL). However, existing SEL literature is primarily concerned with SEL program implementation in elementary schools. Moreover, the teacher's role is often presented as delivering stand-alone SEL lessons from a prepackaged curriculum. Research indicates this approach is less effective with high school students. Consequently, high school teachers desire more SEL professional learning opportunities that consider the needs of their specific student population. In response, this phenomenological inquiry explores high school teachers' experience of engaging students in SEL to better understand what supports high school teachers need. Data gathered from close phenomenological observations and interviews with three high school teachers in mathematics and physical education afforded the opportunity to orient, interpret, and describe the phenomenon of SEL-in-action. Rich descriptions of SEL-as-it-is-lived were generated and analyzed in relation to van Manen's reflections on pedagogy and curriculum. The curriculum documents incorporating SEL into subject area frameworks were used to understand the curriculum-as-plan, and the teacher participants shared their lived experiences of engaging students in SEL in their classrooms to allow for analysis of their experience of SEL curriculum. Findings reveal that SEL manifests in pedagogical actions such as pacing their subject area curriculum to meet student needs, building student-teacher relationships, and in interactions involving caring for students. Teachers experienced SEL as living curricula, regardless of what subject was being taught, and often in moments where the curriculum-as-plan was disrupted. This suggests teachers would benefit from teacher education opportunities that allow them to develop the relational sensitivities attributed to adult SEL, mirrored in van Manen's sense of pedagogical tact. Experiential opportunities to understand SEL within the context of secondary teacher education are recommended for teacher education and ongoing professional development.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

The **Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)**: A collective of practitioners, researchers, policy developers and so on, who develop resources and conduct research on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools (Osher et al., 2016).

CASEL's SEL Framework: CASEL's (n.d.) SEL framework provides the definition and conceptual framework that most SEL research and resources use (Eklund et al., 2018). The framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

(re)present: In an existential approach to phenomenology, the aim of research is to analyze and present the originary phenomenon as close to the ways in which it was experienced as possible (Husserl, 1913/1982; van Manen, 2016a). I use the term (re)present in my research to emphasize that I am presenting the phenomenon in the ways in which my participants described experiencing it, and in so doing, I present again, or (re)present, the lived experience.

Social Emotional Competencies (SECs): At the center of CASEL's SEL framework are five social emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (CASEL, n.d.; Jennings et al., 2019).

Social Emotional Learning (SEL): An approach to teaching and learning that intentionally considers and addresses the social and emotional needs of students and teachers. Many definitions and frameworks exist (Eklund et al., 2018).

SEL curricular objective: A government-mandated curriculum objective included in government-created curriculum frameworks. For example, in the state of Massachusetts Department of Education (1999) Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework, they include a "Social and Emotional Health Strand" with the following "PreK–12: Mental Health" standard: "Students will acquire knowledge about emotions and physical health, the management of emotions, personality and character development, and social awareness; and will learn skills to

promote self-acceptance, make decisions, and cope with stress, including suicide prevention” (p. 35).

SEL curriculum-as-plan: Curriculum-as-plan (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005) is the objectified curriculum documents created by departments of education or ministries of education, often assuming a “fiction of sameness” of the student population meant to engage in the curriculum (p. 161). SEL curriculum-as-plan is inclusive of SEL curriculum created by outside developers for SEL interventions, as well as ministry of education/ department of education SEL frameworks and curricular objectives.

SEL curriculum-as-lived: Curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005) is the subjective experience of engaging students in curriculum, the situated, messy experience of teaching and responding to individuals in a classroom. SEL Curriculum-as-lived is the lived experience of engaging students in SEL within the context of a classroom.

Student SEL: Student SEL is when the emphasis is on students engaging in social and emotional components of learning. It may or may not be inclusive of student SECs.

Teacher/Adult SEL: Teacher SEL is when the emphasis is on teachers engaging in their own social and emotional development. It may or may not consider teacher SECs. The introductory and concluding sections of this publication refer to teacher SECs; the research articles do not. This is because the terminology of SECs aligns with SEL research and SEL interventions (Jennings & Frank, 2015) and is used to explain the meaning and significance of the findings of this doctoral study situated within this context. However, the term “competence” does not align with the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to pedagogy (van Manen, 2015). In the articles, adult or teacher SEL is used instead to better align with the methodological approach.

Zone of Between: The indwelling between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, creating a tensionality between the demands of the two curricular worlds (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005)

Chapter One: Introduction

The Context of the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on education. In March 2020, many students and teachers left their classrooms, anticipating returning in two weeks. However, many students did not return to their classrooms for a year or more (Oster et al., 2021). With little preparation or experience in the medium, K–12 teachers had to learn to adapt their approach to pedagogy and curriculum to a virtual context (Pressley & Ha, 2021). As time away from the in-person classroom increased, governments, researchers, school administrators, teachers, and parents all grew increasingly concerned about learning loss (Azevedo et al., 2021). Furthermore, the inconstancy of ever-shifting recommendations for how to stay safe in the midst of a global health crisis added to concerns for student health and wellbeing (Trinidad, 2021). From these concerns grew a deepening conversation around the social and emotional needs of students, and the ways in which teachers identify, respond to, and provide for their students' needs, especially in such an uncertain time using an unfamiliar medium (Schaffer et al., 2021, Vaillancourt et al. 2021).

As a result, interest in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) grew exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic (Yoder et al., 2020). Teachers wanted to harness the positive impacts of SEL to counteract the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Zieher et al., 2021). Research on SEL has been conducted for over two decades, and frequently cited short-term benefits of SEL include an increase in self-confidence and learning engagement, a decrease in emotional distress, as well as an improvement in behavior, grades, and test scores (Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Mahoney et al., 2021). Long-term benefits include enhanced mental health, social emotional competence, college-readiness, and pro-social behaviors (Greenberg et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). However, research findings have frequently been presented in relation to "SEL interventions," which are school-wide approaches to explicitly developing students' social emotional competencies with systemic supports, providing teachers with limited guidance on the potential of their role (Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017).

A Teacher's Role in Social Emotional Learning

The role of the teacher in SEL studies has often been described as delivering explicit, sequenced, stand-alone SEL lessons with fidelity as part of an isolated SEL curriculum (Williamson et al., 2015). Though limited SEL research exists pertaining specifically to high schools, some scholars suggest stand-alone SEL lessons are not as effective with high school students as they are with elementary school students (Bear et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2018; Yeager, 2017). High school teachers believe there is a need for SEL in high schools and want more SEL teacher education opportunities (Hamilton et al., 2019). However, they want guidance that affords them more informal and relational opportunities than that recommended for elementary school teachers (Clark, 2017; Lamb, 2018). To better understand what SEL guidance high school teachers might be looking for, let us turn toward a brief history of and the current context of SEL in education.

In 1994, researchers and educators came together to discuss how to find an approach to learning that synergistically addressed several areas: academics, health, citizenship, and behavior (Weissberg et al., 2015). Drawing inspiration from cognitive, behavioral, and social theories, they launched the Collaborative for Academic Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Osher et al., 2016). CASEL (n.d.) defines SEL as:

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (para. 1)

CASEL (n.d.) puts forth their conceptual framework for SEL with five “social emotional competencies” (SECs) and four surrounding, nested societal contexts that can promote or inhibit students’ SEC development (see Figure 1). The SECs are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The first circle surrounding the SECs represents the classroom, and includes SEL instruction and classroom climate. This doctoral study seeks to understand this context in relation to teachers’ and students lived experiences with SEL. The next circle represents the school as a whole and the schoolwide culture, practices, and policies that facilitate or hinder student SEL. The third circle symbolizes families and caregivers, as well as the quality of the relationships between the home environment and the school context. Finally, the last circle nests all of these contexts within the greater

community and the learning opportunities available therein and the extent to which they align and promote the identified SECs. All of these contexts are important to meaningful SEL, and impact not only the student's SEC development, but the teachers' experience of and approach to engaging students in SEL (Jennings et al., 2019).

Figure 1

CASEL's SEL Framework (updated 2020)



Measuring success through students' SEC development is a "competence promotion" approach to SEL (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017), and this approach relies on explicit, sequenced development of SECs. In this approach, teacher supports have frequently included an isolated SEL curriculum as well as training on how to implement the curriculum with fidelity (Jennings & Frank, 2015). High school teachers report preferring a more informal approach to SEL, often focusing on relational components of teaching, such as developing student-teacher relationships and building a positive climate in their classrooms, without explicitly developing SECs (Hamilton et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2015). Reeves and Le Mare (2017) describe this as a "relational approach" to SEL, which also reflects the "prosocial classroom" model described by Jennings and Greenberg (2009). As high school teachers have stated, they do not want prescribed SEL lessons, because they want to be able to meet the unique needs of their specific student populations (Clark, 2017; Lamb, 2018). What are the implications of this for SEL teacher education? What information and supports do teachers need to engage in a relational approach to SEL? Let us approach high school teachers' lived experience of SEL with a questioning attitude (van Manen 2016a), an openness to consider the ways in which SEL is experienced and the significance of SEL in a teacher's practice, in order to better understand what supports teachers need to better engage students in SEL.

Orienting to the Phenomenon of Social Emotional Learning

As a high school English teacher, I was introduced to SEL at a professional learning workshop. The presenter defined SEL using CASEL's SEL framework and then applied this framework to a stand-alone SEL lesson from a SEL curriculum. I left that professional learning opportunity understanding SEL as defined by explicit, stand-alone SEL lessons, separate from my subject area. When I began my doctoral program in educational research, however, I was invited to reimagine SEL through the lens of phenomenology. Phenomenology affords the opportunity to investigate phenomena as they are lived (Husserl, 1913/1982). Max van Manen (2016b), who specializes in phenomenological research and approaches pedagogy phenomenologically, states that the purpose of investigating lived experience is to provide "action sensitive knowledge" (p. 21). Thus, the purpose of exploring SEL phenomenologically is to better understand high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL in practice in order to better inform SEL teacher education opportunities. Reflecting on my experiences as a teacher, I asked myself: what are some examples from my classroom where I intentionally responded to and

engaged students in promoting their own emotional wellbeing? One moment in particular stood out. I was a high school English intern, teaching a course for students in Grade 12:

“Okay everyone, time to peer edit.”

The students reach for the first draft of their assignment and their peer editing sheet. The shuffling of papers and soft whispers fill the room. One student, Tom, has his jaw set, his eyes locked forward. He’s leaning back in his chair, his legs almost reaching the student in front of him. He’s wearing a t-shirt when everyone else is bundled up in sweaters. A tattoo of dog tags crawls up his arm. The other students start to hand their papers to the students next to them and read, pencils ready.

I move next to Tom and whisper, “Do you have your draft?” He doesn’t look at me.

“Yeah, but...” He looks down at his hands. “I don’t want to share it with anyone.”

“That’s okay. Would it be okay if I read it?”

He nods his head without making eye contact and leans down to unzip his backpack’s pocket. I walk around the table and sit next to him. He slides his paper over to me.

He starts the paper with a description of playing hockey so vivid that a chill runs up my spine and I hear the echo of blades against ice. I focus on the words, until I stop seeing other students. Tom describes the joy of moving without ever losing contact with the ground, and compares it to the connection he has with his team, how seamless their interactions are on the ice. He’s their captain. They chose him. Tom then compares this feeling to what it’s like at his group home, what it’s like not to know where his parents are or why they left him. The coolness of an ice rink’s air leaves me as heat intensifies in my cheeks. I bite my lip and focus on the discomfort to avoid letting my tears drop.

“This is really good,” I tell him.

“Yeah?” He keeps looking forward.

“Yeah.” I look at him. His eyes meet mine, and they’re glossy, wide, and red.

My hand pulls to touch his, but I refrain. I do not talk about his spelling mistakes or issues with grammar, but rather tell him a couple of sentences that left me wanting to know more. He nods, and the smallest lopsided smile inches upwards. I encourage him to write by hand the additions he might add as I go to walk around the room to check on the other students. When I question what it might be like to experience developing the identified SECs in pedagogical action as a high school teacher, I am reminded of this moment. I was intentionally addressing Tom’s emotional wellbeing and implicitly asking him to do the same. Tom was trying very hard through his writing to be self-aware, and he was self-aware enough in the moment to understand he was

not ready to share. In response, I tacitly asked him to be curious about his self-management capacities. If he was not okay with sharing with peers, could he manage the discomfort of sharing with me? If he was not okay with diving into the editing process, could he take small steps by developing certain details further? In these capacities, Tom accepted and tolerated discomfort, effectively managing his distress (Naragon-Gainey et al., 2017).

Tom's experience as a student is useful for me to consider in relation to my current teaching practice and the ways in which I engage my students in SEL. However, what is more useful to consider, in relation to improving SEL teacher education offerings, is reflecting on my experience as a teacher trying to engage a student in SEL. I felt great uncertainty in this interaction. I did not know what emotional and/or academic supports Tom needed, and if focusing too much on one might shortchange the other. I also struggled not to cry reading his work. My SECs were not where they needed to be to do this work (Jennings et al., 2019). I also struggled immensely contemplating whether I should help Tom create a plan to develop his technical writing skills. I wanted to help him achieve the academic excellence he deserved, and develop his responsible-decision making capacities, but not erode his sense of self-efficacy, or interfere with his already too-busy schedule balancing school, work, and sports.

The Need for Social Emotional Learning Teacher Education

When I think back to this interaction, and consider what SEL teacher education opportunities would have helped me, I would have benefited from exploring the following: (1) Navigating the tension between responding to a student's needs in the subject area and their needs in their personal lives; (2) Understanding in what ways my own SECs impact my ability to engage students in SEL; and (3) Accepting that it is messy, difficult, but also important to intuit which SEC to address and develop when. Reflecting on what opportunities would have been useful for me as a practitioner, I recognized that teacher SECs have many similarities with Max van Manen's (2015) sense of pedagogical tact. Van Manen (2015) claims pedagogical tact requires a teacher to develop several relational sensitivities, including, but not limited to "child-sense," which allows the teacher to understand "what goes on in the life of a child;" "personal pedagogy," in which a teacher develops a "self-reflexive awareness of one's own personal background and emotional make-up;" and a "professional ethic," which allows teachers to differentiate between "good" and "bad" ways of guiding and supporting students (p. 11). These relational sensitivities of pedagogical tact correlate well with CASEL's SECs, and developing

these relational sensitivities would have addressed the issues I had as a teacher trying to understand in what ways to be responsive to the emotional wellbeing of my students while helping them understand and relate to the subject area.

My previous teaching experiences suggest that SEL teacher education practices might be well-served by exploring experiential examples and questioning different ways to respond, not so that a teacher can “perfect” their practice or come up with all the “right” answers, but to develop a more thoughtful, reflective practice (van Manen, 2015). Leaning in further to a phenomenological orientation to SEL, as a teacher I am not so concerned with what to teach to my students regarding SEL, but rather who to *be* with students. I interpret SEL not as a what, but rather a *way of being*. Whether as a teacher or as a student, SECs are not what you know about what you should do in any given circumstance, but who you choose *to be* in any given moment.

To make the phenomenological orientation more accessible, let us return to the example of Tom. When I was with Tom, I did not explicitly instruct him on how to develop his capacities in social awareness and relationship skills. Instead, I gave Tom the chance to develop these SECs experientially in the ways in which I interacted with him. When Tom stated he felt uncomfortable sharing with peers, I asked him if he felt comfortable sharing with me. I did not demand it. I also sat next to him, sharing space and time with him as I read it, being careful to communicate kinesthetically that the experience was a privilege, not a burden. I was not the teacher telling him what writing should be or that my classroom expectations for the moment mattered more than what he was experiencing. I was the teacher who cared about his development as a person first, and as a writer second. I was aware of and responsive to his needs.

For this phenomenological inquiry, I seek to understand what SEL *is* and in turn the lived experience of SEL in relation to a high school classroom. I do not explore what teachers think about SEL, what their attitudes are, or what they believe it should be. I want to know what they practice and experience. From such research, we can perhaps better understand what kinds of teacher education and professional learning practices are needed. Although I am a teacher, I do not assume my experience and interpretation of SEL is representative of others.

An important component of phenomenological inquiry is to set aside assumptions regarding what one believes a phenomenon to be (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021). Edmund Husserl (1913/1982), often credited with founding phenomenological research methodology, described this process as bracketing. As we bracket, we attempt to separate the taken-for-granted

assumptions of a phenomenon, the “natural attitude” in which we perceive the world, and return “to the things themselves,” the originary experience of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1913/1982). Again, stepping into the questioning attitude, wondering into what the phenomenon is before determining research questions, I ask: what is it like to experience SEL in the high school classroom? Do high school teachers experience SEL as a way of being with students, dependent on their own SECs and their own relational sensitivities? Or do they experience SEL in the practices they employ or in intentionally developing SEL curricular objectives? The answers to these questions have different implications for SEL teacher education practices.

Defining the Issue and Purpose of the Study

High school teachers want and need more SEL teacher education opportunities (Hamilton et al., 2019). However, despite SEL being recommended for grades K–12, limited SEL research is specific to the high school context (Durlak et al., 2011; Hamilton et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2015), and what does exist suggests the approaches taken in the elementary school context are less effective with older students (Bear et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2018; Yeager, 2017). High school teachers prefer a relational approach to SEL (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017) in their classrooms, and they desire more SEL teacher education opportunities that accommodate this preference (Clark, 2017; Hamilton et al., 2019; Lamb, 2018; Yoder et al., 2020). Despite a lack of SEL teacher education opportunities pertinent to the high school context, SEL objectives are increasingly being added to curricular frameworks K–12 both across the United States and internationally (Eklund et al., 2018; Jennings & Frank, 2015; Schonert-Reichl, 2019; Yoder et al., 2020). As a result, researchers need more insight into high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL to better understand what SEL teacher education practices and/or opportunities would be most helpful for high school teachers.

In this study, I (re)present and interpret the meaning of three high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL. I do this to lend insight into what these teachers who volunteered to participate in a study on SEL experience. I want to better understand what it looks like in everyday practice for teachers to engage students in SEL, as well as what implications this has in relation to teachers' SECs and SEL curriculum. For example, if high school teachers take a relational approach to SEL, then they function as prosocial models for their students, and a student's SEC development is rooted in that student-teacher relationship (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In turn, I want to understand in what ways this may impact SEL teacher education

practices. What supports do teachers need to develop their ability to build student-teacher relationships? If the participants in this study indicate their own SECs affect their ability to engage students in SEL, in what ways might SEL teacher education practices help teachers develop their own SECs? This study is an emergent phenomenological inquiry that explores high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL to better understand the ways in which future SEL teacher education opportunities could better serve high school teachers.

Research Questions:

- *What is it like to experience Social Emotional Learning within a secondary teaching practice?*
- *To what extent is SEL experienced as a relational practice?*
- *In what ways do practitioners experience SEL as an approach to curriculum?*

The purpose of this study is to provide action sensitive knowledge that helps teachers reflect on their current approach to SEL in such a way that wonders into what meaningful SEL teacher education practices could be (van Manen, 2016b). To better situate the reader within the phenomenon of SEL and current SEL teacher education practices, I offer a brief literature review.

Literature Review

Social Emotional Learning in the High School Context

Despite being recommended for grades K–12, most SEL research focuses on the elementary context, which often limits the teacher's role to delivering a stand-alone SEL curriculum (Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Williamson et al., 2015). Originally, the approach to SEL in high school was meant to mirror the approach to SEL in elementary and middle schools (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). CASEL actively championed using both a preprogrammed, separate SEL curriculum as well as embedding opportunities to explore SEL skills and application within subject area curricula across grade levels. Unfortunately, high school students do not respond to pre-planned SEL curricula the way younger students do (Williamson et al., 2015; Yeager, 2017). Researchers are considering factors that may function as limiting effects (Yang et al., 2018). CASEL acknowledges and recommends that high school teachers take a multifaceted approach to engaging students in SEL, focusing on incorporating SEL into their general teaching practices and subject area curricula (Dusenbury et al., 2015).

There has been some documented success with an integrated approach at the secondary level. For example, Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO) “promotes civic engagement and social responsibility through the teaching of history lessons” and develops SEL competencies through “critical thinking, moral development, and other skills-building activities” (Williamson et al., 2015, p. 187). Success is measured through “[t]argeted student outcomes [which] include social and ethical awareness, civic learning, and historical understanding” (p. 187). Over 1.9 million students have engaged in FHAO, and reported results indicate higher “levels of overall historical understanding and aspects of civic learning, including political tolerance, civic efficacy, and positive perceptions of the classroom climate” (Williamson et al., 2015, p. 190). Thus, SEL can be well-integrated into subject areas. Teachers from subjects such as science and math have fewer such resources, and as a result, some high school teachers assume their role in developing SEL is limited to its ability to improve grades and test scores (Hamedani et al., 2015). SEL approaches do not need to be subject specific, however. Different studies have shown that informal approaches to SEL, with no specific relation to subject area, have shown improvements in students’ perception of school climate (Bear et al., 2017) and an approach to SEL that focuses on building student-teacher relationships increases learner engagement (Roorda et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2018).

In general, high school teachers prefer informal approaches to SEL (Bear et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2019). In their work with educators, Bailey and colleagues (2019) have found that teachers claim prescriptive SEL curricula do not match their needs and resources:

- (a) SEL curricula feel irrelevant because they don’t reflect students’ experiences, at times babying, oversimplifying, or ignoring the real challenges students face in their everyday lives;
- (b) there is not enough time for SEL because of competing academic priorities;
- (c) teachers and staff do not receive enough support to implement SEL programs successfully or to engage in their own authentic social-emotional growth, and
- (d) rigid lesson plans don’t allow teachers to respond to students’ evolving needs. (p. 51)

Their findings mirror multiple other studies (Clark, 2017; Lamb, 2018; Williamson et al., 2015). A study of 1,609 teachers engaged in SEL indicates that secondary teachers prefer an integrated approach to SEL over prescriptive curricula (Clark, 2017). One high school teacher criticized pre-planned SEL lessons, stating: “Let the schools find their own way [to teach SEL]. Each school community has different factors that impact student well-being” (p. 25). This is why most

high school teachers have a more informal approach to SEL that does not utilize stand-alone SEL lessons, but they indicate wanting more SEL guidance to be able to better respond to the needs of their students (Bear et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2019). And yet, high school teachers need further SEL supports as soon as possible, as governments are increasingly adding SEL mandates to curriculum (Eklund et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a nation-wide demand at the state-level in the United States for further SEL supports and SEC development for both students and teachers (Yoder et al., 2020).

To provide further SEL teacher education supports, CASEL has created several resources that include informal practices that teachers can use to further develop students' SEL (Dusenbury et al., 2015). For example, CASEL (2019) recommends "3 Signature SEL Practices" across grade levels, "welcoming inclusion activities, engaging strategies, and optimistic closures" (p. 3). The resource then goes on to give detailed examples of each practice. For instance, the resource provides several welcoming inclusion activities, such as "whole-group greeting activities," "morning circles," and "interactive 'do nows,' such as peer-to-peer homework help" (p. 3). These types of resources give teachers a range of activities to try in their approach to SEL, but the practices alone do not ensure students will engage in SEL, and the examples are often targeted at younger student populations.

Practitioners and teacher educators have long recognized that it is not just what you do with students, but who you are with them that determines whether students are engaged. David Jardine (1990) shares an interaction with an inexperienced educator trying to understand why she struggled to connect with students during his classroom observation, even though she was smiling and making eye contact. He explains to her that approaching pedagogy as a checklist of behaviors or activities can lead to a disconnect between a teacher and their students:

We began a long and painful conversation about the fact that she was speaking about smiling or looking at children as if they were just tricks to use; we talked about the way that such things must come from the heart, that they are living relationships that had to inform who she was with children. (p. 211)

The above example demonstrates that the new teacher may not have developed their own SECs, and that is an important component of student-teacher relationship building. In Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) prosocial classroom model, they highlight the ways in which research suggests teacher SECs and student-teacher relationship building are vital to engaging students in

SEL. They further claim these components should be developed in SEL teacher education practices. Is this the kind of guidance high school teachers are looking for in SEL teacher education practices? When high school teachers are asking for SEL teacher education (Hamilton et al., 2019), are they asking in what ways they can improve their relationships with students? Are they looking for the opportunity to reflect, as Jardine demonstrates? Are they looking for simple practices to incorporate into their classroom, or some combination therein? Further understanding teachers' lived experiences would allow researchers and teacher educators to better understand what supports teachers are looking for in SEL teacher education offerings.

Teacher Social Emotional Learning/ Teacher Social Emotional Competencies

The types of relational sensitivities Jardine (1990) explores with the teacher he is mentoring are also the foundational skills that compose SEL. Developing self-awareness and social awareness are key components of SEL, and mirror the sensitivities van Manen (2015) describes as inherent in pedagogical tact. Do teachers want to develop these types of relational sensitivities? Developing teacher SECs impacts a school's ability to engage students in SEL, but the topic remains understudied (Hen & Goroshit, 2016; Jones et al., 2018). Research findings suggest that if teachers' SECs are poorly developed, they may negatively impact students' SEL (Hoffmann et al., 2020). We cannot assume teachers have naturally developed their SECs prior to teaching, nor that teachers intrinsically understand the intent of engaging students in SEL. For example, the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiative in Britain found that some participants in the study understood SEAL "as a vehicle to endorse the 'British way of life,'" essentially "a means of cultural maintenance" (Wood, 2018, p. 883). These participants did not view SEL as helping students learn how to understand and manage themselves to better relate to the world around them, but rather as learning a prescriptive set of behaviors that reinforced a sense of nationalism.

This alarming example shows why teachers' SECs need to be developed alongside students' SEL (Jones et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). It also demonstrates why school communities need to engage in an on-going dialogue about the purpose of SEL. Not to imply that nationalistic tendencies run rampant, but rather that teachers need to understand that their SEC development affects their ability to build meaningful relationships with students and helps them engage their students in SEL (Jennings et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2018; Poulou, 2017). Research findings indicate student SEL development is difficult without a strong focus on the

relationship between teacher and student (Hoffmann et al., 2020). Teacher-student relationship-building is integral to SEL development as it has the teacher model and the student practice the skills necessary to initiate and sustain relationships (Yoder, 2014). However, whether a teacher believes student-teacher relationship-building is part of SEL development is affected by SEL teacher education (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Poulou, 2017).

Social Emotional Learning Teacher Education

Research on SEL in preservice teacher education and professional learning is still in its nascent stages, but is receiving increasing attention (Jennings et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Additionally, the attitudes of teachers towards SEL as well as their self-efficacy in SEL instruction are being studied with increasing frequency (Slaten et al., 2015; Yoder et al., 2020). In general, teachers report a need for more/improved SEL education as they believe SEL is beneficial for students' mental health, academic success, and interpersonal relationships (Hamilton et al., 2019). Teachers frequently report low self-confidence in developing SEL within their teaching practice, however, claiming poor preparation in teacher education and professional learning contexts (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). The research that has been conducted so far on teacher education programs indicates most of the content offered focuses on instructing teachers on the SEL framework, and/or presenting a particular SEL curriculum, rather than developing the pedagogical content knowledge necessary to make SEL fit their individual context (Jennings & Frank, 2015; Jennings et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

Though deficits in SEL teacher education and professional learning opportunities persist, certain practices have been shown to be more effective than others. Research findings indicate that teachers feel best prepared when they are encouraged to experientially develop a SEL approach while being mentored by or collaborating with other teachers (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Zinsser et al., 2014). Additionally, teachers report feeling more confident regarding their ability to teach SEL when their SEL preparation includes context-specific scenarios and the ability to discuss them with other practitioners (Stipp, 2019). Finally, in some professional learning offerings, they are starting to implement more systemic approaches, offering multi-day workshops centered on community context, and offering ongoing follow-up supports (Jennings & Frank, 2015; Jennings et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). For example, on-going professional learning opportunities that help teachers develop a mindfulness practice alongside other teachers in their school have shown promise (Jennings et al., 2019). However, most of the

current research and resources focus on elementary school teachers (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). The secondary context requires different approaches to classroom SEL. Learning how to weave relationship-building skills and other SEL skills into subject area specific contexts takes education and practice, but secondary teachers report limited preservice and in-service SEL education opportunities (Hamilton et al., 2019). Exploring secondary teachers' lived experiences of SEL would allow for enhanced understanding of the ways in which teachers experience and interpret SEL, as well as what supports they are looking for in SEL teacher education.

Personal Motivation for Study

This is a personally meaningful study for me, because my teachers' abilities to engage in SEL and inspire me to do the same changed my entire life's trajectory. Additionally, my own insufficiently developed SECs led me to leave my teacher education program. I pursued a career in the health field for several years, further developing my own SECs, before returning to education. Had SEL teacher education been part of my teacher education program, I may not have had the delays in my career that I experienced. I will briefly describe my trajectory to illustrate.

As a child, I repeatedly experienced traumatic events at the hands of the people meant to care for and protect me. My home life felt very unstable because of these events. At school, though, my days were filled with wonder. I have always been fascinated with learning, especially through reading stories and escaping into fictitious worlds. My teachers have always nourished my passions. One teacher empowered me to publish my poetry, another nominated a newspaper article of mine for a regional journalism award. I have dozens of significant examples of teachers going above and beyond to support me as a learner.

My teachers made me hopeful about my future. I likely would not be here today if it were not for the dedication and care of many teachers. This led me to pursue becoming a high school English teacher, so that I could support students in the ways I had been supported, and help others discover the beautiful escape afforded to them in literature. However, during my teaching practicum, I faced students who had very similar backgrounds to mine, but desperately different projected life outcomes.

Most of the students struggled with reading and writing, even simple tasks. As the year progressed, working with these students felt both rewarding and increasingly difficult. One of our Grade 10 students, who did not experience any learning disabilities, read at a Grade 4 level.

The school's support systems and external network of supports had failed these students. They often came to school disheveled and tired. The students were still engaged every day, though. One student would even bring in books from a series of ghost stories for me to read so we could discuss them together. However, most of the students did not meet grade level expectations that year. I became a teacher to help students like these, and it dawned on me that my outcomes were far better than would be the majority of the students I would meet from similar backgrounds. I would feel powerless to help them. I would constantly be reminded of the pain I endured as I saw them suffering from similar circumstances.

I had recovered from an eating disorder during high school, a maladaptive coping mechanism for the trauma I experienced at the time, but I relapsed during my teacher education program. I withdrew from the program to get help after my condition kept worsening. Had I identified that I needed further, specialized supports before I reached that stage, that might not have happened. Had my teacher education program offered SEL teacher education, I may have been more self-aware as a teacher, and recognized the impact watching my students struggle was having on my health. I may have been able to serve and support my students better. That certainly was the case after I took a few years off to pursue the health industry, and when I returned, having developed my own SECs, even though I had even more students with truly tragic backgrounds, I was much better able to handle the weight of their pain and continue my work with them. This study allows me to question in what ways teachers currently experience SEL so that we may better understand the needs of preservice and in-service teachers who need support from SEL teacher education opportunities.

A Need for Phenomenological Inquiry

Currently, SEL is interpreted many ways in research and in practitioner resources, including as a: stand-alone curriculum, set of practices, or a way of being more responsive to and engaged with one's students (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Better understanding high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL could afford curricular and pedagogical opportunities to create promising SEL teacher education resources and in turn practices. For example, as many high school teachers indicate they interpret SEL as being able to be responsive to the specific needs of the students in their classroom as those needs present themselves (Clark, 2017; Lamb, 2018), a prepackaged curriculum is of little use. These teachers need insight into ways in which to develop their relational sensitivities, how to read and respond to students in the context of

pedagogical interactions. In the prosocial classroom model, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) point out the need to develop teacher SECs and their relationship-building capacities in SEL teacher education practices, but in what ways can a teacher assess and develop their own SECs and relationship-building capacities? What approach would invite teachers to reflect meaningfully on these relational sensitivities?

This doctoral research thus aims to provide action sensitive knowledge by gathering high school teachers' lived experiences of Social Emotional Learning in their pedagogical interactions. Through the methodology of phenomenology, these lived experiences, which constitute the data for three research articles, were analyzed with the intention of identifying common thematic elements—the phenomenon's essence—and then evocatively (re)presented through vignettes written in such a way that readers can imagine what it is like to experience SEL in their own teaching practice (van Manen, 2016a, 2016b). The essence of a phenomenon for Husserl (1913/1982) is at the core of the experiences that contextualize our understandings and descriptions of a phenomenon. Here Max van Manen (1984), states:

The term “essence” is probably best understood as a linguistic construction: a description of a phenomenon. A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way. (pp. 42-43)

Describing teachers' lived experiences of SEL in such a way affords the opportunity to better understand what SEL is in everyday practice and what its significance is to the high school practitioner. With the teachers, I explore the role of SEL curriculum in their practice, student-teacher relationship building, and their own SECs, and the ways in which they all impact their lived experiences of SEL in their classrooms. These findings can then better inform SEL teacher education practices.

Phenomenological Orientation to Methodology

This study is inspired by Max van Manen's (2016b) “hermeneutic phenomenology.” Hermeneutic phenomenology incorporates the rich descriptive properties of Edmund Husserl (1913/1982) by investigating lived experiences of phenomena through the structures of consciousness, the existential understandings of a lived sense of self, other, space, time, and materiality (van Manen, 2016a). Husserl (1913/1982) states, “natural knowledge begins with

experience (Erfahrung) and remains within experience” (p. 51). Van Manen (2016b) explains Husserl’s approach to phenomenology as “a discipline that endeavors to describe how the world is constituted and experienced through conscious acts” (p. 184). Through rigorous examination of the structures of consciousness of a lived experience, Husserl aimed to provide “a new foundation for epistemology” (Zahavi, 2010, p. 666).

