Programs Don’t Implement Themselves:

Giving Voice to Teachers’ Experiences with Prevention

BY

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THESIS

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<td>4Rs</td>
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<td>APA</td>
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<td>CASEL</td>
<td>Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning</td>
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<td>CSC</td>
<td>Caring School Community</td>
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<td>EBP</td>
<td>Evidence-Based Practice</td>
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<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individualized Education Program</td>
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<td>IES</td>
<td>Institute of Education Sciences</td>
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<td>ISAT</td>
<td>Illinois State Achievement Test</td>
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<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act of 2001</td>
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SUMMARY

In recent years, growing pressures for accountability and effectiveness have fueled a push for evidence-based practice in education. In many instances, evidence-based practice has been operationalized as evidence-based programming, especially with respect to school-based prevention. Although teachers frequently implement prevention programs in schools, we know very little about their experiences with implementation. The purpose of this phenomenological interview study, therefore, was to explore the experiences of teachers with respect to implementing evidence-based prevention programs. Very few teachers in this study were involved in the decision to adopt an evidence-based prevention program at their school, yet most teachers appreciated having such a program. They implemented their program flexibly, for a variety of reasons, and viewed this flexibility to be inextricably linked to positive outcomes for students. The implementation experience, overall, influenced teachers both personally and professionally, in several positive ways. Ultimately, teacher practice was shaped by teachers’ experiences with an evidence-based prevention program, rather than forced to accommodate such a program. For teachers in this study, the phenomenon of implementing an evidence-based classroom prevention program was more about encountering SEL and integrating it into their teaching practice than it was about the program at all.
1. INTRODUCTION

A long-standing tenet of medicine and clinical psychology, Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) is now the prevailing approach with respect to school-based interventions in the U.S., particularly interventions targeting behavior, mental health, or social and emotional competencies. Although itself now defunct, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) strongly promoted the adoption of EBPs by making certain types of federal funds contingent upon them (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004). Although NCLB’s replacement takes a softer stance with regard to what qualifies as evidence-based, little else has changed, particularly for interventions in low-performing schools (West, 2016). The Department of Education defines EBP in education in much the same way that the American Psychological Association (APA) defines EBP in psychology—both emphasize the integration of professional judgment with the best available research evidence to inform decision-making (APA, 2005; Whitehurst, 2002). However, the EBP movement in schools, and particularly the EBP movement related to school-based prevention, is arguably dominated not by evidence-based practice, but by the widespread dissemination of manualized prevention and intervention programs, the developers of which often insist that in order to function properly the programs must be implemented with high fidelity to the original design, leaving little room for teachers to exercise their professional judgment in decision-making. Although individual and organizational factors associated with the successful implementation of EBPs in schools have received research attention, the impact of the EBP movement on educators and their practices has been largely overlooked. Understanding how educators process and experience evidence-based prevention programs is extremely important not only because it can impact program implementation and thereby effectiveness (e.g., Botvin et al., 1990; Han and Weiss, 2005; Rohrbach et al., 1993), but also because of the potential impact of the EBP movement, over time, on teachers’ sense of efficacy, stress, job satisfaction, and other psychological variables that may, in turn, impact the ability of teachers to be effective in their classrooms.
The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the subjective experiences of teachers with respect to the EBP movement, and more specifically, with respect to evidence-based prevention programs. In particular, this study seeks to understand and describe: 1) how teachers have gone about making decisions related to the implementation of evidence-based prevention programs; 2) how they have felt about their experiences with these programs; and 3) how these experiences have influenced their work over time.

1.1. School-Based Prevention

Over the years, schools have become an important setting for the implementation of prevention programs. There are several reasons for this. First, many behavioral and emotional problems can impede both learning and effective teaching, and therefore must be prevented or later addressed in order for schools to go about the business of educating students (Adelman and Taylor, 1998). Second, given the amount of time youth spend there, schools represent one of our best opportunities for identifying and intervening with children who have or are at risk of developing problems (Masia-Warner et al., 2006; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Third, numerous barriers—both logistical and attitudinal—prevent many students from receiving the mental health services that they need, and schools provide a vital alternative to more traditional clinical settings (Atkins et al., 2006). Finally, “the school environment is... a key setting in which students’ behaviors and ideas are shaped” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013), and therefore is also an ideal setting in which to deliver programs aimed at health-promotion and/or risk prevention.

School-based prevention often takes the form of behavior management programs, programs aimed at building social skills or other social-emotional competencies, or programs aimed at preventing specific problem behaviors such as substance use/abuse, bullying, sexual risk behaviors, or school dropout. Terminology for such programs (e.g., behavior management, social-emotional learning, prevention, mental health promotion) is often used interchangeably, because many of their outcomes are closely
related—for instance, programs that promote the development of social skills typically also prevent risky behaviors. It could be argued that social-emotional learning (SEL) is at the core of many school-based prevention efforts, or that it is the mechanism through which many prevention programs are designed to function (Greenberg et al., 2003).

1.2. **Program Implementation in Schools**

Although prevention programs may target a range of outcomes, include different types of components, and employ different theories of change, their developers all specify one thing in common: that they need to be implemented in a high quality manner—frequently operationalized as a high level of fidelity to the program model—in order to produce the desired results. Indeed, strong evidence supports the notion that higher levels of implementation fidelity produce more favorable outcomes (Battistich et al., 1996; Blakely et al., 1987; Botvin et al., 1990; Durlak and DuPre, 2008; Rohrbach et al., 1993).

A host of factors have been found to influence program implementation across a variety of disciplines. Durlak and DuPre (2008), Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, and Wallace (2005), and others have identified factors such as characteristics of the program itself, aspects of organizational capacity, attitudes and skills of individual program deliverers, aspects of the broader community context (e.g., research, policies, funding), and the availability of implementation support (e.g., training, ongoing technical assistance) as important to achieving desired levels of implementation. With respect to school-based interventions in particular, Forman, Olin, Hoagwood, Crowe, and Saka (2009) collected program developers’ perceptions of factors that influenced successful implementation and sustainment of their programs. They identified factors such as administrator and teacher perceptions of the intervention itself and their support or buy-in regarding implementation, the availability of time and economic resources, the ability to integrate the intervention with existing school curricula, the availability of ongoing technical assistance, and competing school priorities. Although factors identified
as important to implementation are fairly consistent across studies, the implementation-related experiences of teachers—the individuals who are responsible for implementing most programs and therefore on whom the quality of implementation rests—are currently missing from this story, and are sorely needed because we do not yet fully understand why and how various factors influence implementation. For instance, what is the relative contribution of different factors to different types of implementation-related decisions that teachers make? Further, how do these factors interact with one another to affect different aspects of implementation?

The literature to date does not provide clear answers to these questions, in part because we, as an academic community, have only recently come to understand the importance of implementation with respect to interpreting outcome data, and implementation data have not been documented and published as routinely as one might like (Durlak and DuPre, 2008). Even when studies do report implementation data, they frequently assess only one aspect of implementation (e.g., fidelity or dosage), overlooking others that may be equally important (e.g., quality or adaptation) (Durlak and DuPre, 2008). Data pertaining to adaptation or re-invention (Rogers, 1995), in particular, have been largely absent from the implementation literature (Durlak and DuPre, 2008), likely because adaptation and fidelity are generally viewed as opposing ends of the same spectrum, and thus many believe that reporting on fidelity obviates the need to report on adaptation. Yet this is not necessarily true; adaptations have been defined not only as modifications or deletions to a program’s components or delivery, but also as additions or enhancements (Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 2002). Alternative views of fidelity have also been articulated, linking it to the underlying theory of the intervention rather than its physical form or components (Hawe et al., 2009). Through this type of lens, adaptations to the form of an intervention may pose no threat to fidelity whatsoever.

Although adaptation has not been a focus of implementation research, there are three reasons why it should be studied. First, interventions are implemented in settings and thus cannot be studied in
isolation (Trickett et al., 1985). One of the ways we can understand the interaction that takes place between an intervention and its setting is to study how programs are adapted to the local needs, cultures, and contexts of the settings in which they are implemented. Second, some research has found that local adaptations can serve to improve the effectiveness of an intervention (e.g., McGraw et al., 1996), and some scholars believe that adaptations may improve the likelihood that a program will be sustained over time (Smith and Caldwell, 2007). Thus, in order to fully appreciate what actually gets implemented and how closely it resembles that upon which the evidence was based, we must attend to issues of adaptation. Finally, evidence suggests that adaptation is the norm rather than the exception (Datnow and Castellano, 2000; Dusenbury et al., 2005; Larsen and Samdal, 2007; Ozer et al., 2010; Ringwalt et al., 2004), and that different types of adaptations are made for different reasons (Solomon, unpublished data). Therefore, focusing exclusively on fidelity reflects a lack of understanding about the local realities of implementation.

The present study proposes to bring to light the experiences of teachers who are directly involved in the implementation of evidence-based prevention programs in order to begin to understand the decision-making process that teachers go through when implementing such programs. Importantly, this study seeks to better understand decisions that impact a broad conceptualization of implementation—one that includes not only fidelity but adaptation as well.

1.3. Teachers in Low-Income Urban Schools

A persistent challenge facing urban schools in low-income communities is ensuring that students are taught by effective teachers (Lankford et al., 2002; Shann, 1998). An implicit aim of the EBP movement is to improve teacher effectiveness by requiring that teachers use effective strategies in their classrooms. However, there is a potential for this movement to foster conditions that could ultimately undermine that goal. Teacher effectiveness may be influenced by a broad range of factors, including not only training and academic background, but also psychological variables such as sense of efficacy
(Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), job-related stress (Byrne, 1993; Maslach et al., 2001; van der Linden et al., 2005), and job satisfaction (Zigarelli, 1996). Although a number of studies have examined the extent to which psychological variables influence program implementation (e.g., Ransford et al., 2009), research has not yet explored the extent to which the EBP movement has influenced the psychological well-being of teachers. Yet it is quite conceivable that it has. For instance, how do teachers feel about implementing packaged programs? Does it make their jobs easier because manualized programs require less planning on the part of the teacher? Does it help teachers to feel more confident about what they are teaching? Does it undermine their sense of autonomy because they feel tied to a manual and unable to incorporate their professional judgment? Do answers to these questions depend on training, experience, and/or the types of programs being implemented? The proposed study will explore these types of questions, and has the potential to help us better understand the ways that the EBP movement is affecting teachers psychologically.

Issues of job-related stress, morale, and job satisfaction are particularly important for teachers in urban settings. It is well documented that urban youth living in poverty are disproportionately likely to have profound mental health and educational needs. Myriad poverty-related biological, social, and environmental risk factors have each been shown to have unique and often cumulative effects on children’s cognitive and/or behavioral maladjustment (Bradley and Corwyn, 2002; Brooks-Gunn and Duncan, 1997; Evans and English, 2002; Rouse et al., 2011; Stanton-Chapman et al., 2004; Whipple et al., 2010). If not addressed, these challenges can greatly impede the ability of youth to perform well academically, progress to the upper grades, and ultimately graduate from high school. Further, low-income urban school settings are often characterized by high rates of student mobility (Kerbow, 1996), which can exacerbate academic and behavioral problems for students and create a sense of instability within classrooms (Lash and Kirkpatrick, 1990; 1994). Thus, teachers in economically disadvantaged urban communities are faced with the added challenges of working with students who have complex
academic and behavioral needs, and preserving continuity of instruction in their classrooms despite instability within the community.

Not surprisingly, teachers in urban settings tend to report higher rates of job-related stress (Feitler and Tokar, 1982; Tokar and Feitler, 1986) and lower rates of job satisfaction (Shernoff et al., 2011) than do teachers in suburban and rural settings. Rates of teacher turnover in poor urban neighborhoods also tend to be higher than average (Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2004). Numerous factors have been found to contribute to this “revolving door” phenomenon in disadvantaged urban schools, including school staffing cutbacks; however, job dissatisfaction is an important one. A study involving a large, nationally representative sample of teachers found that job dissatisfaction was cited as a reason by nearly one-quarter of teachers who left a high-poverty urban school during the 1994-1995 school year (Ingersoll, 2004). Sources of job dissatisfaction include some that are not surprising given conventional wisdom and media portrayals of urban schools—such as limited resources, low salaries, and student discipline problems—as well as others that are, perhaps, less expected—such as “too many intrusions on classroom teaching time” and “a lack of teacher influence over school and classroom decision-making” (Ingersoll, 2004, p. 11). Lippman, Burns, and McArthur (1996) found that teacher perceptions of their influence over the curriculum were lower for teachers in urban schools than for those in suburban or rural schools, and were lowest in schools with the highest concentrations of poverty.

Finally, anecdotal accounts from teachers suggest that programming initiatives are often, themselves, revolving doors. In other words, programs are frequently initiated and then abruptly discontinued given changes in district priorities. This recurrent discontinuation of programs can have deleterious consequences for teachers’ willingness to support future programming efforts (Boardman et al., 2005; Pluye et al., 2004; Shediaic-Rizkallah and Bone, 1998). Perhaps more importantly, it may also
contribute to reduced teacher morale, increased job-related stress, and possibly burnout, because this pattern may exacerbate a teacher’s feelings of lack of control over classroom decision-making.

In summary, research findings lend support to the notion that the EBP movement may be influencing urban teachers on a personal level, to the extent to which: 1) programs are imposed upon teachers without their input, and 2) programs take time away from content or activities that teachers view as more important. The proposed study will focus explicitly on the experiences of urban teachers in low-income communities with respect to evidence-based prevention programs, and will explore teachers’ perceptions of factors that may impact how teachers experience this phenomenon, such as school leadership style, teacher control over classroom decision-making, and the types of programs implemented.

1.4. Lasting Impacts of Evidence-Based Programs on Teacher Practice

There is broad consensus within the academic community that research findings should inform practice, yet too often do not. This phenomenon is typically referred to as the ‘research to practice gap.’ Interestingly, despite considerable discussion of the issue, there seems to be a lack of clarity around what is meant by “practice.” Although the discussion tends to feel rather general in nature—relating broadly to the everyday instructional and/or behavioral methods employed by teachers—strategies to narrow the gap frequently take the form of targeted dissemination efforts around specific programs. In other words, there seems to be a disconnect between the identified problem and the proposed means to address it. If there were a logic model to represent the EBP movement, we might notice a mismatch between the movement’s goals and objectives and its inputs or activities. That is, unless individual programs are theorized to have a long-term impact on practice.

There may be good reasons to focus on programs rather than practices. For instance, unlike in medicine where practicing medical professionals conduct much of the applied research that gets published, most educational research is carried out by university-based academics who are not
themselves teachers in schools (Hargreaves, 1996). This has important implications for how and where research findings are published, who has access to them, and how educators perceive the relevance and applicability of that research to their practice. Further, given that many educational decision-makers are not trained in the “critical appraisal of evidence” (Pilcher and Bedford, 2011, p. 376), they may have difficulty identifying the best available research evidence even if they did encounter the research and perceive it to be relevant to their work. The sheer number of proprietary intervention programs in schools (George et al., 2013) may itself be a function of the challenges inherent in requiring educational decision-makers to identify and adopt evidence-based practices. In other words, identifying effective practices from the scientific literature may be quite a bit more challenging than identifying effective programs, particularly programs that have been compiled by external organizations into publicly available lists of those that are “promising” or “effective” in an effort to aid educational professionals in this process. Indeed, “…requirements that tie federal funds to programs that are identified as ‘research-based’ appear to have increased the adoption of those programs, if not the direct use of evidence in making the selection” (Coburn et al., 2009, p. 80).

An alternative explanation for the proliferation of programs relates to the financial incentives that exist for researchers to develop and promote new programs. Whatever the reasons may be for focusing on programs, the question remains: To what extent do these programming initiatives bring us closer to improving teacher practice? Classroom-based prevention programs are not necessarily intended to have long-term impacts on teacher practice. Such programs target changes in student behavior, knowledge, and/or attitudes. However, given that individual programs are generally short-lived in any individual school, the ultimate value of a program could be measured in the extent to which it shapes teachers’ practices to be more effective. Although an extensive body of literature focuses on the impacts of teacher-level interventions (i.e., intervention programs targeting changes in teacher behavior) on teacher practice—and suggests that teacher practice changes in response to thinking about
things in new ways rather than just developing new skills (Butler et al., 2001; Gersten et al., 1997)—research has not yet addressed the extent to which exposure to and interaction with student-level preventive interventions have influenced teacher practice. Therefore, a contribution of this study will be to describe the range of ways that teachers perceive their knowledge, beliefs, skills, and classroom practices to have evolved as a result of their experiences with student-targeted, evidence-based prevention programs.

1.5. **The Broader Context Surrounding Program Implementation**

It is important to remember that the implementation of programs takes place within a broader context. Implementation processes are undoubtedly influenced in various ways and to various degrees by scientific research, the climate for accountability at the state or federal level, the availability of funding, characteristics of or changes that might be occurring at the level of the organization, and many other factors (Backer, 2000; Wandersman et al., 2008). Understanding teachers’ perceptions of the conditions under which programs are adopted and implemented is important for understanding their experiences with those programs, because the context surrounding adoption and implementation can have a potential impact on teacher support for a given program and motivation towards implementation. This study will attend to such contextual issues by eliciting teachers’ perceptions of the conditions under which program adoption and implementation unfold at the school-level.

1.5.1. **Program Adoption**

Prior to implementation, program adoption, in theory, involves an assessment of local needs and resources, followed by a selection among existing programs based on the match between those needs and resources and program characteristics (Fixsen et al., 2005). It has been suggested, however, that the current landscape of evidence-based programs is unwieldy; the level of complexity inherent in the process of selecting among the many existing programs makes the task a challenging one for educational decision-makers (Becker and Domitrovich, 2011; George et al., 2013). There are also
considerable costs associated with implementing proprietary programs in schools—not only monetary costs for materials, training, and support (George et al., 2013), but also opportunity costs of implementing stand-alone programs that target behavior exclusively and are not aligned with the learning goals of a school (Atkins et al., 2009). In order to implement such programs, other types of instruction or activities necessarily receive less time. These issues undoubtedly affect program adoption decisions at the school-level, and likely also teachers’ perceptions of the programs that they are asked to implement in their classrooms.

Further, decisions around program adoption can be made or influenced by a variety of individuals, including district administrators, school administrators, school personnel, and/or community members. The extent to which different stakeholders have a voice in the decision to adopt a certain program, and in how it will be implemented, can also affect teachers’ perceptions of and motivation towards that program (Durlak and DuPre, 2008). Therefore, the present study will elicit teachers’ perceptions of how and by whom programs were adopted at their school and will explore how that influences their implementation experience.

1.5.2. The Nature of Evidence

The EBP movement has been criticized with respect to the nature of the evidence underlying programs designated as effective (Weiss et al., 2008). For instance, programs are often evaluated only by their developers, in studies that do not mimic real-world conditions in urban, high-poverty neighborhoods where prevention and intervention programs are needed most. Yet organizational context and neighborhood conditions have been shown to impact program effectiveness (e.g., Aber et al., 1998; Metropolitan Area Child Study Research Group, 2002; Weissberg et al., 1981). It has also been argued that we have taken a rather narrow perspective on what it means for a program or practice to be “evidence-based,” given the emphasis on evidence generated by randomized controlled trials (RCTs) (Ramchandani et al., 2001). In the context of a school, teacher observations of students, performance
data, and a variety of scholarly research (including both experimental and quasi-experimental quantitative studies, as well as qualitative studies) represent different types of evidence that could potentially inform practice; yet the EBP movement has effectively created a hierarchy of evidence, whereby these different types of evidence are valued differently (Ramchandani et al., 2001; Thomas, 2004). As a result, most evidence-based programs implemented in schools have been evaluated in somewhat limited ways. The focus of RCTs is on effectiveness, or whether something works—frequently measured in educational research using test scores or attitude ratings (Thomas, 2004)—not necessarily for whom or why. Further, these types of evaluations do not necessarily address issues such as ease of use, the extent to which an intervention is compatible with other activities taking place in a classroom or school, or unanticipated outcomes of an intervention.

Federal legislation has itself served to reinforce this hierarchy. For instance, NCLB specified that “programs are required to use effective methods and instructional strategies that are grounded in scientifically based research. School improvement plans, professional development, and technical assistance...must be based on strategies that have a proven record of effectiveness” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 13). This focus on scientifically based research and effectiveness has lent credence to the notion that certain types of evidence are more valuable than others. It may also lead educational decision-makers to adopt programs based exclusively on their records of effectiveness without regard to the appropriateness of a program for their particular setting (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004).

1.5.2.1. Teacher perspectives on research and evidence

The perspectives of teachers with regard to research and scientific evidence constitute an important part of the context within which implementation of evidence-based programs occurs, because these perspectives may influence the ways in which teachers approach implementation. Additionally, and perhaps paradoxically, these perspectives may have developed, at least in part, as a
result of experiences that teachers have had implementing various evidence-based programs over time. For both of these reasons, it is important to understand teachers’ perspectives on research and evidence, yet only a handful of studies have addressed these issues.

Through focus group interviews, Boardman et al. (2005) found that special education teachers hold somewhat mixed feelings with respect to research evidence. Although many teachers believe it is important to use research-based practices and/or programs, and some even feel that they are not presented with research evidence often enough when being introduced to a new practice or program through professional development, they are also skeptical of the relevance and validity of the research underlying various practices and/or programs. They expressed both concerns about whether programs had been tested with populations similar to their own and concerns about the general nature of research. Several teachers indicated that they felt that research is frequently manipulated to support the agenda of the researcher and therefore is not trustworthy. Regardless of their attitudes towards research, however, most participants in this study indicated that they adopt new practices based on their usability (e.g., feasibility, adaptability) or the endorsement of other teachers rather than the scientific research supporting those practices. With respect to the sustainability of practices and/or programs, teachers spoke of the importance of informal (e.g., personal observations of student learning) rather than formal (e.g., scientific research) evidence.

Jones (2009) identified a range of attitudes towards research among novice special education teachers—from those who clearly valued scientific research and felt it should be utilized in decisions around classroom practice, to those with mixed feelings about the value of research, to those who clearly felt that it has little or no value in guiding practice. However, classroom observations revealed that individual teachers’ practices did not necessarily reflect their attitudes. Those teachers who felt very positively towards research did not necessarily apply research-based practices in their classrooms,
whereas one teacher who expressed a negative attitude towards research applied numerous research-based practices in her classroom.