Hermeneutic phenomenology also incorporates Martin Heidegger’s (1927/1962) interpretative approach to meaning-making through the reiterative process of writing up lived experience descriptions to evocatively (re)present the phenomenon for the reader to imagine experiencing, then analyzing thematic elements and interpreting their meaning. For Martin Heidegger, “phenomenology is ontology—a study of the modes of ‘being in the world’ of human being” (van Manen, 2016b, p. 184). Heidegger claimed that the consciousness of phenomena is “never anything but what goes to make up Being” and that we must “bring forward the entities themselves if it is our aim that Being should be laid bare” (1927/1962, p. 61). As a result, one’s consciousness of an object or experience is oriented in their subjectivity, prompting Heidegger to reject what he saw as a false subject/object dualism (Paley, 2014). Heidegger’s primary concern is revealing the interpretative meaning of an experience (Dowling & Cooney, 2012).

As so few studies and resources exist for SEL in the high school context (Williamson et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018; Yeager, 2017), an approach inspired by hermeneutic phenomenology affords the opportunity to better understand the everyday experiences of engaging students in SEL, while allowing for interpretation of their significance. As van Manen (2016b) states: “even the ‘facts’ of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process” (2016b, p. 181). Writing is integral to the interpretative process and fosters a relational sensitivity to both the experience of the phenomenon and its meaning. Van Manen (2016a) claims that:

[P]henomenological writing [...] tries to systematically explore the meaning structures of a phenomenon or event [but also] tries to find expressive means to penetrate and stir up the prereflective substrates of experience as we live them. The experiential writing of the text should aim to create a sense of resonance in the reader. Resonance means that the reader recognizes the plausibility of an experience even if he or she has never personally experienced this particular moment or this kind of event. (p. 240)

Thus, in this study, I carefully collected participants' lived experiences of SEL, and wrote and rewrote vignettes inspired by these lived experience descriptions, interpreting and (re)presenting the originary phenomenon in order to evocatively present these experiences for the reader to reflect upon and better understand the phenomenon of SEL.

A Phenomenological Approach to Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

As curriculum has played an outsized role in the ways in which teachers engage students in SEL, how might we understand curriculum phenomenologically. High school teachers have frequently rejected isolated SEL curricula because it has been determined by others outside the context of their school, their classroom, and their students (Clark, 2017; Williamson et al., 2015). Ted Aoki describes such content as “curriculum-as-plan,” “the origin of which [...] is outside the classroom, in the Ministry of Education or a school district office” (as cited in Pinar, 2005, p. 14). This type of curricula assumes students have the same needs and shows little concern for the everyday rhythms and concerns of pedagogical practice.

The writers of SEL curriculum often come from clinical psychology or other health-related fields, developing the material to be part of a SEL intervention, and as such, understand curriculum as a set of protocols to follow with fidelity. Whereas, teachers understand curriculum as something to be adapted to meet the needs of their students (Jennings & Frank, 2015). For Aoki (1996/2005) curriculum as implementation is often conceptualized as a:

world in which the measures that count are preset; therefore, ordained to repeat the same—to dance the same, to paint the same, to sing the same, to act the same—a world in which proper names of students tend to be reduced to “learners,” psychologically enframed, where learning is reduced to “acquiring” and where “evaluating” is reduced to measuring the acquired against some preset standardized norm. This metron, this measure and rhythm, is one that, in an overconcern for sameness, fails to heed the feel of the earth that touches the dancing feet differently for each student. (p. 418)

Such an approach to curriculum is particularly problematic when the aim is to help students develop their ability to relate to themselves and others. A curriculum implementation approach often assumes a product-consumer relationship and an instrumentalist design, where the emphasis is on the future outcome and not the inherent meaning in the present moment and the ways in which learning impacts a student's individual development (Aoki, 1993/2005; Liu Baergen, 2020).

Few SEL curricula have been designed for high school students, and as a result, few high schools and high school teachers decide to use an isolated SEL curriculum (Bear et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2015). This does not mean high school teachers are free of curriculum-as-plan in relation to SEL, however. Eighteen states in the United States have included SEL curricular objectives in their curriculum frameworks in grades K–12 (Yoder et al., 2020), and this trend is growing (Eklund et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). Teachers can approach SEL curriculum-as-plan and choose an implementation approach to curriculum, or they can decide to adapt the curriculum-as-plan to meet the needs of their students in daily practice, what Aoki (1986/1991/2005) referred to as “curriculum-as-lived”:

Miss O, knows that an abstraction that has distanced but “accountable” relevance for her exists, a formalized curriculum, which has instituted legitimacy. [...] [S]he knows that this generalized knowing views a teacher like her as one of the thousands of certificated teachers in the province, and children like Andrew, Sara, Margaret and Tom merely as Grade 5 pupils, children without unique names, without freckles, without missing teeth, without their private hopes and dreams. But she knows deeply from her caring for Tom, Andrew, Margaret, Sara and others that they are counting on her as their teacher, that they trust her to do what she must do as their teacher to lead them out into new possibilities, that is, to educate them. She knows that whenever and wherever she can, between her markings and the lesson plannings, she must listen and be attuned to the care that calls from the very living with her own Grade 5 pupils. So in this way Miss O indwells between two horizons. (p. 161)

The tensionality that exists between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived Aoki (1986/1991/2005) referred to as “the zone of between” and he believed this tension is what leads to meaningful pedagogical practice. William Pinar (2005) describes such spaces between the curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived where:

Miss O in-dwells between two horizons — the horizon of the curriculum-as-plan as she understands it and the horizon of the curriculum-as-lived experience with her pupils. Both of these call upon Miss O and make their claims on her. She is asked to give a hearing to both simultaneously. This is the tensionality within which Miss O inevitably dwells as teacher. And she knows that inevitably the quality of life lived within the tensionality depends much on the quality of the pedagogic being that she is. (p. 15)

Aoki's phenomenological interpretation of curriculum goes beyond the text of ministry policy documents to question the nature of the teacher's being with students. A phenomenological approach to teaching and curriculum calls on us to move beyond the desired outcome to instead question and value the experience of learning as a meaningful interaction between teacher and students. "Teaching, for Aoki, is understanding essentially both epistemologically and ontologically as a mode of being that dwells in the tensioned zone between two curriculum worlds" (Liu Baergen, 2020, p. 82). A phenomenological approach to curriculum is meaningful for a study exploring high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL because the research demonstrates that who a teacher is and how they relate to their students, their own SECs, and strength in building student-teacher relationships greatly impacts their ability to and experience of engaging students in SEL (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Crafting a Thesis by Article

Similar to van Manen (2015), my approach to research is with the intent of directly serving pedagogic practice. As such, when selecting between a monograph and a dissertation by article, I chose the latter. In this way, I could orient my findings in practice, share the results through sharing the participants' lived experiences of SEL in vignettes, and then disseminate my interpretation of the significance of these everyday experiences of SEL. Dissertation by article affords me opportunities to disseminate findings thematically and in a way that practitioners can understand. The titles of the three articles are:

- *Attuning the Pace of Curriculum to Student Needs During a Pandemic: Social Emotional Learning in High School*
- *Social Emotional Learning in the High School Classroom: A Phenomenological Inquiry*
- *Giving and Taking Care: Secondary Teachers' Experiences of Social Emotional Learning*

In each article, I was able to give each research question the attention it deserved and share the findings accordingly.

Research Questions

In qualitative research, it is vital to frame the questions in alignment with the methodology chosen. As phenomenology investigates lived experience, questions must focus on a phenomenon as it is experienced. Van Manen (2016a) further suggests "what is it like" questions because they allow for expansive and emergent inquiries of both "[w]hat is the phenomenological meaning" while also investigating how does X "present or give itself" (p. 36).

In this way, I can investigate in what ways high school teachers experience SEL in their everyday practice, as well as the significance and meaning of these moments.

In order to explore the phenomenon, my primary research question is: *what is it like to experience Social Emotional Learning within a secondary teaching practice?* Each article explores this question, but the first article, “*Attuning the Pace of Curriculum to Student Needs During a Pandemic: Social Emotional Learning in High School,*” is devoted to this question alone. In this article, I explore with my participants what lived experiences of SEL reflect inherent practices of pedagogy. In answering this research question, participants reflect on both their experience of engaging their students in SEL, and the ways in which their own SECs help or hinder their ability to do so in the moment. However, the phrase “SECs” is not used in the article, as the word “competence” is rooted in interventionist approaches and instrumentalist conceptualizations of curriculum, which are inconsistent with a phenomenological approach to pedagogy and curriculum (van Manen, 2015).

In the second article, “*Social Emotional Learning in the High School Classroom: A Phenomenological Inquiry,*” I again ask the primary research question, but I probe further to explore: *to what extent is SEL experienced as a relational practice?* In the lived experiences of SEL shared by my participants, I explore the ways in which they relate to their students. This questioning delves deeply into student-teacher relationship building and its role in SEL in the high school classroom.

Finally, in the last article, “*Giving and Taking Care: Secondary Teachers’ Experiences of Social Emotional Learning,*” I build off of the findings in my first two articles, and dig deeper to ask: *in what ways do practitioners experience SEL as an approach to curriculum?* In this article, I explore the tensions between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, and I articulate the approach to SEL curriculum that the teachers in this study practice and experience.

Methodology

Research Context

In the spring of 2020, I shared my research interests in exploring high school teachers’ lived experiences of SEL with a colleague. He directed me to a school district interested in further developing their approach to SEL at their high school, in a way that explicitly supported teachers’ needs. I followed-up with the district’s administration and counseling department, and they invited me to conduct my research at their school district. They also invited me to work as a

consultant to help them self-assess their school-wide approach to SEL prior to my research collection, and to then help them improve their approach after my research collection. I was paid through grant funds that were independent of the school, and I was not paid for my doctoral research. It was advantageous to work within a school district for this phenomenological study as the research collection methods, a series of close observations and a series of interviews, are best situated where the researcher can participate in the participants' lifeworlds, allowing for greater access to participants and their experiences (van Manen, 2016a, 2016b). The school district was also a great fit because of their interest in SEL and desire to incorporate the findings gathered from teachers' lived experiences. I met the school's administrative team in the spring of 2020, and in the fall of 2020, I facilitated the school's self-assessment of their current health offerings and supports using the School Health Index developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This self-assessment was inclusive of their system-wide approach to SEL (though this did not explicitly include the SEL classroom practices of high school teachers). I then began and concluded my doctoral research collection in the spring of 2021. Due to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, all contact during this period was virtually mediated.

The school district serves approximately 1,000 students in grades 6-12. The school has a minority enrollment of 32 percent, and 18 percent of students come from homes where English is not the first language. Roughly six percent of students come from economically disadvantaged households, and five percent of students are identified as having disabilities. It is a public school district, but they have a strong emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Historically, the school has been ranked in the top ten schools in Massachusetts and the top 150 schools in the United States, according to US News & World Report. I have the University of Ottawa's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board (REB) permission, as well as permission from the school district, to publish research findings naming the school, but I am choosing not to publish the name of the district in this manuscript. I want to discuss my experience as a researcher conducting research that impacts mental health in a community where two student members of that community died by suicide during research collection. I believe this is an important experience to share, but I also feel that, as this is such sensitive content, I would like to protect the privacy of the school community.

I was not paid for conducting my doctoral research. However, I have been paid for my work helping them assess and address their systemic SEL supports. And my doctoral research

and work have informed each other. In my Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the school, they guaranteed my ability to conduct research, publish findings, have sole access to the data collected, and keep my participants anonymous. In return, I would share my findings with the school community in order to help them improve their approach to SEL. I began working at the school in August of 2020. I shared this information, including a copy of the MOU, with the REB in November, 2020, and received ethics approval for my study in January, 2021. The REB gave me permission to invite teachers from the district's high school, via my University of Ottawa email account, to participate in my study. I had to make it clear that my position as a researcher held no undue influence, and would not impact any potential services or supports I could offer them in the future. Because of the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the REB alerted me that if I wanted to do any data collection in-person, there would be an additional ethics review process. As the school had been virtual up until that point, and planned to remain so throughout the school year, I applied for virtual-only access.

The REB gave me permission to conduct a series of observations and interviews with each participant. The REB further required that students not be in view, unless they were to be designated research participants and their parents gave permission. Instead, I chose to have teacher participants allow me to observe in a way where I could not view the students, such as inviting me to a separate Zoom™ link on an alternate device and account, so that my view was of just the teacher. Because of my position in the school, the REB required that I keep participants anonymous, and so I did not give participants the chance to be identified. I have also masked any identifying characteristics in this manuscript and all article publications. I have given each participant a pseudonym that remains the same throughout the articles, and so with the lived experiences of SEL they share, as well as their quotes on SEL and education, I can still give a deep sense of who they are as educators who engage in SEL, without identifying who they are in the world.

Participants

Teachers were invited from the high school of the school district in Massachusetts previously mentioned, from disciplines that have state-mandated SEL objectives (math, English, and physical education). The invitational email stated the potential participants had to be certified secondary teachers, and have been an active practitioner for at least the last three consecutive years in order to ensure they have had recent lived experiences of SEL. Twenty-five

high school teachers were invited via email and three volunteered to participate, one health and physical education teacher and two math teachers. Van Manen (2016a) recommends between three and five participants to allow for in-depth inquiry, as hermeneutic phenomenology relies on a limited researcher-participant distance, where the researcher is engaged in the participants' life-worlds. This requires not only repeated access to the individual, but an intimate understanding of the ways in which they express and interpret meaning. A greater number of participants would have hindered my ability to engage fully with each individual, which would have limited my understanding of the participants' lived experience of the phenomenon as well as my ability to interpret its significance. I will give a brief introduction of each of the three participants below. Each article further introduces each teacher.

Mrs. Williams, High School Math Teacher. Mrs. Williams has been a teacher for over two decades. She began in industry, working as an engineer for many years. She became a teacher to "leave a legacy," and when asked what types of math courses she prefers to teach, she said:

Because my, my supervisors, always say, "If we give you the fundamental courses, we never have to worry about the kids later on, because you've developed the building blocks, and a love for learning that any teacher can come along and teach them the hard stuff because they're ready. But if we give you, tough courses, and other teachers that don't care as much about the kids teach them the fundamentals, we may never get them to you. Because when they get there, they're not going to have the building blocks." So, unfortunately, I'm often not opting to go to for the really exciting, sexy, big-time math that's up there.

Mrs. Williams has a deep love of math, but she makes it clear her devotion to students is stronger.

Mr. Sanchez, High School Math Teacher. Mr. Sanchez also started teaching math after a career in industry (a trait more common than not at the school). He became interested in teaching to better understand the USA's educational system, as he was raised in a different country (another common trait in the school). When asked his views on learners who do not feel naturally gifted in math and are unsure about their capabilities, he stated:

There's always so much to learn. It's not about how much, if you're not good at math, [...] it's about...] how much sincere effort. That's all that matters, and if you're taking sincere

effort by staying in your cocoon, or you will open. You are being receptive of, like, “Okay, I’m not getting it, so let’s ask a question.”

Mr. Sanchez recognizes that many students have fractured relationships with math, and he reiterates throughout his interviews that his aim is to help students “connect to math.” Although he teaches many advanced students, he finds joy in helping students develop their relationship with math more than he enjoys any specific math content.

Mr. Smith, Middle and High School Health and Physical Education Teacher. Mr. Smith became a PE teacher because he had great relationships with his coaches when he was playing in team sports when he was in school and university, and he really enjoys being physically active. He views his classes as a gateway for students to develop a better relationship with their health and movement. When asked what his goals in his classes were, he stated:

If my students leave here, and they have fond memories of health and phys. ed., I feel like I’ve done my job. Because if they leave here and they, they’re like, “I did not like PE, I don’t like exercising then.” But if instead they’re like, “Yeah, we went to class and had some laughs and I learned a couple things.” I think that like, they’re gonna leave here and live a long time. [...] And so, on the other hand, like if someone leaves, and they’re like “Gym class is where I got yelled at for like being lazy, and like, made to feel stupid because I can’t kick a ball,” I don’t think that they are going to have the best outcomes when it comes to learning to appreciate a healthy lifestyle later on in life.

Mr. Smith takes his job very seriously, as he sees it as possibly the last engagement in physical activity and health-promoting behaviors some of his students will have. He wants to build strong relationships and help his students enjoy themselves more, which he believes will improve the likelihood of them leading healthier, happier lives.

All three participants claim they prioritize their students’ learning over their subject area curricular objectives. This looks different across their individual contexts. The different presentations of SEL opened my mind up to the many different approaches to SEL in practice, facilitating my need for, and ability to, engage in bracketing, an important component of phenomenological methodology (Husserl, 1913/1982; van Manen, 2016a, 2016b).

Bracketing

A core methodological component of phenomenological inquiry is to suspend presuppositions and assumptions about the phenomenon in order to both describe and understand

the originary experience (Heidegger, 1927/1962; Husserl, 1913/1982; van Manen, 2016a, 2016b). Husserl (1913/1982) described this process as “bracketing.” As a researcher, this meant I had to bracket my own presuppositions and assumptions about the phenomenon prior to beginning the study, while engaging in research collection, and while interpreting and analyzing the information gathered.

Bracketing looks different depending on the stage of research. In the beginning, I acknowledged that I had objectified SEL through CASEL’s SEL framework. Because that was my orientation to SEL, I originally struggled to identify experiences as SEL if they were not intentionally preprogrammed. I also assumed that my participants would describe SEL through CASEL’s SEL framework because the participants have state-mandated SEL objectives derived from the framework. Throughout the entire study, I have had to continuously bracket my conceptual understanding of SEL in order to allow for and authentically (re)present my participants’ lived experiences of SEL.

Before beginning research collection, I read a diverse array of texts: phenomenological texts to understand relational phenomena in pedagogy (Howard et al., 2021; Wiebe et al., 2017); practitioner blogs and articles that described their approaches to SEL (Education First, n.d.); and SEL research articles (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Hamedani et al., 2015). I also spoke with many friends who were practitioners to better understand the ways in which they interpreted and experienced SEL. After opening my mind to what SEL could be, I reflected on the different moments in my own teaching practice that I might consider SEL, and explored what themes were therein, again referencing phenomenological pedagogical texts.

In order to bracket in preparation for engaging with my participants, I practiced interviewing with my doctoral supervisor. We reflected on what questions might bias my participants’ answers, and ways in which to gather rich, descriptive accounts of lived experience. To bracket throughout the research collection process, I journaled to question my own assumptions and bias, read phenomenological texts constantly, and carefully engaged my participants in reflection on their sensory experiences instead of their cognitive conceptions. Through continuously bracketing in such capacities, I was able to stay oriented to my participants’ lived experiences of SEL.

Research Collection

I gathered information through a series of close observations as well as a series of interviews. Close observation is meant to allow the researcher to “enter the lifeworld” of their participants, and van Manen (2016b) claims “the best way to enter a person’s lifeworld is to participate in it” (p. 69). The purpose of the observations was to allow me to become acquainted with the participants and their realm of experience, as well as to gather anecdotes and examples of the participants’ lived experience of SEL. Each teacher was observed for 2-3 class periods. I made an audio recording of each observation. I took frequent field notes, describing the teacher’s response to and engagement with students, detailing the time so I could refer back to the moment in the audio recording.

After each observation, I would ask the teacher to share if they experienced SEL in that class period, and if so, could they please describe the moment and their experience of it, including student interactions as they pertained to the teacher's experience, as I was not able to see students’ responses, only hear them. After our debriefing session, I would find the time of the moment described in my recording as well as in my field notes. I had two observation periods with each teacher. Mr. Smith and Mr. Sanchez each identified one experience of SEL in their observation periods. Mrs. Williams identified and described two experiences of SEL in her observation periods. After each observation, I also journaled about the experience to bracket my bias, listened to the audio recording as I reviewed my field notes, summarized the experience, and identified thematic elements of the teacher’s lived experience. I identified thematic elements by paying attention to what the participants described again and again. For example, what structures of consciousness were the participants most aware of in these moments, to what sensations did they continuously return?

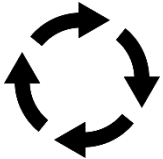
I used this material after each observation as inspiration to write vignettes to (re)present the phenomenon. I tried to reflect on their sensory experiences (including kinesthetic and physiological sensations and senses and the ways in which these inform their relational attunement) of the moment identified. I also searched for similar experiences described in phenomenologically-oriented pedagogical texts (Howard et al., 2021; Wiebe et al., 2017). I used the vignettes I had written to inform and inspire my questions in the interviews with participants. To facilitate rich, in-depth data collection, I engaged in what van Manen (2016b) describes as the “phenomenological interview,” where I asked participants for their lived experience descriptions

of SEL through collecting “experiential narrative material, stories, or anecdotes” (p. 314). However, the account needs to be pre-reflective, and as participants often include “personal views, perceptions, perspectives, or interpretations” (p. 314), I had to phenomenologically orient my participants and constantly redirect them to their sensory experiences in the moments identified. To do this, I gave prompts, such as: Think of a moment when you experienced SEL. Before sharing, reflect on what this moment felt like. I asked participants to share their lived experiences of SEL in as much sensory detail as possible. These prompts ask after van Manen’s (2016a) existentials, a lived sense of self, other, space, and time. If teachers seemed stuck, or kept reverting back to conceptualizations, I used the vignettes of the SEL experience I observed and they described to me to inspire my questions. I did not share my vignettes with them directly, but instead asked the teachers to go deeper and deeper into their experience, to see if I depicted the sensations and feelings authentically. I then edited the vignettes after the first interview with each participant to better (re)present what they experienced. In the second interviews, I asked for further experiential anecdotes, including anecdotes from their in-person teaching practice prior to the pandemic, and I asked the teachers to share how they define and interpret SEL and what it means for their practice. After the second interview, I returned to the vignettes I had written to question if they accurately (re)presented the meaning of the experience the participants’ described, and if they inspired similar sensory reimaginings. After each interview, I again listened to the audio recording of my observations and interviews, reviewed my field notes, and identified thematic elements.

At the end of research collection, I had a dozen lived experience descriptions across participants, of which I had written at least one initial draft of a vignette. Several of these had already transformed across several iterations. I also sourced more than a dozen pertinent lived experience examples of pedagogical interactions between teachers and students in phenomenological literature in order to interpret my findings (Howard et al., 2021; Wiebe et al., 2017). Furthermore, I also had my transcripts of each observation and interview, journals, summaries, and a list of thematic elements to inspire my analysis. For van Manen, this methodology is not a prescribed procedure. However, he does elucidate possible approaches for proceeding with one’s analysis. In Table 1.1, I summarize van Manen’s (1984) methodological outline for doing phenomenology.

Table 1.1

Summary of van Manen's (1984) Methodological Outline for Doing Phenomenology

	Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience
	In orienting to the phenomenon, the researcher examines assumptions and forms the phenomenological question that inspires the study.
	Existential Investigation
	The researcher examines and questions their own lived experiences, that of their participants, and descriptions of the phenomenon in both phenomenological and artistic mediums.
	Phenomenological Reflection
	Examining information gathered for common thematic aspects, the researcher determines the essential themes.
	Phenomenological Writing
The researcher writes up the examples gathered from participants, careful to authentically reflect what participants shared, writing and rewriting lived experience examples and the interpretation thereof.	

In my section on bracketing, I share what van Manen describes as “Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience.” I questioned my assumptions and developed a research question to orient my study. In my research collection processes, I engaged in “Existential Investigation” through gathering information from participants centered around the existentials of their experience of the phenomenon. I also began my “Phenomenological Reflection” and “Phenomenological Writing” in these stages. The four arrows to the left are meant to illustrate the reiterative nature of these stages. Van Manen (1984) delineates between stages for clarity, but the process is not linear.

Analysis

In van Manen's (2016a) approach to hermeneutic phenomenology, writing is analysis, and so in different ways, I had been engaging in analysis throughout the process of research collection. After finishing research collection, I had a tremendous amount of information gathered. My approach to “phenomenological reflection” and “phenomenological writing” had many similarities across my analysis within the three articles, but had some key differences.

Analysis of “Attuning the Pace of Curriculum to Student Needs During a Pandemic: Social Emotional Learning in High School.” In the first article, I focus on the research

question: *what is it like to experience Social Emotional Learning within a secondary teaching practice?* The first article seeks to understand the lived experiences that occurred during the conditions of the pandemic. My observations of teachers took place during the pandemic in a virtual context. The goal of phenomenology in (re)presentations of a phenomenon is to be able to evoke, with write-ups (Lloyd & Smith, 2021), the same sensory experiences as the originary experience (van Manen, 2016a, 2016b). Hermeneutic phenomenology asks the researcher to participate in the participants' lifeworld. I know these teachers through a virtual world. Thus, I knew I wanted my first article to focus on the lived experiences of SEL that the teachers shared concerning the virtual classroom when I was present. In this way, I could better orient myself to my participants' approach to pedagogy in research prior to analyzing and interpreting their lived experiences of SEL when they were in-person, when I was not present.

I gathered four lived experience descriptions of SEL from each participant. However, only one for which I was present with Mr. Sanchez and one with Mr. Smith. I had two options to choose from with Mrs. Williams. I looked for common thematic elements in these four lived experience descriptions. I read and reread phenomenological literature and pedagogical texts that depict teaching virtually (Cornelius, 2014; Morgan, 2018; Philipsen et al., 2019; Veletsianos, 2020). I searched for any and all references in my transcripts for mentions of "COVID-19," "pandemic," "technology," "virtual," "Zoom™," and "online." I was looking for thematic statements and commonalities. What stood out the most was the teachers' sense of time. They were more aware of the ways in which time passes in a virtual medium compared to in-person. This led me to look for descriptions of time in the transcripts, and "pace" and "pacing" repeatedly appeared across all participants' transcripts. I then sourced phenomenological, pedagogical, and artistic descriptions of pacing and/or the passage of time (Goble, 2020; López López & Coello, 2020; Saeverot & Torgersen, 2021). This inspired me to again edit my vignettes. During this process, I was attempting to write my article, and the article itself went in several different directions as I more evocatively described the vignettes, and as I was able to find resources that helped me to better analyze the thematic commonalities amongst the participants, particularly concerning the ways in which the participants' approaches to pedagogy and curriculum impacted their experiences of pace. I summarize the methodological process in Table 1.2, and illustrate the depth of the questioning attitude in this inquiry in Table 1.3.

Table 1.2

The Stages of Analysis in “Attuning the Pace of Curriculum to Student Needs During a Pandemic: Social Emotional Learning in High School”

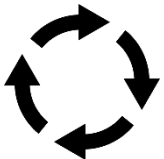
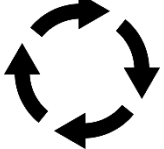
	Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience
	I determined my main research question by suspending (putting aside) my understanding of SEL through CASEL’s SEL framework. I asked: <i>what is it like to experience SEL within a secondary teaching practice?</i>
	Existential Investigation
	I observed participants, and asked them if they experienced SEL during the observation period. I wrote up initial vignettes based on their responses. These inspired questioning regarding existentials and significance in interviews.
	Phenomenological Reflection
	The existential of time was a primary focus of participants. The word “pace” is used repeatedly. I referred to phenomenological texts on the experience of time in education. I used transcripts and phenomenological texts to continue to write-up and edit vignettes.
	Phenomenological Writing
	At least five drafts of each vignette were produced. Each iteration of the vignette affected interpretation, and the entire article was rewritten five times to best evoke the sense of time in lived experiences of SEL, and to authentically (re)present the themes that affect the participants’ experience of time in SEL.

Table 1.3

The Stages of Questioning in “Attuning the Pace of Curriculum to Student Needs During a Pandemic: Social Emotional Learning in High School”

	Turning to the Nature of Lived Experience
	<i>What is it like to experience SEL within a secondary teaching practice?</i> In what ways is SEL experienced in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time • Space • Relation to others • Relation to self • Materially (Virtually)
	Existential Investigation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does my write-up (re)present the experiences that my participants describe? • What similarities of experience and presentation are there? • What words are significant? What are their etymologies?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways have the themes identified been represented in phenomenological texts?
	Phenomenological Reflection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Am I evoking the existentials of the experience shared? What components of practice do participants share that impact their experience of SEL? In what ways are pedagogy and curriculum explained in phenomenological texts in a way similar to the experiences described by participants?
	Phenomenological Writing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is my interpretation of meaning and significance representative of my participants' experience? In what ways might my bias or my experiences be influencing my interpretation? Does the description of the lived experiences of SEL invite the reader to imagine experiencing SEL in their own classroom? Did I answer my research question?

Again, hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry is not so linear, and many of these questions reoccurred across stages, but this demonstrates the emphasis on questioning the existentials of the experience, the ways in which my write-ups (re)present the participants' lived experiences of SEL, the significance and meaning of these experiences in relation to pedagogy, and the ways in which my own bias and interpretation may impact how authentically I am able to (re)present and interpret my participants' experiences. Constantly examining the natural attitude through adopting a questioning attitude is essential to phenomenological inquiry (Husserl, 1913/1982; van Manen, 2016a, 2016b).

Analysis of “Social Emotional Learning in the High School Classroom: A Phenomenological Inquiry.” In my second article, I focus on the research sub-question: *to what extent is SEL experienced as a relational practice?* My participants had shared that their pacing of their course while teaching virtually was largely impacted by the ways in which they interpreted their students' needs. This made me curious to explore the ways in which they read and responded to their students. I looked in the vignettes for examples of the teachers reading and responding to students' needs. I found three examples in which it was clear that the teachers sensed a need and did their best to respond to it: a student asking for help with homework; a student reluctant to engage in physical activity from home; and students struggling to understand their scores after an exam. I looked for “need,” “issue,” and “problem” in the transcripts to find

the ways in which the teachers described sensing student needs. A theme emerged therein. As the teachers described looking for and responding to student needs, they also described building relationships with their students. I then looked at phenomenological, pedagogical, and literary examples that vividly describe building relationships (Beutel, 2010; Giles, 2010; Giles et al., 2012; Rojas & Liou, 2017). I edited the vignettes, reflected on the literature, and continued the cycle reiteratively. I found that the teachers' self-awareness and relational awareness afforded them the ability to read and respond to their students in a way that developed student-teacher relationships.

To better explicate the ways in which phenomenological texts are used to further explore the phenomenon being studied, I include a lived experience description from van Manen and Li (2002) and briefly summarize how the example informed my analysis.

Jason dresses in black from head to toe, Gothic style. His profile is strikingly noble: sultry lips, shaved head, dramatic black eye shadow, shiny black nail polish. Jason stands out in our small sheltered school.

It is the first day of school and I explain my Reading Room program to the grade nine students. Jason wanders into class, positions himself directly in front of me and proclaims, "I don't do reading."

"Really?" I reply, "Reading Room should be an unusual experience for you then." As the students begin to read, the class quiets down. Silence replaces the chatter and scuffling.

I notice that Jason doesn't have a book. He sits sagged in his chair drumming his index finger on his desk. I peruse the bookcase and select a few novels. I am not expecting miracles. Quietly, I approach his desk, bend down, and tentatively whisper, "Uh, Jason, why don't you choose the least offensive book and see if eh, you can read a few pages before the class is over." He raises his oval eyes and with a throw of the head dismisses me benignly, sighing: "I'll see."

But I leave the carefully picked titles on his desk. Jason is still hanging back in his seat. He casually spins the books around with his hand, seemingly indifferent. I turn away.

A few minutes later, out of the corner of my eye, I see that Jason has picked up Carol Matas' *The Freak*.

"Yes, I hooked him!" Now the book has to reel him in. I am hopeful: Jason may turn into a reader yet. (p. 217)

Van Manen and Li (2002) explain, "What this story [...] communicate[s] to a reader are some of the more subtle pathic qualities of tone, gesture, presence, and a sense of tact that momentarily congeals into a relational atmosphere" (p. 217). This example demonstrates the nuances of student-teacher relationship building in everyday moments of pedagogical practice. Using such an example to reflect upon inspired me to inquire further into the sensory experiences of teachers and the ways in which they perceive their students' responses. Interactions such as these cannot

be defined by or reduced to a list of best practices or checklists, but demonstrate the complexity and messiness of being-in-relation to students in pedagogical practice.

Analysis of “Giving and Taking Care: Secondary Teachers’ Experiences of Social Emotional Learning.” In my third article, I focus on the sub-question: *in what ways do practitioners experience SEL as an approach to curriculum?* While analyzing findings for the second article, sensing and responding to student needs was a common theme across all the teachers’ shared lived experiences of SEL. I wanted to dive deeper into how this common theme related to the participants’ sense of SEL curriculum. None of the participants described ever planning for SEL in their lived experiences. Additionally, as I reflected on my remaining vignettes, I recognized that there was a common theme of disruption in three. Not only was SEL not intentionally planned for, it seemed to happen in moments that were experienced as distinctively disruptive.

Within these vignettes, and the transcripts surrounding the participants’ descriptions of the events, was a heightened sense of self-awareness. In the moments when the teachers’ plans were disrupted, they sensed their own inner sensations to assess in what ways they could respond. They also sensed the students’ reactions. The teachers were depending on their own SECs in the examples, and approaching SEL as living curricula in moments of care. To question my interpretations, I searched the transcripts for “curriculum,” “plan,” and “care.” None of the participants ever described planning SEL lessons or SEL objectives, but rather described SEL in moments of interactions with their students, in caring for their students. I then reflected on phenomenological and pedagogical representations of care (Hash et al., 2021; Noddings, 2012; van Manen, 2015; Webster, 2021) as well as curriculum-as-lived, curriculum-as-living, and living curricula (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005; Koopman & Koopman, 2018; Liu Baergen, 2020; Lloyd, 2018; Magrini, 2015; Smith, 2021; Snowber, 2019). I reiteratively edited my vignettes, and consulted these texts and my transcripts.

To again demonstrate the ways in which phenomenological descriptions of pedagogy informed this study, I provide an example from van Manen (2016a) that reflects upon the factors that influence a teacher’s ability to give and take care in a school district:

My preparation time has been cut back to the contractual minimum. I have been assigned to teach additional high school courses, for which I have neither expertise nor interest. The enrollment in all my classes is at maximum. And it seems that every day we

have so many problems in our schools that we are required to attend lengthy staff meetings several times a week. I rarely get home in time to make supper.

Then there are the daily morning “student needs” conferences, lunch-hour supervisions, phone calls to and from parents, and all kinds of other ad hoc meetings.