Two studies conducted in the United Kingdom provide insight into potential reasons for variation in teachers’ perspectives on research evidence. Everton, Galton, and Pell (2000) surveyed both classroom practitioners and school administrators in the UK and found that certain types of educational research were more highly valued than others. In particular, school personnel rated research evidence as more valuable if it provided specific, actionable information that could be applied directly to classroom practice, either with respect to teacher-student interaction or to aspects of pedagogy such as providing feedback or conducting assessments. Williams and Coles (2007) also surveyed teachers and head teachers (school principals) in the UK and found, on the other hand, that although most respondents held relatively positive attitudes towards the value of research evidence, certain individual characteristics influenced these attitudes. In particular, more positive attitudes were expressed by teachers who had ever participated directly in research, by younger teachers (ages 20-30), by female teachers, and by head teachers as compared to classroom teachers. Further, interview data suggested that the culture of the school may impact individual classroom teachers’ attitudes towards applying scientific research in their practice, such that teacher attitudes may resemble those of administrators at their school. It is important to note, however, that some respondents indicated an awareness of being viewed by colleagues in a negative light as a result of their pro-research orientation. Williams and Coles (2007) noted that this “left little room for the full development and sharing of knowledge that would act as a stimulus to reflection and application of research ... It also left little room for the spread of good practice in finding and using research information” (p. 193). In other words, individual teachers’ perspectives on research evidence may not be as important a factor in the application of research findings to practice as the professional climate for research within the school.
In light of critiques of the nature of evidence within the EBP movement, the likelihood that teachers’ orientations towards research evidence may influence the ways in which they approach implementation of evidence-based programs, and the fact that we know incredibly little about teachers’ perspectives on these issues, the present study will explore teachers’ perspectives and experiences as they relate to the evidence (both formal and informal) underlying programs that they have implemented.
2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

My conceptualization of evidence-based teacher practice seems to differ from the implicit conceptual model that frames the dominant discourse, so a clear articulation is in order. For purposes of this inquiry, teacher practice is defined as the manner in which a teacher conducts her profession, including all the techniques or strategies that she employs in the classroom. In my view, evidence-based teacher practice should look something like evidence-based medicine in that the professional—in this case the teacher—takes into account various sources of information in making practice-related judgments (see Figure 1). These sources include the teacher’s prior professional experience in the classroom (e.g., what has/has not worked for her students in the past), her prior personal experience (e.g., as a student herself, as somebody who has worked with children in other capacities, etc.), her education, student teaching experiences, professional development, and the research evidence underlying any programs that she has been asked to implement.

Teacher practice is informed by all of this “evidence” as well as the immediate and broader context in which it takes place. The immediate context describes the classroom and consists of things like the number of students, characteristics of the students (e.g., ability levels, cultural backgrounds, motivation), and the availability of resources (e.g., time, materials, staff). The broader context resides outside of the classroom and describes the school, families, neighborhood, district, and beyond. It includes things like state learning standards, district and school priorities, the school’s curriculum, the neighborhood context (e.g., norms for behavior, SES, level of crime), the professional climate within the school, characteristics of parents (e.g., beliefs, levels of involvement), and characteristics of the school leadership (e.g., leadership style, supportiveness of teachers). Some of these contextual features are more stable (e.g., physical aspects of the classroom), some shift over relatively long periods of time (e.g., learning standards), and some are much more fluid, undergoing rapid change through classroom processes (e.g., student needs and abilities).
Figure 1. Proposed model of evidence-based teacher practice.

**Context**
- State & District Policy
- School Curricula
- Class Size
- Available Resources
- Professional Climate/Collegiality
- Neighborhood Characteristics
- Student & Parent Characteristics
- School Leadership

**Evidence**
- Education & Training
- Personal Experience
- Professional Experience
- Evidence-Based Programs

**Teacher Characteristics**
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Beliefs
- Attitudes
- Motivation

**Student Outcomes**

**Teacher Outcomes**

**Teacher Practice**
Finally, all of this information—both evidential and contextual—is filtered through the teacher herself, including her own knowledge, skills, beliefs, attitudes, and motivation. The end product is an ever-evolving classroom practice, in which the teacher constantly adjusts her practice to the changing needs of her students, given her own growing experience and developing beliefs, etc. In this view, teacher practice takes place within a dynamic system, the outcomes of which are changes experienced by teacher and students. These changes, in turn, feed back into the system as aspects of the evidence, context, and teacher characteristics that influence practice. Further, these student and teacher “outcomes” interact in complex ways. For instance, teachers may become more or less motivated or stressed in response to knowledge- or behavior-related changes in their students, and students may become more or less motivated in response to attitudes conveyed by their teacher.

This view can be contrasted with what I believe is becoming the conventional view of evidence-based practice in education, in which the teacher implements evidence-based programs. Evidence-based programs are defined here as commercially available sets of lessons and/or activities intended for implementation by the teacher, which have been shown to be effective in randomized controlled trials, and which usually require some training and/or technical assistance and often include a manual to guide implementation. From this perspective, the goal is for the programs to be implemented with a high level of fidelity, and the influence of context and teacher characteristics to be minimized. Figure 2 depicts this model, as I see it, in which various evidence-based programs make up a teacher’s practice. As you can see, evidence-based practice here rests on a substantially narrower definition of “evidence” than in the proposed model depicted in Figure 1, and the teacher’s prior experience is relegated to the category of teacher characteristics. Moreover, state and district policy, which is regarded as part of the context within the proposed model, is here elevated to the status of prime mover; it serves as the single most powerful influence over a teacher’s practice.
Figure 2. Conventional model of evidence-based teacher practice.

- **Context**
  - Class Size
  - Available Resources
  - Neighborhood Characteristics
  - Student & Parent Characteristics

- **Teacher Characteristics**
  - Prior Experience
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
  - Beliefs
  - Attitudes
  - Motivation

- **Evidence-Based Program #1** (e.g., Mathematics)
- **Evidence-Based Program #2** (e.g., English Language Arts)
- **Evidence-Based Program #3** (e.g., Science)
- **Evidence-Based Program #4** (e.g., Social Science)
- **Evidence-Based Program #5** (e.g., Social Emotional Learning)

**State & District Policy**

**Needs Assessment**

**TEACHER PRACTICE**

**STUDENT OUTCOMES**
Another important difference between the two models relates to outcomes. Whereas the proposed model recognizes the ways in which both students and teachers experience change as a result of processes related to teacher practice, the conventional model, with its focus on programs, emphasizes student outcomes only. Any ways in which teachers are influenced by implementing student-level programs are unintended and not regarded as significant.

Within the proposed model, various factors inform teacher practice but they do not come together into a rigid formula; rather the teacher is the driver in the classroom, making a multitude of decisions every day. I believe that programs may serve to minimize the teacher’s influence, essentially standardizing the educational process from classroom to classroom and school to school. Programs differ from the broader notion of curricula in that they prescribe not only learning goals and educational content, but also the means by which those goals are to be achieved. Given that the evidence underlying any “evidence-based” program is tied to a high-fidelity version of the program, implementing these programs not only discourages teachers from employing their professional judgment and creativity but also from adapting the programs in ways that may be necessary given the particulars of their classroom setting. I view the confounding of practice and programs as a potential threat to the teaching profession, in that it redefines teachers as instruments rather than agents of the educational process. Therefore, I believe it is important to explore the decisions that teachers make when implementing evidence-based programs, their subjective experiences of implementing such programs, and the ways in which programs have impacted teachers’ practice over time.
3. THE PRESENT STUDY

In summary, educators operate outside of research relationships more often than not, yet, given the nature of scholarly research, we know very little about implementation in routine practice. Much of what has been published on program implementation is specific to the context of research studies or projects in which researchers have been involved in some way, and is thus not generally representative of real-world implementation. We know astonishingly little about the implementation process that unfolds in schools most of the time, and this study promises to provide needed insight into that process. Further, much of what we know about teachers’ experiences with implementing evidence-based programs comes from feedback solicited from teachers following participation in program evaluation studies. In many cases, these data reflect only very basic measures of satisfaction with the program or perceptions of effectiveness. Some case studies have been conducted to deepen our understanding of teachers’ experiences with particular programs, yet this work has been program-specific. In other words, nobody has yet asked teachers about their experiences implementing different evidence-based programs over time, despite the very real possibility that these experiences are having a cumulative effect on teachers’ psychological well-being. These are important issues in and of themselves, but certainly important if we are to effectively strategize around ways to reduce the so-called ‘research to practice gap.’

Therefore, the overall purpose of this study is to understand and describe the experience of implementing evidence-based prevention programs for teachers at schools serving low-income, urban communities. My specific aims are to understand and describe:

1) the kinds of decisions that teachers encounter when implementing evidence-based prevention programs, and the ways in which they go about making those decisions;
2) the range of ways that teachers experience program implementation on a personal or psychological level, and their perceptions of factors that may influence this experience; and

3) the range of ways that teachers perceive their knowledge, beliefs, skills, and classroom practices to have evolved as a result of their experiences with evidence-based prevention programs.

An awareness of the importance of context permeates this study. As such, teachers’ perceptions related to the conditions under which program adoption and implementation unfold are explored throughout.
4. METHODS

4.1. Research Paradigm

I conducted a phenomenological (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990) interview study in order to understand and describe the experiences of teachers with respect to implementing evidence-based prevention programs. Phenomenology, as a research approach, acknowledges that there is no objective reality and instead focuses our attention on the “lived experience” of individuals with respect to the phenomenon of interest. As such, it is ideally suited to exploring the perspectives of teachers about the phenomenon of implementing evidence-based prevention programs.

4.2. Sampling

Teachers are the unit of analysis in this study. My sample consists of thirteen PreK-8th grade teachers across seven urban public schools who, at the time of data collection, were implementing an evidence-based prevention program that met study criteria (see below). Demographic characteristics of teachers and schools are presented in the Descriptive Results section.

For recruitment purposes, qualifying programs were: commercially available sets of lessons and/or activities that teachers implement in their classrooms, focusing primarily on the promotion of social-emotional competencies and/or the prevention of risky behaviors (e.g., related to substance use, violence, or HIV). Programs that consist solely of behavior management strategies did not qualify, because all teachers have some sort of existing behavior management approach; one of the goals of this project was to explore the ways in which teachers navigate bringing something additional—namely a prevention-oriented curricular component—into their classrooms, rather than the ways in which they experience using a new approach to doing something that they already do. In order to qualify as evidence-based, programs had to appear on at least one nationally recognized database of programs, such as IES’s What Works Clearinghouse, SAMHSA’s National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices, or the 2013 CASEL Guide released by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional
Learning. I reviewed summaries of all of the school-based prevention programs included in these three databases; from the hundreds of programs reviewed, I identified 56 that contained a classroom curricular component and could be implemented by teachers (rather than mental health providers, for instance). I used this list of 56 programs to guide my recruitment efforts. Ultimately, four qualifying programs were implemented by this sample of teachers; information about these programs is presented in the Descriptive Results section.

I employed a wide range of sampling/recruitment strategies in an effort to locate urban teachers who had first-hand experience implementing one of the 56 qualifying programs. These strategies were employed concurrently. Only those strategies that ultimately led to the successful recruitment of one or more teachers is described below.

1. I utilized my existing professional and personal networks, and reached out to doctoral students in the UIC College of Education. I asked these contacts if they knew of schools or teachers that may have implemented social and emotional learning programs or other prevention programs in the past several years. Three teachers were recruited using this strategy.

2. After learning that one particular program (Second Step) was being implemented widely throughout Chicago, I obtained a list from the CPS Office of Social & Emotional Learning of schools that had received Second Step training. I contacted principals at schools on the list and asked for permission to contact individual teachers in order to gauge their interest in participating in my project. One teacher was recruited using this strategy.

3. I attended the 2014 CPS Social-Emotional Learning Expo and made notes about the SEL programs and practices being featured by schools that attended. I then contacted principals at schools that had attended, and asked for permission to contact individual
teachers in order to gauge their interest in participating in my project. Four teachers were recruited using this strategy.

4. I conducted extensive online research, to identify schools implementing particular programs. For instance, some schools featured a qualifying program on their school website, some schools were featured on program websites, and some schools were featured on other sites (e.g., YouTube) in conjunction with implementing a particular program. I then contacted teachers directly about their potential interest in participating in my project (using publicly available contact information). Three teachers were recruited using this strategy.

5. Lastly, I conducted purposive snowball or chain sampling, in which each new teacher contact was asked to provide referrals to other potential participants. Two teachers were recruited using this strategy.