Many days I cannot even get to the bathroom before the afternoon school buzzer because three out of five days I have lunch-hour supervision, which leaves me exactly ten minutes for dealing with contingencies, getting coffee, and eating my own lunch in the staffroom.

Moreover, my husband and kids at home complain because I spend many of my evening hours dealing with more than 150 weekly student writings, assignments, and projects.

I have been feeling so down and besieged that I simply can no longer see how I can do my job with any degree of adequacy. So when individual students at school come to me for extra help or to discuss their problems, I now tend to react in ways that sometimes surprise me when I reflect on it afterward.

On more than a few occasions I have told students to back off, take charge of their own affairs, and expect no special treatment from me.

What disturbs me most is that my relationship with my students seems to become less personal. Things are just not as they should be.

Yet as I tell these things, I feel guilty and quite mixed up about it all. (p. 56)

This example shows that the teacher experiencing this anecdote is unable to develop and/or sustain their SECs because of their working conditions. As a result, they are unable to engage students in SEL. They find themselves failing to build and maintain student-teacher relationships successfully. When exploring teacher SECs and relational sensitivities that allow a teacher to engage students in SEL, it is also important to explore the conditions that hinder or facilitate this process. Examples, such as this one, lend insight into the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic conditions could be experienced, and allow me to question what allowed these teachers to continue to engage students in SEL despite the difficulties of the pandemic.

In sum, there were common elements in my analysis within each article. I started by writing and rewriting the vignettes to (re)present my participants' lived experiences of SEL. In each iteration, I reviewed: the transcript, my list of thematic elements, and phenomenological accounts of lived experience descriptions that had similar elements. I used these to continuously redraft the vignettes and reflect on what common themes were across the vignettes of all my participants. What follows next is an introduction to my findings and results as I explain the progression and purpose of the articles I submitted for publication.

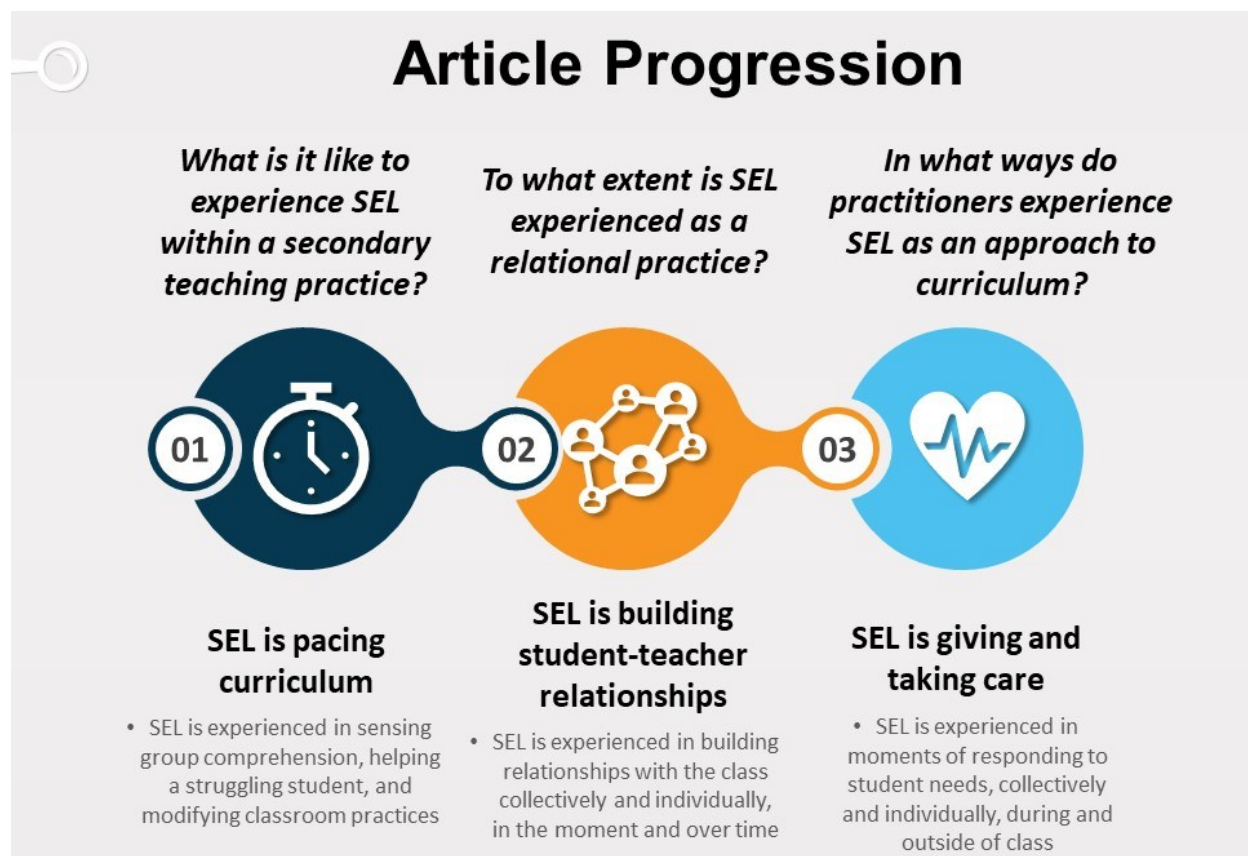
Article Progression and Publication

The articles in this dissertation illustrate an emerging inquiry. The focus of each article builds upon the findings of the article directly before it. To begin with, the following figure

demonstrates the progression of the articles, highlighting which research question the article most fully responds to, the theme found across participants' lived experiences of SEL in that article, and a brief summary of the experiences described therein. The descriptions of each article that follow further expand upon these, and shares where the articles were submitted.

Figure 2

Article Progression Illustration



Note. Template sourced from PresentationGo.com

“Attuning the Pace of Curriculum to Student Needs During a Pandemic: Social Emotional Learning in High School”

In the first article, I explore lived experiences of SEL situated in the conditions of the pandemic. I was curious if there were any thematic elements shared across lived experience descriptions of SEL that were specific to the teaching conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mrs. Williams experienced SEL as she struggled to help a student understand a math problem, and she had to try multiple approaches to aid in comprehension. Mr. Smith experienced SEL in an opening class activity, a type of opening activity that he introduced to his courses during the pandemic to help students engage with one another. Mr. Sanchez described checking to see if all the students in the class understood the math concept they had learned, and the added difficulty of doing so virtually. A similar theme in all of the teachers' experiences was that teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic made them hyper-aware of pacing their courses. They kept referencing their sense of time. They were very conscious of the ways in which they looked for and responded to student comprehension online versus in-person. This article explores how SEL is inherent in pedagogy when determining the pace of the course and helping students engage at that pace, which is a relational dynamic for many teachers.

I titled my first article *“Attuning the Pace of Curriculum to Student Needs During a Pandemic: Social Emotional Learning in High School.”* I submitted the article to the journal *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*. I chose this journal because it examines “learning within, and through, social practices” (Elsevier, n.d.a., p. 1). The organization of my article was impacted by the requirements of the journal. The journal is housed by Elsevier, which has certain formatting requirements regarding section order, sequencing, and labelling. I created a very structured narrative to align with their requirements. Hermeneutic phenomenology gathers rich lived experience descriptions as data, and this does not fit well into the parameters of most journals. Ultimately, the associate editor of the journal suggested that my article would be better suited for a different journal on Elsevier's platform, *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*. Their feedback demonstrated that their journal is looking for a stronger cultural orientation. I will resubmit to another journal, but am considering my options.

“Social Emotional Learning in the High School Classroom: A Phenomenological Inquiry”

For the second article, I was curious to explore the ways in which the high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL demonstrate their relational attunement to students, the ways

in which they read the needs of and respond to students. They described their lived experience of SEL through the ways in which they related to students. Mr. Smith experienced SEL in an interaction with a student that exemplified the fruition of developing a relationship over the duration of his course. Mrs. Williams experienced SEL in meeting one-on-one with a student who wanted extra help on a homework question, and who demonstrated a need to connect because of their feelings of isolation during the pandemic. Mr. Sanchez experienced SEL while trying to help students become more aware of their own responses to scores after an assessment, and in what ways that response impacts their understanding of and relationship to math. These examples show that these participants experience and interpret SEL through the relational bonds they develop with students.

I wanted a clear title that would let the reader know immediately the topic and context, so I titled the manuscript: "*Social Emotional Learning in the High School Classroom: A Phenomenological Inquiry*." I chose to submit this article for publication in the journal *Teaching and Teacher Education*, because its main aim is "to enhance theory, research, and practice in teaching and teacher education" (Elsevier, n.d.b., p. 1). This journal has the desired aims and intended audience for what I hope my findings might be able to impact. This journal is also hosted by Elsevier, and again, numbering and sequencing the article is impacted by formatting guidelines. Unfortunately, the managing editor reached out and suggested the article would be more appropriate for a companion journal on the Elsevier platform. Again, they named *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*. This time, the feedback cited concerns over lack of reproducibility and the small participant pool. This demonstrates some of the difficulties and barriers using a methodological approach inspired by hermeneutic phenomenology can pose for those trying to share their findings in more widely-read publications. I anticipated these results and will continue trying to source a journal that could reach educational researchers and/or professionals who could benefit from questioning their orientation to SEL and SEL teacher education opportunities.

"Giving and Taking Care: Secondary Teachers' Experiences of Social Emotional Learning"

The last article explicitly questions the experience of SEL curriculum. The participants have not described an approach to SEL through curriculum-as-plan, such as in intentionally planning a stand-alone SEL lesson or incorporating SEL objectives, but through spontaneous interactions with students, as part of curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005). I struggled

with this, as I understood SEL through the CASEL framework and state curriculum documents, but my participants did not. Whereas, I struggled to navigate the zone of between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived in approaching SEL in my subject area curriculum, the participants experienced SEL in navigating the zone of between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived in their subject area. SEL facilitated a responsive, relational practice for my participants.

In their lived experience of SEL, the teachers all share moments where their classes were disrupted, and they had to rely on their own self-awareness and relational awareness to understand what needs the students were communicating, and to intuit what actions would meet those needs. Mrs. Williams describes responding to a technology malfunction. Mr. Smith experiences SEL in responding to a student refusing to participate in class. Mr. Sanchez identifies SEL in a moment where a student asks for his help during a break between classes, and he must forego his initial plan for that time. In each example, the teachers experience a disruption, a deviation from their plan, and they must adapt in the moment. The reason the teachers adapt is because they care for their students, and they identify these lived experiences as an act of caring. As such, I titled the article, "*Giving and Taking Care: Secondary Teachers' Experiences of Social Emotional Learning.*"

The strong emphasis on exploring pedagogical and curricular approaches is why I chose to submit this article to the *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*. This journal "is dedicated to the study of curriculum theory, educational inquiry, and pedagogical praxis" (Taylor & Francis Online, n.d., para. 1). The goals of the journal also mirror my desires as a researcher with this study, as the journal "aims to promote emergent scholarship that critiques and extends curriculum questions and educational foundations that have relation to practice" (para. 1). This journal allows for and encourages a more personal approach to research, and invites the researcher(s) to introduce themselves to their audience so that the readers can better situate the study. Inviting me to introduce myself as a researcher empowered me to write the article using my own voice, and to refrain from the passive, impersonalized voice preferred by most research publications. Furthermore, this allowed me to reflect more deeply and meaningfully on my findings. I investigate what supports teachers require to engage in SEL, as well as the consequences for teachers who do not receive adequate support. I question the role of SEL teacher education in helping educators source and develop those support systems. After

submission, the journal asked me to revise the introduction and literature review to focus more on curriculum theorizing and less on current SEL literature, and then to resubmit.

Review of Progression

In summary, in the first article I explored deeply my main research question: *what is it like to experience SEL within a secondary teaching practice?* Participants described experiencing SEL in pacing their curriculum to meet student needs. This relational approach to SEL and pedagogy led me to further develop the main research question in my second article, while also questioning: *to what extent is SEL experienced as a relational practice?* The lived experiences of SEL in this article look at different ways in which teachers develop relationships with their students, individually and collectively, in the moment and over the duration of a course. In the final article, through my participants' lived experiences of SEL in acts of caring for their students, I was able to deeply question: *in what ways do practitioners experience SEL as an approach to curriculum?* My three articles follow in chapters two through four. A concluding chapter follows the three articles. In the concluding chapter, I share more fully the key findings and lessons learned within the study. I synthesize findings across the three articles to offer future recommendations for SEL teacher education practices. I also expand upon my experiences as a researcher, both in conducting a phenomenological study, and in serving a school community and mobilizing my findings there.

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Chapter Two:
Attuning the Pace of Curriculum to Student Needs During a Pandemic: Social Emotional Learning in High School

Abstract

Although Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is recommended for grades K–12, research suggests that what is effective in elementary and middle schools, having a separate SEL curriculum, is less effective in high schools. Instead, engaging high school students in SEL through pedagogic practice and the subject area curriculum is encouraged. There are few secondary studies to help guide high school teachers though, and the COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the need for SEL. Knowing how to pedagogically respond to a student in a time of crisis is no easy feat, however. Are we supposed to cling to pre-pandemic practices as much as possible? Or be responsive to the needs of students in the moment, even if that takes time away from course plans? Through classroom observations and multiple interviews, we explore several high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL during the pandemic. Using an approach inspired by van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology, we analyze the information gathered to examine the ways in which the teachers in the study experience SEL. We identify a common theme that the teachers respond to student needs by adapting the pace of the curriculum, and they experience this process as engaging students in SEL.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning; secondary education; curriculum; pedagogy

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted K–12 education in North America (Trinidad, 2021). Within the United States of America, each state had its own school closure protocols in response to pandemic-related shutdowns, and many schools had some form of virtual instruction (asynchronous, synchronous, or a hybrid blend of in-person and online classes) from March 2020 through the spring of 2021 (Oster et al., 2021). This sudden and drastic change forced teachers to adapt their pedagogical practice and curriculum to a new medium. All of this disruption in the midst of a pandemic, coupled with limited physical access to students, led school systems to place greater emphasis on student health, explicitly including student mental health (Schaffer et al., 2021). Teachers recognized their students were struggling both academically and personally, and actively sought classroom practices that would help them address the needs of their students (Miller, 2021). As a result, interest in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and its classroom applications grew exponentially (Yoder et al., 2020).

SEL has many definitions and has been presented through several frameworks (Weissberg, et al., 2015). However, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been studying SEL for decades, and their research and recommendations for practice are the most frequently cited (Eklund et al., 2018). CASEL (n.d.) defines SEL as:

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (para. 1)

SEL is inclusive of the various components of wellbeing, including the information necessary to learn and the context necessary to develop psychosocial skills, mental health practices, physical activities, health-promoting behaviors, and academic skills (Corcoran et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2017). However, SEL does not inherently develop all of these components. It depends on the approach to SEL taken by the school district and staff members within the schools, but SEL has the potential to create a comprehensive approach to wellbeing if approached by practitioners committed to a culturally responsive, equitable, and holistic understanding of SEL and its benefits (Franck et al., 2020; Frydenberg et al., 2017; Stark et al., 2021). SEL has been researched for over two decades, and includes both short-term and long-term benefits, such as an improvement in behavior, grades, and test scores, as well as enhanced mental health, college-

readiness, and pro-social behaviors (Corcoran et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). These outcomes are desirable, but most of the extant research focuses on interventions within the elementary or middle school context (Bear et al., 2017; Yeager, 2017).

In elementary and middle schools, SEL usually has its own separate curriculum, consisting of a series of mini-lessons taught by counselors (Williamson et al., 2015). This approach has been found less effective with high school students (Bear et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018; Yeager, 2017). Additionally, in a study including 316 high school teachers, the vast majority claimed they prefer incorporating SEL into their subject area curriculum as opposed to stand-alone SEL instruction (Clark, 2017), with one high school teacher stating: "Let the schools find their own way [to teach SEL]. Each school community has different factors that impact student well-being" (p. 25). The nascent research within the high school context suggests SEL should ideally be a part of a teacher's pedagogic practice and incorporated within their subject area curriculum, but research examining teachers' experiences of SEL in the classroom remains sparse (Hamedani et al., 2015; Williamson et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018). This leaves teachers with little guidance. However, a growing body of research is gathering high school teachers' opinions and attitudes towards SEL (Hamilton et al., 2019; Slaten et al., 2015), with teachers indicating a need for SEL in teacher education and/or professional learning that helps them explore in what ways to incorporate SEL into their practice (Stipp, 2019).

1.1 Understanding Teachers' Lived Experience of SEL

I, Janna, the first author of this inquiry, am curious to study teachers' lived experiences of SEL in the classroom because although I have taught several secondary school subjects, including English Language Arts (ELA), English as a Second Language (ESL), as well as Health and Physical Education (HPE), meeting the social and emotional needs of my students was always a vital component of my pedagogy. However, looking back, my approach to SEL differed based on the subject I was teaching. In ELA, literature explicitly explores the best and worst of humanity, from a universal perspective. As an ESL teacher, I helped students identify cultural norms and gave them a safe space to determine their response. In HPE, students learn how to feel comfortable and capable of becoming physically literate. There are many subject-specific resources in each field to discuss pedagogy that touch on elements of SEL, but without a common language of experience, schools cannot have a broader discussion on meeting the social

and emotional needs of students as a collective. I am curious to observe and interview high school teachers to get a sense of the degree to which SEL is present in their pedagogical practice, particularly during the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic.

My research interests aligned well with a school district in Massachusetts, and they invited me to conduct this phenomenological study at their high school. This research is the first step in helping the district identify their needs prior to developing a district-wide approach to SEL. The district has one middle school and one high school, and several years ago they developed a curriculum to address character development (with SEL embedded) for Grades 6–8 for specially trained teachers. The administration and the counseling department want to ensure students in Grades 9–12 are also being offered sufficient emotional and social supports, especially during the pandemic. The district volunteered to participate in this research to better understand the experiences and perspectives of their high school teachers in order to know where to begin with a district-wide approach to SEL. The entirety of research collection happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such, all contact with the school district was virtual, and all teaching was conducted virtually. This was an unavoidable limitation of the study.

The state of Massachusetts has outlined subject-specific SEL curriculum objectives for several subjects, but guidance is limited to a few examples of how to embed these curriculum objectives in given subjects (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017), as well as free SEL trainings introducing possible applications of CASEL's framework (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021). As we are not aiming for a prescriptive approach, but a flexible and adaptive approach to SEL that invites all subject areas and all pedagogic styles to participate, we wish to understand the current, everyday experiences of practitioners in the district before we can have a larger discussion about the broader context of what SEL is in a high school classroom and in what ways that might be measured. I thus conducted this phenomenological study to ask: *what is it like to experience SEL within a secondary teaching practice?*

1.2 A Phenomenological Approach

As a research methodology, phenomenology seeks to understand the lived experience of a phenomenon (van Manen, 2016). The goal of this study is to move beyond a conceptual framework of SEL to explore experiences of SEL in pedagogical action with the intention of (re)presenting and interpreting these lived experiences. One of the many advantages of a

phenomenological study is that, in order to (re)present lived experience, all assumptions must be suspended. Bracketing, the act of suspending one's presuppositions, ensures one's own biases and interpretations do not impact the (re)presentation of the participants' lived experience of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1913/1982). In this way, we can, as phenomenological researchers, move away from SEL as it has been defined through the CASEL framework, and see with fresh eyes in what ways teachers experience engaging students in SEL. Going into this study, I had assumed that because the state of Massachusetts has state-mandated SEL objectives largely derived from CASEL's SEL framework, that the teachers who volunteered to participate in this study would discuss SEL in terms of this framework. What will soon be revealed, however, is that not one high school teacher who participated in this study mentioned CASEL's framework. Instead, they discuss SEL as a way of being relationally connected and responsive to student needs.

2. Methodology

As phenomenology is so vastly interpreted and applied (van Manen, 2016; Zahavi, 2010), it is important to root the methodological approach in the phenomenological orientation. This study was inspired by Max van Manen's (2016) "hermeneutic phenomenology." Hermeneutic phenomenology accounts for both Husserl's rich description of a phenomenon as it is consciously experienced and Martin Heidegger's reiterative exploration of meaning. Heidegger (1927/1962) used phenomenology to interpret the phenomenon of being. Hermeneutics as an adjective is defined as "Of, relating to, or concerning interpretation or theories of interpretation," (Oxford University Press, n.d.b.). As there are few SEL resources specifically for high school teachers, an approach inspired by hermeneutic phenomenology can explore the everyday practices and experiences of engaging students in SEL. It also allows for the interpretation of these experiences in relation to other phenomenological texts.

2.1 Participants

From the high school of the partnering school district in Massachusetts, teachers were invited from specific disciplines (math, English, and physical education) because these subject areas have state-mandated SEL objectives. Twenty-five teachers were invited via email; three volunteered to participate, two math teachers and one health and physical education teacher. Van Manen (2016) recommends between three and five participants to allow for in-depth inquiry because hermeneutic phenomenology relies on becoming closely acquainted with participants' life-worlds, which requires not only repeated access to the individual, but an intimate

understanding of the ways in which they express and interpret meaning. A greater number of participants would hinder the researcher's ability to engage fully with each individual, limiting the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon and its meaning.

2.2 Information Gathering

Information gathering processes involved observations and interviews. Each teacher was observed for 2-3 class periods, virtually. After each observation, I asked teachers if any moments from that class period felt like they were engaging students in SEL, and their experiences of those moments. Afterwards, I would illustrate the moments they described through vignettes to share with the teachers in their interviews. Similar anecdotes were sourced in phenomenological literature.

After the observation process, each teacher was interviewed twice, for approximately thirty minutes each. The first interview with each teacher was structured to gather anecdotes of their experiences of engaging students in SEL in the classroom. I asked the teachers if there were any specific "look-fors" in relation to what it is like to experience SEL in high school pedagogy, especially during a pandemic. To phenomenologically orient (van Manen, 2016) them to this phenomenon, I asked questions as prompts that would help participants describe their experience through the structures of consciousness (a lived sense of time, space, self, and other), such as: Think of a moment where you engaged students in SEL. What did you experience? What was your sense of time in the moment? What was it like to interact with the students in your class?

After the first interview with each teacher, a summary was written, and thematic elements were noted. Additionally, their (re)presentation of lived experiences were written up into vignettes. The second interview with each teacher gathered further anecdotes and expounded upon the significance of these moments.

2.3 Analytical Process

In hermeneutic phenomenology, analysis occurs throughout, and the act of writing is considered part of the analytical process (van Manen, 2016). Van Manen places great emphasis on how the process of interpreting meaning requires languaging: "even the 'facts' of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process" (2016, p. 181). Writing is integral to the interpretive process and fosters a relational sensitivity to both the experience of the phenomenon and its meaning.

In other social sciences, much of the information gathering consists of collecting statements and using them verbatim to illustrate a theme. In phenomenology, the real source of information is the lived experience itself. Thus, the goal of the researcher is to offer the reader a felt sense of that phenomenon, so that it is not just considered conceptually but felt experientially. To do this, the researcher is careful to gather in-depth information from participants. For this study, I was careful to ask the teachers to relive and (re)present the structures of consciousness of the phenomenon, the four existentials: a sense of space, time, body, and human relation. I then had to “write-up” these lived experiences via vignettes, careful to evoke the existentials shared with me through my writing (Lloyd & Smith, 2021). A vignette is a lived experience description of the phenomenon. In this study, the vignettes share a brief story of a moment in the classroom that (re)presents the teachers’ lived experiences of SEL, so that readers might be able to imagine the experience and reflect on what they might do, and what such a moment might mean for their own pedagogical practice.

The resulting vignettes from the observations and interviews were analyzed for thematic elements. The vignettes were edited to better evoke the thematic elements identified. The vignettes were then compared against the entirety of the transcript of each participant to ensure the resulting theme authentically (re)presented the lived experience described as well as the nature of the participant’s entire interaction. The thematic elements were then researched and interpreted through phenomenological literature.

3. Results: Secondary Teachers’ Experiences of SEL in a Virtual Classroom

All three teachers who participated in this study discuss the struggle to be responsive to students’ needs in the pandemic. In the late winter and early spring of 2021, all courses during the year had been conducted virtually to that point, and the administration and teachers did not anticipate a return to in-school classes until the following year. Two of the teachers had taught half of their students in-person prior to the pandemic, and one had not met any of their students in-person prior to it. Teachers thus had to quickly develop their teaching style within a virtual environment, and then attempt to learn and interpret these students within a virtual environment, when they were largely unfamiliar with the medium as well as many of their students. What follows is a quick portrait of each educator, with identifying characteristics masked to cloak identities, followed by a vignette of their lived experience of engaging in SEL within their virtual

classrooms. *These teachers use gendered pronouns, and so their analysis is written accordingly.

3.1 Mrs. Williams, a High School Math Teacher

Before becoming a math educator two decades ago, Mrs. Williams had a career in business, and she described the transition accordingly: “I had those corporate years, but this is so much more impactful, so much more exciting, and working with [adolescents] every day and trying to make them equipped for a better life is fulfilling.” Mrs. Williams stated that when she is in her classroom with students, “the whole universe has stopped and we’re just in a bubble together, sharing this space.” When asked if the pandemic had intruded upon that, or made her feel she must speed up how quickly she introduces concepts to make up for interrupted learning, she stated: “there is no sense of time, there is no hurry up. Because it doesn't matter how long it takes really.” The only time she feels anxious, the only time she feels tempted to speed up is not in regards to hurrying students’ learning, but in regards to responding to student needs quickly enough in the moment so that they do not feel discouraged or disinterested. One such moment occurred during an observation, and Mrs. Williams fleshed out the details of her experience in an interview, including student reactions (as I was only observing and able to see Mrs. Williams, but she could view her class), which primed the write up of the following vignette. The vignette is written in first person to better evoke Mrs. Williams’ experience:

“Juan, pick an odd number to solve between 13 and 25 on the page.”

Juan chooses a question and speaks in starts and stops as he attempts to walk us through the question. He is squinting, with furrowed brows, into the screen. His pauses are growing longer; students begin to fidget on the screen.

Using the simplest language I can, I ask how to accomplish the third step of solving the problem. Juan solves that component. I ask Juan about the next step, but this time he looks at his book for several moments, and then looks up, expression blank, then scans his peers, not sure what to say next. I try to rephrase the question. Juan nods “no.” I rephrase it again, slower and simpler this time. He shrugs. I feel my pulse quicken. Why can’t I phrase this in a way that makes it more accessible for Juan? What am I missing about how he’s understanding this step? The moment lingers, and I can feel Juan losing hope. I wish I could reach through the screen and pat his shoulder, let him know this is my failing, not his. I’m sure he’s going through a list of berating phrases about his math inability right now. I feel stuck in this moment, unable to get out from under its weight.

Though in her interview, Mrs. Williams shared her hesitancy, her tone never indicated any anxiety during the class. Her face remains calm, and though this moment interrupted the flow of

the class, she tries to control her responses to allow Juan to process at his own speed rather than be forced to adopt the speed of the class.

I try rephrasing the step again. He shrugs his head, then his shoulders, and looks down into his lap. I apologize for being unclear and ask another student, Emily, to rephrase the question. Juan watches Emily on the screen. Emily is using a tone that you would use with a scared animal, soft and high-pitched. It makes her question sound like an invitation, which welcomes Juan to try a different perspective. Juan nods gently and silently mouths the words Emily says as he draws the answer to the problem on the screen. This process continues until he graphs the equation.

I want to stand. I want to pump my fist in the air. I want to hug Juan.
“You persevered! We all stumble with new methods, and learning how to push through to find the answer teaches us more than if we just memorize the process. Great job!”

Mrs. Williams identifies this moment as engaging Juan in SEL because she affords him the necessary time to understand his learning processes. She feels where many teachers miss an opportunity to engage students in SEL is when they let a student interpret their temporary misunderstanding as a lack of ability. She empathizes with fellow teachers, though, and recognizes that there is only so much time in a class period. Mrs. Williams also recognizes that it can be difficult to know what a given student needs at a particular moment. Some days, Juan is intimidated by working through the problem in front of the class and prefers working with her after class or with a peer privately during class. SEL asks the teacher to be responsive to students in the moment, so engaging students in SEL can present in many different ways depending upon the student and the moment.

3.2 Mr. Smith, a Secondary Physical Education Teacher

Mr. Smith was a self-described “slacker” in high school until one teacher’s comment changed his career path. After nodding off several times in class, the teacher said to him, “I think you would probably do really well if you stayed awake.” The teacher was not angry or reproachful, just sharing his belief in his ability. After that conversation, Mr. Smith changed his behavior completely, started studying, and pursued becoming an educator. When asked why Mr. Smith pursued physical education, he stated, “my own positive experience with coaches that I had, and the success I had as an athlete.” The educators and mentors Mr. Smith had in his life inspired him in his daily life as well as in his aspirations for the future.

Physical education had unique challenges during the pandemic as it is a place-based discipline and relies on physically interacting with one another (Howley, 2021). The Health and Physical Education (HPE) department at the school had to reimagine their curriculum when the

school turned virtual. As a department, they reached out to students to ask what kind of experience they would like in a virtual HPE classroom, and the feedback they received was “some movement every day [...] and we just need a break from awkward Zoom™ conversations.” In response, the HPE department kept classes whole-group as much as possible, included movement, and incorporated more health elements to help students cope. Mr. Smith claims that the students responded really well to HPE’s virtual approach, and when asked what he experiences as the teacher when the class is going well, he stated, “When they're really doing well, you kind of remove yourself from the equation so they can just interact with each other [...] time slows down, you just kind of back away and then like soak it in.” Students’ engagement and the relaxed atmosphere were on display during observations, and he filled in the details of his experience during an interview, which inspired the following vignette:

I greet each twelfth-grader by name as they enter my health and physical education class on Zoom™. I ask some about different family members, others about sports practices, and some I tease over sports allegiances. The students are early to class, mostly smiling and watching the chat box. I am never quite sure what to expect from their answers to the daily question.

I type, “If you could be any animal, what animal would you be?”

Sandy writes “giraffe.” I ask her if she knows that they have a black tongue and give birth standing up. She laughs and says she has seen their black tongues in National Geographic photos but didn’t know about their birthing practices.

Emily types she would be a cat. Then John, another student, interjects to say that cats are the only animal to kill for fun, and that they will eat their owners within hours of their death. Several students share sadistic stories of previous pets leaving dead rodents as presents on doorsteps through the chat box. The students are laughing and cringing. The conversation wraps up after a couple minutes, and I then share current events related to the changing weather. Students comment at length in the chat box as I share, how they have visited the areas, what their predictions for the future are, and so on. Then I started the music and sprung up from my chair to begin the physical activity portion of the class.

Mr. Smith identifies this interaction as engaging students in SEL because the students recognized and advocated for what they needed beforehand, and are actively engaging with one another in the moment. These skills are part of SEL as well as part of the HPE curriculum. Mr. Smith explains that the HPE department could not possibly teach all of the curriculum objectives they would normally because of physical constraints, but they could go much more deeply into different parts of the curriculum. Thus, he feels that limiting the scope of the curriculum to deepen skill practice was responsive to student needs and authentic to the subject area. Some teachers during the pandemic in other subject areas, however, wondered if limiting the scope of the curriculum in their subject area would be a detriment to student wellbeing as opposed to an asset.

3.3 Mr. Sanchez, a High School Math Teacher

Mr. Sanchez had a successful career in engineering before exploring the field of education. He originally turned to math education “just to understand the education system better [...] for my children [...] to know how to help them be successful.” Mr. Sanchez moved to the US from another country and was trying to navigate the educational system to better advocate for his children, and was pleasantly surprised at how math is taught here: “The focus of this country’s education system is not just teaching what to memorize, but it is showing all of the different applications, and I like that very much.” Mr. Sanchez’s affinity for math and appreciation of the US education system led him to teach. And yet, he understands acutely that not every student has had positive experiences with math. “Math is,” he tells us, “not their favorite subject sometimes, so you have to understand what has led to that. As a teacher, after that, it’s our job to make students aware of their strengths.” Mr. Sanchez is trying to help students develop all of the skills they need to be successful in whatever goals they have. As a result, Mr. Sanchez, out of all of the participants, shared a greater sense of trying to keep his course at a similar speed to pre-pandemic conditions according to external measures of what students need to learn. He found a silver lining in the virtual environment in that it allowed him to disregard distractions:

When you are teaching and then you have to spend time in managing [students] it becomes frustrating in real life. That frustration is lesser [virtually], because at the back of my mind I know some of them are not listening to me, but I have to do my job.

Mr. Sanchez wants students to be successful in their next math course so that students can progress according to the paths they and their parents have laid out for them. While observing Mr. Sanchez’s classes, it is clear he attempts to keep the pace of his course quick to achieve curricular objectives while attempting to continuously read students’ understanding. A follow-up interview inspired the write up of one such moment:

I explain the new concept. It is just a different way to solve the same kind of problem we have been tackling all week. I try to remember to go slow, but I feel my pace quickening as I continue, a nagging at the corner of my mind that we need to cover a certain number of concepts before the midterm. I am explaining the concept through a problem, showing the steps as I say them. I feel stuck on a treadmill, moving as fast as I can, with no outwardly apparent progress, and my internal speedometer is difficult to read. These types of moments seem to slip by and stay suspended simultaneously.

The students seemed to understand the other way to solve these types of problems earlier this week. Their formative assessments were strong, but I struggle to read their

faces in class. From my second screen, I can see all of the students' faces. Their eyes are focused on the screen, but their mouths are set in indecipherable lines. No affirmative nods. No confused brows. It is hard to speak and think about what I want to say next as I scan their faces. I want to look for comprehension as I explain, but struggle to speak, write, and scan at the same time.

In some moments, it is very clear Mr. Sanchez is trying to read the students through the screen and finds them impassive. There is no visible or audible frustration, but sometimes Mr. Sanchez will answer questions he poses, or halfway explain the process to get to an answer before jumping to the conclusion.

I rely on cold calls. I will start with one of my stronger students to gauge understanding and not embarrass anyone.

“Jamie, begin the next problem. What’s the first step?”

Jamie does not look surprised to be called. His eyes do not widen. His brows remain stationary. In fact, his entire body does not move as he explains the first step and provides the correct answer. The students seem to understand.

Next, I will ask a student who often struggles with new concepts. “Jasmine, what’s the next step?”

“Uh...”

She looks down for a brief moment, but the object she’s looking at is offscreen; hopefully it’s her text or notes. Her shoulders cave inward. She bites her lip. I feel my stomach drop. But then she outlines the next step and gives the right answer without further pause. I can move on to the next application of the concept.

Mr. Sanchez identifies this moment as engaging the class in SEL because, “I am testing if they are aware of what they know and do not know, and if they keep pace.” He is trying to get them to assess their own level of understanding. At the beginning of each course, he takes great pains to communicate to students that he is accessible outside of class to help, but that they must keep up during class or possibly fall so far behind that they will be unable to learn new skills. He is continuously asking them to be aware of and responsible for their own learning journeys while also actively offering support. The example provided by Mr. Sanchez stresses the importance of having interdisciplinary conversations on SEL because another teacher may assume that his teaching style disregards SEL because, in some ways, the moment or an individual student’s understanding in the moment are not prioritized over long-term learning goals. However, Mr. Sanchez keeps this demanding speed precisely because he cares and is advocating for the students’ future success. A high school requires a flexible approach to SEL because it is necessary to have teachers who understand student needs in various ways, because individual students will have different needs and life aspirations.

4. Analysis

The vignettes that (re)present the experiences of Mrs. Williams, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Sanchez all show these three teachers engaging students, both individually and collectively, in SEL as the teachers interpret the phenomenon. Though there are many different definitions of SEL, most definitions and frameworks center around the development of awareness of self and others (Eklund et al., 2018). Awareness is defined as “The quality or state of being aware, consciousness” (Oxford University Press, n.d.a.). One of the greatest aims of SEL is to help a student develop their awareness of self. This was evidenced by the teachers’ answers to the main research question of this phenomenological study: what is it like to experience SEL within a secondary teaching practice? The teachers in this study find that one of the core components of teaching, determining the speed at which to have students interact with the subject area, necessitates that they engage students in SEL. This process inevitably requires the teacher to engage students in reflecting on their own understanding and their own awareness of their learning processes.

4.1 Pacing Curriculum Engages Students in SEL

The most pervasive theme, and common struggle amongst the teachers, is the challenge to attune themselves to the pace of their students during the pandemic, whether with the class as a whole, as Mr. Sanchez, or with an individual student as in Mrs. Williams’ classroom. The word “pace” means “One's course or way; a journey, a route, a way; passage, passing” (Oxford University Press, n.d.c.). The word came up several times across participants when describing helping students engage with curriculum. Learning how to translate teaching practices to a virtual medium made pacing much more challenging. Erika Goble (2020) describes the lived experience of time in education as “our experience of ourselves: of who we understand ourselves to be, the past we tell ourselves, our anticipated future, and who we become because of the possibilities opened up by education” (p. 180). When the pace of curriculum meets student needs, they feel capable and encouraged (Zhang et al., 2020). When the pace of curriculum moves too fast or too slow, students struggle to engage, and this frustrates their sense of future possibilities (Bertram et al., 2021). Pacing curriculum to meet student needs is challenging in general, but exponentially so during a pandemic through a virtual classroom with limited preparation (Trinidad, 2021).

In these moments of pacing the curriculum, the teachers are engaging students in SEL as they are asking students to become more self-aware of their learning processes. Mrs. Williams slows the pace of the curriculum to meet Juan's needs and initially experiences the moment with some tension for fear of failing Juan and damaging his sense of self-efficacy. Ultimately, Juan understands and the pace of the curriculum quickens again, but this sense of time is distorted for Mrs. Williams as she experiences it as a suspended moment, where nothing else exists but the student's needs. When Juan is successful, she feels genuine joy and excitement. Mr. Smith feels the pace of his curriculum slows considerably as his students learn to interact with one another in healthy ways during a difficult time. This skill set aligns with his curricular objectives, and he does not experience the slowed pace with any anxiety. In contrast, Mr. Sanchez senses the disruption of the pandemic acutely, and tries actively to compensate for the loss of face-time with students in-person by moving through as much of the curriculum as possible. He does this to ensure the students have the abilities they need to be successful in their next course and to not feel their goals are impeded by the pandemic.

Although all three teachers share their experience of pacing the curriculum, their experience of the moment and their role in it is largely impacted by two factors: their sense of pedagogy and their sense of curriculum. The teachers' sense of pedagogy and curriculum determine the ways in which they relate to and read their students' understanding, impacting how the teachers pace their curriculum and engage students in reflecting upon their own awareness of their learning processes.

4.2 Pace as Determined by Pedagogic Practice

In the modern North American context, "pedagogy" is defined as "[t]he art, occupation, or practice of teaching" (Oxford University Press, n.d.d.). As the word is so generally defined, different epistemological and ontological beliefs lead to various understandings (van Manen, 2015). This, in turn, can lead to different interpretations of the role of SEL in pedagogy. Mrs. Williams shared her relational foundation of pedagogy when asked what it is like to experience engaging students in SEL in her classroom:

I'm better aware of treating our learners as people, as humans, and helping them to feel confident, to ask questions, feel confident to say "I actually have no idea what you just said," when we engage in that level of caring about a person as an individual.

When asked to define SEL, Mrs. Williams stated, “Trying to meet the needs of the learners so that they can learn, put them [...] in a place where they're able to learn, grow and develop” and she claimed SEL “is the foundation of effective teaching, period, regardless of content, age, or ability level.” When encouraged to put SEL specifically into the context of a high school math class, she stated “feel[ing] mathematically taken care of, [...] feeling nurtured in my learning, and that nobody's putting any constraints on me and I'm constantly being urged to reach more.” Mrs. Williams demonstrated this level of concern for Juan’s progression in math class by giving him the time, space, and support necessary to allow him to understand his learning process.

Mr. Smith also espouses a very relational approach to pedagogy: “My job is to educate every child. That means that, you know, I give them what they need, and ask of them, ‘Give me what I need.’ I mean, that's coaching.” In a coaching relationship, for Mr. Smith, a coach helps develop an athlete’s strengths and compensates for their weaknesses by offering the athlete support and by asking the athlete to put in the work. The same can be applied to any subject area. The teacher identifies gaps in knowledge or ability and highlights the path to better engagement if the student is willing to put the effort in. The teacher’s help is student-specific, and built on a relationship where the student’s skill is valued as is the teacher’s guidance. Mr. Smith’s slowed pace of the curriculum during the pandemic honored students’ requests and treated them as experts on their own health and wellbeing.

Although Mr. Sanchez’s greatest aim is to help students use math as a vehicle towards whatever life trajectory they wish, that does not mean he finds learning and teaching a perfunctory process. Mr. Sanchez states, “I need to make [students] connect with math emotionally before they can succeed.” Mr. Sanchez cares tremendously about all of his students and wishes them not only success, but that he could instill in them an appreciation for math’s processes:

So, right now in my CP [College Preparatory] class [...] the goal is just to give them the necessary skills to know basic math and make them confidently comfortable. [...] I wish I can get more time to spend with those students so that I can make them more interested in the applications, or tap into their talents and go from there.

Mr. Sanchez is aware of and responsive to pressures outside of the classroom, but believes that at the core of education, if logistical constraints were relieved, helping students enjoy and appreciate the subject area is the highest aim of pedagogy. Mr. Sanchez also repeatedly states the

importance of emotionally supporting students in their relationships with math and building their confidence. His view of education is still very relational, but constantly mediated through the subject area and external expectations, which impacts how he paces his courses.

All three teachers share a relational view of pedagogy; they develop relationships with the students that they teach. This impacts in what ways they pace the curriculum. Because Mr. Smith cares about his students' health during the pandemic, he limits the scope of his curricular objectives but broadens the depth to which they can practice health-related skills in class. Mr. Sanchez also cares deeply about his students, though his focus is on their future trajectory. He keeps the pace of his curriculum quick so that his students will not face any setbacks from this year, at least not from his class. Instead, they will be prepared mathematically for any path they choose next. The sense of pedagogy each teacher has impacts the relationship they build with students, influencing how they practice SEL in their classrooms through pacing curriculum.

4.3 In What Ways Curriculum Impacts Pace

According to van Manen (2015), "Even teachers who see it mostly as their task to 'deliver' the government-mandated curriculum are inevitably relationally involved with their students" (p. 42). He recognizes that many teachers discuss curriculum as a list of objectives, as something to implement, but even if they do so, they still function as facilitators between the subject area and the students. They are relationally connected. The teachers in this study clearly align with van Manen's interpretation of curriculum, as evidenced by their desire to develop relationships with their students in order to function as mediators between them and the subject area. The participants recognize that not all high school teachers feel this way, however. Mrs. Williams laments that "the model of education in high school is fundamentally different from how we view middle school and elementary school," and she refutes this view, claiming, "I think it's the same process; it's just different material." She also claims that this understanding of learning at the high school level as fundamentally different means pacing the curriculum is often limited by external factors:

I also think that too many of us at the high school level are given a textbook, given a curriculum, and told, 'You better get going.' And therefore, anything that you might want it to do, there just isn't time for. So, sit out, be quiet. I'm just going to talk as fast as I can because I got to get through this before Friday. And that's a miserable place for everybody in that room.

As demonstrated by Mrs. Williams, teachers often face a certain amount of tension between meeting the demands of state-mandated curriculum and meeting the needs of students before them. Curriculum theorist Ted Aoki (1986/1991/2005) describes the former as “curriculum-as-plan,” which is often determined by experts removed from the classroom, who “assum[e] a fiction of sameness” and offer “generalized [and] disembodied knowing that disavows the living presence of people” (p. 161). Conversely, Aoki labels “curriculum-as-lived” as the ever-responsive experience of teaching to meet the day-to-day needs of students. The tension within the “zone of between” curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived is what calls for a responsive relational practice. Aoki (1986/1991/2005) frames this tension as a positive experience: “tensionality allows good actions to arise when properly tensioned chords are struck, and tensionless strings are not only unable to give voice to songs, but also unable to allow a song to be sung” (p. 162). Normally, Aoki frames the tension of determining curriculum as positive, but this year has been unlike any other, and chords can only withstand so much tension before breaking.

In this study, only Mr. Sanchez really detailed personally feeling this tension to be responsive to the state-mandated curriculum, as showcased in his vignette. When asked if students who also feel such external pressures should be relieved, he stated:

No, I don't discourage them to be hard on themselves because the real world is different. There is a lot of competition, so if some of them are hard on themselves, probably, they are working on the bigger goal that they are capable of achieving. So that's my take. I came from a different background; I have my education in different countries so I have seen how much competition exists.

Mr. Sanchez focuses on high-achieving students and helps them meet specific objectives to prepare them for other courses. Mr. Smith detailed slowing the curriculum to meet student needs during the pandemic, but the curricular objectives in physical education are more flexible. Mrs. Williams is working with students who need remediation to begin with, so her biggest goal is to increase their sense of self-efficacy. Developing that feeling of mastery is vital for them to engage further with the curriculum. Thus, she feels little conflict in slowing the pace to meet student needs. All teachers show care and concern for their students, but it leads to different results in pacing their curriculum.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Decades of research make clear that SEL improves student health and academic outcomes (Corcoran et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). However, there remains a gap in resources and research concerning SEL in the high school classroom (Bear et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2018). This phenomenological study aims to better understand high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL. While what limited research does exist suggests that SEL in high school must be responsive to context (Clark, 2017), understanding what a teacher experiences daily lends insight into the ways in which SEL can be experienced and interpreted. The teachers in this study explain that pacing curriculum requires teachers to engage students in SEL. The students must become aware of their own individual pace of learning and its relation to the classroom's pace. The teacher helps mediate this if there is a gap, but what that mediation looks like depends upon that teacher's sense of pedagogy and curriculum.

SEL is not and should not be prescriptive in the high school context. Teachers can engage students in SEL in different ways. Teachers must be responsive to student needs and the needs of the subject area, while incorporating both into their own pedagogic practice. The findings of this study demonstrate different ways of engaging students in SEL through pacing curriculum that are authentic to their context, specific to the teacher, subject area, and students. More research is needed to give more examples of various ways in which to engage high school students in SEL.

A phenomenological inquiry does not aim to solve a problem, but digs more deeply into the lived experience of a phenomenon. Teachers who volunteered for the study were already advocates of SEL. They believe in being self-aware and questioning their own processes and practices. Before teachers can aid students in developing self-awareness, teachers must practice developing their own. The need to provide assistance to current and future practitioners in deepening their sense of self has previously been identified (Ergas, 2017), as has the need to create space for deeper personal reflection in teacher education and professional development opportunities (Bredmar, 2020). High school teachers have had little guidance, however, on approaching SEL in their own classrooms. The pandemic has further highlighted the need for SEL, and more deeply questioned what it looks like in the high school context (Yoder et al., 2020). The need during the pandemic has been so pronounced that even in the post-secondary context, professors have called for more interpersonal supports and the need to normalize a

deeper emotional engagement and focus within curriculum (Hash et al., 2021). The pandemic led to an outcry for guidance to help teachers support students through SEL.

This study demonstrated that teachers who are interested in engaging students in SEL may want to begin with in what ways they determine pace in their courses, as that is a universal concern across subject areas. Not all years are as demanding as the pandemic, but each teacher is called to be responsive to both curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived. Even pre-service teachers understand and feel this tension acutely (Sherbine & Hara, 2020). This fundamental component of teaching asks the teacher to engage themselves and their students in SEL. More research is needed to give more examples of ways in which high school teachers engage students in SEL, but this research demonstrates that SEL is an important component of teaching in high school, not just during a pandemic, but in each classroom. Future educators need to have time and space to question their views on pedagogy and curriculum, and in what ways their sense of these will impact their relationships with students and their daily interactions with them. Current educators need school-wide support in questioning what SEL means for their practice and what implications that has for a school-wide approach to SEL. Valuing teachers' experience with SEL in the classroom is a good foundation for that discourse to begin.

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Chapter Three:
Social Emotional Learning in the High School Classroom: A Phenomenological
Inquiry

Abstract

Researchers recommend Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in grades K–12, but few studies focus on the high school context. This study addresses the lived experiences of SEL in high school classrooms. Participating teachers were observed and interviewed to vividly describe SEL. Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology inspired the analysis of information gathered. The study's results reveal that teachers' experiences of SEL revolve around the ways in which they inherently develop students' sense of self-awareness and relational awareness in their pedagogical practices. The study analyzes much-needed in-depth examples of SEL in-action, including responding to a student's struggle to meaningfully connect to curriculum.

Keywords: Social Emotional Learning; secondary education; holistic education

1. Situating the Phenomenon

1.1 Differences Between Elementary and Secondary Education

Internationally, a teacher at an elementary school needs a much broader foundation across subject areas than those who teach older students and specialize in one subject area, emphasizing depth in that one subject area over breadth across subject areas (Systems Approach for Better Education Results, 2013). As a result, some secondary teachers view themselves primarily as content area experts (Keiler, 2018). However, the difference between knowing a subject intimately, and being able to teach that subject well has long been explored through the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (Tamir, 1988). A key component of pedagogical content knowledge is understanding the emotional landscape of a classroom (Zembylas, 2007). What invites a student to engage in their own learning journey within that subject area? What deters them? These have been enduring questions within the field of education. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) provides an approach to education that aims to answer these questions (Schonert-Reichl, 2019).

1.2 What is Social Emotional Learning?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (n.d.) defines SEL as:

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (para. 1)

Essentially, SEL is an umbrella term for all the ways in which people learn to be happy, healthy, and successful. When researchers first began discussing SEL and creating recommendations for practice, many teachers expressed the view that social and emotional development were the responsibility of school counselors (Elias, 1997). However, since that time, decades of SEL research in thousands of schools has demonstrated positive impacts on academic, health, and social outcomes (Corcoran et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). As a result, when surveyed, most high school educators believe SEL is important and want more SEL guidance, but they report far fewer pre-service and in-service learning opportunities than their elementary counterparts (Hamilton et al., 2019). There is a dearth of research on and resources

for the high school context in general, leaving high school educators with little guidance for their own classrooms (Hamilton et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2015).

1.3 An Experiential Orientation

Before exploring the ways in which SEL recommendations in the high school context have evolved over the years, let us imagine a tenth-grade English classroom experience and ask in what ways, if any, this example engages students in a subject area academically, emotionally, and socially. Read the following from the teacher's perspective:

I am standing in front of a student's desk. As it's the first day, I do not know her name yet. Her eyes are focused on her hands.

"What's your name?"

"Allison."

She glances up to look at me as she speaks. Her voice is soft, but her eye contact is strong.

"Nice to meet you, Allison. And what's your greatest strength in English? Or if you prefer, what do you like most about English?"

She pauses for a moment, looking down at her hands again. When she looks up, she's smiling deeply, and she talks quickly.

"I really love reading books that are part of a series where you feel like you get to grow up with the characters. My mom read the whole Madeleine L'Engle *Wrinkle in Time* series to me growing up. It's my favorite."

"I loved that series, too! I really identified with Meg. Anyone else in the class?"

I look at the other students. Allison turned to look as well. No one raises their hands.

"I loved *Anne of Green Gables*," Catherine offers.

"Me, too!" states Jamilah.

"Harry Potter!" one of the boys in the back yells.

"Yes!" a few students exclaim.

What is the teacher doing in this example? It is the first day of class, and they are trying to learn their students' names by asking each student what they like about English or what their strengths are in the subject area. The teacher tries to build commonalities between students through the subject area by asking the whole class if they can relate to Allison's example of her favorite thing in English, reading a beloved book series. The teacher is getting to know students through their relationship with the subject area. This is an informal, implicit example of developing students' self-awareness of their feelings towards and abilities in the subject area while attempting to build a sense of classroom community. Some high school teachers feel that their limited time with students also limits their student-teacher relationship building responsibilities as they are more concerned with subject area demands; while others would claim activities such as these are vital to learning (Yang et al., 2018). Research strongly supports the latter (Kincade et al., 2020). Such informal examples of SEL as the one above are the types of practices that high

school practitioners describe (Bear et al., 2017; Dusenbury et al., 2015; Hamilton et al., 2019). However, because individual teacher SEL practices were originally envisioned as part of a larger, explicit framework, when such an approach was not implemented or was found ineffective in high schools, individual high school teachers were left with little guidance in developing their own approach to SEL in their classrooms (Williamson et al., 2015).

1.4 History of SEL in High School

In 1994, researchers and educators came together to discuss how to find an approach to learning that synergistically addressed several areas: academics, health, citizenship, and behavior (Osher et al., 2016). These individuals, as part of the Fetzer Group, would later launch CASEL and pair the term “social emotional learning” with a conceptual framework that integrates the efforts of family, school, and community to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students. Though several models of SEL exist, CASEL’s SEL framework is most frequently referenced (Eklund et al., 2018). CASEL (n.d.) builds on their definition of SEL by identifying five SEL “competencies”: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Originally, the approach to SEL in high school was meant to mirror the approach to SEL in elementary and middle schools (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). CASEL actively championed using both a preprogrammed, separate SEL curriculum as well as embedding opportunities to explore SEL skills and application within subject area curricula across grade levels.

Unfortunately, research has demonstrated that high school students do not respond to pre-planned SEL curricula the way younger students do (Williamson et al., 2015; Yeager, 2017). Researchers are considering various factors that may function as limiting effects, such as different dynamics in student-teacher relationships, methods of facilitation, and so on (Yang et al., 2018). As a result, CASEL acknowledges and recommends that high school teachers take a multifaceted approach to engaging students in SEL, often moving away from the stand-alone lessons seen in elementary grades and focusing on incorporating SEL into their general teaching practices and subject area curricula instead (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Teacher preferences align with their recommendations (Bear et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2019). A study of 1,609 teachers engaged in SEL indicates that secondary teachers prefer an integrated approach to SEL over prescriptive curricula (Clark, 2017). One high school teacher criticized pre-planned SEL lessons, stating: “Let the schools find their own way [to teach SEL]. Each school community has

different factors that impact student well-being” (p. 25). This is why most high school teachers have a more informal approach to SEL that does not utilize stand-alone SEL lessons, but they indicate wanting more SEL guidance to be able to better meet the needs of their students (Bear et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2019). High school teachers need further SEL supports now, as governments are increasingly adding SEL mandates to curriculum (Eklund et al., 2018). For example, eighteen states in the USA already have state-wide SEL mandates for preK–12, and the list continues to grow, not just nationwide, but globally (Yoder et al., 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted how essential SEL is, making resources and guidance for high school teachers a pressing need.

1.5 Research Context

A school district in Massachusetts indicated interest in participating in this study because they were struggling to determine a school-wide approach to SEL within their high school. They had developed and implemented a successful SEL curriculum in their middle school, but wanted a different approach in their high school that could be flexible enough to continuously adapt to the evolving needs of the students and teachers. To consider what their school-wide approach to SEL could look like at their high school, we had to explore in what ways individual teachers experience SEL in their classrooms in order to create a high-school-classroom-specific context for the conversation. The administration of the school welcomed this study in order to understand, value, and be responsive to teachers' experiences prior to considering adjusting school practices or policy.

1.6 Valuing Teachers' Lived Experience

As so little research and so few resources exist on SEL in the high school context (Hamilton et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2015), a study that questions teachers' lived experiences of SEL can help guide other teachers in reflecting on their own practice. Existential approaches to phenomenological inquiry investigate the lived experience of a phenomenon through exploring structures of consciousness, existentials, such as a sense of lived time, space, body, and human relations (van Manen, 2016). In order to (re)present participants' lived experiences authentically, researchers influenced by Edmund Husserl (often credited as responsible for introducing phenomenological methodology) aim to bracket their assumptions and presuppositions about a phenomenon, not only at the beginning but throughout the entire research process to facilitate a direct experience with the thing itself, the phenomenon in

question—in this case, SEL. Bracketing ensures one's own biases do not impact the (re)presentation of the phenomenon in question (Husserl, 1913/1982). For example, going into this study, I, the first author, had assumed the teachers would largely discuss SEL through CASEL's framework, because Massachusetts has state-mandated SEL objectives in several subject areas derived from this framework. What will soon be illustrated, though, is that none of the high school teachers who participated in this study mentioned CASEL's framework. Instead, they discuss SEL as a way of being responsive to student needs. Through emergent phenomenological inquiry, teachers' lived experiences of SEL can then be distanced from conceptualizing SEL through the CASEL framework, and instead be described and interpreted through the teachers' sensory experiences.

1.7 Research Questions

In order to better understand teachers' lived experiences of SEL as opposed to just their conceptualizations of SEL, the primary research question is: *what is it like to experience SEL within a secondary teaching practice?* Digging deeper into the existentials of the experience allows for exploration of the sub-question: *to what extent is SEL experienced as a relational practice?* The answers sought here are not opinions and attitudes, but vivid descriptions of the phenomenon in question in order to (re)present the phenomenon as experienced.

2. Methodology

2.1 Phenomenological Orientation

This study was inspired by Max van Manen's (2016) "hermeneutic phenomenology." Van Manen uses this term to acknowledge the influence of both Husserl's descriptive approach to phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's "hermeneutics," also referred to as "interpretative" phenomenology (Dowling, & Cooney, 2012). Van Manen incorporates both approaches, explaining: "the (phenomenological) 'facts' of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced" (2016, pp. 180-181). An approach inspired by hermeneutic phenomenology allows the researcher to explore the everyday experiences of engaging students in SEL, (re)present them in intimate detail for others to imagine experiencing, while interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon through other pedagogically-oriented phenomenological texts.

2.2 Participants

Twenty-five high school teachers from the Massachusetts school district were invited from disciplines that have state-mandated SEL objectives (math, English, and physical

education). Of the twenty-five teachers invited via email, three decided to participate. Two math teachers and one health and physical education teacher volunteered. Only three to five participants are recommended by van Manen (2016), as hermeneutic phenomenology requires a limited researcher-participant distance to become intimately acquainted with participants' life-worlds through close observation. Close observation mandates that "one be a participant and an observer at the same time" in order to "maintain a certain orientation of reflectivity while guarding against the more manipulative and artificial attitude that a reflective attitude tends to insert in a social situation" (2016, p. 69). Gaining this level of access to each participant and their life-worlds, as well as engaging in the appropriate amount of reflection and interpretation, necessitates limiting the number of participants.

2.3 Data Collection

Close observations and interviews were the primary methods of information gathering. Each teacher was observed for two to three class periods. Moments where teachers were interacting with and responding to students were described in field notes. Directly after each observation, teachers were asked to identify whether they experienced SEL in any of their interactions with students during that class period, and if they responded in the affirmative, follow-up questions on their sensory experience of that interaction were asked. Afterwards, lived experience descriptions were written up to share with teachers in their interviews.

Each teacher was interviewed twice, for approximately thirty minutes each time. The first interview gathered anecdotes of their experiences of SEL. To phenomenologically orient (van Manen, 2014) the teachers to this phenomenon, the first author prompted them with the following directions: Think of a moment when you experienced SEL. Before sharing, reflect on what this moment felt like. What were the sensations in your body? What was your sense of time in the moment? What was it like to interact with the students in your class? What was it like to navigate the space you were in?

The second interview with each teacher gathered further anecdotes and expounded upon the significance of these moments. Each interview was summarized with thematic elements noted. The descriptions of teachers' lived experiences of SEL were written up into vignettes as (re)presentations of the phenomenon, and similar experiences were sourced in phenomenological literature.

2.4 Analysis

Often, qualitative social science research consists of collecting statements and using them verbatim, most frequently for some type of thematic analysis (Creswell, 2013). In phenomenology, however, the lived experience itself is the primary source of information gathered (van Manen, 2016). The goal of the researcher is to (re)present the phenomenon through their writing up of the lived experience, so that it can be felt experientially by the reader. To achieve this, the first author was careful to ask the teachers to relive the phenomenon through the structures of consciousness. The first author then engaged in “writing-up” these lived experiences via vignettes, which requires writing and re-writing (Lloyd & Smith, 2021), so that each iteration comes closer and closer to evoking the practitioner’s felt sense of SEL.

To create these vignettes, the participants in their interviews provided descriptions of their lived experiences of SEL, and these details allowed for the first draft of vignettes. Researching extant phenomenological literature for relevant examples and pertinent insights, along with further consultation with teachers and their transcripts, helped identify common thematic elements. The vignettes were then reiteratively edited to become more evocative and to better inspire the felt sense of the thematic elements identified.

3. Results: Vivid Descriptions of SEL in-action

A quick introduction of each educator follows. Identifying details and characteristics are masked. A vignette inspired by their lived experience of SEL is given, along with a brief exploration of the moment’s significance. The different thematic elements of the teachers’ sense of others in these experiences of SEL, in this case, their sense of their student and/or students, are then analyzed and interpreted in the following section. *Gendered pronouns are used in this section to align with participants’ preferred pronouns.

3.1 Mrs. Williams, a High School Math Teacher

Mrs. Williams became a math educator over two decades ago, after having had a successful and lucrative career in business. She left that career path in order to have a greater impact on humanity, and shares her thought process in the transition: “I’m not using my life to make others better. I’m using my life to make a company more wealthy. I want more. I want to make a difference at the end of the day.” Mrs. Williams is very invested in the growth of her students, and believes viewing education that way as a teacher leads to happier educators, “I think if more of us were more aware of who’s in front of us versus what are we supposed to

teach, I think we could become more effective and we'd be more fulfilled.” Mrs. Williams views SEL as meeting the needs of her students, and prioritizing them above all else. She detailed one moment she identified as SEL because it was clear the student was looking for connection and affirmation. That moment is the muse for the following vignette, written from the teacher’s perspective:

Class has just ended, and Ryan requested to meet to discuss his homework. Before entering the breakout room on Zoom[®], I round my shoulders back, stretching my shoulder blades over the frame of my chair. I inhale deeply, let my smile reach across my face, and move closer to the camera lens.

I let Ryan into the breakout room. I can see his bedroom in the background, with his posters and his bedspread.

Ryan says, “I saw you walking last week!”

“Say hi next time!”

He laughs. “I will.” He pauses for a moment. “I really miss being in-person.”

“Me, too, Ryan. Me, too.”

I ask Ryan how I can help him. Ryan explains that he is still having difficulty with a math problem from last night. I ask Ryan to walk me through the problem from beginning to end. At first, Ryan’s voice wavers as he explains his reasoning step-by-step. At one point, Ryan says eight multiplied by eight is sixteen.

I interject softly, “Did you just say eight times eight equals sixteen?”

“Yes!” Then Ryan looks down, his brows furrow. He laughs, “Oh that’s not right.”

“Don’t worry! That’s why we write down each step because it’s so easy to make an error like that! Can you talk me through the rest of the problem?”

I try to soften my smile as I listen. It keeps spreading wider because Ryan’s voice has grown stronger, louder, more confident.

“I guess that was my mistake! The rest of the problem is easy now!”

Mrs. Williams identifies this experience as SEL because she understands Ryan is explicitly asking for math help while tacitly asking for his emotional needs to be met. She is able to recognize the ways in which he is communicating his needs and respond to them in the context of addressing his math comprehension. For Mrs. Williams, at the heart of SEL, is developing strong student-teacher relationships in which she is aware of and responsive to student needs. She acknowledges that teaching virtually as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has led even strong students to doubt their abilities, as was the case here. She knew Ryan was one of the strongest students in her class, and she had seen his homework from the night before. She knew he understood the process. She suspected if he was having an issue, it was likely a simple calculation error. Instead of dismissing his concerns, though, she gave him prompts to help him identify and believe in his own strengths. She also made sure to take a moment to connect, as he

started the conversation with a comment that indicated he was feeling isolated in the new virtual world.

This interaction is very brief, but it demonstrates that a relationship has been built between the two. In what ways are these relationships facilitated? Ryan was comfortable sharing that he was struggling in the virtual medium. Mrs. Williams let Ryan know he was not alone, and that even adults felt similarly. In this way, Mrs. Williams is acknowledging and validating Ryan's feelings. She is also creating the foundation to help Ryan understand the emotional landscape outside of himself by letting him know adults struggle too, and modeling healthy boundaries in which to share and connect in a pedagogical relationship. In what ways does a teacher navigate a pedagogical relationship in high school? Is this the primary way high school teachers facilitate SEL?

3.2 Mr. Smith, a Secondary Physical Education Teacher

Mr. Smith would likely not have become a teacher if it were not for the relationships he had with his high school teachers and university mentors. A bright, but unmotivated high school student, one teacher told him that if he applied himself more, he would be an excellent student. This motivated him to work harder and pursue further education. As for why he chose health and physical education, he stated, "my own positive experience with coaches that I had, and the success I had as an athlete." Mr. Smith is a naturally gifted athlete, but he understands that many of his students do not feel that athletics is their strength, "The students who are not natural athletes need to feel included. So, I find small ways to encourage them." He is sensitive to the competing needs of the inherently gifted athletes in his class and those who struggle to see any progress. He experiences mediating the relationship the latter has with physical activity as SEL. He shared the details of helping a reluctant student find meaning in movement in an interview, which was the impetus for writing the following vignette:

Finally! A smile spreads across my face. In her weekly reflection on her physical activity for the week, Amy writes:

"I'm beginning to get all of the positive things people say about movement. I really enjoyed my walk today. It was so nice being in nature and being with my friend. I didn't even notice I was sweaty until I got home."

I feel my heart swell up in my chest. I feel hope. In other years, Amy refused to take part in any sport, and did so in a loud, sometimes disrespectful way. During the COVID-19 pandemic, at the beginning of the 2020 school year, she was often sullen, arms crossed, glaring at her computer screen. I felt powerless to affect her. It made me try to put more

energy into my movements and more enthusiasm into my voice, but she never joined in. I thought the day was a win if I could get her to smile at any point.

During the pandemic, we asked students to keep a journal reflecting on their physical activity outside of class. At first, every entry Amy described pacing in her house and stated that it felt like a giant waste of time. A few weeks into the assignment, though, she started to walk outside. The tone of her reflections has shifted ever since then, slowly becoming more positive, and a few weeks ago, she started participating in class. This week, she smiled the whole time, and today, her reflection shows she is finding meaning in movement.

Mr. Smith describes experiencing this moment as a realization of just how far Amy had come in her own SEL journey because she had developed an awareness of what physical activity could offer her life. Mr. Smith experiences and understands SEL as “developing the skills that allow them to be happy, healthy people.” Originally, Amy had behaved poorly in class while communicating that she found little purpose in the assignments and activities. Mr. Smith was not sure if assigning movement as homework would be effective or helpful in remedying this, and every time Amy described what a monumental waste of time pacing in her house was, his doubts grew. He had discussed with her different options, and gently encouraged her to try walking outside, but he doubted she would do that. He was thrilled when she tried, and now he was ecstatic that she had found meaning in the experience. The meaning she found in the assignment at home also allowed her to be open to the potential meaning of the activities in class. Mr. Smith is very candid about being unsure of what this individual student needed from him in order to grow.

He describes SEL as a series of in-class and outside-of-class interactions and developments. He describes needing to support and encourage her while still holding her accountable. The virtual medium brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic also made him further unsure of what she needed and in what ways he may be able to respond to her needs. However, in this virtual medium, he was more effective in helping her attempt and find meaning in physical activity than any year prior. Is this a reflection of his methods? Her development? Her needs in difficult times? A combination therein? What this example shows is that students' needs are complex. Growth takes time. A teacher may not know what any given student needs at any given moment, never mind 20 or 30 students simultaneously. It is an on-going relationship, though, so a teacher has time to help a student grow and develop. One moment alone does not determine growth, but an amalgamation of moments over time can facilitate it.