I sought to maximize variation on the basis of the particular program implemented, the grade level taught by the teacher, and her length of time in the profession. With limited success, I also sought to include both confirmatory and nonconfirmatory cases.

4.3. **Data Collection**

4.3.1. **Interviews**

After securing informed consent in compliance with UIC’s IRB procedures, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers. These interviews were guided by a prepared set of 22 questions plus additional probe questions (see Appendix A), but conducted in a flexible manner so that issues raised by teachers could be fully explored (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2002). Questions were open-ended in nature, designed to elicit rich narratives of participants’ experiences and perspectives (Czarniawska, 2004). The interview guide was piloted with a former classroom teacher to test the flow and comprehensibility of the questions. As a result, minor revisions were made to
the wording of certain items, but the overall instrument seemed to function as desired. Interviews were conducted between January and August 2014. They all took place outside of contract hours. In-person interviews were conducted with all Chicago-area participants, at a location of their choosing—typically a coffee shop. Phone interviews were conducted with the two participants located in other states. Interviews ranged in length from 44 minutes to 2 hours 50 minutes. They were recorded with a digital audio recorder and later transcribed verbatim. All participants were paid $30 for their time. Additionally, two participants were provided with a small box of homemade cookies to thank them for their time. I had intended to continue this practice for all participants; however, due to time constraints, I was not able to.

4.3.2. Memos

I made occasional notes during the interviews and created post-interview memos (Charmaz, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1994). These memos served the purpose of allowing me to record themes that I noticed emerging during the interviews, to highlight anything that stood out, and to make note of anything that felt like it might need to be clarified or further explored. These memos aided me in making a determination about whether I needed to ask follow-up questions of teachers that I had already interviewed and/or revise my interview protocol moving forward. They also served as a launching point for data analysis; I returned to them throughout the analytic process, as they helped me track the evolution of my own thinking about important concepts.

4.4. Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after they were conducted. Transcripts were then imported into ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis program. Analysis was conducted as interviews were completed, in order to determine whether follow-up interviews were needed, and in order to make any necessary revisions to the interview guide. Interview transcripts were analyzed through a continuous coding process, which is a form of content analysis, largely consistent with the procedures
outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). These procedures involved three coding phases that were iterative in nature: open coding (carefully reviewing the text to identify categories and subcategories, as well as their properties and dimensions), axial coding (exploring relationships among categories and subcategories), and selective coding (identifying the central or core themes that incorporate all existing categories in such a way as to explain the phenomenon as a whole).

I utilized both a deductive and inductive approach to analysis, such that codes and categories were both a priori (i.e., tied to my research questions and conceptual framework) and “emergent” from the data themselves. I began the analysis process with a list of five constructs that I felt were central to the aims of this study. These constructs were: school context, evidence, teacher characteristics, teacher practice, and teacher outcomes. I then developed a list of data elements related to each of these constructs—in other words, specific types of information that I felt (based on having conducted and transcribed the interviews myself) I would be able to locate within the transcripts and would inform my understanding of each construct. For instance, in relation to teacher practice, initial data elements included: program adaptations (types of changes, reasons for changes, and processes for making changes), integration of program into overall schedule, and integration of program with other subjects.

With these data elements in mind, I then read through and annotated the first two interview transcripts. Using the memo feature within ATLAS.ti, I highlighted places in the text where I noticed the aforementioned data elements. I also used memos to highlight places in the text where I noticed additional (i.e., unplanned/“emergent”) data elements. These latter memos, in particular, became a sort of dialogue with the text, in that I used this space to reflect on what I was finding and to consider the ways in which these unexpected data elements related to my research questions. After annotating the first two transcripts in this manner, I developed an initial list of codes that were primarily at the “index” level, although a few codes were already elaborated by subcodes that provided dimensionality. For instance, “Program Outcomes on Teacher” initially included subcodes reflecting two “types” or
“examples” of such outcomes—“Program Outcomes on Teacher Practices” and “Program Outcomes on Teacher Knowledge/Beliefs.” I then generated a preliminary definition/description of each code, and in some cases specified inclusion/exclusion criteria.

With this initial code directory in hand, I then re-read the first two transcripts and applied codes using the code feature within ATLAS.ti, making refinements to the directory when they felt necessary. During the formal coding of my first two interviews, relatively few changes were made to the code directory. However, as I proceeded to read through and code my remaining interviews, I made many refinements, primarily to broaden code definitions, but also by adding new codes based on new ideas that I encountered in those transcripts. Whenever new codes were created, I made a note to myself so that I could go back and re-read all previously coded text in order to apply the new codes if/where applicable.

After coding all interview transcripts, I conducted simple queries to check for consistency and accuracy of coding. In other words, I conducted queries for each code, in order to review the quotations to which I had applied each code and verify that I had applied it to similar types of information. I also further refined codes at this stage. Viewing “like” quotations together enabled me to see places where subcodes were appropriate.

I utilized various tools for the purpose of exploring relationships among codes and looking for patterns across participants (e.g., more complex queries, the Codes Co-Occurrence Table feature in ATLAS.ti, and many, many Excel tables). I also re-read transcripts and wrote memos about the overall “essence” of each, as well as similarities and differences across these “essences.” Ultimately, this process was immensely helpful as it forced me to step back and consider the overarching “story” rather than focusing exclusively on the codes that I thought were most closely related to my research questions. For instance, although I had noticed during the coding process that many teachers talked about standardized testing and the ways it impacted their teaching—and had coded for this—it was a
code that I had largely overlooked when searching for relationships among codes, because I did not perceive it as fundamentally related to my research questions. Stepping back and asking “big picture” questions (e.g., What keeps coming up and why? What are the common threads?), as well as attending to “emotional” language used by teachers (e.g., enjoy, happy, icky, frustrated), moved the analysis forward from codes and categories to themes. Additional memos and tables helped to clarify the main themes with respect to relationships among the codes they comprise.

4.5. **Data Quality**

Two important and related goals for qualitative researchers are: 1) “confirmability”—that their interpretations be grounded as much as possible in the data and not in their own biases, and 2) “credibility”—that the research findings reflect the “truth,” or, within a phenomenological research paradigm, the phenomenon as it has been experienced by participants (Guba, 1981). In the present study, peer debriefings and member-checking together enhanced data quality with regard to these issues.

Frequent debriefing sessions with my academic advisor and other members of my research team served as ongoing checks on my emerging coding framework, themes, developing insights, and interpretations. Giving others an opportunity to analyze segments of interview transcripts and engaging in discussion about our differing perspectives helped me to challenge my assumptions and interpretations of the data, and allowed others to contribute alternative interpretations. The goal of this process was not to reach a specified level of inter-rater reliability; rather the goal was for different individuals with different perspectives to engage with the data and discuss their different interpretations. As Barbour (2001) explains:

...the degree of concordance between researchers is not really important; what is ultimately of value is the content of disagreements and the insights that discussion can provide for refining coding frames. The greatest potential of multiple coding lies in its capacity to furnish alternative
interpretations and thereby to act as...“devil's advocate”...in alerting researchers to all potentially competing explanations. Such exercises encourage thoroughness, both in interrogating the data at hand and in providing an account of how an analysis was developed.

(p. 1116)

Additionally, engaging in a member-checking process gave participants the opportunity to assess the extent to which my interpretations of the data reflected their actual experience. I reached out to all thirteen participants in March 2016 to inquire about their availability and willingness to provide feedback on my overall findings/interpretations, taking care to convey that I viewed their feedback as an integral part of the research process. Ultimately, five teachers participated in the member-checking process, and all indicated that my findings indeed reflected their experience as well as that of many other teachers they know. Several of them also contributed additional insights, which were incorporated into the results.

Finally, confirmability can be enhanced by transparency with respect to the presentation of results. In other words, in writing about the findings of this study, I have provided evidence alongside my interpretations and conclusions so that any reader can judge for themselves the extent to which the findings are grounded in the data.
5. RESULTS

This study sought to explore the experiences of teachers as they navigated the implementation of evidence-based prevention programs. In particular, it sought to understand and describe the experiences of teachers at schools serving low-income, urban communities, with a focus on: (1) the kinds of implementation decisions teachers make, (2) their personal/psychological experience with program implementation, and (3) the range of ways that teachers perceive themselves changed as a result of implementing such programs.

Interviews were conducted with thirteen teachers, and audio recordings of those interviews were transcribed and analyzed as outlined in the Methods section. Those analyses revealed that for many teachers, their encounter with the evidence-based prevention program they were implementing coincided with their first encounter with social-emotional learning (SEL). Moreover, this encounter with SEL was more salient for many teachers than the fact that the program they were implementing was evidence-based. The SEL-ness of the program overwhelmingly shaped their experience; as such, my results heavily emphasize teachers’ experiences with implementing an SEL program and “doing SEL” with their students.

Through encountering and implementing an evidence-based SEL/prevention program,¹ many teachers perceived themselves transformed both personally, with regard to their thoughts, beliefs, and skills, and professionally, with regard to how they practice teaching. A broader transformation made these individual-level changes possible—namely, a change in the culture, norms, or expectations/obligations of teaching spurred by what I will call the social-emotional learning (SEL) movement. This broader change, affecting the teacher’s role, both introduced teachers to a new way of thinking and

¹ Throughout the results and discussion, these terms will be used interchangeably and often in combination.
created the space for teachers to transform their teaching practice in a way that they felt would more fully address their students’ needs. Evidence-based SEL/prevention programs served to: 1) facilitate the process of transforming one’s teaching practice, 2) demonstrate to some teachers, and confirm for others, that this transformed practice is important, and 3) provide teachers with the skills necessary to sustain their new teaching approach into their future careers.

Findings are organized into four main sections. First I present descriptive information about the teachers, schools, and programs, to help put the rest of my findings into context. Next I discuss the ways in which the SEL movement has transformed the role of the teacher. Then I discuss the ways in which teachers perceived themselves personally transformed by their experience with an SEL/prevention program. And finally, I discuss the ways in which teachers perceived their teaching practice to have transformed through this experience, as well as the bidirectional relationship between teachers’ personal and professional transformations. Although these findings heavily emphasize my third research question—regarding how teachers perceive themselves changed—information about teachers’ subjective experiences with implementation, and the kinds of implementation decisions that they made, are both woven throughout the discussion.

5.1. **Descriptive Results**

5.1.1. **Teachers**

My sample of thirteen teachers represented a range of grade levels/teaching roles, years of teaching experience, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. It was less diverse with respect to gender (92% female); however, this largely reflects the gender breakdown among teachers nationwide. A 2011-2012 study found that 89% of primary school teachers and 72% of middle school teachers were female (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Six teachers taught regular K-8 grades/subjects, one teacher taught Pre-K, and one teacher was hired as a technology/resource teacher with the explicit expectation that she would also provide supplemental SEL support as part of her role. Interestingly, although total years of teaching
experience ranged from 2 to 20 ($M = 7.9, SD = 6.34$), teachers in this sample were relatively new to their current schools, with years at current school ranging from 1 to 9 ($M = 3.3, SD = 2.43$). This is consistent with the documented high rates of turnover for urban teachers (Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2004). Teachers were all currently implementing the program that we discussed, either at the time of the interview or during the immediately preceding school year (in the case of interviews that occurred during the summer). Table 1 summarizes key characteristics of teachers.