3.3 *Mr. Sanchez, a High School Math Teacher*

Prior to becoming an educator, Mr. Sanchez had a successful career in engineering. Mr. Sanchez turned to math education decades ago because he was trying to better advocate for his children, "I came from a different background; I have my education in different countries so I have seen how much competition exists." He also claims that math education is central to providing opportunities in education, but that for many students math may not be their favorite subject "for two reasons. It could be because of their previous experiences with the math, and it could be because just the brains are not thinking mathematically [...] like the certain brain chemistry." Mr. Sanchez claims here that his role as a math educator is to help students remediate their relationship with math, which involves addressing prior experiences and feelings in relation to their math education, as well as becoming aware of the ways in which they approach and respond to a math problem. The process of helping students understand and improve their relationship to math is what he identifies as SEL. His description of one pre-pandemic, in-person moment in which he asked all the students in his class to reflect on the difference between their relationship with math versus their perceived performance in math class inspired the creation of this vignette:

We have five minutes left until the bell rings and students are dismissed for the day. I feel my shoulders slumping as my energy wanes. Fourteen of my fifteen students sit around discussing their last exam. A handful are smiling, having sighed deeply when they received their exams. A few look visibly upset, their eyes watery or fidgeting in silence. Most are sharing papers back and forth, demanding to see the papers of their peers who received credit for questions they missed.

I remind myself not to visibly sigh. I ask, "Does anyone have a question for me? If you do feel like I graded unfairly, please come talk to me. I'm human. I make mistakes sometimes."

The students grow silent and shift in their seats, but do not ask me a question. After a few seconds, they resume their complaining, but this time in soft whispers.

Mr. Sanchez is attempting to support his students at this moment. Are they likely to speak out in front of all their peers, though? What are some other possible approaches to acknowledging and addressing the classroom when multiple students seem upset?

"Everyone, stop for a minute, please. Look at Jamal."

A hush falls across the students. They peer over at Jamal at the board.

"When he received his exam back, he reviewed it, asked a peer to walk him through the questions he missed, and then he came up to clean my board, as he always does."

The students look around at each other. A few shrug. A few sink lower in their seats.

"If you're just upset about your grade, remember that these exams let me know what we need to focus on as a class, and they let you know what to focus on in your studies. For me

as a teacher, it's not how much math you know, but how much math you can share with others and get everybody ahead.”

Some of the students visibly soften at this, look around, and nod gently.

Mr. Sanchez understands and experiences SEL as the ways in which he helps his students “develop an emotional bond with math.” He did not select this moment to demonstrate definitive success, but to question the process involved in engaging students in SEL. Mr. Sanchez explains that he is feeling tired and frustrated in this moment, and he understands that his students are likely feeling similarly. He ultimately wants to help students learn to alleviate their own struggles, but he believes that before he can do that, he must acknowledge and bring attention to that struggle. In what ways can a teacher bring up uncomfortable issues in order to facilitate student growth in a non-confrontational way? How should timing be considered? Classroom dynamics?

4. Interpreting the Findings

When asked to describe their experiences of SEL in the classroom, the three teachers all described spontaneous moments of interacting with their students. They do not pick moments where they plan to teach students a skill, or to incorporate state-mandated SEL objectives. The moments that stand out to them are the moments where students were struggling, either with a problem, an assignment, or a score, and they felt compelled to respond to their students' struggle. The teachers do not describe having a step-by-step plan of what to do in these types of situations. They describe a relational attunement to their students in the moment, a desire to help students become more aware of themselves across contexts. The themes therein—helping facilitate self-awareness and developing relational awareness—will be further explored and interpreted to understand the ways in which these high school teachers experience SEL, and what implications this may have for other high school teachers.

4.1 Social Emotional Learning as Fostering Self-Awareness

In the vignette inspired by Mr. Sanchez, he hopes to make students aware of their behavior. He posits that if they cognitively reframe their experience in a more positive and constructive manner, they will feel better, and their behaviors will improve. This line of reasoning reflects elements of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) (Osher et al., 2016). CBT encourages individuals to reflect on their thoughts and make connections between how their thoughts and emotions influence their actions. CBT has inspired SEL (Osher et al., 2016), and has also been explicitly incorporated into SEL curricula and programs (van de Sande et al.,

2019). In the experience of SEL Mr. Sanchez described, he was short on time with his students, unable to fully mine the moment's potential. In a SEL survey administered to 15,179 educators, 43 percent of respondents indicated that having more time would improve their ability to engage students in SEL, and "more time" was the additional support desired by the greatest number of respondents (Hamilton et al., 2019). If Mr. Sanchez had more time, for example, he might have been able to more fully help his students examine their emotions and resultant behaviors. He might have been able to ask them why they were so negatively impacted by their scores. What were they feeling that led to these behaviors? They could have discussed in what ways, in the future, he as a teacher might present scores, and they as students might respond to scores so that everyone in the room understands their current progress and feels empowered to learn more.

Mr. Sanchez did not choose this moment as a paragon of excellence, but rather as a moment to consider in what ways it is possible to engage students in SEL. He identified this moment in his classroom as a moment of SEL because "the students needed to connect better to the material and each other [...] There is no point to learning math if you can't share it." He recognized students needed to enhance their own awareness of what they were doing and why, but he did not know exactly how to address it in the moment. It can be tempting, as a teacher, to think of what one might have done differently, but Mr. Sanchez had fifteen students and five minutes to address the situation. In being responsive to the class in the moment, reflection is often a luxury a teacher cannot afford. As van Manen (2015) states:

In the interactive moment of teaching [...] there is no time to deliberate rationally and morally, considering one point of view and another. [...] [T]his kind of deliberative reflection in action [...] rarely can be employed in pedagogically interactive and relational situations. (p. 38)

Reflecting on this moment will not reveal what "should" have been done. There is no concrete, resolute answer. What does this moment teach us, then? This moment helps us understand the context in which SEL takes place and gives us the ability to consider a range of responses and their possible outcomes, allowing practitioners to reflect on their practice.

Like Mr. Sanchez, Mr. Smith was consciously attempting to help his student develop their sense of self-awareness. The context of Mr. Smith's experience is different, though. He is describing a relationship with one student over time, versus Mr. Sanchez's entire class in one moment. As a result, Mr. Smith's experience gives us more insight into that specific student-

teacher relationship, as well as what it feels like to repeatedly attempt to develop a student's sense of self-awareness. Mr. Smith describes feeling "unsure" during the process of attempting to mediate Amy's relationship to physical activity. He claims the process is "tricky, because if you push too hard, they shut down. If you don't push at all, they may never try." This is why he created a loose structure in which the expectation was that she participate, but he encouraged her agency in selecting what activity she participated in. He then asked her to reflect on the experience in a journal to get her to identify the impact movement had on her. Although he created a plan and followed through on his approach, he had no idea if the actions he was taking would be helpful. He felt great joy and relief when her actions indicated she benefited from his approach.

Mrs. Williams also attempts to inspire a greater sense of self-awareness in Ryan. When he asks for help, she could have looked at his work and identified the issue for him, and the interaction would have been much faster than asking him to verbally explain his process. However, Mrs. Williams wanted Ryan to become aware of his own thought processing and feel more confident in his ability. She is careful to slow down and really listen to what Ryan is and is not saying, and gives him space and support to identify his needs. In this way, she asks him to recognize and respond to both his thoughts and feelings in relation to his math ability.

What is similar about the experiences of Mr. Sanchez, Mr. Smith, and Mrs. Williams in attempting to foster self-awareness in their students? First of all, they all describe being very attentive in the moment. They look for ways in which their students communicate their needs. At that point, their primary concern is reading and responding to the student(s) in front of them, not a curricular objective. Mrs. Williams states that "everything else just fades away." In the process of being so attentive to others, they describe oscillating between being hyper-aware of and then numb to their own needs and concerns. Mr. Sanchez and Mr. Smith describe feeling their annoyance with their student(s) but also feeling a deep care-as-worry (van Manen, 2002) that superseded momentary frustrations. Of that frustration, Mr. Smith stated, "I'm not getting into a battle of wills with a teenage girl who refuses to do anything that day. [...] There's no winning that battle." He also demonstrates his care-as-worry, "Reading her reflections and seeing that she found a way to enjoy moving... nothing's better, because now I feel she has a chance at a healthy life, which will make her a happier human." Mrs. Williams does not describe feeling frustrated, but she had a meeting and lunch planned at the time her chat with Ryan was taking

place. She claims her thoughts never touched on time or hunger during their interaction, but flooded her thoughts and feelings before and after. All three describe recognizing student needs, feeling for an approach to meeting those needs, and continuously reading for a response throughout the process to gauge efficacy. The attempt to foster self-awareness in their students relies heavily upon their ability to be self-aware of their own needs and how those needs impact their relationships with students.

4.2 Social Emotional Learning as Developing Relational Awareness

The teachers share their experiences of SEL in the context of their interactions with students. Not only are they attempting to develop students' awareness of their behaviors, thoughts, and emotions, but they are also drawing the students' attention to the ways in which they interact with others, whether through the student-teacher relationship or peer-to-peer relationships. Mr. Sanchez asks his students to reflect on the ways in which their behaviors impact other students. Mr. Smith refuses to give up on Amy and persists in gently encouraging her until she finds meaning in movement. When Ryan looks to Mrs. Williams for answers, she instead supports him as she nudges him to find his own answers.

All of the teachers in this study experienced SEL through their relationships with their students, and viewed identifying and meeting student needs as integral to their ability to teach them. It is through the teacher's process of developing their own self-awareness and relational awareness that they are able to engage students in SEL. Phenomenological theorists and researchers do not use the term SEL but have long explored the need for pedagogical self-awareness and relational awareness in order to meet the holistic needs of their students. Curriculum theorist David Jardine (1990) claims the development of such pedagogical relationships requires "self-understanding and self-reflection" (p. 212). Martin Buber (1947/2002) wrote at length about the nature of pedagogical relationships, and describes this development of self and relational awareness as "self-education":

In learning from time to time what this human being needs and does not need at the moment, the educator is led to an ever deeper recognition of what the human being needs in order to grow. But he is also led to the recognition of what he, the "educator", is able and what he is unable to give of what is needed—and what he can give now, and what not yet. [...] The forces of the world which the child needs for the building up of his

substance must be chosen by the educator from the world and drawn into himself. (p. 120)

Mr. Sanchez, Mr. Smith, and Mrs. Williams experience SEL as attempting to read student needs and intuit what will meet those needs in a similar capacity as Buber describes. Mr. Sanchez recognizes many of his students struggle in response to their scores, but does not yet know in what ways to respond to individual students regarding the issue. Mr. Smith understood Amy had a need and was constantly trying to meet her need, but was unsure of his ability to do so given the context of the pandemic. Mrs. Williams was trying her best to meet the myriad of needs Ryan had in the face of virtual education in the midst of her own attempts to navigate the new medium.

The teachers in this study are not discussing their experiences with SEL in terms of delivering a pre-planned lesson with concrete objectives, which would necessitate little teacher self-reflection, but rather through interactions with their students in which they identify that their students needed their guidance and must intuit what guidance to provide. These are what van Manen (2015) describes as pedagogical moments, and though van Manen does not discuss SEL, his phenomenological pedagogy inherently develops the same aim as SEL, “Within this broader existential sense of learning, pedagogy does have goals. We want our children to grow toward a life of meaningfulness, personal and social responsibility, and happiness” (p. 44). Just as some existential tenets (a lived sense of self and relation to other) mirror components of the SEL competencies (self-awareness and social awareness), the goals of a phenomenological approach to education echo the aims of CASEL.

According to the lived experiences of the teachers in this study, the key to teachers engaging high school students in SEL seems dependent on the teachers’ continuous development in their own SEL journey, their own continual state of awareness. This again draws parallels to a phenomenological approach to education, as “Phenomenologists insist that teaching is an orientation toward being” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 427). High school teachers are engaging high school students in SEL through complex, spontaneous interactions, that rely on the teachers’ ability to sense what a student needs, “Pathic aspects of pedagogical practice concern “affects” – affects of thoughtfulness, tact, sensitivity, and the ability to grasp what goes on in the inner life of the other” (van Manen, 2015, p. 42). All of the teachers describe a process of intuiting a student is struggling and why. Some teachers would be oblivious to or unconcerned with the

student response in Mr. Sanchez's class. In other classes, Amy might be labeled a "problem student" and treated punitively rather than being helped to find her own meaning in physical activity. Mrs. Williams could have just pointed out the calculation error in Ryan's homework. Instead, these teachers actively tried to engage students in SEL. The question then becomes, if we are concerned with developing SEL in high schools, can we help high school teachers develop the sensitivities necessary to be present, aware, and responsive to students?

This is a problematic proposition: Can sensitivity be taught or trained? We may have to admit that agogical development is not served well by "skill" or "competency" training. Agogical sensitivities such as affects, feelings, ethical values, and tactfulness cannot be trained in an instrumental manner, but, if approached with openness, willingness, and commitment, they can be developed through phenomenological reflections and evocations, but only in those who are receptive to it. (van Manen, 2015, pp. 41-42)

For high school teachers interested in helping students develop self-awareness and social-awareness, it is a process of reflecting on their practice, as Mr. Sanchez, Mr. Smith, and Mrs. Williams are doing. According to the research (Yeager, 2017), it is most likely not a predetermined curriculum or checklist, but rather a continuous, thoughtful reflection on everyday lived interactions with students.

4.3 Does a Relational Approach to SEL Meet the Needs of All Students?

The teachers in this study do not experience SEL as engaging in a planned curriculum. Instead, they describe moments of responding to student needs. This means that they build strong relationships with individual students. For Amy, Mr. Smith is able to help her build self-awareness and improve their relationship to the extent that she willingly participates in class and finds meaning in assignments now. With Ryan, Mrs. Williams is able to help boost his sense of self-efficacy in math and help him feel less isolated in a difficult situation. Developing SEL through organic, authentic contexts seems to be beneficial in these examples. In Mr. Sanchez's example, there are too many students and too little time to get a sense of the impact. This begs the question: if SEL is only developed through the student-teacher relationship in organic, spontaneous ways, what happens if an individual student never feels comfortable enough to build an individual bond with the teacher?

Mrs. Williams addresses this issue in her interviews and demonstrates her practices in observations. As she has primarily remedial classes, she does occasionally have some students

who feel so insecure in their abilities that they rarely speak up. She has carefully crafted the practices in her classroom as a result. As shown with Ryan, with each math problem in class, Mrs. Williams is very careful to build students' "metacognition." She does this by having students orally process each step of a problem and explaining how they know if they are right or wrong. She wants students to understand what they think, why they think it, and the patterns of their thoughts. She also wants students to examine how they feel in relation to their thought processes, so she will ask students to discuss how they felt during the process. All of these are aspects of self-awareness, albeit limited to the cognitive aspects of self-awareness, and the hope is that this process will help students hone their ability to be present, so they are more aware and continuously engaged. She does not feel this can completely compensate for a lack of a strong student-teacher relationship, but she sees it as a safety net for those too shy to engage. This is her passion, but not all teachers inherently develop such practices in their classrooms. Will a teacher's comfort zone dictate the depth and scope of SEL? Are there authentic ways to sequence students' social and academic growth within high school classrooms? Would that be desirable?

Reeves and Le Mare (2017) compare two approaches to SEL: a "relational approach" that prioritizes the teacher-student relationship without explicitly developing SEL, and the "competence promotion approach" that measures SEL competencies without expressing concern for pedagogical relationships. Reeves and Le Mare promote the former and disparage the latter. Research does indicate that strong student-teacher relationships increase student engagement in high school students (Roorda et al., 2011) and a SEL approach that focuses on student-teacher relationships has the potential to improve students' academic, social, and emotional health outcomes (Yang et al., 2018). Prior studies have shown that even informal approaches to SEL lead to students reporting a positive impact on their sense of school climate, across grade levels (Bear et al., 2017). Reeves and Le Mare are specifically referencing the elementary context, however, where a teacher would likely have at most thirty students. A high school teacher may have five classes of thirty students each. Can they develop a deep relationship with each student? Could skill or competency development meet the needs of students whom teachers are not able to build strong one-on-one relationships with? Skill development has historically been an essential component of SEL (Elias, 1997; Elias & Weissberg, 2000), but studies within the high school context have seen little transfer outside of the classroom of SEL skills developed within

the classroom (Yeager, 2017). Does this suggest teachers should not focus on skill development, or that other factors are at play, such as student-teacher relationships or methods of facilitation?

The participants in this study align most closely with a relational approach to SEL. They do incorporate what they refer to as “skills” and “skill-training,” but they do not do it in a mechanistic, objectified capacity. Mrs. Williams refers to “metacognition” as a skill that she understands as developing SEL, but her aim with her classroom practices is for students to begin to develop a way to constantly check-in with themselves, to sense what they are thinking and feeling, and how all of their thoughts, feelings, and sensations influence their sense of self and their ability to relate to others. Mr. Smith also describes SEL as helping his students “develop the set of skills they need to be happy, healthy adults,” but when he describes skill-building, he describes deeply personal practices. For example, with Amy, he wanted her to find meaning in movement and to develop a physical practice, but he did not judge her abilities against a checklist. Just as the participants develop self-awareness and social awareness as ways of being with themselves and others, the skills and skill sets the participants describe promoting are ways of being more present and more aware, rather than executing degrees of ability.

The participants do not describe attempting to measure whether their approach allows all students in their class to develop their self-awareness and relational awareness. Also, they rarely explicitly identify to students what they are hoping students will develop. They do not intentionally or explicitly add SEL components into their subject area curriculum or introduce a stand-alone SEL curriculum. Their approach to SEL demonstrates different informal practices, which mirrors the approach described in the extant SEL literature regarding the high school context (Bear et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2019). Additionally, many of the practices they describe align with a phenomenological approach to pedagogy:

Phenomenological scholarship on teaching invites you to teach as a mode of relation to yourself, to others, to subject matter. A contemplative and meditative self-reflexivity is required [...] In the phenomenological world, modes of being rather than sets of behavioral skills characterize the effort to understand curriculum and teaching. (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 434)

Can a more reflective approach to relating to students through everyday practices be considered SEL? Would it meet the needs of students? If so, how do we help practitioners become more thoughtful and more reflective in everyday practice without concrete plans, curriculums, and

checklists? Phenomenological pedagogy has long championed the aims of SEL in everyday practice, but can this approach to education be scaled to meet the needs of all students and teachers?

5. Conclusions and Lingering Questions

The high school teachers in this study were asked to describe their experiences of SEL through detailing their lived sense of self, other, space, and time in these moments. The teachers were not given a definition of SEL or asked to follow a specific framework, as the intent was to understand how these teachers experience and interpret SEL in their daily practice. The teachers do not describe pre-planned SEL lessons, or the incorporation of SEL objectives within their subject area curriculum. The experiences of SEL teachers described revolve around unplanned student interactions, where students identify an issue and the teachers try to intuit what response will be most helpful. In each of the moments identified, the teachers are trying to foster a greater sense of self-awareness and relational awareness in their students. The teacher's ability to engage students in this process depends upon their own practice of reflecting on themselves and their relationships with students, their process mirroring the self-reflection inherent in a phenomenological approach to pedagogy (Buber, 1947/2002; Jardine, 1990; Pinar et al., 1995; van Manen, 2015).

Two of the existentials identified by van Manen (2016) in his hermeneutic phenomenology, a lived sense of self and other, align with two of CASEL's SEL competencies, self-awareness and social awareness. A systematic review of secondary SEL programs indicates that these two competencies are the most impacted by SEL programming, which suggests that these competencies may be necessary precursors to the other competencies (van de Sande et al., 2019). The teachers in this study approach SEL by attempting to help students practice continuously being aware of what they are thinking, feeling, and why—and how this impacts the ways in which they relate to others. This relational approach to SEL is supported by research that indicates even informal SEL practices boost older students' perception of school climate (Bear et al., 2017), and an emphasis on student-teacher relationship building increases older students' academic engagement (Yang et al., 2018). As such, the approach taken and the practices illustrated by the teachers in this study can be used to help current and future high school educators reflect upon and consider what SEL might look like in their own classrooms.

This study also asks teachers to consider what SEL asks of them, if engaging in SEL means developing a more reflective practice in general, emulating a phenomenological approach to pedagogy. Phenomenology explores the meaning in everyday experiences. This study suggests further phenomenological inquiry could give teachers the rich context needed to develop a more reflexive practice that would better serve their students in engaging in SEL. Phenomenology does not aim to solve a problem, but rather more deeply understand a phenomenon, and so this research does not suggest a formal procedural method to create SEL teacher education opportunities. However, encouraging participants to reflect deeply on their own classroom experiences (Bredmar, 2020) and those of others could offer ways in which teachers can enhance their approach to SEL in their own classrooms. Furthermore, discussing teachers' experiences and interpretations of SEL is a necessary foundation for any district to consider a school-wide approach to SEL in high school.

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Chapter Four:

Giving and Taking Care: Secondary Teachers' Experiences of Social Emotional Learning

Abstract

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has been primarily researched in elementary schools, and within this context, SEL curriculum is often presented as an isolated, preplanned curriculum, with a list of curricular objectives to be delivered. A phenomenological inquiry was conducted to better understand the ways in which SEL and SEL curriculum are understood and experienced in a high school context. Data gathered from close phenomenological observations and interviews with three high school teachers in mathematics and physical education afforded the opportunity to orient, interpret, and describe the phenomenon of SEL-in-action. Rich descriptions of SEL as it is lived were generated and analyzed in relation to van Manen's reflections on pedagogy and curriculum. Findings reveal that SEL manifests in the pedagogical actions of teachers caring for students regardless of what subject is being taught, and often in moments where the curriculum-as-plan is disrupted. Experiential opportunities to understand SEL within the context of secondary teacher education are recommended for teacher education and ongoing professional development.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Learning; curriculum-as-plan; curriculum-as-lived; care

Orienting to the Phenomenon

An Experiential Orientation

I, Janna, the first author of this phenomenological inquiry, was first introduced to the concept of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) as a practitioner attending a professional learning workshop. The presenter defined SEL through a framework provided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (n.d.):

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (para. 1)

Within CASEL's SEL framework, the process of acquiring and applying such knowledge, skills, and attitudes is aligned with becoming competent in five areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These five social emotional competencies form the basis of a "competence promotion" to SEL and SEL curriculum (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). The presenter of the professional learning opportunity I attended espoused a competence promotion approach, and applied this framework to a stand-alone SEL lesson from a SEL curriculum. Being introduced to SEL in this way gave me the impression that SEL was an isolated list of skills and objectives to teach students. I understood SEL as competency-based content to deliver, or in curriculum theorist Ted Aoki's terms, a curriculum-as-plan, "the origin of which [...] is outside the classroom, in the Ministry of Education or a school district office" (as cited in Pinar, 2005, p. 14). I left that workshop assuming I could only engage students in SEL through explicit SEL lessons as part of a SEL curriculum separate from my subject area.

As a researcher under the supervision of Dr. Lloyd, the second and supporting author of this inquiry, I was later re-introduced to SEL through the lens of phenomenology, specifically through the doctoral student of the late Aoki, namely professor emeritus Max van Manen, who inspired lived understandings of curriculum (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005; Lloyd, 2018; Magrini, 2015; Pinar et al., 2004). This prompted me to wonder: what does it mean to understand SEL as more than a set of objectives to achieve, but to live the curriculum of SEL in pedagogical action? When I reflect on my own experience as a teacher, one interaction stands out:

The last bell of the day just rang, and all of the students have left except for Derek. I asked him to stay after class to discuss an assignment. He sits, fidgeting with a pencil, staring at the table. I try not to stare in amazement at how nimbly he twirls the pencil, despite the length of his fingers. Derek has congenital limb deformities that impacted the development of his arms. I walk over to him and kneel at the table in front of him. His eyes remain fixated on the table.

“Hey, Derek, are you having issues writing your paper? You didn’t turn in a draft.”

“I, umm, uh.” He glances down at me for a moment before looking away again.

“Are you struggling with where to begin? I know that discussing a time you failed before you succeeded at something is a really broad prompt. Most of the students write about learning a new skill, like learning to ride a bike.”

A few moments pass in silence, and then tears drop on his desk. I mask my surprise.

“What’s going on, Derek? How can I help?”

He starts to stutter and stops. I feel a pang of guilt; I am not sure if he can ride a bike.

“I know failure; all I do is fail. I never succeed after.”

I want to cry, but instead I remind Derek of what a good student he is in my class, and together we brainstorm and outline a paper based on the process of experiencing success.

When I think of what it might be like to live the identified competencies of SEL in pedagogical action, this experience stands out. I was helping Derek develop his sense of self-awareness by sharing what he was feeling and how that was impacting his progress in the course. Additionally, together, we helped him further his self-management skills by allowing him to tolerate and move past his discomfort in a safe and supportive environment. In this interaction, however, it is not just Derek’s social and emotional competencies that are being developed, but my own as well. Derek taught me that I need to be more self-aware and socially aware when I offer prompts. Despite attending a professional learning workshop on SEL, I felt unprepared to live the curriculum of SEL in that I felt very unsure of how to respond to his needs in the moment, and tremendous guilt for not having anticipated his needs prior. This relational interpretation of SEL curriculum feels meaningful to me in a secondary context, but I was curious to explore the ways in which other high school teachers experience and interpret SEL and SEL curriculum.

With an interest in better understanding in what ways SEL may be experienced in everyday pedagogical interactions, I wanted to observe and learn what it is like for other teachers to experience SEL in their lessons. I desired to set aside and suspend my prior understanding of SEL as an objective, disembodied curriculum (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005), and open myself up to understanding what SEL is like for others. To open oneself to seeing and understanding an

experience in a direct sense with no preformed judgement clouding one's vision is to engage in phenomenological bracketing (van Manen, 2016a, 2016b). Bracketing dates back to Edmund Husserl (1913/1982), who is frequently attributed with founding phenomenology as a research methodology (Luft & Overgaard, 2011). Engaging in phenomenological bracketing, however, does not imply that one enters a study naïvely. Before one suspends judgement on a phenomenon in question, in this case, how SEL is lived in pedagogical action, it is important to deeply understand how it has been researched to date. Becoming acquainted with relevant literature orients the researcher to existing taken-for-granted understandings and provides context for making sense of SEL in novel ways.

Review of Literature

SEL has been studied for over two decades, and findings indicate SEL benefits learners' behavior, grades, test scores, mental health, college-readiness, and pro-social behaviors (Corcoran et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). The majority of the research has been conducted within the elementary school context, though, and often involves "implementing" an isolated SEL curriculum, "delivered" by specialists (Bear et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2018). There is a dearth of research involving high school teachers and students (Williamson et al., 2015; Yeager, 2017). Originally, researchers suggested SEL in high school should mirror the approach to SEL in elementary schools (Elias, 1997). However, high school students do not respond to pre-planned SEL curricula the way younger students do (Williamson et al., 2015; Yeager, 2017). As a result, CASEL recommends that high school teachers engage students in SEL as part of their general teaching practices and subject area curricula (Dusenbury et al., 2015). Teacher preferences align with their current recommendations (Bear et al., 2017; Hamilton et al., 2019).

Research suggests that high school teachers prefer to approach SEL informally, in a way that allows them to be responsive to their students' needs (Clark, 2017; Yoder et al., 2020). For example, in a study including 316 high school teachers (Clark, 2017), teachers showed little faith in pre-programmed SEL curricula, with one stating: "Let the schools find their own way [to teach SEL]. Each school community has different factors that impact student well-being" (p. 25). Despite not wanting a prescriptive SEL curriculum, high school teachers do report wanting more SEL education and guidance in order to be able to best serve their unique student populations (Hamedani et al., 2015; Yoder et al., 2020). However, high school educators report far fewer pre-

service and in-service SEL offerings than their elementary counterparts (Hamilton et al., 2019). High school teachers need further SEL supports now, as governments are increasingly adding SEL mandates to curriculum (Eklund et al., 2018). For example, eighteen states in the USA already have state-wide SEL mandates for preK–12, and the list continues to grow, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted how essential SEL is (Yoder et al., 2020).

Multiple studies indicate that SEL instruction offered in isolation (independent of subject area or individual context) leads to little or no skill transfer for secondary students (Bear et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018). Yeager (2017) states:

If we define a successful program as one that intentionally instructs adolescents in a given skill, leading them to use that skill in novel settings and thereby show greater wellbeing, then the evidence is discouraging. But if we broaden our definition to include programs that affect social-emotional outcomes by creating climates and mindsets that help adolescent cope more successfully with the challenges they encounter, then the evidence is not only encouraging but demands urgent action in schools across the country. (pp. 88-89)

Yeager suggests that for secondary students, high school teachers need to refrain from preprogrammed approaches to SEL, and adopt a more student-responsive approach. Research indicates that even informal SEL practices boost secondary students' perceptions of school climate (Bear et al., 2017), and an emphasis on student-teacher relationship building increases high school students' academic engagement (Roorda et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2018). A systematic review of secondary SEL programs indicates that self-awareness and social awareness are the most impacted by SEL programming (van de Sande, et al., 2019). Self-awareness and social awareness are also foundational elements of a phenomenological approach to pedagogy, which asks the teacher to develop these sensitivities as they engage their students in doing the same (van Manen, 2015). CASEL acknowledges that a curriculum-as-plan approach to SEL has been less effective in secondary settings and recommends that teachers thoughtfully reflect on their pedagogical approach and subject area curricula to better align with SEL aims (Dusenbury et al., 2015).

I engaged in this study to ask what this looks like in practice and to question what the lived experience of the educator is in such moments. Additionally, the parallels between SEL and phenomenological approaches to pedagogy and curriculum may benefit future studies by further

exploring in what ways phenomenological inquiry could aid SEL teacher education practices. For example, Aoki's (1983/2005) situational praxis, which he describes as a method of curriculum implementation, embodies the type of reflectivity and responsivity that researchers claim secondary SEL needs (Williamson et al., 2015; Yeager, 2017): "The implied view of Curriculum X is that it is the text to be interpreted, and critically reflected on in an ongoing transformation of curriculum and self" (Aoki, 1983/2005, p. 118). Such an approach encourages the teacher to engage in SEL as a living curriculum.

Research Questions

High school teachers report preferring more informal practices, a more relational approach to SEL in their pedagogy, and they want more SEL teacher education and professional development to help them achieve their aims (Hamilton et al., 2019; Yoder et al., 2020). As such, we, as researchers, need to better understand high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL. Accordingly, the main research question of this study is: *what is it like to experience SEL within a secondary teaching practice?* To understand the different components of lived experience, Max van Manen (2016a) recommends that five existentials of experience guide the inquiry, "lived relation (relationality), lived body (corporeality), lived space (spatiality), lived time (temporality), and lived things and technology (materiality)" (p. 302). These existentials of consciousness guide the type of questions asked to help answer the main research question. Additionally, asking after these existentials also helps answer the study's sub question: *in what ways do practitioners experience SEL as an approach to curriculum?*

Inquiring into high school teachers' lived experiences of SEL allows us to explore the everyday practices and interactions that inspire SEL and the significance these experiences have for teachers and students. Van Manen (1984) states, "the end of phenomenological research is to sponsor a critical educational competence: knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the basis of a carefully edified thoughtfulness" (p. 36). I decided upon a phenomenological inquiry because it allows for the lived experience of SEL in the classroom to be differentiated from the concept of SEL through a preconceived framework. We can question what the lived experience of SEL is in the high school classroom, and offer descriptions that invite teachers to question what it is like to experience SEL in their classroom, and in so doing, invite opportunities for meaningful reflection.

A school district in Massachusetts invited me to conduct my doctoral study as they had a vested interest in developing SEL within their high school programs. They had successfully developed a SEL curriculum for grades 6-8 but were unsure how to approach SEL at the high school. They saw the relevance for teachers to share their lived experiences of SEL as an important starting point for understanding how SEL could be integrated into the high school in a way that meets the needs of staff and students. As such, invited participants for this study were not given a specific framework or model of SEL in advance of their participation. Rather, they were encouraged to share their current experiences and interpretations of SEL.

Methodology

Phenomenological Orientation

This study is inspired by Max van Manen's (2016b) "hermeneutic phenomenology." Hermeneutic phenomenology incorporates the rich descriptive properties of Husserl as well as Martin Heidegger's interpretative approach to meaning-making (1927/1962). Van Manen places great emphasis on how writing is a key component of analysis: "even the 'facts' of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process" (2016b, p. 181). Writing is integral to the interpretative process and fosters a relational sensitivity to both the experience of the phenomenon and its meaning. As so few studies and resources exist for SEL in the high school context, an approach inspired by hermeneutic phenomenology explores the everyday experiences of engaging students in SEL while allowing for interpretation of their significance through other phenomenological texts.

Participants

Teachers were invited from disciplines that have state-mandated SEL objectives (math, English, and physical education). Twenty-five high school teachers were invited via email, and three volunteered to participate: one health and physical education teacher and two math teachers. A small sample size is beneficial in phenomenological research as it affords the researcher an opportunity to engage in in-depth explorations of the participants' life-worlds (van Manen, 2016a).

Information Gathering and Analysis

Information was gathered through a series of close observations and interviews. A close observation is meant to allow the researcher to enter the participant's lifeworld, and "involves an attitude of assuming relation that is as close as possible while retaining hermeneutic alertness to

situations that allow us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those situations” (van Manen, 2016b, p. 69). Each teacher was observed for 2-3 class periods. A brief conversation was held after each observation to ask teachers if SEL was experienced.

Following two observations, which gave the researcher an experiential orientation to the teacher and the phenomenon of SEL in action, the interview process began. Each teacher was interviewed twice for approximately thirty minutes. Initial interviews gathered anecdotes in response to an invitation to describe a particular moment where SEL was experienced. To phenomenologically deepen their descriptions, teachers were given prompts, such as: what were the sensations in your body? What was your sense of time in the moment? What was it like to interact with the students in your class? What was it like to navigate the space you were in?

After the initial interview, a summary was written, thematic elements were identified, drafts of vignettes were generated, and further examples of anecdotes sourced from phenomenological literature were gathered. In the second interview with each teacher, the meaning teachers find in these moments was explored. Such “*action sensitive knowledge*” (van Manen, 2016b, p. 21) inspired the “write-up” of these lived experiences via vignettes in order to authentically evoke the originary experience (Lloyd & Smith, 2021). Vignettes presented thematic elements of the phenomenon, and phenomenological texts were referenced to interpret significance.

Results: SEL-in-Action

A brief introduction of each educator follows, with identifying details and characteristics masked. A vignette inspired by their lived experience of SEL follows, with a brief exploration of the moment’s significance. Common thematic elements of all three participants’ experiences are further discussed in the following sections. *Participants use gendered pronouns.

Mr. Smith, a Secondary Physical Education Teacher

Mr. Smith teaches both health and physical education (HPE) and believes that HPE may be the students’ only introduction to and exploration of health-promoting behaviors. He defined SEL as “educating students on how to get along in the world as a human being with others and with yourself.” When asked to discuss the role of SEL in teaching high school, he said, “I think it’s important to not just know your content but know and understand the population of people you’re working with. Because they’re not just mini-adults.” Mr. Smith claims this takes effort and that in order to engage students in SEL, teachers must constantly gauge their own abilities

and wellbeing as he details teachers' many responsibilities: lesson planning, facilitating the lesson, developing relationships with students, and so on. He further explains that when one student interrupts the class, the teacher has to be aware of not only that student, but all the other students and how their learning is impacted. In such moments, he hopes to meet the needs of all the students in the class, by helping the student causing the interruption identify and meet their needs by practicing self-management. Mr. Smith details vividly in his interviews one such pedagogical moment that inspired the creation of this vignette:

The sun is out. The grass is dry. This is the perfect weather to play soccer. I separate the class into two teams, and direct one team to grab pinnies. Some move quickly with agility. Others lumber across the field. Everyone moves, except for one student.

Jesse (pseudonym) stares at me, with her arms crossed and lips downturned in a grimace. I try not to, but I look at my watch. If I want all the students to have a certain amount of field time, they need to start now. I walk towards her, my legs heavy, seconds dragging.

"I'm not going to play soccer. Go ahead, fail me. No one cares about my grade in gym."

The students on the field are taking their places. Jerry (pseudonym) puts the ball in play. I look at Jesse again. Seconds expand. I remind myself of what I like about Jesse so that I can better hear what she is saying. On our mile-run day, she will jog with the students struggling to finish and encourage them to keep going.

"I have an extra soccer ball and some mini cones. You can practice dribbling or you can walk laps around the field while we play. What would you like to do?"

Her shoulders droop as she slowly walks to the outside of the field. I jog over to the other students. I keep an eye out for her. Eventually, her pace quickens. (Vignette created from interview with Mr. Smith)

Mr. Smith identifies this moment as drawing on his own SEL development while also asking Jesse to engage in SEL. He claims that when students interrupt the class, the first impulse can be to get frustrated and try to exert control over the student, but he tries to bring the moment back to the overall relationship. In this way, it is easier for him to understand that the student might be having a bad day, or might feel insecure about their abilities. He says, "not everything that affects us is about us" and states that in order to engage students in SEL, teachers must provide a model of how to respond with empathy rather than frustration. He claims this takes effort, though, and teachers must constantly gauge their ability to give. He says he might not have been able to be so calm with Jesse in that moment if he was tired, hungry, or had a bad morning.

Mrs. Williams, a High School Math Teacher

Mrs. Williams was drawn to teaching in order to be able to connect with students. She had a lucrative career in business prior to pursuing education, “I had those corporate years, but this is so much more impactful, so much more exciting, and working with [teenagers] every day and trying to make them equipped for a better life is fulfilling.” Mrs. Williams prioritizes her relationships with students over her subject area, and claims that this is not the normal practice in high school teaching, but is a key component to why she feels so much fulfillment in her practice. She defines SEL as: “trying to meet the needs of the learners so that they can learn. Forget your stupid content; just get them in a place where they’re able to learn, grow and develop.” Mrs. Williams laments that “the model of education in high school is fundamentally different from how we view middle school and elementary school” and refutes this view, claiming, “I think it’s the same process; it’s just different material.” Mrs. Williams is very relationship-oriented, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, she was concerned that students’ learning might be impacted. As such, whenever technology disrupted learning, she worried the students might disengage. She describes these moments as requiring her to call upon her own SEL and ask students to do the same. Her description of one specific instance was the stimulus for the following vignette:

Two minutes to class—I need to check my setup. Zoom® is in gallery view to see all of my students on one screen. My second screen shows what the students are viewing. My tablet is set up to project on that screen, so I can physically write in response to students’ directions to solve problems. I’m all set. There are ten students in the waiting room, eleven, twelve, and thirteen... I let them into the main room. They are smiling, and I greet each one by name, but their brows furrow as they move closer to the screen. Many students type in the chat box. “*We can’t hear you!*” “*No sound.*” “*Nothing.*”

If I lose my students’ engagement now through frustration, they may struggle to get back on track. I need to fix this quickly! I check to make sure I am not muted. I am not. I check to see if my keyboard mute button is on. It isn’t. I feel my heart rate increasing. The students just arriving add to the chat box, as they cannot see what has been typed previously. My chest is tight.

Most teachers are familiar with moments like these. One issue can create a deluge of others.

What can a teacher do to get the class, and themselves, back on track?

I private message Mr. Lopez (pseudonym), my teaching assistant, and ask him to greet the students and take attendance while I figure out why they can’t hear me. I double-check my speakers as well as my Zoom® audio settings. Everything is setup properly. Then I see it—my headphones were plugged in. I unplug them and ask the students if they can hear me. I see the students smile and sit upright. I feel like I could cry and laugh at the same time. I laugh.

“Sorry! My headphones were plugged in! I still have so much to learn from you all about technology! Thank you for your patience.”

I take a few deep breaths and let my students' laughter center me in this moment. (Vignette created from interview with Mrs. Williams)

In the event that the copier jams or the internet goes down, teachers must adapt their lesson plans and, in the process, readjust their expectations for the day. What allows a teacher to let go of momentary stress? Mrs. Williams was able to make fun of her mistake. She describes feeling rejuvenated by her relational bond with the students as they laugh with her. That de-escalated everyone's frustration and allowed them to refocus. However, she claims that building these relationships and developing the self-esteem necessary to respond in such a way takes time, which is why she states that SEL, even for teachers, is “a constantly evolving process.”

Mr. Sanchez, a High School Math Teacher

Mr. Sanchez became a math teacher after a career in engineering to better guide his children. He claims, “I have my education in different countries so I have seen how much competition there is.” He wanted to understand the most advantageous steps to take in one's educational career. He now guides students along their own paths through math education in pursuit of achieving their aspirations, and he describes how he interprets SEL in this process:

in learning math, you have to attach emotionally to math, and I mean you have to understand your abilities and limitations. Teachers also need to understand the emotional standing of students. Math is not their favorite subject sometimes so you have to understand what has led to that [...] after that, it's our job to make students aware of their strengths, [and] I can definitely feel that I need to connect with students' emotion. But first, I need to make them connect with math emotionally so that they can succeed.

Mr. Sanchez cultivates relationships with students in and through his subject area to help the students be successful in life. When asked to describe a lived experience of SEL, Mr. Sanchez described an interaction with students that served as the basis for this vignette:

Two students from my class, Anna (pseudonym) and Sasha (pseudonym), walk up to me in the hall. They smile at me. Anna has a piece of paper in her hand that she pushes towards me.

“I know you come from an engineering background, and I want advice on my courses.”

I only have a few minutes before my next class, and I was hoping to get more coffee, but these students look so hopeful and excited.

"I'm happy to describe what I needed, and what my sons needed when they applied a few years ago. But then you should follow up with a guidance counselor."

They nod at me. I lean against the wall and review the course list.

"And you want to go into mechanical engineering, right?"

"Yes!"

"Okay, well, your science selections are great, but you should probably take Mr. Deshpande's course next term instead of this course listed here, because it's a prerequisite for the math they'll be looking for in your freshman year..." (Vignette created from interview with Mr. Sanchez)

Mr. Sanchez chose this experience as a moment of SEL because it reflects the student's attempt to build their awareness of what they need to do for their future. To Mr. Sanchez, this moment illustrates the trust in their student-teacher relationship and shows that this student knows their teacher is invested in their future success. Mr. Sanchez is also open about how, while these moments are significant, they do necessitate additional time and energy. He describes how these are the moments that inspire teachers to go into teaching, but also explains that if there are too many demands on teachers' time and energy, these types of exchanges are the first to suffer. He explains that if it had been a testing week, he would have asked her to return during his office hours. Mr. Sanchez describes being tempted to do just that at that moment, but he knew he was prepared for his next class and had enough energy without additional coffee.

Discussion of Findings

The participants all discuss SEL in different ways in which they relate to students in spontaneous moments of student need. None of the participants described SEL through curricular objectives or through the CASEL framework. In each example, two themes were present: (1) that SEL occurred in moments that disrupted what each teacher had planned and was enacted in responding to student needs; and (2) that SEL manifested in moments of caring for their students.

SEL as Living Curricula

Teachers' understandings of SEL-in-action align with responding with tact to unplanned moments—a student interrupts Mr. Smith's lesson plan; technology delays Mrs. Williams' class; and Mr. Sanchez shares his precious few moments between classes. The teachers chose these moments as examples of SEL because they were very aware of their own feelings in the moment and how their reactions to those feelings would impact their students. Describing SEL in ways that embody pedagogical responsiveness to students orients us to understanding SEL as a curriculum that is lived. Curriculum theorist William Pinar explains that a phenomenological

approach to understanding curriculum “invites you to teach as a mode of relation to yourself, to others, to subject matter. A contemplative and meditative self-reflexivity is required” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 434). These teachers reflect on these moments as experiences of SEL precisely because they were so strongly drawn into an awareness of living and teaching in a relational manner.

In each example of SEL-in-action given, a student interrupts the teacher’s plan, asking them to be responsive to their needs. Aoki (1986/1991/2005) labels this tension between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived the “zone of between.” He claims the zone of between is what calls for a responsive relational practice:

Within this tensionality, guided by a sense of the pedagogic good, we are called on as teachers to be alert to the possibilities of our pedagogic touch, pedagogic tact, pedagogic attunement—those subtle features about being teachers that we know, but are not yet in our lexicon, for we have tended to be seduced by the seemingly lofty and prosaic talk in the language of conceptual abstractions. We must recognize the flight from the meaningful and turn back again to an understanding of our own being as teachers. It is here, I feel, that teachers can contribute to fresh curriculum understandings. (p. 164)

This tensionality and its resulting effects are observed in Mr. Smith’s actions. When he feels the tension of trying to meet the conflicting needs of the class and Jesse, Mr. Smith is tempted to ignore Jesse’s needs to tend to the needs of the class as a whole. Instead, Mr. Smith reminds himself of his relational connection to Jesse and what he enjoys about the student, so he may acknowledge and respond to Jesse’s needs. The tension in the moment encourages Mr. Smith to reflect upon how he might be able to meet everyone’s needs in the moment.

Mrs. Williams also feels tension when faced with technological impediments that disrupt and delay her class. Instead of letting the tension discourage her, though, she finds a way to use the experience to demonstrate to students how adults persevere through adversity, leaning into the power of curriculum-as-lived. Additionally, Mr. Sanchez feels the tension in the zone of between. This is his moment to rest and recharge before giving himself to the next class. He is afraid that if he does not follow his plan, he will be unable to give himself fully in the next class. In the moment, he reflects on his needs, and determines he has this moment to give, and the meaningful interaction with the student does not drain his energy and, in some ways, seems

restorative. All three of the participants have a heightened sense of self in these moments because they are so conscious of how their actions impact their students.

These three teachers illustrate the type of self-reflexivity that Pinar describes and also exemplify van Manen's sense of pedagogical tact. There are multiple components, types of sensitivities that pedagogical tact requires, but two in particular are on display here: "Child-sense: possessing the active and reflective sensitivity to sense what goes on in the life of a child [...and...] Personal pedagogy: developing the self-reflexive awareness of one's own personal background and emotional make-up" (van Manen, 2015, p. 11). For child sense, honing one's sense of other, in this case the student(s), all three teachers show this type of sensitivity. Mr. Smith understands that Jesse must be struggling with something greater than just not wanting to play soccer, and he allows Jesse some agency in choosing what to do that day as a result. Mrs. Williams is sufficiently familiar with her students to know that they can become easily distracted and disappointed, and she works hard to connect in ways to which they can easily relate, such as through the humor she uses to break the tension of the moment. Mr. Sanchez senses Anna really wants to connect at this moment and may be discouraged if he asks her to come back later.

All three also show a developed sense of self-reflexive awareness, as mentioned by Pinar and colleagues (2004), which is essential to van Manen's (2015) pedagogical tact, and further described by theorists and researchers who phenomenologically approach pedagogy and curriculum (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005; Jardine, 2008; Smith, 2021; Snowber, 2019). Mr. Smith dives deeper into his relationship with Jesse to dissipate tension. Mrs. Williams asks her teaching assistant to help with attendance to attenuate the tension of needing to move the class forward and jokes after the moment is over to change the mood. Mr. Sanchez reframes the experience cognitively so he feels autonomy in choosing to relate to Anna in this moment, instead of feeling overwhelmed with too much to do and too little time to do it. Their self-reflexivity is essential to their ability to act on their child-sense. In turn, their pedagogical tact seems to be what allows for their ability to deviate from their plans to be able to experience and value curriculum-as-lived.

SEL as Giving and Taking Care

Pedagogical tact allows these teachers to respond to moments of tension by sensing what their students need, and being self-aware enough to determine what they are capable of giving to their students in response to this need. These moments demonstrate that a teacher's experience of SEL requires responsiveness, a constant awareness of relation to others in the moment. These

moments also require the teacher to care for their students' needs and have the desire to respond to and fulfill these needs. Mr. Smith wants to ensure Jesse has a positive association with physical activity. Mrs. Williams aims to fix the temporary technological malfunction to ensure her students are able to actively participate in learning. Mr. Sanchez hopes his conversation with Anna will better prepare her for what actions she needs to take to have the future she desires. In each example, the teachers are caring for their students, but this care is not just a feel-good experience. In each example of caring, there is an element of tension as the teacher considers whether they are able to respond to their students' needs.

“Care” is commonly understood today as “To have regard, fondness, or attachment *for* [a person or a thing]” (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Though care and caring often have expressly positive associations in the English language, caring inherently implies concern for others in its meaning in other languages. Van Manen (2002) states: “[W]here in English these two terms care and worry are kept separate, in Dutch, German, and some other languages, these meanings are inextricably wound up in the mode of life described by the term caring” (p. 266). Van Manen claims, “Worry—rather than duty or obligation—keeps us in touch with the one for whom we care” (p. 264). Thus, van Manen uses the term “care-as-worry” in order to represent the experience of caring: “It concerns the relationship between the commonly accepted meanings of the term caring and the lived experience of caring, especially as in the primordial context of caring for someone who is vulnerable due to age, health, or circumstance” (p. 265). The teachers' experiences of SEL in this study indicate that creating a caring relationship with students involves experiencing tension in the zone of between, navigating meeting the demands of both curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, in addition to responding to the sometimes-conflicting needs of individual students. Care-as-worry describes what the teachers experience as they utilize their pedagogical tact to engage students in SEL in curriculum-as-lived.

In each lived experience description, the teachers in this study express the ways in which they care for their students and the inherent tension in this care. Mr. Smith wants Jesse to enjoy physical activity, but not to the detriment of the rest of the students. Mrs. Williams must respond to technological malfunctions while trying to teach her class, and she fears students will disengage as a result. Mr. Sanchez wants to help Anna, but hopes it will not impact his ability to teach his next class. To respond to this tension, teachers must not just consider their students' needs and give care to them in these moments, but they must also assess their own needs. Mr.

Smith takes a moment to remind himself of why he likes Jesse to reframe the moment's tension. Mrs. Williams asks for help from her teaching assistant and deescalates the tension by joking about the incident with the class after the issue is resolved. Mr. Sanchez acknowledges he will sacrifice a moment for himself and his pined-after coffee, and he reminds himself that it is an opportunity to guide and connect with a student. The teachers only give care to their students after quickly assessing their ability to do so in the moment.

In their interviews, the teachers indicate that turning inward and reflecting on their needs must happen continuously, not just in-the-moment, if they are to be able to engage in SEL. All of the participants express being aware of and addressing their own daily needs in order to ensure they have the ability to care for their students. Mr. Smith states, "you got to keep some like gas in the tank. You can't, you can't give to others [...] if like you're kind of empty." Mrs. Williams said, "if I don't get sleep, then I can't be this nurturing. And I know that, so I have to get my sleep." When asked in what ways the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted his teaching practice and ability to engage in SEL, Mr. Sanchez stated, "The pandemic actually helped [...] I was feeling good about taking care of my own wellbeing [...] I got time to pay attention to that [...] and that made me more confident in my teaching." Additionally, all of the teachers discussed developing a practice of gratitude that helped them experience fewer moments of tension, and deal with tension more quickly and calmly when it manifested, even as the demands on teachers grew during the pandemic. Mr. Smith kept a gratitude journal. Mrs. Williams made sure to reflect on what she was grateful for on daily walks outside. Mr. Sanchez works actively on developing his "mindset" so that he is "goal-oriented," not "problem-oriented." The amalgamation of their daily practices, as well as their self-reflection in tense moments, is what allowed these educators to take care of themselves sufficiently to give care to their students.

The teachers also state that it is important to acknowledge that if external demands become too great, they struggle to care for students adequately. A teacher must be supported by their administration and colleagues. Classes cannot be too large, the curriculum too vast, or classroom conditions detrimental. Teachers need supports in order to be able to sustain offering care to others (Hargreaves, 1998). Ideally, the teacher has both strong professional support from their administration and colleagues, as well as meaningful personal support from their family and friends. If the teacher ensures they are sufficiently cared for, they are better able to engage in SEL and care for their students.

Conclusions and Lingering Questions

The high school teachers in this study experience SEL through the ways in which they relate to and care for their students. The teachers share lived experiences of SEL where their plans for that class period are interrupted, and they must respond in the moment to the needs of the students. In these moments of SEL-in-action, the teachers describe developing a relational attunement with students in order to intuit what students need, which intimates that van Manen's (2015) sense of pedagogical tact is what allows teachers to engage students in SEL. Reflecting on such experiences can help current and future practitioners thoughtfully consider their teaching practice and the ways in which SEL might manifest.

High school teachers are asking for more SEL guidance but do not want prescriptive curricula (Hamilton et al., 2019). Exploring a phenomenological approach to pedagogy and curriculum could allow teachers to develop the necessary relational sensitivities to engage students in SEL. The teachers in this study share that SEL manifests in pedagogical interactions where they are caring for their students, and responding to their needs, even when those needs conflict with the curriculum-as-plan. They also share some ways in which they alleviate the tension of trying to continuously respond to and meet the needs of each student. The teachers in this study primarily do so by demonstrating how they ensure they check in with themselves in moments of disruption, as well as through developing daily practices that sustain their ability to care for others. Their responses suggest that engaging in SEL requires sufficient external and internal supports. Further studies exploring the role of support systems and self-care practices in developing SEL would be beneficial to guide teachers in SEL teacher education.

As a practitioner, my initial introduction to SEL did not encourage me to explore such themes as SEL-as-living-curriculum, or what implications such an approach had for developing the ability to care for my students as well as myself. I wish it had, and I wish I had been exposed to such thoughtful SEL education as a preservice teacher, because I left my teacher education program when I experienced personal health issues and felt increasingly pressured to ignore my health in order to meet the needs of my students. This is a trend mirrored in the teaching profession, and this lack of support for teachers' needs in and outside of the classroom is hypothesized to be a part of the reason why approximately half of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Kelly & Northrop, 2015). Teachers' needs matter. Additionally, they are not able to give care if they are not in a position to take care of themselves. The findings

of this study suggest that a phenomenological approach to SEL teacher education might help teachers develop the personal and relational sensitivities necessary to experience SEL and engage students in SEL, which in turn could positively affect teacher and student wellbeing.

Phenomenological inquiry affords an opportunity to better understand the lived experiences of high school teachers, in this case, the ways they experience the complexities and depths of SEL. Phenomenological studies do not offer procedural recommendations or aim for certain outcomes. Instead, the findings of this study indicate that SEL invites high school teachers to be responsive to students in the moment, reading their needs and sensing ways in which to meet them. To do this, teachers need guidance in developing a deeply reflexive practice. SEL teacher education should present opportunities to reflect on how best to support this process both within the individual teacher's classroom and within a given school district. Ongoing professional supports that encourage sharing experiential examples and engaging in dialogue could provide meaningful development of the relational sensitivities the participants described as necessary to engage in SEL.

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Chapter Five: Conclusion

Organization of Chapter

In this concluding chapter, I will begin by sharing my experiences as a researcher, reflecting on my methodological approach, what it was like to collect research in my school district, and what I learned in the process of pursuing a thesis-by-article. I will then present my research findings, first by reviewing the findings of each article, and then synthesizing thematic findings across articles. After sharing the implications of these findings, I offer a brief reflection on what exploring SEL teacher education practices might look like through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Next, I will address the limitations of my study, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for more lived experience examples of teachers reflecting on their own cultural awareness, and the ways in which this study does not address the needs of teachers struggling with tensions related to SEL curriculum-as-plan.

I present a brief exploration of my findings compared to CASEL's SEL framework in order to address the latter limitation. In this section of the concluding chapter, I share more about my participants than anywhere else in the thesis. My ethics required I keep my participants anonymous, and so I did not reveal more about each individual in the articles as the intent of publication is wider dissemination, and the larger the audience, the more likely readers could identify participants. In order to understand the ways in which the teachers inherently do or do not consider the SECs of CASEL's framework requires greater familiarity with their practices. I still cloak their identities by masking personal characteristics, but I detail their practices, thoughts, and feelings to a much greater degree in this section. I then reflect on what I learned as a researcher mobilizing findings in a school district. Finally, I conclude with a brief overview of my planned next steps as a researcher.

My Experience as a Phenomenological Researcher

Methodological Considerations

Phenomenology aims to investigate lived experience deeply to (re)present it so that others can imagine the experience and understand its significance. From the beginning, I knew that it would be difficult to get teachers to share their experiences using sensory details. I just did not anticipate how hard. My invitation to participate in the study, letter of consent, and introductory emails all explained my approach, but still I found my participants wanting to discuss SEL as a concept, using abstractions and opinions. I had to gently redirect and probe over and over and

over. The first interview was just gathering lived experience descriptions, and it was only thirty minutes, but I found it felt much longer. I enjoyed my participants, valued tremendously what they had to say, but it felt exhausting to constantly redirect, constantly asking them what their sense of time, sense of self, and sense of lived relation to other was. I kept having to change how I languaged a question to be clearer.

I had read at-length about the limited researcher-participant distance in van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology, but there is a difference between conceptually understanding and actually experiencing something. My participants welcomed me warmly into their lifeworlds. They shared their experiences without reservation, and since we communicated via a virtual platform, they told me these stories from their living rooms and bedrooms. One held their toddler as they talked to me. I was a bit in awe of how positive and enthusiastic these teachers were in the midst of the nightmare of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about the research process, was how actively I had to work at being aware of my own biases. I was shocked that none of my participants mentioned CASEL's SEL framework. I was also surprised that more math teachers than any other subject area were interested in participating. That showed me my assumptions about the interests of teachers from different subject areas. Additionally, working with my participants illustrated to me the biases I had concerning what SEL looks like in practice. One teacher taught in a very enthusiastic and animated way, asking students to verbalize each step of their thinking. The students sounded excited to be learning and to understand the material. I thought to myself, this is SEL; this could be a masterclass in SEL. When I watched another teacher in my study, it was sedate in comparison. Everyone's voices were very calm. Students still volunteered answers and knew answers when called upon, but because of my own biases, I did not immediately recognize how this approach met the emotional needs of students. However, there are many approaches to SEL, and my preference is not the best practice, just one of many. I understand now the importance of bracketing, and why bracketing must be rigorously and repeatedly practiced (Husserl, 1913/1982; van Manen, 2016a, 2016b).

Research Context

Learning to be a phenomenological researcher required me to develop the same sensitivities that CASEL (n.d.) describes as SEL competencies. I had to be continuously self-aware, so that my bias would not impact my (re)presentations of my participants' lived

experiences, or my interpretation of the significance of these everyday experiences. I also had to be very aware of the needs of my participants. In the midst of my research collection, a student died by suicide, and a student who graduated the year before also died by suicide. I wanted to ask my participants how it impacted them, but felt it was an unethical inclusion in the study unless they volunteered their feelings. None of them discussed the passing of these students. However, these occurrences made me feel the weight of the importance of this study, too.

Their deaths also made me reflect on Mr. Sanchez's interpretation of pacing the curriculum to meet external demands. Originally, I questioned and doubted whether maintaining a quick pace in the pandemic was beneficial to student health. However, the students who died by suicide had been students who excelled, academically, socially, and so on. They belonged to honor societies, played in sports, and had served in leadership positions in student clubs. The student who had graduated was attending a highly-ranked school in their field of study. Some studies suggest that high-achieving university students are experiencing anxiety and their mental health is being impacted if they feel their ability to progress in their academic careers is being limited due to circumstances beyond their control during the COVID-19 pandemic (Schwartz et al., 2021). The same could be true for high school students. We need more research to better understand the impact. Additionally, most of the research conducted on students struggling with their mental health in school settings has historically been done in relation to externalizing behaviors, or those who obviously struggle academically and/or behaviorally (Fazel et al., 2014). High-achieving students are understudied as a result and have only recently been identified as an "at risk" group to struggle with mental health issues (National Academies of Sciences et al., 2019). The circumstances made me realize, though, that there are, and should be, many approaches to SEL to anticipate the different needs of diverse learners. This is why phenomenological approaches to teacher education would be useful. There are no clear answers here, and phenomenology affords such ambiguity in the search for meaning (Jardine, 1990; Pinar et al., 2004).

Thesis by Article

I knew that allowing such ambiguity while still clearly (re)presenting a phenomenon was a difficult task for a researcher. I agree with those aims, but had no idea of the real time and energy investment required until after the first observation. Writing is analysis, and analysis is an interpretative, seemingly never-ending process (van Manen, 2016a, 2016b). Comparing findings

to other phenomenological pedagogical texts feels so meaningful in some moments, and hopelessly circuitous in others. I was very grateful for the structure of thesis-by-article. It organized my emergent inquiry so that I could fully explore one research question, and the subsequent themes that emerged. Focusing on one vignette from each participant at a time made the scope feel feasible. Phenomenological inquiry is often amorphous, so having clear bounds was helpful.

Phenomenological inquiry does not lend itself easily to predetermined structures, however. I found it difficult to structure the articles by the formatting guidelines of journals. Understandably, journals want to format articles so that the information can be shared quickly, but phenomenological inquiry is meant to be imagined, experienced, and reflected upon (van Manen, 2016a, 2016b). Research journals want the author(s) to clearly state the context of the topic. The point of phenomenological inquiry is to question assumptions and wonder into the possibilities of experience. The formatting guidelines of research journals rarely welcome that opportunity. Additionally, the type of results that hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry affords is not easily represented in a results section. The results are the lived experiences, and they are (re)presented through vignettes. Introducing each participant and giving a small sense of the significance of their lived experience is difficult, and then the interpretation of the results feels so distanced because of the separation of sections.

Originally, I felt like I was failing because I struggled so much to make my findings fit into the constraints of journal formatting. However, I felt much better about my progress when I searched for well-renowned phenomenologists and found that they published in very few journals, but were much more likely to write their own books, publish book chapters in anthologies, or publish in more theoretical and/or explicitly phenomenological/philosophical publications (van Manen, 2002, 2015; Saevi, 2011; Snowber, 2019). Additionally, these authors usually publish theoretical publications rather than research findings. Studies inspired by hermeneutic phenomenology are not well-suited for most educational research journals. There are some journals that are much friendlier to phenomenological inquiry, but their turn-around time for publication is much lengthier. Additionally, I do see great value in publishing articles meant for audiences that normally have little exposure to phenomenological inquiry, so they might discover its potential in relation to pedagogical practice.

I understood, however, prior to submission, that my articles had a high likelihood of being rejected by the more positivistic-leaning educational journals because my methodological approach and the types of findings such a study produces differ considerably from their usual publications. I will keep looking for more appropriate journals for publication, shifting my gaze to publications with more open formatting options. Article publication allows for a much better chance of disseminating findings amongst researchers. I will also pursue ways to mobilize my findings in more teacher-friendly capacities, such as practitioner magazines. This may be a more effective avenue to help school districts reconsider their approach to SEL professional learning opportunities.

Prior SEL research has made clear: (1) SEL is important in the high school context (Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2017; Rutledge et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2017); (2) high school teachers need and want more guidance (Hamilton et al., 2019); and (3) SEL teacher education needs to consider how to meet the needs of the many high school teachers who report preferring a more informal and relational approach to SEL (Clark, 2017; Hamedani et al., 2015; Lamb, 2018). Teachers need opportunities to reflect on lived experiences, consider their own, and collaborate with other teachers (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2014). They need a space where it is safe to make and discuss mistakes, where the assumption is that SEL is, and always will be, an ongoing process. I will explain the ways in which my findings support these claims further, first by reviewing the findings of each article, and then by synthesizing their results thematically.

Research Findings

“Attuning the Pace of Curriculum to Student Needs During a Pandemic: Social Emotional Learning in High School”

In the first article, I asked: *what is it like to experience SEL within a secondary teaching practice?* I chose to examine the lived experiences of SEL my participants identified in my observation periods in order to orient all of the examples in the virtual context, recent experiences, and those in which I was able to be a part of the participants' lifeworlds at the time of occurrence. Mr. Smith inspired one vignette with his SEL experience of interacting with his class as he welcomed them into their Zoom™ classroom and invited them to engage with each other in an opening activity. Mr. Sanchez described his experience of SEL as checking for

student comprehension across the class as a whole. Mrs. Williams illustrates helping a student work through a problem they find difficult in front of the class.

In each of the moments listed, the teachers felt very aware of the pacing of the course and of how deeply they engaged students with material. Their sense of time in relation to their students was heightened. Mr. Smith limited the breadth of topics in his PE course but deepened skill practice, so he felt little tension between balancing his students' expressed needs and the curriculum-as-plan of his subject area. The former took clear precedence over the latter. He even stated: "COVID has been good. You do what you can and it has even allowed for other opportunities they seem to really like, like they enjoy doing some meditation in class, which they never seemed comfortable with in-person." Mrs. Williams felt supported by her department to give her students the time they needed to engage fully with their material in her remedial math courses. She said, "So the whole universe has stopped and we're just in a bubble together, sharing this space. [...] there is no hurry up. Because it doesn't matter how long it takes really." In contrast, Mr. Sanchez felt a great deal of tension. Pacing felt rushed, time fleeting, and he struggled to read his students' comprehension and needs in the virtual medium. He stated:

sometimes students are watching distracted. When you are teaching and then you have to spend time in managing them it becomes frustrating in real life, that frustration is lesser over here, because at the back of my mind like I know like, some of them are not listening to me, but I have to do my job.

Mr. Sanchez describes feeling that conflict between meeting the needs of the student before him and meeting the objectives of the curriculum-as-plan, and whereas he felt able to better read and respond to his students in-person, virtually he would continue with the lesson plan out of a sense of obligation.

The findings of this study were threefold. First, the participants described experiencing engaging students in SEL through pacing their courses, an inherent part of most teachers' pedagogical practice (Goble, 2020). As such, secondly, pacing one's course depends on the teachers' own SECs and approach to pedagogy. Again, teachers can have similar motivations with very different presentations. Mr. Smith and Mrs. Williams slowed their pace to meet student needs. Mr. Sanchez kept a quick pace because in his mind he was prioritizing the long-term needs of his students by providing them with the content they would need to be prepared for their next course. Finally, the teachers' understanding and experience of curriculum also impacts

spacing. For Mr. Smith, the content objectives of the health and physical education (HPE) curriculum-as-plan mattered much less to him than students being able to practice and develop their health skills to buttress them in a difficult time. Mrs. Williams desired for her learners to feel confident and capable in math. She cared about certain topics inasmuch as they served the students' overall understanding and aptitude in math, so that they felt like capable learners. Whereas, Mr. Sanchez cares a great deal about the curriculum-as-plan in his subject area because he believes it serves the students in pursuing external goals. In this article, participants experience SEL as attuning to student needs through spacing their course in accordance to their needs. The teachers' sense of pedagogy and approach to curriculum impacted their spacing and, thus, their approach to and experience of SEL.

“Social Emotional Learning in the High School Classroom: A Phenomenological Inquiry”

The second article builds on the main research question, but then asks, *to what extent is SEL a relational practice?* The teachers in the study could have described SEL as delivering an isolated SEL curriculum and they could have experienced SEL as delivering SEL objectives. None of them did. Instead, they reflect what the extant literature sharing high school teachers' attitudes and practices report, that SEL is experienced in informal, unplanned-for interactions between students and teachers (Clark, 2017; Lamb, 2018). The teachers all shared lived experiences of SEL examples through moments where they were developing student-teacher relationships. Mrs. Williams identified a moment of working one-on-one with a student asking for homework help as an experience of SEL. Mr. Smith shares a moment that illustrates the development of his relationship with one student over the duration of a course. Mr. Sanchez tries to get the entire class to reflect on their relationship to math in terms of their response to assessment scores.

In their lived experiences of SEL within the context of relationship-building, the teachers describe how their sense of others is heightened. All of the teachers identify that their students are expressing a need, whether explicitly or tacitly. Mrs. Williams' student needs help feeling confident in his math abilities. Mr. Smith's student needs help finding meaning in movement and in physical activity. Mr. Sanchez's students imply that they do not interpret assessment scores as benchmarks for understanding and are struggling with the discrepancy between what they thought their scores would or should be, and what they actually are. The teachers all attempt to intuit what would help the students in response to their needs. The participants share that they are

unsure in these moments whether the action they chose to take is beneficial or not, but they believe that building student-teacher relationships is essential to helping students learn.

Mr. Sanchez describes how building relationships with students in math is absolutely essential because their prior experiences with math may have left them feeling incapable: in learning math, you have to attach emotionally to math, and I mean you have to understand your abilities and limitations. Teachers also need to understand the emotional standing of students. Math is not their favorite subject sometimes so you have to understand what has led to that [...] after that, it's our job to make students aware of their strengths, [and] I can definitely feel that I need to connect with students' emotion. But first, I need to make them connect with math emotionally so that they can succeed.