Additionally, teachers varied with respect to how different the program they encountered at their school was, relative to their past experience. In other words, for some teachers, the program presented a new and different way of doing things. For others, it felt very consistent with what they had done previously, and perhaps even employed certain practices that they had already used. At the extreme ends of this range, two teachers (15%) had previously implemented a formal SEL program, whereas two teachers (15%) made a point of saying that the program they encountered at their school felt very new and/or eye-opening for them. Six teachers (46%) fell somewhere in the middle; three indicated that practices from the program aligned well with what they were already doing in their classrooms (e.g., morning meetings), two indicated that content from the program aligned well with things they already focused on in their classrooms (e.g., feelings) or things that they had previously touched upon in a less structured way (e.g., self-improvement), and one indicated simply that aspects of the program felt consistent with what she already did in terms of building relationships with her students. Finally, three teachers (23%) did not discuss the extent to which the program aligned with their prior experience.

Teachers did not vary much with respect to their knowledge of and involvement in the program selection process. Only one teacher was directly involved in this process at her school and knew exactly why that particular program had been chosen. Given how new most teachers were to their current schools, the vast majority (69%) arrived at their school after the program had been selected, and either
<table>
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<td>96.6% Black</td>
<td>87.4% Low Inc</td>
<td>Y - 2013</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001*</td>
<td>Ms. A</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>12, 9</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>PK-8 Magnet</td>
<td>288 students</td>
<td>99.7% Black</td>
<td>88.5% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Ms. G</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>14, 2</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>PK-8 Magnet</td>
<td>288 students</td>
<td>99.7% Black</td>
<td>88.5% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Ms. C</td>
<td>Pre-K</td>
<td>3, 3</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>K-7 Charter</td>
<td>680 students</td>
<td>79.6% Hispanic</td>
<td>28.4% LEP</td>
<td>64.8% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3001*</td>
<td>Ms. J</td>
<td>3rd grade</td>
<td>8, 2</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>K-7 Charter</td>
<td>680 students</td>
<td>79.6% Hispanic</td>
<td>28.4% LEP</td>
<td>64.8% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3002</td>
<td>Ms. B</td>
<td>2nd grade</td>
<td>2, 2</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>PK-8</td>
<td>490 students</td>
<td>79.8% Black</td>
<td>76.1% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
<td>Broadview, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4001*</td>
<td>Ms. K</td>
<td>8th grade Language Arts</td>
<td>10, 8</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>PK-8</td>
<td>490 students</td>
<td>79.8% Black</td>
<td>76.1% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
<td>Broadview, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5001</td>
<td>Ms. Me</td>
<td>K-8th grade Technology/ Resource 3rd grade</td>
<td>2, 1</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>PK-8</td>
<td>600 students</td>
<td>90.8% Hispanic</td>
<td>40.5% LEP</td>
<td>64.8% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5002*</td>
<td>Ms. Mu</td>
<td>K-8th grade Technology/ Resource 3rd grade</td>
<td>3, 3</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>PK-8</td>
<td>600 students</td>
<td>90.8% Hispanic</td>
<td>40.5% LEP</td>
<td>64.8% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5003*</td>
<td>Ms. Ra</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>2, 2</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>PK-8</td>
<td>600 students</td>
<td>90.8% Hispanic</td>
<td>40.5% LEP</td>
<td>64.8% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5004</td>
<td>Ms. Mu</td>
<td>6th-8th grade Math (8th grade Homeroom)</td>
<td>18, 2</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>PK-8</td>
<td>600 students</td>
<td>90.8% Hispanic</td>
<td>40.5% LEP</td>
<td>64.8% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6001</td>
<td>Mr. T</td>
<td>6th grade Math</td>
<td>5, 2</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>K-8 Charter</td>
<td>525 students</td>
<td>64.19% White</td>
<td>20.95% Black</td>
<td>29.9% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8001</td>
<td>Ms. Ro</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>20, 3</td>
<td>Belizean of African descent</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>PK-5 Educare Learning Complex</td>
<td>314 students</td>
<td>64.19% White</td>
<td>20.95% Black</td>
<td>29.9% Low Inc</td>
<td>N - 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Teacher participated in the member-checking process, March-April 2016. ** Years of teaching experience were rounded up, so if the interview took place during a teacher’s 3rd year, the number shown would be 3.
had no idea how it had come to be there, or had just a general impression about the history. In fact, seven teachers (54%) arrived at their school after implementation had already begun. Three teachers (23%) were part of their school’s SEL leadership team during the current or most recent school year. Table 2 summarizes information about the implementation context from the teacher’s perspective, including information about the teacher’s involvement in program selection.

### 5.1.2. Schools

My sample of thirteen teachers represented seven schools, of which two (29%) were standard public schools, two (29%) were public magnet schools, two (29%) were public charter schools, and one was a learning complex consisting of a public elementary school and an early childhood center. Four schools (57%) were located in Chicago, IL; the other three were located in Illinois just outside of Chicago, in Pittsburgh, PA, and in Atlanta, GA. Four schools (57%) had a predominantly African American student body and two (29%) had a predominantly Latino student body; the last school was more diverse with respect to race/ethnicity. All but one school served a predominantly low-income population (i.e., over 60% of the student body received free or reduced price lunch). Table 1 summarizes key characteristics of schools.