Mr. Smith reiterates that relationship-building is the key to student learning, "having that relationship is like your best chance at getting them to learn." Mrs. Williams even prioritizes that relationship over subject area learning, understanding the former will inform the latter:

The focus is, let's have a relationship such that we can trust each other [...] Because there's this math thing that we need to share. But if we're not going to be trusting each other enough to ask questions we got to fix that before we fix the math thing. [...] I spent days, weeks at the beginning of the school year developing this culture, saying that I will make mistakes and guys, I want you to forgive me when I say something that's wrong, or that doesn't make sense. Please call me on it because I want to fix it. And, therefore, when you say something that's not completely correct, I want permission to help you. I want us to be able to communicate clearly. Even if you come in and say, you know, my girlfriend broke up with me yesterday, and I'm not in a good space. That's way more important than any math lesson of the day.

These teachers all believe that student-teacher relationship building is not just at the core of engaging students in SEL, but also the heart of being an effective teacher. The teachers share their experiences of engaging students in SEL that are small everyday moments that foster and sustain student-teacher relationships.

"Giving and Taking Care: Secondary Teachers' Experiences of Social Emotional Learning"

In the third article, I build on the findings of the first two articles and research questions and then dive deeper into the sub-question of: *what is it like to experience developing SEL as a curriculum?* If SEL is not a stand-alone curriculum, how does SEL manifest in the high school

classroom? The teachers do not describe a plan for SEL. Their experiences of SEL were in unplanned moments where students expressed a need, explicitly or tacitly, and the teachers felt the call to care. Not only were the moments unplanned, but they were also identified as moments of disruption, in which teachers must adapt in the moment to care for their students.

Mr. Sanchez had a student ask him to give her course selection advice instead of relaxing during his break between classes. Mrs. Williams had technological difficulties that prevented her from engaging with her students at the beginning of class. Mr. Smith had a student refuse to participate in the class activity. The teachers respond to these disruptions by identifying students' needs, intuiting a helpful response, and assessing whether they are capable of giving that response. They experience SEL as a living curriculum in moments of care. Mrs. Williams even describes SEL as "feel[ing] mathematically taken care of, [...] feeling nurtured in my learning, and that nobody's putting any constraints on me and I'm constantly being urged to reach more." Part of this ethic of care is recognizing students' needs in the moment, the potential constraints on their learning, but also this desire to help them realize and activate their potential. For example, Mr. Sanchez describes:

So, right now in my CP [College Preparatory] class [...] the goal is just to give them the necessary skills to know basic math and make them confidently comfortable. [...] I wish I can get more time to spend with those students so that I can make them more interested in the applications, or tap into their talents and go from there.

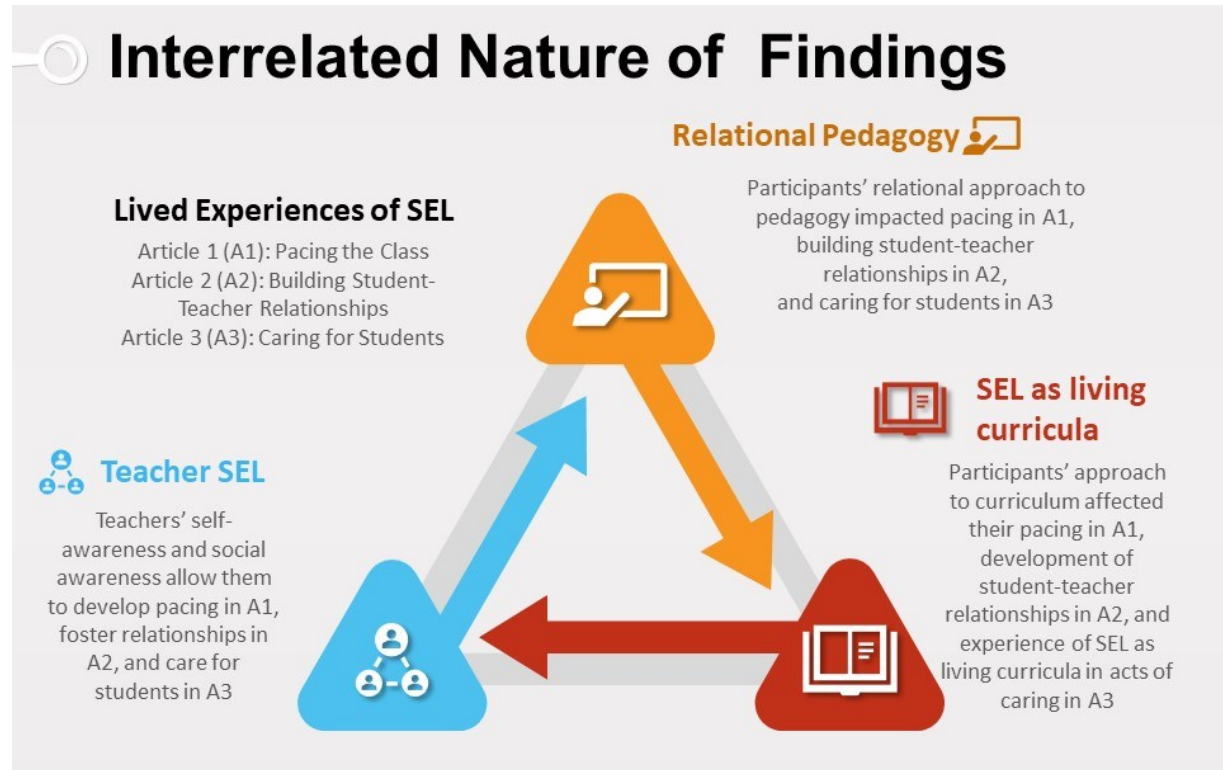
Mr. Sanchez does not always experience the tension within the zone of between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005) positively during the pandemic, as the added stressors make him worry for his students and their futures, but he still experiences SEL as living curriculum in instances of caring for his students.

The tension between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived in their subject areas is engaging for Mr. Smith and Mrs. Williams. They recognize what concepts students need to learn and develop their learning in these capacities authentically in ways that meet the needs of their students. The teachers are very clear though, that the only way they are able to approach SEL as living curricula, as caring for students, is if they have sufficient external support, and have developed personal practices that allow them to also adequately care for themselves. Mr. Smith states, "you got to keep some like gas in the tank. You can't, you can't give to others [...] if like you're kind of empty." Mrs. Williams adds to this, "if I don't get sleep, then I can't be this

nurturing. And I know that, so I have to get my sleep.” Likely, those who chose to participate were those who had mechanisms in place to care for themselves during the pandemic, limiting the participant pool. For example, Mr. Sanchez went so far as to describe the pandemic as a boost to his health, “The pandemic actually helped [...] I was feeling good about taking care of my own wellbeing [...] I got time to pay attention to that [...] and that made me more confident in my teaching.” These teachers recognize that they cannot care for students unless they can sufficiently take care of themselves.

Summary of Findings

The teachers described experiencing SEL in unplanned moments of interacting with their students. They also illustrate SEL as inherent in their teaching practice. First, they described experiencing SEL in pacing their courses, navigating the tension in the zone between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived. The ways in which they responded to this tension and engaged in SEL depended on their interpretation of and approach to pedagogy and curriculum. The second circumstance in which they experienced SEL was in building relationships with their students, whether individually or communally, in the moment or over time. Finally, participants experienced SEL as living curriculum in moments of caring for their students. Their ability to engage in caring depended upon the strength of their external support systems and personal practices. In Figure 3, I further explain the interrelated nature of these findings, and then explore these themes through synthesizing the findings afterwards. I then discuss how the findings could be applied to teacher education practices.

Figure 3*Graphic Illustration of Findings*

*Template sourced from PresentationGo.com

The graphic illustrates that the teachers' relational approach to pedagogy is what facilitated their approach to SEL in each lived experience shared. Their relational approach to pedagogy was then reflected in their experiences of SEL as a living curriculum, contextualized in acts of caring for their students in moments where they expressed a need. To what extent the teachers are able to read and respond to students' needs depended upon their relational sensitivities, as well as to what extent they had developed their own SECs. I will further explain and explore each theme.

Approach to Pedagogy

The participants' approach to pedagogy determined what they interpreted and experienced as SEL. There are many different ways to approach pedagogy (Giroux, 2018; Perlow et al., 2018; Ramos & Roberts, 2021; Wane & Todd, 2018), but all of the participants in this study have a relational approach to pedagogy (Lyle, 2019; Noddings, 2012; Saevi, 2011), where they believe it is their responsibility as a teacher to build relationships with their students by reading and responding to their needs. For example, Mr. Smith, who was motivated to seek

post-secondary education and then become a teacher because of the relationships he had with his teachers and coaches, stated, "I think it's important to not just know your content but know and understand the population of people you're working with. Because they're not just mini-adults." He recognizes that teaching means meeting students at their developmental age and helping them grow. Mrs. Williams, who by becoming an educator took a huge pay cut, wanted to teach in order to leave a legacy. She is relationally driven in her practice:

I don't think my students see me as their teacher, I think they see me as a listener. And I'm listening to their brain and their brain is speaking out loud. And I sense that they are thankful for it. And they really like it. And I can gently ask them questions or nudge them. And virtually every single time that happens, they say, "I just figured this out on my own." I say, "You absolutely did." It's so nice when they appreciate that they were able to figure it out. And it was a safe environment for them to work through this thing.

She states her students do not "see her as a teacher" because she recognizes the power dynamic inherent in the student-teacher role, but she feels her role as a teacher is to serve her students and nurture their learning in safe and supportive relationships.

Mr. Sanchez also came from industry and took a pay cut to pursue teaching, and his motivation was to better understand educational systems in the US to better support his children. He, too, approaches pedagogy relationally, and he is invested in the future success of his students.

it's very easy to have a negative feeling towards math and I feel that in order to make students comfortable in my class, I must touch base with their social and emotional comfort with the subject and it's going to be more helpful for them to become successful in math class. [...] It's okay to make mistakes; it's okay to ask questions. Especially when I take ninth graders, I don't teach just math, but I also focus on becoming a good person. Like how you should ask your questions, how you should write your emails, how you should approach an adult, how your answer should be written and all that. So that emotional attachment with students is necessary in order to make them love math and become successful in that. That's what I do.

The teachers interpret and approach student-teacher relationship building in different ways, but at the heart of their approach to pedagogy is a desire to help each student grow and develop both as a learner in their subject area as well as a person outside of the classroom.

Their approach to pedagogy is reminiscent of the ways in which theorists and practitioners within the Utrecht School of phenomenology understood pedagogy as the relationship between youth and adults (Wardekker et al., 2014). Martinus Langeveld, a leading figure in the Utrecht School, described an adult's role in pedagogy as helping the child or adolescent shape how they relate to the world (van Manen, 1978). Van Manen (1978, 2016a, 2016b), inspired by Langeveld and the Utrecht School, uses this sense of pedagogy to redefine practice. Van Manen develops a phenomenological approach to pedagogy consisting of both the practice holistically and its constituent parts. The participants' experiences of SEL and attitudes towards pedagogy suggest that they practice pedagogy in a similar fashion. Their main aim is to help the learner orient themselves to the world through their subject area, and they do so by engaging thoughtfully in a series of everyday interactions with students.

The participants share everyday moments that happen spontaneously, because they understand these unplanned moments are the foundation of building relationships with students. The amalgamation of hundreds of interactions is what creates and sustains student-teacher relationships. It is not a singular moment or practice. This, too, reflects the Utrecht School's approach to pedagogical practice. Langeveld approached improving pedagogical practice through situation analysis, reflecting on ways in which to interact with students that would help or hinder their learning process (Levering, 2012; van Manen, 1978). Langeveld turned to concrete experiences, not conceptual abstractions, to reflect and improve upon pedagogical relationships; "he attempted to locate phenomenologically the norms of pedagogical acting in the concrete experiences of everyday living with children around the home and at school" (van Manen, 1991, p. 507). Through reflecting on past experiences, teachers can become more thoughtful practitioners in the moment. Similarly, van Manen (1991) explores ways to build relationships with students through reflecting upon the pedagogical moment:

The experience of thoughtful pedagogical action in pedagogical situations has a peculiar structure. It is neither largely habitual nor problem solving, neither intellectual nor corporeal, neither purely reflective in a deliberative sense nor simply spontaneous or arbitrary. Thoughtful action differs from reflective action in that it is thoughtfully attentive to what it does without reflectively distancing itself from the situation by considering or experimenting with possible alternatives and consequences of the action. Living the pedagogical moment is a total personal response or thoughtful action in a particular

situation. So when we come to tactful action, rather than say that it is 'reflective' we should say that tactful action is "thoughtful" in the sense of "mindful." (p. 516)

In this study, the teachers chose moments where they were developing relationships with their students. They did not choose moments that were exemplars of SEL, but rather moments where they were aware, mindful, of the ways in which their interactions with students impacted their students' learning, both in relation to the subject matter, and in relation to better understanding their own learning processes.

One teacher, Mr. Sanchez, has a narrower approach to what this means and looks like in practice, relating all interactions to the ways in which the students understand and approach math and the ways in which this broadens or narrows their academic and career paths. Mr. Smith and Mrs. Williams are more willing to modify the way they approach the subject area to meet the needs of the students. All three are motivated by meeting students' needs, however. Mr. Sanchez views math as a vehicle to greater success and stability in life, and believes better understanding math can help students understand the inherent patterns in life more readily, and in the process, better appreciate life's intrinsic beauty and purpose. All three teachers approach their teaching practice through building relationships with their students and helping their students build and sustain their relationships with their given subject area. Approaches to SEL teacher education practices that ask participants to describe and reflect upon their own lived experiences of developing student-teacher relationships within the context of the busyness and messiness of everyday practice could help them better understand, and then more effectively practice, the types of relational sensitivities that facilitate SEL.

Approach to Curriculum

The participants' approach to pedagogy not only impacts their approach to SEL within their practice, but also the ways in which they understand and engage in SEL curriculum. The teachers do not intentionally incorporate explicit SEL lessons or state-mandated SEL curricular objectives into their practice. Nor do they have a general scope and sequence of SEL in their practice. The teachers do not approach SEL as curriculum-as-plan, though in many ways, they describe their own SECs as what allows them to navigate the zone of between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived within their subject area curriculum. Their own SECs are what allow them to differentiate between the call of the curriculum-as-plan and the call of their students' needs in the moment, especially within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although Aoki (1986/1991/2005) never uses the terminology of SEL, he does share the ways in which a teacher's practice requires relational awareness and reflexive awareness that asks the teacher to reinterpret their understanding of the curriculum and the ways in which to engage each successive group of students in that curriculum:

And Miss O knows that some people understand teaching for the second year a Grade 5 class, as she is doing, is teaching the same class as last year, in the same room as last year, in the same school as last year, with the same number of pupils as last year. But Miss O knows that although technically people may talk that way, in teaching this year's Grade 5 class, the seemingly same lessons are not the same, nor are the Grade 5 pupils though they sit in the same desks, nor is Miss O herself for she knows she has changed from having reflected upon her teaching experiences last year with her Grade 5s. She no longer is the same teacher. Miss O knows that "implementing" the curriculum-as-plan in this year's lived situation calls for a fresh interpretive work constituted in the presence of very alive, new students. (p. 162)

The ways in which Aoki describes teachers' relationships with curriculum reflect the ways in which these teachers approach their own subject area curriculum and how their own SECs facilitate their ability to do so.

The teachers in this study approach SEL as what facilitates their ability to build relationships with students and engage them in learning. This requires the teachers to have developed their own SECs and rely on the relational sensitivities therein to engage students in SEL. In the lived experiences of SEL the participants shared, SEL-in-action is a living curriculum of building student-teacher relationships and responding to students with care in their practices. Liu Baergen (2020) further expands upon the notion of dwelling between curriculum-as-plan and lived curricula:

By heeding the moments of lived experiences of teachers and students, the past experiences as lived experiences and the ongoing experiences as living experiences, the understanding of curriculum as juxtaposed plan and lived curricula is revealed. This is where the teachers' and students' lived experiences become part of a curriculum, a twin moment of two curriculum worlds. (p. 82)

The participants describe this tension when asked about their approach to SEL curriculum, though they largely shared their approach to their subject area curriculum.

For example, Mr. Smith, a health and physical education teacher, describes his desire to follow the curriculum-as-plan, but be responsive to students' needs:

In K through 12 education, like, you know, you do have these standards and like you're either meeting them or you're not meeting them. And, you know, sometimes teaching them that discipline is important. [...but, overall...] My job is to educate every child.

That means that, you know, I give them what they need, and ask of them, "Give me what I need."

Mr. Smith acknowledges there is a curriculum-as-plan; it was developed for a purpose and can help students. However, first, and foremost, he attends to the students in front of him in a relational, living curriculum. Mrs. Williams names how the tension created by the zone of between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived can increase in high school education practices. She laments that "the model of education in high school is fundamentally different from how we view middle school and elementary school" and refutes this view, claiming, "I think it's the same process; it's just different material." She believes the student-teacher relationship should be forefront, and though together they develop a deeper understanding of the subject area, the students' needs influence the how and when. Though Mr. Sanchez may seem more curriculum-as-plan oriented, he poetizes the applications of math, "I want students to understand the application of math to your life. As life is beautiful, math is also beautiful, because there are so many math phenomena that can give you answers to the real-life phenomena." He views math not only as a vehicle to success, but also a way to orient oneself to the world in a way that enhances its purpose and meaning.

Orienting to SEL as living curriculum is what facilitates their approach to their own subject area curriculum, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. I use the terms "living curriculum" and "living curricula" to emphasize the ways in which teachers engage students in SEL and develop their own SECs in a constantly evolving process, and to emphasize the nature of temporality in such interactions and in ongoing pedagogical practice (Lloyd, 2018). Mr. Smith and Mrs. Williams experience the tension between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived as a positive part of developing a relational practice. Mr. Sanchez shares that in regular conditions, he experiences that tension as a healthy challenge that invigorates his practice, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, he could not find the balance in the zone of between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-and-lived (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005) he usually experiences,

and felt much more worry for his students. This worry is an act of care, though, as explained by van Manen (2002).

Approaching SEL curriculum in teaching as living curricula versus curriculum-as-plan would allow teachers to question all the ways in which SEL affords a responsive, relational teaching practice. Instead of asking what SEL competencies can be instrumentalized and measured, practitioners could ask in what ways SEL allows them to be caring educators and encourages their participants to be engaged learners. Again, developing their own lived experience descriptions of student-teacher relationship development and reviewing lived experience descriptions of SEL in SEL teacher education could help teachers imagine different scenarios. They could then reflect on what they might do in those scenarios, and the ways in which their responses might benefit students. This could lead to a more mindful practice overall.

Teacher Social Emotional Learning/ Teacher Social Emotional Competencies

In their lived experiences of SEL, the teachers are able to vividly describe their sense of self and their sense of relation to their students in these moments. These relational sensitivities correspond to CASEL's (n.d.) SECs of self-awareness and social awareness. Within the context of relationship-building, the teachers describe how their sense of relationality, their social awareness, is especially heightened. They claim that their ability to help their students develop self-awareness depends on how well they are able to read and respond to student needs. For example, Mr. Smith describes SEL as "educating students on how to get along in the world as a human being with others and with yourself." Additionally, Mr. Smith states "not everything that affects us is about us" as a teacher, and as a person in general. He is able to be kind and caring with students even when they are behaving poorly by consciously fostering empathy for what they might be experiencing. Mrs. Williams defines SEL as:

When I'm better aware of treating our learners as people, as humans, and helping them to feel confident, to ask questions, feel confident to say "I actually have no idea what you just said." When we engage in that level of caring about a person as an individual it changes the role of teacher from the unfortunately stereotypical "I taught it; you didn't get it. Not my problem," to a facilitator of joyful, confident learning.

Mrs. Williams recognizes that to do this takes constant work, continuous reflection, and an ample dose of humility. Mr. Sanchez also acknowledges that to engage students in SEL requires humility:

One thing that has helped me in this teaching career is that my son was on a plan. So I always try to put him in, in my mind, and remember the student perspective. I believe that made me a better person. I will say better person because I was able to understand these different learning styles and how differently students can think. It took me a little longer to realize that my own son was not able to comprehend two plus two is equal to four. Two plus two was something different. So he needs to have a different approach and everything. It took me a long time to understand that.

For Mr. Sanchez, engaging students in SEL is important, because he sees his son in each struggling learner. He also views math as a facilitator or barrier to success in life, and he wants to make sure math does not prevent any of his students from reaching where they want to go in life. He recognizes to get to this perspective was a journey for him, and continues to be.

Throughout all of their lived experiences of SEL, the teachers describe attempting to intuit what would help the students in response to their needs. The participants share that they are unsure in these moments whether they are taking the right action, but are eager to find actions that will help their students. The responses of the participants reflect a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to pedagogy:

The notion of education as an unspecialized practice; as a way of simply and authentically “being with” children means that it is not principally a matter of enumerable set of skills and competences, which are (or are not) one’s possession. Pedagogy is instead a question of who and how one is in relation to children. It is a matter of one’s disposition, one’s personal, physical and emotional presence or presentation, of one’s personal relationship with this particular child ([Friesen & Saevi, 2010] p. 143). The paradoxical and at the same time differentiating qualities of the pedagogical relation radically shift the meaning of education by ethically challenging the lived relationality of each encounter between adult and child, teacher and student. (Saevi, 2011, p. 460)

Those who approach education phenomenologically are not looking to create procedures and checklists for how to best interact with children. They analyze situations to better understand the everyday practices that build and sustain student-teacher relationships, and what it means to be-in-relation to a student as a teacher. As the relational sensitivities described by those who approach pedagogy phenomenologically would strongly disagree with the use of the word “competency,” I have avoided using the phrase “SECs” in the articles I submitted for publication

because such a phrase is inconsistent with the methodology, but I believe it is useful, in the conclusion, to explore the similarities between teachers' SECs and the relational sensitivities that phenomenologists describe in their approach to pedagogy, and the participants describe in their experiences of SEL in this doctoral study.

These findings parallel existing SEL research that claims a teacher's SECs largely impact their ability to engage students in SEL (Hen & Goroshit, 2016; Hoffmann et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). These findings also mirror the relational sensitivities described by van Manen (2015) in his description of pedagogical tact. Pedagogical tact requires developing one's:

Child-sense: possessing the active and reflective sensitivity to sense what goes on in the life of a child [...]; Personal pedagogy: developing the self-reflexive awareness of one's own personal background and emotional make-up [... and ...]; the professional ethic that distinguishes "good" from "bad" ways of supporting children. (p. 11)

The teachers describe attempting to develop their "child-sense" when they are pacing their curriculum, building student-teacher-relationships, and caring for students. All of these experiences happen when the teachers sense a student's needs and intuit a response. Their responses require a "professional ethic" as they are interpreting what actions would be helpful in meeting their needs. Finally, the ways in which they approach SEL, primarily through building relationships with students and developing classroom climate, all share common elements with van Manen's "personal pedagogy." They must be self-aware as educators to understand what students need and whether they are capable of giving of themselves, what Buber (1947/2002) described as "self-education." Offering opportunities in SEL teacher-education practices for teachers to reflect on their relational sensitivities would develop their SECs. In such offerings, they can much more honestly and openly reflect on their ability to identify and respond to student needs and engage students in SEL.

Implications

The Need for Social Emotional Learning Teacher Education

High school teachers report wanting and needing more SEL teacher education (Hamilton et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2015). However, SEL teacher education cannot just be an introduction to the CASEL SEL framework. The teachers in this study reiterate what other studies have found; many high school teachers approach SEL through informal, relational

practices (Bear et al., 2017; Clark, 2017; Lamb, 2018, Yang et al., 2018; Yeager, 2017). These teachers want help reflecting on how to respond to student needs collectively and individually. Further, they want help in developing their pedagogical practice so that they can respond better in the moment, as their lived experiences of SEL are often in unplanned-for moments. Mr. Sanchez claims he struggles to facilitate students' abilities to help each other in the classroom. Mrs. Williams recognizes that different learners have different needs, and so if she understood better some of the complications and difficulties some of her students with various diagnoses and conditions have in classrooms, it would allow her to help them more. Mr. Smith openly admits that when he is helping reluctant learners he is never quite sure if the approach he chooses to take will be effective, and he would love to reflect on such instances with other teachers to feel more confident in his responses. How can we help teachers prepare for the unplanned?

Helping teachers develop the relational sensitivities that van Manen (2015) describes in pedagogical tact, which correlate well with CASEL's (n.d.) SEL competencies, is one way that SEL teacher education could better address the needs of high school teachers. What might this look like? Phenomenological inquiry does not provide procedural answers, but further phenomenological inquiry would allow for more lived experience descriptions. The more examples teachers have to reflect on their practice, on what SEL can look and feel like in their classroom, the more opportunities they will have to develop a reflexive approach to SEL in their pedagogy and curriculum. A phenomenological approach to teacher education offers one meaningful pathway, but there are multiple approaches to teacher education and professional development that allow the educator to become more reflexive, ranging from self-study (Dalmau et al., 2016), leveraging arts integration or collective memory work (Lyle, 2019), to more embodied approaches (Mathewson Mitchell & Reid, 2017; Snowber, 2019). In the next section, I will offer some concrete ways in which SEL teacher education practices can be reimaged using hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry.

SEL teacher education should create a safe space for teachers to be able to explore their approach to SEL, a place where educators can dialogue. For example, while Mr. Smith and Mrs. Williams felt like they were serving their students by slowing the pace of their courses during the pandemic, Mr. Sanchez felt like doing so could actually harm his student population. SEL teacher education cannot be a place where teachers are looking for right and wrong answers or checklists of what to do or not to do. SEL teacher education can certainly offer practical

resources and even conceptual frameworks, but it should not be limited to that. SEL teacher education needs to be a safe place to question, to make mistakes. All of the participants share being unsure if the response they intuited to student needs was appropriate and if it would actually be helpful. This is an important concern. There is little certainty in SEL. Each student has to make their own learning journey, so what helps one student might not help another student.

An additional challenge for high school teachers regarding SEL is that they are assigned a much greater obligation to one singular subject area than their elementary counterparts (Ross, 2017), and they have much less time with each student. As such, SEL teacher education meant for specific subject areas could help them better imagine what SEL is in their context, but they also need guidance in understanding universal approaches to SEL and help considering different responses to the context-specific needs of individual students (Hamilton et al., 2019). In short, SEL teacher education cannot be accomplished through a one-day seminar or workshop. SEL teacher education needs to be ongoing throughout an educator's career and needs to help them consider their lived experience, not just theoretical abstractions (Jennings & Frank, 2015). A phenomenological approach to teacher education would be well-suited to meet the needs of practitioners if they were interested in developing SEL. However, it is important to note, as van Manen (2015) claimed, as have numerous other practitioners and educational theorists who champion a self-reflective approach to education (Lyle, 2019), the kind of nuanced relational sensitivities necessary to engage in this work need to be developed voluntarily. A relational approach to SEL is not a skill set that can be conceptually learned and then automatically mastered in practice.

The Need for Support Systems

All three teachers reference external supports and systems when discussing their approaches to pedagogy and curriculum. In the COVID-19 pandemic, they largely felt they had the administration's support in determining what was best for their students. They discuss how an institution's framing of curriculum-as-plan impacts their curriculum-as-lived. According to the teachers in the study, these external supports help or hinder relational approaches to pedagogy and curriculum. The teachers make it clear that the only way they are able to experience SEL is to have sufficient support systems. If they have too many students or if the administration pushes curriculum-as-plan too hard, it is very difficult to be responsive to student

needs and to build relationships with students. This means they need adequate school supports. Additionally, all the teachers all claim that when they are hungry, tired, or struggling in the moment, they have much more difficulty engaging students in SEL and managing their own SECs. They have to ensure they take care of their daily needs. To do this, they identify that they have developed personal practices to sustain their daily wellbeing, ranging from movement, gratitude, or relational practices, and so on. Teachers must take care of themselves in order to give care to others.

All of the teachers also expressed that they are not able to develop meaningful relationships with all of their students. Mr. Smith teaches a quarter of the entire school's population each year. Thus, the teachers all profess wishing there were some safety nets for their students. If there are some students who have no well-developed relationships with any adult in the building, SEL will be challenging (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Mr. Smith believes adding a SEL scope and sequence for skill development in HPE would act as such a safety net. Mrs. Williams explicitly develops metacognition skills with all of her students in hopes of helping each student develop the SEL skills she believes they need. Mr. Sanchez helps students learn the academic skills outside of math class to do the same, such as writing an email to a teacher or professor, study skills, and so on. All of the teachers claimed that skill development is part of SEL, and historically, that has been how SEL has been developed in schools (Elias, 1997; Jones et al., 2018). In some schools, they interpret SEL curriculum-as-plan through skill development and develop systemic structures around skill development. Asking after what supports teachers need to better engage in SEL and what supports currently exist in the school system, would help teachers better understand their role in SEL and what supports they can offer students if the classroom environment is insufficiently meeting their needs.

Support Systems Across Departments Need to be Better Integrated

The teacher alone is not responsible for the student's wellbeing or even their academic success. This school has many systems in place to provide support. Teachers are a universal, or Tier 1 support. They have a role to play in helping all students develop into healthy, successful adults, but when it is clear that students need specialized supports, it is beyond the scope of a teacher's role to try to provide that (Williamson et al., 2015). Teachers need better guidance in determining when to refer students for Tier 2 (group) and/or Tier 3 (individualized) supports. Teachers' approach to SEL develops sensitivities and skills for general wellbeing and academic

success; it is not meant to offer treatment for poor mental health. A school needs to offer strong Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports so that students who need such services are still able to be a part of their classroom communities (Jennings et al., 2019).

This school district has these types of support systems in place, but the teachers are mostly unaware of them. They know how to refer students to a counselor if there is an issue, but they are not always sure when to do so. This issue is not unique to this school district (Chafouleas et al., 2016). Historically, many secondary teachers felt that even SEL was not their responsibility but the responsibility of counselors (Elias, 1997). High school teachers have improved their attitudes towards and belief in SEL, but they still feel confused about what exactly their role is in promoting SEL and what other supports exist (Hamilton et al., 2019, Yoder et al., 2020).

Considerations for Teacher Education

Before reflecting on what SEL teacher education practices could look like when taking a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, I will briefly recap current practices. Historically, and currently, in-service SEL teacher education is largely determined by which SEL program a school district chooses to implement (Kim et al., 2021), and mostly consists of training teachers in the curriculum structure, ways to improve fidelity, and informing teachers about different cognitive, behavioral, and social theories pertinent to the specific SEL curriculum (Jennings & Frank, 2015). This is problematic on several fronts, beginning with the conceptual and practical divide between the curriculum writers/SEL teacher educators and the teachers responsible for engaging students in the SEL curriculum:

Whereas prevention research defines [SEL] programs as interventions, educators consider such programs to be curricula. [...] Clinicians are trained to understand the psychological theories and constructs that underlie an intervention's theory of change and recognize the need for strict adherence to an intervention delivery protocol. In contrast, [...] [t]eachers typically learn to adapt curricula to match their students' background knowledge, experience, and the learning context. (Jennings & Frank, 2015, p. 426)

The writers of the SEL curriculum have a very different understanding of its purpose than the teachers engaging students in the material because of the ways in which their orientation to a SEL curriculum is determined by their profession.

Most of the existing literature on SEL is on SEL interventions (Corcoran et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011), and the terminology and approach to curriculum presented there are not presented for a teacher to understand and interpret their role in the classroom context clearly (Williamson et al., 2015; Yeager, 2017). Some programs, and some school districts, however, do take care to help teachers to understand their approach to SEL beyond isolated stand-alone SEL lessons, such as by embedding SEL in their instructional practices (Mahoney et al., 2021). As is the case with in-service SEL teacher education practices, the preservice context for SEL teacher education practices is also primarily limited to the elementary school context, as instruction in SEL is often limited to child development courses (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). SEL is often shared through direct instruction strategies in the context of cognitive, behavioral, and social theories, which limits the practical application and experiential development of SEL in one's teaching practice (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). There has been a growing emphasis recently, though, on helping preservice teachers develop their own SECs, partially to help them engage students in SEL, and also to address high teacher attrition rates (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Jennings et al., 2019).

One approach to improving teachers' SECs and overall wellbeing has been to have teachers take part in mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) (Jennings et al., 2019). One example is the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program, which "integrates emotion skills instruction and mindful awareness and compassion practices through didactic, experiential, and interactive learning process" (p. 218). Over five days of training over several months, teachers receive thirty hours of instruction. Participants experienced "significant reductions in psychological distress and time urgency and significant improvements in adaptive emotion regulation and mindfulness" (p. 219). Another MBI for teachers is the Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques (SMART) in education program, which offers eleven sessions over eight weeks, including direct instruction and experiential opportunities, leading to self-reported increases in mindfulness and self-compassion, and decreases in occupational stress and burnout (Crain et al., 2016; Jennings et al., 2019). Finally, the Community Approach to Living and Learning Mindfully (CALM) offers teachers short, daily opportunities to engage in mindfulness and yoga practices, and participants in a sixteen-week study reported increases in mindfulness, positive affect, and distress tolerance (Harris et al., 2015; Jennings et al., 2019). These approaches to improving teacher SECs and wellbeing also benefit the teachers' daily

practice, but these examples have come almost exclusively from the elementary and middle school contexts (Jennings et al., 2019).

Historical SEL teacher education practices rely largely on direct instruction strategies, and the few examples of more experiential and collaborative current SEL teacher education practices rarely include high school teachers, so what approach to SEL teacher education would fit the needs of high school teachers specifically? High school teachers have made it clear they do not want a prescriptive curriculum (Clark, 2017; Lamb, 2018), and the aim of approaching pedagogy phenomenologically is not to be prescriptive, but to wonder into the possibilities (Huebner et al., 1999; Jardine, 1990; van Manen & van Manen, 2021). Given that the participants in this study consistently indicated that their experiences of engaging students in SEL depended on their own relational sensitivities, drawing parallels to van Manen's (2015) pedagogical tact, I will explore ways in which to approach SEL teacher education practices through a hermeneutic phenomenological lens. For example, if SEL teacher education were to be approached phenomenologically, a teacher could be asked to remember a lived experience example of engaging a student in developing self-awareness. The teacher would then be asked to:

1) Welcome Curiosity (Reflect on the existentials)

- What was their cognitive, emotional, and kinesthetic experience in this interaction? What was their sense of time and space? In what ways did they relate to their student in this moment?

2) Identify Assumptions

- When initially reflecting on this moment, it is important to differentiate between what they think self-awareness is and should be, and the ways in which they experienced helping a student develop this SEC.

3) Practice Nonjudgement

- The point of this exercise is not to judge, shame, or blame the teacher (or student) for their actions, but to question what attempting to engage in SEL in practice looks and feels like.

4) Record and Reflect on Experience

- The teacher would be asked to journal, illustrate, or in some other medium, record their experience, its meaning for their practice, and what it makes them consider for their future practice.

From this exercise, a teacher might share an experience similar to Mr. Smith's example that demonstrates the results of working with a student over the duration of a course to help them build self-efficacy and appreciation of the subject material. Or they could share a single moment in time, similar to the example of Mrs. Williams working with a student one-on-one and helping them better understand their thought processes and abilities in the subject area. The purpose of this type of exercise is to aid a teacher in understanding what helping students develop self-awareness looks like within the scope of their own practice.

The reason for having participants focus on a specific lived experience example is that there is a difference between understanding a concept and developing a practice, and teacher education practices in general have long struggled to address the bifurcation of theory and practice (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). SEL teacher education practices need to help teachers develop their own approach to SEL in the classroom. Whether we intend to or not, we serve as role models for our students and engage them in reflecting upon their own SECs (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This can be an overwhelming prospect. It is too much to ask teachers to reflect on their practice as a whole in regards to SECs. If we focus on singular moments, or specific practices, it limits the scope to a manageable and meaningful activity.

Take, for example, the simple act of asking, "How are you?" In the North American context, this functions as a greeting. You are not expected to answer thoughtfully. In one of my own preservice teacher education classes, however, a teacher educator tried to model asking after students' wellbeing. The instructor asked participants to answer the question more honestly. One girl shared that she was struggling and started sobbing from the stress and pressure of the program. She was not prepared to be that vulnerable, and the instructor had not anticipated the possible responses to his request. Inviting teacher candidates to reflect and share with a narrower scope would have been more useful, such as how they felt about a certain component of their teaching practicum. Managing our emotions in social contexts is complex, and even more complicated in professional settings (Jennings et al., 2019). When asked to reflect deeply on their impact on students' SECs, teachers are implicitly asked to reflect on their own SECs (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). This is why determining the scope of an exercise is so important.

Like with other professional learning opportunities, SEL teacher education would be best served if it were not a singular workshop or seminar, but a series, or done within the context of a mentoring/coaching relationship (Kraft et al., 2018). It would also be advantageous for this work

to be done by a group of teachers from the same subject area (Mahoney et al., 2021). To make it a series of SEL learning opportunities, each session could focus on different student SECs and/or teacher SECs within the context of the classroom. Alternatively, components of pedagogical practice related to SEL could be explored, such as student-teacher relationship building, developing classroom climate, and so on. The latter approach would align well with van Manen's (2015) sense of pedagogical tact. Any approach should aim to create an ongoing dialogue. Practicing developing such acute sensory awareness in everyday pedagogical practice aligns well with developing a mindfulness practice, which has been adopted in various SEL programs and SEL teacher education programs with promising results (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Jennings et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021).

It is important to reiterate that to do this work in a meaningful way, it must be voluntary (van Manen, 2015). However, there are ways to help teachers develop their capacity to meaningfully reflect in stages. For example, I will present two different ways in which you could use this approach to explore specific classroom practices instead of immediately focusing on SECs. First, teachers could explore CASEL's (2019) three signature practices in the context of their own classroom and go through the same process outlined above (Welcome Curiosity, Identify Assumptions, Practice Nonjudgement, Record and Reflect on Experience). Adding a last step, "Experiment with Approach," would more actively engage these teachers in reflection in an accessible way. Let us start with "an inclusive opening activity." Teachers could reflect on the ways in which they currently begin a class, go through the process of reflection, describing one such experience, and then either modify their approach, or try a different opening activity altogether. They could then compare and contrast the differences in their lived experiences.

Another way to use this approach in classroom practices is to ask teachers to share a general problem in their classrooms. Take student motivation, as an example. Teachers would then be encouraged to reflect on a specific classroom experience that illustrates this problem. After reflecting on the experience, teachers would be asked to identify a strategy that could address the problem. If students are unmotivated in class before a weekend or a vacation, using a reward in this instance, such as five extra points on the next quiz if everyone stays on task might be useful. Or if students seem unmotivated after lunch, beginning class with an interactive activity or a physical activity could better engage students. Applying this approach to practices in this way is

less phenomenological, but becoming a reflexive and thoughtful practitioner necessitates practice and reorientation. It will take time and develop in stages.

In summary, using a hermeneutic phenomenological lens in SEL teacher education practices asks the teacher to limit the scope of learning to the context of their own practice and their own lived experiences. This could help them become more reflective practitioners and better develop their own SECs while preparing them to develop students' SECs. Such an approach should not be used in just one session or workshop, as the type of reflection it requires takes time to develop. This approach could be applied to staff-wide experiences, but may be more effective in professional learning communities (Barr & Askell-Williams, 2020) in either curious interdisciplinary groups or subject area departments. Depending on the school district, this could be more useful in the context of mentoring or coaching relationships (Kraft et al., 2018). Practitioners passionate about SEL could develop this approach alongside self-study practices (Dalmau et al., 2016; Lyle, 2019). In contexts where staff may be more hesitant, using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to consider the potential of evidence-based SEL best practices compared to current practices would be useful. Or asking teachers to reflect on current issues and what classroom practices would address the specific components of those issues in a given context would be helpful.

Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry invites teachers to ponder the possibilities of education and to meaningfully question their classroom experiences. This is just one set of examples of ways in which hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry can inspire SEL teacher education practices. These suggested practices are informed by the feedback of the participants in this study, suggesting the informal, relational components of everyday practice determine the ways in which they engage students in SEL. An approach to SEL teacher education that allows them to consider SEL in a contextualized setting would help them to further develop their practice of SEL in their pedagogical approach.

Limitations

A phenomenological study does not aim to provide procedural answers, but rather to more deeply understand a phenomenon (van Manen, 2016a), in this case, SEL. As such, the discussion of the limitations of this study will focus on the factors that could deepen the understanding of the phenomenon rather than some of the other merits of other types of research, such as reproducibility.

Conditions: COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic created a unique way of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1927/1962). It is not so much that the environment was virtual, but more so that this study was conducted in the midst of tremendous and constant change. It is feasible that a teacher's sense of SEL is altered during such times of crisis. In some ways, this might mean their sense of SEL is heightened, allowing them to engage more deeply in discourse on SEL, but further phenomenological study on SEL should be conducted in times of more relative stability to see if that has an impact on findings. However, prior research suggests that high school teachers have long experienced SEL in informal, relational practices, and have avoided stand-alone SEL lessons and curricula (Bear et al., 2017; Clark, 2017; Lamb, 2018; Williamson et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018; Yeager, 2017). The experiences the teachers in this study describe reflect the extant literature, suggesting post-pandemic studies would likely have similar findings.

The conditions of the pandemic also limited the scope of my research, though. I was not in-person, and I could not see the students in the classes. This limited my ability to explore the more kinesthetic dimensions of SEL and relational pedagogic and curricular practices (Snowber, 2019). Though I asked after these experiences in interviews and described the teachers' movements in observations, an in-person study would allow for greater exploration of an embodied relationality and the ways in which the teacher moves through space with their students.

Context: Fairly Homogenous

Phenomenological inquiry aims to explore the universal components of an experience. Thus, conducting research in more diverse contexts would not likely change the essentials of the lived experience of SEL, but it would give more diverse lived experience descriptions. As this study claims that experiential examples would be useful for teacher education purposes, a broad array of examples would be helpful. Additionally, van Manen (2015) describes at great length the inherent morality of pedagogy, including the need for instructors to develop "ontotheological awareness of what are the contemporary cultural forces that seem to shape not only the character of young people but also [...] the adult" (p. 11). Teachers need to reflect on their own cultural heritage and how it influences their pedagogic practices, and also how to create a culturally responsive approach to SEL that warmly welcomes each student (Barnes & McCallops, 2019; Jagers et al., 2018; Jagers et al., 2019; Merrell & Gueldner, 2010). Descriptions of lived

experiences from more diverse contexts would aid in the development of this self-reflexivity (Kazanjian, 2019).

Curriculum: Lack of Responsivity to SEL Curriculum-as-Plan

Part of the reason I chose this district to conduct this research was that Massachusetts has state-mandated SEL curricular objectives in certain subject areas and a history of trying to develop SEL teacher education (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). I wanted to explore the ways in which teachers responded to the SEL curriculum-as-plan. However, the math teachers had no awareness of the inclusion of SEL curricular objectives in the State of Massachusetts mathematics curriculum framework. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2017a) Curriculum Framework for Mathematics includes SEL as a “Guiding Principle” for its “Mathematical Practice Standards”:

Social and emotional learning can increase academic achievement, improve attitudes and behaviors, and reduce emotional distress. Students should practice self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills, by, for example: collaborating and learning from others and showing respect for others' ideas; applying the mathematics they know to make responsible decisions to solve problems, engaging and persisting in solving challenging problems; and learning that with effort, they can continue to improve and be successful. (p. 15)

Although the state of Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2017a) understands SEL through CASEL's SEL framework, directly applying student SECs to their Mathematical Practice Standards, they never reference CASEL or explain the SECs in the Mathematics Curriculum framework document. They also give remarkably few examples of what this can look like in practice. On the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2017b) website, they further explicate the SECs, and align the SECs with specific Mathematical Practice Standards, but include no exemplars for practice. Additionally, the participants in this study are older teachers who have taught for over a decade and who originally came from industry, and the addition of SEL to the math curriculum framework happened in the last five years.

This question of the ways in which teachers respond to SEL curriculum-as-plan is of increasing urgency, as within the United States, more and more states are adding SEL curricular objectives to different subject areas across high school curricular frameworks (Eklund et al.,

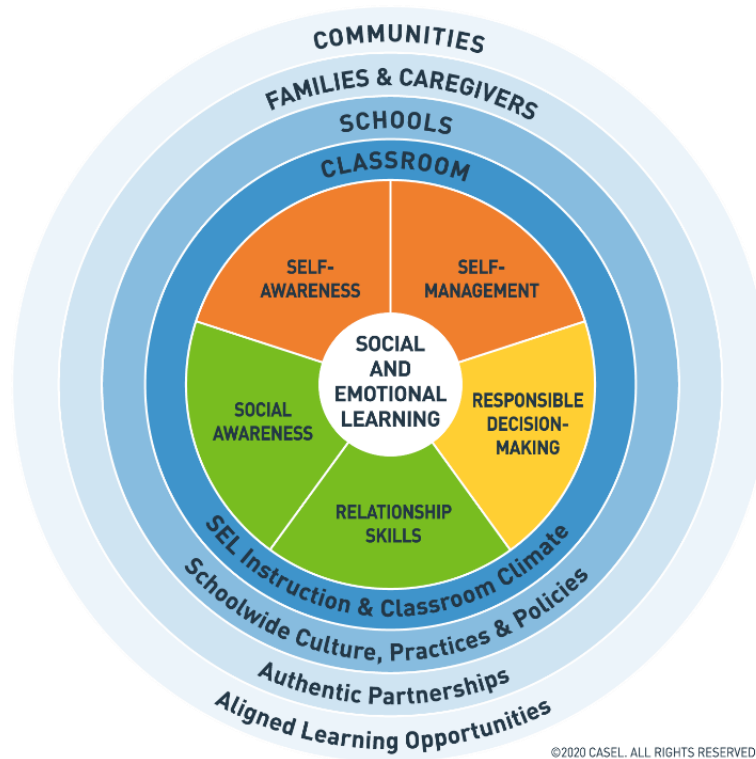
2018). Do high school teachers want help applying, exploring, and measuring these SEL curricular objectives? Are they even aware of and concerned with addressing these curricular objectives? If they are, are their different concerns across subject areas? For example, in the state of Massachusetts Department of Education's (1999) Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework, they include a "Social and Emotional Health Strand" with the following "PreK–12: Mental Health" standard: "Students will acquire knowledge about emotions and physical health, the management of emotions, personality and character development, and social awareness; and will learn skills to promote self-acceptance, make decisions, and cope with stress, including suicide prevention" (p. 35). In health courses, what students are asked to learn and practice inherently aligns with SEL (Society for Public Health Education, 2019). The curriculum framework goes on to break down the standards by grade level and gives examples of lessons and assignments that develop students' comprehension and practice of skills pertinent to this SEL curricular objective. Additionally, SEL objectives have been in the Massachusetts Department of Education (1999) health curriculum framework for over twenty years. The HPE teacher in this study had no issue discussing his practice in terms of SEL, and though he rarely included explicit SEL objectives in his lesson plans, nor did he have a developed SEL scope and sequence for his courses, he felt comfortable explicitly developing SEL with his students.

It is a limitation of the study, however, that the participants really had no sense of tension from SEL curriculum-as-plan, as that has been the main controversy in exploring the ways in which high school teachers engage students in SEL (Williamson et al., 2015; Yeager, 2017). Without being able to deeply question this, there are still many questions to ask regarding what supports teachers are looking for from SEL teacher education opportunities. High school teachers have already made it clear they do not want a prescriptive SEL curriculum isolated from their subject areas (Hamilton et al., 2019). In what ways do they then experience responding to mandated SEL curricular objectives? Is that what they want more guidance on in SEL teacher education opportunities? Or do they want universal practices that any teacher can use regardless of subject area? For example, CASEL distributes and recommends universal SEL classroom practices, such as creating classroom routines with inclusive class openers, engaging interactivities, and optimistic closures (CASEL, 2019). Are high school teachers looking for tips and tricks that would be easy to apply to their classrooms when they are asking for more SEL teacher education? Or are they asking for more guidance on the relational components of SEL,

the parts of practice that are harder to describe and develop, such as student-teacher relationship-building and the development of classroom climate? The teachers in this study approach SEL in their classrooms primarily through the ways in which they develop student-teacher relationships and build classroom climate, but a larger sample, with teachers specifically addressing SEL curriculum-as-plan, would better explore the different types of supports teachers may want in SEL teacher education opportunities.

Comparing Findings to CASEL's SEL Framework

Although the math teachers in this study were unaware of the inclusion of CASEL's SEL framework in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2017a) mathematics curriculum framework, all of the participants discussed addressing the five SECs. They do not use the exact terminology, but do share the different components of their practice that align with the SECs. As the methodology of my study examines lived experience, exploring the ways in which my participants conceptualize SEL within their pedagogic practice is beyond the scope of my research, but makes for a useful practical resource. This section of my findings can be used to reflect upon the ways in which high school teachers might begin to explore SEL as inherent in their pedagogical practice, and/or in what ways they might wish to begin reimagining their approach to SEL in pedagogy. I reshare Figure 1 to orient the reader to exploring the participants' reflections in relation to CASEL's SEL framework.

Figure 1*CASEL's SEL Framework (updated 2020)*

Although my methodology examines lived experience, when considering findings in relation to the conceptual framework, it is useful to understand the ways in which the participants understand SEL. I will provide my participants' definitions of SEL and share which student SECs they intentionally developed (though using different terminology) and which teacher SECs they discussed (again, using different vocabulary). I will then explore in what ways they did or did not mention linking their SEL classroom practice to the contexts represented by the other rings encasing the five SECs (schools, families and caregivers, and communities). Finally, I present the systemic structures the school I worked with has put in place to support student SEL to demonstrate a practical example of how the teacher's role in SEL development is supported through other systems and practices. This section goes beyond the methodological scope of my study, beyond the writing up and interpretation of lived experience examples of SEL, to give practical, conceptual explanations and illustrations of SEL in practice. This functions more as a practical resource than an extension of my research. I do this to allow for more fully

investigating the parallels to CASEL's SEL framework and to question in what ways the CASEL SEL framework serves or does not serve high school teachers.

Mr. Sanchez

When asked to define SEL, Mr. Sanchez automatically discussed the role of SEL in his own context as a math teacher:

in learning math, you have to attach emotionally to math, and I mean you have to understand your abilities and limitations. Teachers also need to understand the emotional standing of students. Math is not their favorite subject sometimes so you have to understand what has led to that [...] after that, it's our job to make students aware of their strengths, [and] I can definitely feel that I need to connect with students' emotion. But first, I need to make them connect with math emotionally so that they can succeed.

For Mr. Sanchez, SEL in a secondary math classroom means promoting a student's sense of self-efficacy and nurturing their growth as a learner in the subject area. Regarding the SECs, he aims to help his students develop their *self-awareness* specific to the ways in which they understand and relate to math, improve their *self-management* skills to the extent that they persevere academically regardless of personal concerns, and practice *responsible decision-making* within the scope of their academic careers. In his interviews, Mr. Sanchez discusses several ways in which he specifically attempts to bolster these skills, though without using the SEC terminology.

Regarding *self-awareness*, he claims he develops students' awareness of their math ability by asking students frequently to reflect on whether they understand certain concepts, and whether the ease and speed with which they are able to solve certain math problems reflects understanding. Further developing self-awareness, and extending such awareness to *self-management* practices, Mr. Sanchez explains that he has a welcoming routine with students where he greets them in class, asking them how they are feeling that day, and whenever they answer too many times with "exhausted" or "tired," he explicitly discusses with students developing a "positive mindset" to overcome their fatigue. He uses the example of the Tour de France cyclists, who must ignore the perceived pain in their bodies in order to persevere. Finally, he claims that there are many different ways in which he helps students practice and develop their *responsible decision-making* skills. He helps them learn when and how to write emails to teachers and professors. Mr. Sanchez discusses course selection and study strategies. He also

gives students he has had for at least a year a number for a messaging platform and promises to answer any math questions they send him if sent prior to 10 p.m.

When asked about the social component of SEL, Mr. Sanchez said, "I don't think I really do that, focus on that." When asked to think of any examples in which he helped the students engage and interact with each other and then reflect on the qualities of these interactions, the only example he could think of was where he held up Jamal's behaviors as an exemplar for other students and asked them to reflect on their own responses to assessment scores. Mr. Sanchez did state, however, "For me as a teacher, it's not how much math you know, but how much math you can share with others and get everybody ahead." This statement highlights, however, why it is important the research regarding teachers and SEL is not just limited to surveys or interviews reflecting attitudes towards and opinions on SEL. What teachers value and what they address in everyday practice may differ.

It is important to note as well that Mr. Sanchez volunteered to be part of the study because he believes SEL is important and wishes to grow as a teacher. He did not sign up as an expert, but as a teacher wishing to develop further to better serve his students. Mr. Sanchez, out of all the participants, sees SEL as a way to help students become acquainted with the subject matter. The ways in which a student develops SEL outside of their academic careers and professional lives, Mr. Sanchez's claimed, did not feel pertinent to his practice. He even stated, "Some teachers develop relationships with their students beyond their time at school, and they might come to visit after they go to college, but I do not do that. It is a personal choice." Mr. Sanchez made me deeply question the ways in which teachers interpret and practice SEL because his orientation to SEL so strongly emphasizes the bond between the student and the subject area, but not necessarily between the student and the teacher.

Mr. Sanchez was an important participant to have, as research does indicate that there are high school subject area teachers that perceive their first duty to the subject area rather than the student (Keiler, 2018). Mr. Sanchez illustrates that even if this is the case, they can still value and develop what they interpret and label as SEL in their classrooms. This population of teachers is important to include in discussions on SEL and allows them to develop and expand their understanding and practice of SEL. What was also very interesting and important to acknowledge and consider is that Mr. Sanchez feels very passionate about math, emotionally

bonded to the subject area, and that subject area impacts the ways in which he orients to the world. He said,

I want students to understand the application of math to your life. As life is beautiful, math is also beautiful, because there are so many math phenomena that can give you answers to the real-life phenomena [...] You'll suddenly see the application of everything, and you suddenly see, "Oh this small thing can be deciphered." You can see the patterns of sunflower seeds and you can see the pattern inside a cone that you can decipher using math. Not too much high math is needed. All those answers are there in precalculus and calculus.

In regards to his own SECs, Mr. Sanchez claims he actively practices *self-awareness* in relation to the ways in which his relationship to math informs his orientation to the world. He also actively works on *social awareness*, recognizing that teacher-parent communication can be difficult in electronic communication. He has a two-email rule. If sending two emails does not resolve the issue, or if the conversation continues beyond sending two emails, he calls home. Mr. Sanchez gives an example of what it means to take a skill-based, subject-area-oriented approach to teacher SECs. He made me question my own understanding of student and teacher SECs and what they might look like when applied to different subject areas. In regards to the rings of support in the conceptual framework, teachers who view SEL similarly might benefit from further understanding the practical supports provided in a school-wide approach to SEL so that they can see how the student will relate and perform better within the subject area by receiving these additional supports.

Mrs. Williams

In the first observation, Mrs. Williams said, "SEL is basically metacognition, right?" *Self-awareness* and *self-management* as well as concrete skill development therein are the cornerstones of her practice. In each class observed, for the majority of the period, Mrs. Williams invited students to engage in metacognition. She did not explicitly name it for the students, but she did with me after observations and in interviews. With each math problem, she asks students to talk through each step, share how they know something is wrong or right, and how they feel about the process. She has created a classroom climate where this is enthusiastically practiced and welcomed, and students volunteer to help each other when they struggle for an answer. The ways in which the students treat each other demonstrate that she has spent time developing the

students' *social awareness* and *relationship skills*, at least within the context of their classroom. Regarding *responsible decision-making*, Mrs. Williams constantly provided students with different instructional scaffolds to aid their learning and verbally reminded them of how and when they might utilize these scaffolds in and beyond class to bolster their learning.

This care and concern for students is further reflected in her attitudes and opinions towards what educational practices should look like in high school. Mrs. Williams laments that "the model of education in high school is fundamentally different from how we view middle school and elementary school" and refutes this view, claiming, "I think it's the same process; it's just different material." She further defines SEL as: "trying to meet the needs of the learners so that they can learn. Forget your stupid content; just get them in a place where they're able to learn, grow and develop." When encouraged to put SEL specifically into the context of a high school math class, she stated "feel[ing] mathematically taken care of, [...] feeling nurtured in my learning, and that nobody's putting any constraints on me and I'm constantly being urged to reach more."

When asked about her own SECs, Mrs. Williams shared that developing her own *self-awareness*, *social awareness*, and *relationship skills* are constants in both her moment-to-moment practice and her reflections on her pedagogical practice. She is attempting to read her students' understanding in each moment of class and is reflecting on ways to present information and engage students in learning based on the ways in which they responded in the moment and in the days and weeks prior. She tries to tailor her interactions to meet student needs and is careful to stay abreast of what is happening in her students' personal lives. For example, she started one of her classes that I was observing by recognizing students on the honor roll and those who had performed well in various sports games. The way in which she plans her courses reflects *responsible decision-making*, as she begins each year with certain curricular objectives, maps them on an app she developed, and constantly modifies her goals in relation to her students' needs. She engages in a great deal of planning, but is careful to do so in a way that protects her well-being. She discusses ensuring good sleep habits, nutrition, rest, and relaxation. She also has a very intentional gratitude practice in which she frequently reflects on what she has in her life that she is grateful for on small and grand scales.

Mrs. Williams works very hard to further develop students' SEL supports by interacting with and reaching out to the other contexts that can benefit students, those indicated by the rings

surrounding the five SECs in the CASEL SEL framework. Mrs. Williams actively reaches out to her students' prior and future teachers, the special education department, and the counseling department to align necessary supports. She also intentionally reaches out to families and builds relationships before any issues arise so that the families can best support their students' learning journeys. Furthermore, Mrs. Williams actively watches out for and encourages her students to participate in extracurricular activities that would strengthen their abilities and self-efficacy in math. Her warm, cheerful, friendly, and energetic demeanor demonstrates one iteration of a relational approach to SEL. She does not use a SEL curriculum or intentionally include prescribed SEL curricular objectives, but SEL shapes every component of her pedagogic practice. She is a great example of what this can look like in daily practice in a subject area that has fewer explicit and specific SEL supports than other subject areas (Wong et al., 2019).

Mr. Smith

Mr. Smith defined SEL as “educating students on how to get along in the world as a human being with others and with yourself.” HPE are the subject areas where the topics explored most closely align with SEL content in traditional SEL curricula and SEL programming found in SEL interventions (Society for Public Health Education, 2019). For example, in this school, there is a whole unit on relationship-building, so in HPE, relationship skills are explicitly taught, not just experientially developed in relation to learning in general with others. When asked to discuss the role of SEL in teaching high school, Mr. Smith said, “I think it's important to not just know your content but know and understand the population of people you're working with. Because they're not just mini-adults.” Mr. Smith understands that, as a teacher, it is his job to make the topics in his subject area accessible to his students based on their developmental growth, and SEL is a cornerstone of this process for him.

Mr. Smith is the only teacher in this study to explicitly develop components of all of the SECs. He explains that he does so because the SECs are explicitly included in the expected topics of his courses, and throughout the Massachusetts Department of Education (1999) Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework, as well as national standards for HPE (SHAPE, 2020). Regarding *self-awareness*, Mr. Smith intentionally and explicitly has students examine their feelings and how they express them. He has students keep a gratitude journal, where they reflect on what they are grateful for in a day. Additionally, he has students reflect on their physical health and their relationship with their bodies in relation to physical activity and

movement practices. To develop *self-management* skills, Mr. Smith has students brainstorm approaches for dealing with negative feelings. For example, students come up with a list of healthy, productive things to do if they are feeling sad or frustrated, such as taking a walk, listening to music, or talking with friends (Naragon-Gainey et al., 2017). There is also a mental health unit in which students explore how they understand and experience their mental health and what supports are available to them should they need them. The SECs of *social-awareness* and *relationship skills* are explicitly developed in a relationship-building unit but also explicitly in practice through themes of leadership and sportsmanship. In this context, Mr. Smith models behavior and explicitly has students reflect on what it means to be a leader and a “gracious loser” or “humble winner” and why it is important. Finally, concerning *responsible decision-making*, Mr. Smith relates his work back to helping students choose health-promoting behaviors in the short-term and long-term.

Mr. Smith was the most comfortable with the terminology of SEL, as HPE borrows heavily from the health fields (Society for Public Health Education, 2019). Although he does not use the term “SEC,” he stated he was comfortable reflecting on his SECs both personally and professionally. As a teacher, Mr. Smith is well-aware that many students feel insecure and inept in PE, and that his relationship with them can mediate or reinforce this feeling. As a result, he continuously develops and reflects on his senses of *self-awareness*, *social-awareness*, as well as his approach to *relationship skills*. He constantly reads his students to interpret their needs in the class and adjusts his interactions with them based on how he understands their needs. He also aims to continuously act as a prosocial role model in these capacities, engaging in all the activities he asks of his students, such as the gratitude journal. He further gave an example of modeling sharing and asking for pronouns with students. Mr. Smith also described *self-management* as integral to these SECs. His lived experience example of SEL with Jesse demonstrates one way in which he manages his emotions when interacting with students (when students are misbehaving, he reminds himself of what he likes about that student). In regards to *responsible decision-making*, Mr. Smith discussed his own health and social practices and how he has to plan to get exercise in and be very intentional about when and the ways in which he spends time with his young family. He wants to set a good example for them of what it means to be a kind and caring person, and so he knows he must look after his own needs in order to be that person for them.

Mr. Smith is also actively involved in supporting and sustaining the district's systemwide approach to SEL. He participates in the school's advisory program and has taught middle school students the character education curriculum that the district's counseling department developed. As a coach, Mr. Smith has also established relationships with many parents and functions as a prosocial model for students and their families on and off the field. Mr. Smith is also in a unique position in that, within his role, he will have taught each student in the school by the time they graduate. He and his department also work closely with the counseling department to ensure necessary physical and mental health supports are in place, as well as college and career readiness training. Mr. Smith works with the entire extended school community to help support students in SEL.

Systemic Structures

The CASEL SEL framework centers students' SECs, and the role of the teacher and their classroom environment and practices are the first ring around them. However, these practices are situated within the context of the entire school community. Teachers play an important role in students' SEL, but they are just one player among many in what is meant to be a system-wide model. This school has many policies, practices, and community partners to support SEL development, but they are beyond the scope of the interviews and observations. A beneficial future study would be to examine teacher practices in relation to the systemic supports provided in a school. I do, however, describe some of the systemic structures of SEL development within this school district in the next section, sharing my experience as a researcher mobilizing findings.

Mobilizing Findings in Practice

I started the study with the expectation that the participating school community would make use of the findings. Luckily, this was not in contradiction to, but in support of my freedom as a researcher. To do this work well, I needed to build relationships across the school community to find out how they interpreted SEL, what needs they had, and how I could be of service. I label the process with the acronym SERVE: (1) Survey the landscape; (2) Extend a hand; (3) Research the options; (4) Value their lived experience; (5) and Empathize and problem-solve. A key question guides each stage. The five key questions are: (1) What needs do you have? (2) How can I be of service? (3) What options are available? (4) What approach would best fit your context? (5) What supports do you need to improve results? I depict this process in Figure 4.

Figure 4*Graphic Illustration of the Mobilizing Findings Process*

*Template sourced from PresentationGo.com

Survey the Landscape

Starting in August, 2020, I began work at the school, building relationships with staff to better understand their needs. I began facilitating the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) School Health Index (SHI) in order to help the school district self-assess their strengths and weaknesses in supporting a systemic approach to SEL. Meeting with teachers, parents, administrators, counselors, and facility support staff, I listened to individuals share their grievances, and encouraged teams to come up with plans for solutions. I was surprised at how impactful it was just to ask staff members about their experiences in the school community, what needs they had, and what they felt would be ideal solutions.

Extend a Hand

After facilitating the CDC's SHI, I had many concrete ways in which the school community wanted help. After conducting my phenomenological research, I also reached out to my participants to ask what practical supports they thought would best support SEL. The main

feedback I heard was that the community would like additional funding in order to (1) hire additional support staff to respond to students' immediate academic and mental health needs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) provide optional PDs for teachers to learn about SEL and supporting student mental health, and (3) provide teachers with options to practice different approaches to teaching (such as project-based learning in acceleration academies or summer enrichment programs). The one silver lining of the pandemic has been the increase in grant opportunities. I was able to source over \$590,000 in grant funding to support these initiatives.

Research the Options

My school community was really at a bit of a loss originally as to how to develop more meaningful experiential professional learning practices. I researched different approaches, such as professional learning that encouraged more reflection on teachers' emotional experiences in practice (Bredmar, 2020), teacher-led professional learning (Stanulis et al., 2016); themed, ongoing professional learning (Iver et al., 2022); developing communities of practice (Goodyear & Casey, 2015); and so on. I presented them with their options without trying to sway their direction. Additionally, part of the feedback I received from my work with different community stakeholders, was that they needed SEL screeners. They wanted a SEL scope and sequence for skill development for their health and physical education curriculum. I researched different options and presented them with their choices.

Value their lived experience

The administrators let me know that they had tried to adopt a whole-child approach (Lewallen et al., 2015) in the past. The school had ended up hopelessly divided, and ultimately did not adopt the approach. The teachers had preconceived notions about what they thought SEL was within that context, and a handful of vocal teachers made it clear they thought any emphasis on students' wellbeing would detract from their academic success. I made it a point to try to get to know these educators, to understand their viewpoints, and to get a sense of what they had experienced in their classrooms and the greater school community that led them to feel this way. I started with the belief that their feelings are valid and that they deserve to be heard. I then tried to devise a path forward where everyone's needs are met. Sometimes we found compromises. Sometimes we did not.

Empathize and Problem-solve

We have tried to pilot many different initiatives during my tenure here. The ones most pertinent to my phenomenological study, piloting a teacher mentoring program, developing teacher-led PDs determined by teacher interest, and engaging in an on-going Blue-Ribbon panel to determine best teaching practices at the school, are all showing promise. Additionally, I am working with the HPE department to take the SEL curriculum they have purchased, and reimagine how to use the SEL objectives provided therein to inspire practices. In this way, together we are actively exploring the tension between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005). These approaches all have listening to and valuing teachers' experiences at their heart. They are not easy, though. We talk about pedagogical approaches, and sometimes those conversations are collective, sometimes they are individual; sometimes we get lost in abstractions, and sometimes we spend a lot of time talking about what are supposed to be time- and energy-saving tips and tricks for practice. It is a process. Hopefully, in the future, what these teacher education practices offer is a community that welcomes questioning their lived experiences in the classroom.

In conclusion, I have been incredibly lucky to be welcomed into this school community and to have had the opportunity to SERVE them. Often, it is difficult to mobilize research findings because research can oversimplify an issue and make it seem simple what actions to take, but that is only easy to do when divorced from context. The real-life learning environment is complicated and made up of many moving parts, as well as a matrix of relationships. Schools require assistance in understanding how to apply findings in a context-appropriate manner. This school community gave me the chance to understand what it was like to use my findings to serve their context. It has been an honor.

Next Steps

My work with the school demonstrated that reimagining SEL teacher education approaches will take time and that every school district will want to adapt an approach to work for their context. This inspires me to investigate the approaches to SEL teacher education in preservice contexts. In what ways can we help future teachers develop a more reflective practice? Are they currently thinking deeply about their approach to pedagogy and curriculum, or are they too worried about the more structural and practical components of teaching? In what ways can we reimagine terms like "classroom management" to focus on fostering the skills

necessary to build relationships with students to discourage disruptive behavior and encourage active engagement? These are the types of questions I hope to explore next and the context in which I hope to explore them.

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