Every single teacher described their school in glowing terms. The professional climates of the seven schools were described, across the board, using words like “incredible,” “supportive,” “like family,” “collaborative,” and “close-knit.” For two unrelated teachers, their school was not only like family, it also included actual family members; both had sisters who taught there at the time. Additionally, every teacher felt that their administrators granted them a lot of flexibility, discretion, or freedom with regard to teaching in general; however, in the course of conversation it became clear that different teachers meant different things by this. For instance, many teachers explained that they could add their creativity to existing curricula, or spend extra time on a concept if students didn’t quite understand it, whereas one teacher indicated that he basically had free rein to do anything he wanted in
TABLE II.  KEY ASPECTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Prog.</th>
<th>Teacher involvement/understanding of circumstances surrounding program adoption?</th>
<th>Did the school have an SEL leadership team?</th>
<th>Was the school doing anything SEL-related above and beyond the program?</th>
<th>Were there any unusual circumstances that could have affected implementation?</th>
<th>What did the teacher recall about the training she received for the program?</th>
<th>How was implementation structured at the school / what did teachers understand was expected of them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1001</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Program was already being implemented when she arrived at the school; she was not aware of the circumstances surrounding program adoption, although she believed that the previous school counselor was the one who brought it in.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>This did not come up.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. W</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>The program was one component of a larger SEL emphasis at the school (“We have the Second Step program throughout the day, but we expect you to live it”). She mentioned that students in the school got SEL stickers when “caught being your best,” and that SEL prizes were announced over the intercom each week. They also do CHAMPS (schoolwide behavior management).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. W</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>Her school was a welcoming school this year; it merged with the “rival” school down the street. It doubled in size, got new staff, and she described many of the new students as being very “low” skilled. She indicated that her school was a model school for Second Step; someone came in during the previous school year and videotaped teachers implementing the program.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. W</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>It was a half-day training, very hands-on, very thorough. The trainer familiarized her with the materials, showed her how to implement the lessons, went over what was/was not optional, and included pointers on how to modify certain activities if necessary (e.g., given time/resource constraints).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. W</td>
<td>4th grade</td>
<td>She was expected to implement the program once per week, during world studies time. When I asked her what she thought the program trainer would say about the ways in which she adapted the program, she responded, “I really think they would say, you know, You’re the teacher, you gotta do what fits.”</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>She was at the school when the program was adopted (she thinks in 2009). Her recollection was that an administrator and 2 teachers attended a series of CASEL PDs, and from there they decided to adopt the program. She wasn’t aware of the specifics.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Two teachers and an administrator attended a number of CASEL PDs around the time that implementation began, and one teacher served as the school’s SEL coordinator throughout implementation.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. A</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>Each classroom had an SEL peace center, unrelated to Second Step.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. A</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>Her school was featured in a Second Step video on YouTube. Both CASEL and Second Step program staff had come to observe (but not evaluate) implementation. The school was slated to be closed the prior school year but at the last minute it wasn’t; she attributed this to the school’s strong emphasis on SEL.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. A</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>She recalled being trained and seeing different “examples,” but didn’t remember any details. Indicated that it might have been someone from Second Step who trained them, or it might have been a fellow teacher, she couldn’t remember.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. A</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>She was expected to implement the program once per week in place of a social studies lesson. Her administration also required that teachers integrate SEL, in some way, into all content area lessons. Teachers turned in a checklist once each quarter to their SEL coordinator, outlining what Second Step lessons they did and when, how they went, and what other SEL activities they incorporated into their classroom. She perceived the program to be scripted, but not in a rigid sort of way; she saw it as a guide and felt that this was how it was presented in the beginning.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Prog.</td>
<td>Teacher involvement/understanding of circumstances surrounding program adoption?</td>
<td>Did the school have an SEL-related leadership team?</td>
<td>Was the school doing anything SEL-related above and beyond the program?</td>
<td>Were there any unusual circumstances that could have affected implementation?</td>
<td>What did the teacher recall about the training she received for the program?</td>
<td>How was implementation structured at the school / what did teachers understand was expected of them?</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 Ms. G 4th grade</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Program was already being implemented when she arrived at the school; she perceived it as being in place for 2-3 years prior to her arrival. She perceived that the school was considered a “pilot school for social-emotional learning,” and that the program was brought in as a supplement to what they were already doing.</td>
<td>This did not come up</td>
<td>Each classroom had an SEL Peace Center, unrelated to Second Step, where kids could go to calm down when they couldn’t handle their emotions, or to work out a problem with a peer.</td>
<td>The school was slated to be closed the prior school year but at the last minute it wasn’t; she attributed this to the school’s strong emphasis on SEL. She indicated that the school is a model school for SEL, and that teachers from Chicago and beyond have come to observe.</td>
<td>There was a brief workshop (about 1 hour) where someone from the district came and trained the teachers on the program. She remembered seeing a slideshow and going through maybe two of the lessons.</td>
<td>She was expected to implement the program once per week, and it was up to her to fit it in. Her principal also expected teachers to incorporate SEL into every lesson, regardless of content area. She perceived this integration expectation to be related to the Illinois learning standards for social-emotional learning. She recalled that the program was presented with the tone of “follow the script,” but that it also felt very straightforward and manageable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Ms. C Pre-K</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Program was already being implemented when she arrived at the school; she perceived it as being in place for 1-2 years prior to her arrival. She was under the impression that the principal had learned about the program through a university class and decided to bring it back to the school. She believed that the program was brought in first, and then all of the other SEL activities (e.g., the mentoring program, etc.) had followed suit (this is the opposite of teacher 2002’s impression).</td>
<td>She mentioned an SEL committee at the school, which one of the kindergarten teachers was part of. She indicated that she would go to that “really knowledgeable” teacher if she had any questions about the program.</td>
<td>She described “SEL days” at the school, special t-shirts, “birthday shout-outs,” and a mentoring program, indicating that SEL was infused throughout the culture of the school. Like her colleagues (above), there was a Peace Place in her classroom, where kids could go to calm down before returning to the group. She, the program fit well with other things that she was already doing in her classroom (e.g., a focus on feelings).</td>
<td>As a Pre-K teacher, she had an assistant in the room. Like her colleagues (above), she noted that the school frequently had visitors who came to observe the teachers implement Second Step and learn about the different ways that they support their kids through SEL. Like her colleagues, she mentioned that the school was spared from closure because it was regarded as a model school for SEL. She also mentioned that Pre-K through 3rd grades were part of a pilot for the Second Step safety/child protection program (e.g., good touch, bad touch).</td>
<td>There was a “full-blown” PD about the program, where a woman came out to speak to them about it, showed them “the different materials and the different grade levels and that sort of thing.”</td>
<td>She implemented the program once per week. It was built into her schedule for Thursdays, but she felt free to move things around if necessary. She perceived the program to be “scripted” but flexible enough that she could add her own personality and her own “two cents” to it. She was initially given the kindergarten version of the program kit and had to adapt it for her students; later that year she received the early childhood version.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Teacher involvement/understanding of circumstances surrounding program adoption?</td>
<td>Did the school have an SEL leadership team?</td>
<td>Was the school doing anything SEL-related above and beyond the program?</td>
<td>Were there any unusual circumstances that could have affected implementation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3001 Ms. J</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Program was already being implemented when she arrived at the school. Her impression was simply that her administrators had seen a need for it among their students, were aware that other schools were using it and seeing positive results, and so they brought it in.</td>
<td>There was a Dean of SEL as well as an SEL committee of teachers.</td>
<td>The school was also implementing Responsive Classroom, Cloud Nine (a curriculum that integrates character traits into subject areas), and various other SEL-related practices (e.g., Peace Path for conflict resolution, a “calm classroom” technique delivered over the announcements every morning, schoolwide “focus weeks” that address a particular issue—such as kindness—and have activities throughout the week, etc.). Additionally, they had PBIS.</td>
<td>She co-taught.</td>
<td>She didn’t recall receiving any “formal” training. During “summer launch,” before school started, there was “a ten minute thing” where she was given her kit and had an opportunity to ask questions.</td>
<td>There was a 20-minute SEL block built into every morning; this is when they implemented Second Step. But from the beginning they were encouraged to reinforce ideas throughout the day and help students apply the skills. Together, her team planned their year-long implementation schedule (i.e., to ensure they could fit in all the lessons). She perceived the program as “very scripted,” but also flexible in terms of incorporating additional things. They had a 20-min block every morning for teaching Second Step. From the beginning, schoolwide implementation differed slightly from the program’s design—e.g., due to time constraints, the long-term plan (created by another teacher, she believed) split lessons across multiple days. Originally, they were expected to “follow the lesson plans,” but based on teacher feedback, the Dean of SEL gave them freedom/discretion with regard to implementation—essentially, do whatever you think is best, we trust you. She then perceived the program materials as a resource rather than a script.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3002 Ms. B 2nd grade</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Program had already been implemented for one year when she arrived at the school. It was her understanding that the social worker/Dean of SEL brought the program in, although she didn’t know any specifics.</td>
<td>She seemed to suggest that teachers rotated, each quarter, with regard to SEL planning for the school.</td>
<td>She described her school as having a strong focus on SEL. They were implementing Responsive Classroom alongside Second Step. There were also a number of schoolwide SEL-related practices that were encouraged, such as the Peace Path, Stop-Think-Act, etc. This teacher actually found all these different things potentially quite confusing (“Where sometimes programs on top of programs, and so much language, that I think it’s maybe too much”).</td>
<td>She described her school as being a “young” charter, only in its fifth year, and perceived that, as a result, policies were constantly changing (however, other teachers at non-charters said similar things). When we spoke, the school was still in the process of adding a grade level each year and not yet at full capacity.</td>
<td>At their 3-week “summer launch” the year she started, all the new teachers got trained on SEL and the Second Step program. She described it as just an overview of the program, provided by their Dean of SEL. All teachers are also required to do the Second Step online training every year as a refresher.</td>
<td>From the beginning, schoolwide implementation differed slightly from the program’s design—e.g., due to time constraints, the long-term plan (created by another teacher, she believed) split lessons across multiple days. Originally, they were expected to “follow the lesson plans,” but based on teacher feedback, the Dean of SEL gave them freedom/discretion with regard to implementation—essentially, do whatever you think is best, we trust you. She then perceived the program materials as a resource rather than a script.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3003 Mr. L 3rd grade</td>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Program had already been implemented for a year when he arrived at the school. His impression was simply that his administrators had seen a need for it among their students, were aware that other schools were using it and seeing positive results, and so they brought it in.</td>
<td>There was a Dean of SEL as well as an SEL committee of teachers.</td>
<td>The school was also implementing Responsive Classroom, Cloud Nine (a curriculum that integrates character traits into subject areas), and various other SEL-related practices (e.g., Peace Path for conflict resolution, a “calm classroom” technique delivered over the announcements every morning, schoolwide “focus weeks” that address a particular issue—such as kindness—and have activities throughout the week, etc.). Additionally, they had PBIS.</td>
<td>She co-taught.</td>
<td>She described her school as having a strong focus on SEL. They were implementing Responsive Classroom alongside Second Step. There were also a number of schoolwide SEL-related practices that were encouraged, such as the Peace Path, Stop-Think-Act, etc. This teacher actually found all these different things potentially quite confusing (“Where sometimes programs on top of programs, and so much language, that I think it’s maybe too much”).</td>
<td>They had a 20-min block every morning for teaching Second Step. From the beginning, schoolwide implementation differed slightly from the program’s design—e.g., due to time constraints, the long-term plan (created by another teacher, she believed) split lessons across multiple days. Originally, they were expected to “follow the lesson plans,” but based on teacher feedback, the Dean of SEL gave them freedom/discretion with regard to implementation—essentially, do whatever you think is best, we trust you. She then perceived the program materials as a resource rather than a script.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Prog.</td>
<td>Teacher involvement/understanding of circumstances surrounding program adoption?</td>
<td>Did the school have an SEL leadership team?</td>
<td>Was the school doing anything SEL-related above and beyond the program?</td>
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<td>What did the teacher recall about the training she received for the program?</td>
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</table>
| 4001 Ms. K 8th grade (Language Arts) | SS   | When we spoke, the school had just finished year 3 of implementation. It was the previous social worker who had brought in the program. Her impression was that this was in response to the new Illinois social-emotional learning standards. At the time, they were still working on crafting what they thought SEL should look like and this program seemed like a good starting point ("just because something was better than nothing at the time"). The social worker had said that the program was intended to "tighten up the homeroom time. We’re gonna make it more of a social-emotional thing."
<p>| | | This did not come up. | | | | | The program was implemented only by the middle school grades (6th-8th). The social worker “pushed in” and co-taught the Second Step lessons with the teacher. A 30-min block was set aside for SEL every third day. Although she tried really following the cards closely at first, the program was not presented to teachers as rigid, but rather as “this is the support.” Teachers were encouraged to &quot;mix things up&quot; and make them their own. In fact, when she then checked in with the social worker regarding changes she wanted to make, she was told, “It’s more important to make sure that the kids are having honest discussions, and really talking about a lot of these issues and a lot of these topics, more than it’s important for us to stick to the script. It’s gotta be useful.” |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Prog.</th>
<th>Teacher involvement/understanding of circumstances surrounding program adoption?</th>
<th>Did the school have an SEL leadership team?</th>
<th>Was the school doing anything SEL-related above and beyond the program?</th>
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<th>How was implementation structured at the school / what did teachers understand was expected of them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Me Technology/Resource</td>
<td>CSC</td>
<td>She arrived at the school as implementation began, after the decision to adopt this program had been made. Her understanding was that the school had been approached by a community agency to implement the program as part of a pilot, and that her principal was very open to anything that might help the students through the recent merger (see &quot;Were there any unusual circumstances...?&quot;). The principal presented the program as a way to bring in additional resources to support SEL. She described her principal as being invested in SEL, talking about it with teachers all the time. She referenced doing supplemental SEL-related things outside of the program (e.g., sending teachers to PDs on restorative justice) but it wasn’t clear if there were any SEL-related activities, beyond the different components of the CSC program (buddy activities, home-side activities, parent cafes), happening for the students at the time. When we spoke, the school was in the process of planning out more targeted supports for high-risk students (e.g., SEL book clubs for tier 2 students). Her sister was also a teacher at this school at the time. This teacher had implemented a formal SEL program at her previous school. There were a number of recent changes for this school: 1) the school was closed the prior year and had moved/merged with a new school this past year; 2) the new building was also shared by a separate middle school; and 3) the preschool was moved to a different building, but the principal still oversaw it, so she divided her time between the two buildings (~1 mile apart). Finally, they were in the process of transitioning to a dual-language school when I spoke with this teacher; that change was slated to take place that same fall. They had a lot of PDs that addressed adult social-emotional development. It sounded like they had PDs addressing specific topic areas covered by the program (e.g., one for bullying, etc.). Additionally, the Caring School Community people came out twice to provide professional development and/or coaching support to the teachers. This was the school’s 2nd year implementing SEL, but the first year using the actual program. This teacher was hired as the Technology Instructor, but also to provide SEL support to students (together with the art teacher)—particularly the 7th and 8th graders, because the CSC program only goes up to 6th. So, the 7th and 8th graders were participating in classroom meetings (based on the 6th grade version) with their homeroom teachers, and then this teacher and the art teacher were expected to hold supplemental small group meetings once per month; however they had a lot of flexibility and opted to do this much more often, which was fine with the principal. This teacher felt that the program was presented as required but flexible. She noted that there was very limited accountability. In the very beginning of the year, all of the resource teachers (e.g., science, art, music, gym, etc.) rotated through all the homerooms to participate in the classroom meetings, in order to make it truly schoolwide.</td>
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<td>Ms. Mo</td>
<td>CSC</td>
<td>This teacher was directly involved in program adoption. The school was part of a Safe Schools pilot program grant that her principal had applied for, and they had just finished year 2 of the pilot when we spoke. During year 1 the leadership team had worked to establish a “single school culture” while exploring program options with the help of outside people (she wasn’t sure who they were, perhaps from a community organization). Flexibility was one of several reasons why they chose this program. This teacher may have unknowingly spurred program adoption. During her first year at the school, she began doing morning meetings with her class (something she had learned about during her student teaching). Her principal noticed how well it seemed to be working, encouraged all teachers to begin doing these meetings, and also applied for the grant around that same time.</td>
<td>Yes, this teacher was co-leader of the leadership team, which met monthly and included several classroom teachers, the bilingual lead teacher, a social worker, the school counselor/case manager, and a parent. During year 2, it also included some of the resource teachers.</td>
<td>During the first year of the grant, before the CSC program was implemented, they did CHAMPS.</td>
<td>This teacher was implementing morning meetings prior to program implementation. She described the school as experiencing a lot of changes in the prior 2-3 years (including a school merger); as a result, many teachers were relatively new to the school, and the racial/ethnic composition of the school changed. It was formerly predominantly Latino, but now there are a lot of new African American and White students (she mentioned that this issue of race was something they tried to address through the program, but without having any program lesson cards that actually touched upon this topic).</td>
<td>She mentioned that they had coaches during the first year of the grant, before the CSC curriculum was brought in, but it’s unclear what role those coaches filled. Then, at the beginning of the year that had just ended when we spoke, when the curriculum was formally introduced at the school, a representative from the CSC program came out for a day, introduced all of the teachers to the curriculum, and modeled some activities for/with the teachers.</td>
<td>They had a 30-minute SEL block built into their schedule, 3 days a week, intended for classroom meetings. Teachers initially had trouble keeping meetings to this length (they often went much longer); during the February training they were coached to instead try holding only one full meeting towards the beginning of each week, and using 5-10 min “check-in” meetings each afternoon. She perceived the classroom meeting component of the program as very guided/structured for the first 8 weeks; after that, it served more as a resource. She perceived the lesson cards to be scripted, but felt free to deliver the “gist” of what they said. The 7th and 8th grades used the 6th grade version of the curriculum, which was a decision made in collaboration with a trainer. Like her colleague (above), she noted that the resource teachers rotated in during the initial weeks of implementation.</td>
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<td>5003 Ms. Ra 4th grade</td>
<td>CSC</td>
<td>(She was at the school the year that the decision to adopt this program was made.) Her impression was that the school was chosen to participate in a “social-emotional learning pilot program,” and that the pilot program chose the CSC program to be implemented in this school. She explained that it was a slow process, where year 1 was dedicated to getting buy-in for SEL, and then year 2 was bringing in the actual CSC program, as an SEL resource. Her principal was on board with the whole thing.</td>
<td>Yes; she views it as a valuable resource. The leadership team checked in periodically to see how things were going, if teachers needed any help, etc.</td>
<td>She continued to do morning meetings every morning, based on what had become the norm in the school the year before the CSC program was brought in (see teacher 5002 – Teacher involvement/understanding of circumstances surrounding program adoption?). She wasn’t sure if everyone continued doing those morning meetings, but she did, in addition to the more problem-focused meetings that are part of the CSC program.</td>
<td>A team came in to train them; she wasn’t sure who exactly they were. &quot;It was at the beginning of the year, and we had a really, like, good conversation about it.” A team came back in December and actually implemented a classroom meeting with students, so the teachers could see how to facilitate the conversation. She found this immensely helpful.</td>
<td>Year 1, implementation was just “setting the foundation of the program in our school, like, what SEL was in general.” She began implementing morning meetings at the suggestion of teacher 5002. Year 2 was with the CSC program. She perceived the first weeks of the year as being set in terms of topics, and then later the teacher had more freedom/disccretion, “you can take it anywhere you’d like.” At the same time, she felt that the meetings were designed to be “structured.” So I think she viewed the structure as being somewhat important to maintain, but conducive to almost any topic/issue that she might want to address with it. That said, once the initial weeks were over, she wasn’t exactly sure how often she should be having meetings. When the training team came back in December, they addressed those lingering questions. They had a 15-minute SEL block built into their schedule, first thing every morning. They also implemented the buddy component of the program, which she perceived as flexible, and the home-side activities, which went out on a regular schedule, usually prompted by a reminder from the leadership team. Finally, she perceived that the school had a lot of discretion with regard to what the parent involvement component of the program looked like.</td>
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<td>Ms. Mu 6th-8th grade Math (8th grade Homeroom)</td>
<td>CSC</td>
<td>The decision to adopt this program was made before she arrived at the school, and she was not aware of how that happened. But her principal was &quot;completely on board with the program.&quot;</td>
<td>Yes, and she was selected to be part of the team.</td>
<td>The leadership team had some discussions about embedding these concepts into academic content areas, and not having it be so isolated. But that hasn’t necessarily happened yet, or at least not schoolwide.</td>
<td>Similar to teacher 5001, this teacher’s sister also works at the school. Nothing else came up.</td>
<td>She attended a PD on SEL shortly after starting at the school mid-year (during year 1 of the grant). Through word of mouth, she came to understand what was meant by “class meetings” (the kind that preceded the CSC program). Then before school started the following year, she attended a PD on the CSC program specifically, and they took her through the process of facilitating a meeting, which was immensely helpful. The two people who conducted the PD were &quot;working very closely with the school.&quot; She later referenced having been trained (as part of CSC) on what to do if you observe bullying outside of class, but I’m not sure when this happened (i.e., if part of the initial PD or a later one).</td>
<td>When she first arrived mid-year, she learned that everyone was supposed to be doing &quot;class meetings,&quot; but she had no idea what that meant, and the CSC kits weren’t in the building yet. When the CSC program was presented the following year, it was done so in a way that made it seem flexible. The kit only went up to 6th grade, so she had to adapt it for her students; she felt that this was expected/ permitted. She did perceive the cards to be scripted, but she tailored them to her students. I think she perceived the structure to be important to maintain, but the examples, etc., more flexible. Teachers were expected to send home a home-side activity every 2 weeks, but they could choose among activities. She may have viewed the buddy component of the program as more of a suggestion than a requirement; the frequency of buddy activities was at the teacher’s discretion. She did the CSC meetings/lessons 3 days per week in the afternoon, when she had her homeroom group for their 40-minute social studies period. I don’t think she received any guidance about how/when to fit it in, but she felt that her principal would probably be ok with how she did it (i.e., by skipping social studies on those days). Social studies was often integrated with language arts, so it wasn’t lost entirely. The kit covered only the first 8 weeks; after that, she perceived that she had to make up her own lessons (her colleagues had a different perception of this). The art and computer teachers were there to help with SEL; they worked with individual classes, every other week, around SEL-related topics.</td>
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<td>6001</td>
<td>OBPP</td>
<td>The program had been in place at the school long before he arrived. He didn’t know the history, but assumed it was because it was such a well-researched program.</td>
<td>Not initially. At some point after he arrived, a group formed (1 person from each grade level team) that tried to envision next steps for the program at their school. They met with a program consultant; together they designed a program that fit the Olweus requirements but also “respected what we did as a school” and fit the needs of the students.</td>
<td>His understanding was that the school had always had morning meetings, and then they added in the Olweus program later on. Schoolwide they had PBS, which took the form of a Principal’s 100 Club (i.e., recognizing students for good work or for doing something out of the ordinary). But this wasn’t utilized much by middle school teachers. Instead, he and his grade-level team created their own systems for celebrating their community [of students]. They recognized students monthly for perseverance, commitment, community membership, and empathy (they chose these areas as a team) to celebrate “the strides that students are taking to, uh, become better people.” And rather than just announcing each reward, they identified the specific things that the student did to show the quality. His team also did conflict resolution meetings, which they were trying to push out to the school at large. He perceived that the expectations at the school were that teachers should not just cover content, even during academic lessons.</td>
<td>Two years prior, when he first came to the school, it had just separated from the charter management company that was overseeing it; it is now self-managed. He co-taught. Also, they “looped,” so he was with the same “home base” students 2 years in a row, and had a chance to build strong relationships with them. He’s always done morning meetings, even before coming to this school. The program was presented to him during a meeting, where they were going over the results of a school culture poll that was part of the program. The program was already in place, but the poll showed that a lot of students still felt like teachers didn’t really do much to help with student problems; students felt teachers were very lackadaisical whenever it came to addressing real issues. So it was fairly early when he and his team (all new) decided that they couldn’t just implement it as is, b/c it obviously wasn’t working as is.</td>
<td>Although he was given documentation related to the program (a written overview and lesson plans that followed), and somebody did sort of explain it to him, nobody trained him on how to implement it. He really learned about it more from his students, who knew the program very well by that time. His “training” coincided with the school’s transition to being self-managed, so he suspects the training piece just didn’t get the attention it otherwise might have gotten.</td>
<td>He was first told that the program was to be implemented once every week, at some point. Later they were told it was to be done on Mondays (presumably to make it easier to monitor implementation). For him, this just replaced his regular morning meeting that he would have been doing already, but gave it a more specific focus. It never felt rigid to him, although he and his team did initially try to implement it “as is.” When they saw that the students weren’t engaged and/or weren’t getting much out of it, they asked around and were told that it was meant to be more of a framework to build upon. So then they tried adapting the program—maintaining the key concepts, but trying to structure lessons that would help students apply those concepts. Schoolwide, they had bullying prevention forms for reporting instances of bullying. Essentially, a student can fill out a form that goes through the counseling program.</td>
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<td>Ms. Ro Kinder.</td>
<td>Prog. 4Rs</td>
<td>The program was in place at the school long before she arrived. She knew nothing about the history; she was told only that “this is the program we implement.” Her principal felt very positively about the program.</td>
<td>She described her principal as being “big on celebrating what’s good and talking about what’s not so good.” This seemed to be reflected in both how she conducted all of their PDs and staff meetings, and in certain schoolwide practices (e.g., parent prep rallies). She also mentioned several schoolwide behavioral systems/practices that they use (PBS, Dojo – an online system that allows you to award points to different classrooms, Vine of Kindness – recognizing acts of kindness, etc.)</td>
<td>She felt that she had received “a lot” of training on this program: 1) an initial training for new teachers (delivered by a woman from New York), 2) somebody who observed once a month and gave teachers feedback, and 3) continuing professional development once a month (“we go to a program that’s connected to 4R, where some of the same modules, um, and some of the same strategies, we’re participating in”). She also mentioned coaches, but didn’t provide any details about this aspect of the implementation support.</td>
<td>There was a block of time (Mondays, 8:00-8:45) built into their schedule for implementing the program. It cut into their math time, but they added 25 extra minutes of math to the schedule on some other day. It was all worked out for her.</td>
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his classroom, including discard the math curriculum given to him and create his own if he felt it could be more effective.

Finally, with regard to the evidence-based prevention program that was being implemented at each school (see Table 1 for information about which program was implemented at each school, and Appendix B for detailed information about each program), it became clear that different schools had structured implementation differently, or that administrators at different schools had communicated different expectations of their teachers. For instance, at some schools teachers perceived that the program was one component of a larger school-based SEL initiative, whereas at other schools teachers perceived that the program was their school’s SEL initiative. Similarly, at some schools teachers perceived that they were not only expected to implement the program but also to integrate SEL throughout the day, into all content areas. At other schools implementing the same program, this type of integration was not an expectation that was communicated to teachers. Additionally, at some schools, administration had set aside time during the day or week for teachers to implement the program, whereas at other schools teachers felt that they were responsible for decisions about how to fit the program into their schedule. Lastly, at some schools, teachers felt that they were expected to implement the program in a certain way (e.g., following a certain sequence, or following the script), whereas at other schools teachers felt that although they were expected to implement the program, they could do so in whatever way they deemed appropriate.

Importantly, teachers at two schools indicated that theirs was considered a “model school”—either for SEL or for the particular program that they were implementing. Table 2 presents information about the implementation context, from each teacher’s perspective.

5.1.3. **Programs**

My sample of thirteen teachers implemented a total of four evidence-based classroom prevention programs: Second Step (SS, 54%), Caring School Community (CSC, 31%), the Olweus Bullying
Prevention Program (OBPP, 8%), and the 4Rs Program (4Rs, 8%). All four of these programs are intended mainly as “universal” preventive interventions, meaning that they were designed to promote skills and/or prevent problems within the full population of students, rather than provide targeted interventions for students identified as at risk for specific problems. That said, OBPP includes more targeted components for students that have bullied others or been bullied in the past. See Appendix B for detailed descriptions of each program.

5.2. **Thematic Results**

5.2.1. **Transformation of the Role of the Teacher**

My interviews suggest that making SEL an explicit part of formal education\(^2\) has broadened the teacher’s role in a way that teachers felt very positively about, in part because it is a welcome break from teaching to the test. This finding weaves together three sub-themes that run parallel throughout my interviews: 1) teachers perceive that standardized testing has narrowed the scope of teaching over time, 2) teachers want to nurture their students’ social-emotional development, and 3) teachers derive meaning from helping their students develop social and emotional competencies—both because it allows them to approach their students more holistically, and because it provides them an escape from the incessant focus on testing that pervades the rest of their work.

5.2.1.1. **Standardized tests have narrowed the scope of teaching**

I never once asked teachers about their experiences with standardized tests, yet they repeatedly brought standardized tests into our conversations, painting a picture of the ways in which testing has constricted both their teaching and their students’ learning. It was obviously very much on teachers’ minds. Ms. B, a 2\(^{nd}\) grade teacher in her 2\(^{nd}\) year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, …

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\(^2\) Going forward, references to the “SEL movement” refer back to this idea.
explained that the renewal of her school’s charter now hinges on NWEA test data, and therefore, during a recent professional development day at her school, she and the other teachers restructured their classrooms in a way that aligned with the test but not at all with their teaching philosophies:

[A]ll of us, um, spent the entire day revamping our curriculum and our centers for, you know, the eighty-, eighteenth time, but changing everything so that it was aligned to certain goals on the test. Which is, like, such an icky thing, because it’s so much less holistic. This is an example of, like, the art of teaching going away. And we actually, like, instead of having our centers aligned by, “You can take out a spelling center, color your spelling words and get to know your spelling words and break them apart, and notice the suffixes...,” instead of something like that ... the child has a menu, and they say, “My RIT band,” which means my score, essentially, “is a 220. So I’m allowed to pick out the 220 bin, that has a...” - it, it’s just really feels icky.

The testing-related pressures that teachers feel are not only tied to their school’s ratings but also to their own performance ratings, and they fully recognize that these pressures dictate how they allocate time in the classroom. Ms. W, a 4th grade teacher in her 4th year of teaching, who was also implementing Second Step, lamented:

It’s consistently changing, you know, for our school. Um, and I’m talking about curriculum-wise. Need to do this. And so I’ve gotta stay on top of that. Because it does come down to scores. The ISAT that they take, the NWEA which is now part of this new program called the REACH assessment....That’s what teachers are going to be evaluated on. So I’m evaluated on how they perform on this test. That changed this year. How they do affects my rating. It’s a huge deal. I gotta come in there, no matter whatever’s goin’ on, and teach all these other things.
Beyond their own immediate experience, teachers also perceived broader trends unfolding that reflect an overall narrowing of education, so as to focus more and more on core testing subjects:

Even now with the new PARCC Assessment, it’s gonna be given three times a year, and some of the kids are testing for 90 minutes. That’s a huge chunk of the day. And if we keep doing things like that, you know, already schools across the nation have seen cutbacks in art and music because we need more instructional time...

-Ms. K, 8th grade language arts, 10th year of teaching, implementing SS

Perhaps surprisingly, even the Pre-K teacher in my sample brought up this issue unsolicited, explaining that there has been movement lately towards introducing standardized testing at her grade level. She discussed this at length, was clearly quite upset about it, and indicated that she has been pushing back because she feels it is antithetical to everything that she has been taught to do in terms of taking a child-centered approach, following kids’ interests, meeting them where they are, and providing scaffolding for them to learn. In fact, she explained that she would never be willing to teach at another grade level because of the ways in which standardized testing delimits teaching: “Pre-K is the only, the last grade I think they’re allowing us to teach as much as we possibly can, but they’re still trying to ease those tests in there” (Ms. C, 3rd year of teaching Pre-K, implementing SS).

In sum, teachers expressed a feeling that our testing culture has altered the very essence of teaching, and turned what was once a craft into more of a science:

...I’ve learned that when you treat teaching more as an art and you treat it more as an intuitive practice, when you listen to a child read, you can pick apart those things that they need, and you can cater to those things. I think that, um, testing has made teaching more of a science than an art, sadly, um, and it’s become a lot less unique to the child as far as, like, getting to know the child socially and adapting your practice in that way. And it’s become a lot more getting to know the child as a data point, and,
“This is where he is in reading, and this is where he is in science, and this is where he is in his cognitive ability, and this is where he is in his physical abilities, and this and that.” And, and then, and then having to see those data points go up.

- Ms. B, 2nd grade, 2nd year of teaching, implementing SS

5.2.1.2. Teachers want to nurture their students’ social-emotional development

In talking with teachers about their overarching views on teaching—not just about the SEL/prevention program they were implementing—many teachers discussed their desire to educate the “whole child,” to be more than “just a teacher” (i.e., to also be a positive role model, to intervene in students’ lives in more than just academic ways, etc.), and to build strong relationships with their students. For some, like Ms. Ra, a 4th grade teacher in her 2nd year of teaching, who was implementing Caring School Community, this is simply how they’ve always envisioned teaching:

[T]hat’s part of being an educator, too. Like, taking on those roles, as a psychologist, if I had to be a, a type of social worker, I’ll do it too. And I, I’ve taken on that, on that role, and that’s because I, that’s why I came into teaching. Because I knew there’s more than just needs in acade-, academic needs....

Other teachers explained that they came to feel this way over time—through seeing their students’ struggle with social-emotional issues and/or through struggling, themselves, to teach in classrooms where social-emotional issues interfered with student learning:

[Y]ou’re not gonna get through reading if you have all these behavioral issues. Or if the kids are just socially, “I’m not gonna do anything.” There’s gonna be just a battle. So... I’m not productive, you’re not productive, we both fail.

- Ms. W, 4th grade, 4th year of teaching, implementing SS
This sentiment was expressed as much by teachers at the upper grade levels as those at the lower grade levels. Ms. K, an 8th grade language arts teacher in her 10th year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, explained:

> [T]hey bring their stuff into the classroom and it’s, and it’s, i-, they’re kids! They’re, there’s messy, it’s problems, and you can either force it to head on... and I think it’s unrealistic to ask everybody to leave their stuff at the door.

Teachers also cited a variety of harsh realities that students experience outside of school (e.g., homelessness, having a parent who got arrested, having a parent who is a prostitute, exposure to violence in the neighborhood), and explained that they believe students need an opportunity to process their feelings about such things, as well as to develop skills and strategies that can help them cope:

> [S]ome of them do live in environments where they find it hard to control their emotions, or they don’t have anybody to talk to. So, uh, teaching them strategies, and how to deal with their problems and emotions and... it’s, it’s something that they need, ‘cause they can’t concentrate on school stuff if they’re mess-, if they have problems goin’ on at home, or, you know....they need programs like this, um, to... ‘cause they don’t get it at home, ‘cause their home lives, or some of their home li-, homes, homes are so chaotic, you know, they come to school and that’s their only release...

- Ms. G, 4th grade, 14th year of teaching, implementing SS

Another teacher, reflecting back on her thoughts and feelings about doing SEL with students at her previous school, which was located in a neighborhood that she described as having more crime than her current school’s neighborhood, said:

> I know this sounds so problematic, I don’t wanna sound like, you know, one of those, like, freedom writers...where it’s like, “Oh, like, I’m gonna come and save these kids!”

But it was very much like that, like, thinking, “This is more, like, life or death.” It wasn’t
like, necessarily, but it was, like, “These skills are so important to these, for their survival. Like, how else are they gonna go home and deal with this? How else are they gonna be on the street and be able to deal with it?” So...there was more stress to, to kind of, like, ingrain SEL and, like, do whatever I could in one year to, to give them the tools that they needed to be able to handle life. You know?

-Ms. Me, K-8 technology/resource, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC

Finally, one teacher talked about her students’ social-emotional needs from more of a broad, social justice standpoint, in terms of helping them find meaning in their own educational process in order to experience social mobility in life:

...I myself grew up in, in a low-income community, most people of color, and it was rough because a lot of time we wouldn’t find a reason to be in school. And...the fact that I’m an exception, and I was the first in my family to go to college, i-, isn’t, it isn’t ok with me. And then I was like, “Well, what went wrong?” And I think that’s where, in, in the community that I’m in, I want kids to, like, really get that hunger for learning and, like, really love to be at school and, like, avoid(?) the zero-tolerance policies that just wanna kick a lot of students out because they’re just not conforming or, to the rules... I think that’s where I value it, the(?) it’s more like a comprehensive approach to our, to our kids and where we’re going. They’re growing up in, like, tough neighborhoods and it’s, it’s a lot like mine. And I see it, I see myself in them a lot....what I would like to see in my classroom is that I’m able to really tie a purpose into being at school through social-emotional learning....It’s investing them in, like, why they come to school, and, like, “Why are you taking this test? Why is it important? And, to your life, and to your family.” And, um, it’s a, a deeper meaning, I think ....Just coming to school every day,
let’s give it a purpose, “Why are you sitting down? Why are we doing this work? And how is that gonna help you in the future?”

- Ms. Ra, 4th grade, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC

5.2.1.3. **Teachers derive meaning from helping their students develop social and emotional competencies**

In stark contrast to the ways that teachers have felt restricted by standardized testing, they described the ways in which SEL—as a content area, rather than a particular program—has felt liberating and has allowed them to feel like they are really making a difference in their students’ lives. When asked how she felt about being the one to do SEL with her students rather than a school counselor or social worker, Ms. Ra (above) responded:

Actually that’s what some of my favorite parts of, of my, of my job. That I’m able to have those conversations and even transform what it means to be a teacher, in my own way. Um, I, I, I enjoy it. I, I don’t think it’s, it’s a burden at all.

Ms. Me, a K-8 technology/resource teacher in her 2nd year of teaching, was specifically hired to provide SEL-related support at her school. The expectation was that homeroom teachers would implement the Caring School Community program with students, and that Ms. Me and another resource teacher would occasionally help facilitate classroom meetings (part of the program), independently facilitate meetings when teachers didn’t have time, or facilitate supplemental, SEL-focused, small group discussions with students. She explained that she was delighted to learn that providing this type of SEL support would be a key part of her job when she was hired for her current position:

[That was the most enjoyable part of my job, you know, last year, and so I was like, “I… great, technology, I can do that….but this is, like, this to me is the most impactful part.”

So I was completely willing to, to take on that role…
Not only have teachers appreciated SEL because it helps them more fully address their students’ needs and make a deeper impact, they have also appreciated it for themselves. SEL affords teachers an opportunity to step away from the pressures that permeate much of their job, and that often undermine the sense of purpose and meaning that teachers derive from their work:

[W]e’re, we’re happy that we have something that we do, and that we have a time in the day where we talk about feelings a little bit. Because the kids really need it, and we need it [laughs] too. So it’s a nice, it’s just a nice thing to have to break up the day.

-Ms. B, 2nd grade, 2nd year of teaching, implementing SS

They appreciate SEL because, in contrast to everything else they do, it is not testing-driven. It allows teachers to approach their students more holistically, and not reduce them to a data point. Ms. K, an 8th grade language arts teacher in her 10th year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, emphasized the welcome disconnect between SEL and standardized testing when she said: “I didn’t need to give tests on it, I didn’t need to give worksheets, I didn’t really need to assess.”

In summary, teachers expressed feeling that standardized testing has not only dictated how they allocate time in their classrooms and how they structure their lessons, but also that it has fundamentally changed what it means to be a teacher. Although they feel that their students have pressing social and emotional needs that they, as teachers, want to address, they often feel that their hands are tied because of those testing-related constraints. The SEL movement has given teachers the space to “transform what it means to be a teacher,” so that they can more fully address their students’ needs, and, in a very small way, bring the “art” back into teaching.

5.2.2. **Personal Transformation of the Teacher**

Evidence-based SEL/prevention programs implemented in schools are primarily designed to impact students—with respect to their skills, attitudes, behavior, and ultimately academic performance—and school climate, yet, according to my interviews, teachers have been influenced by
these programs in myriad ways. These unintended, unassessed program outcomes, or what one might term “ripple effects,” include the ways that teachers perceived themselves transformed on a personal level. This category represents enduring changes; teachers perceived themselves transformed in ways that stemmed from their implementation of the programs but will extend beyond the implementation period, into their future lives and careers.

Over the course of their experience with SEL/prevention programs, teachers perceived changes in their own thinking, beliefs, and skills, including: 1) a paradigm shift from managing behavior to teaching social skills, 2) increased commitment to teaching SEL in some capacity, 3) improved social and emotional competencies, and 4) the acquisition of skills for handling students’ social and emotional difficulties. Furthermore, some teachers perceived that these changes have already had, and will continue to have, an impact on how they carry out their jobs. The interplay between the personal and professional transformation of teachers will be discussed in the final section of results titled “Transformation of the Teacher’s Practice.”

5.2.2.1. A paradigm shift from managing behavior to teaching social skills

Some teachers were previously unaware of SEL as a content area before arriving at their current school. For those teachers, the encounter with the program (or with their school’s broader SEL initiative, of which the program was one component) marked their introduction to the very idea that social and/or emotional competencies can be taught. Teachers’ comments suggest that this newfound awareness resulted in an empowering shift in the way they think about student behavior. For instance, Ms. J, a 3rd grade teacher in her 8th year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, explained, “…I knew nothing about social-emotional learning. I didn’t even know it was a thing….I guess I felt, I thought that all of that fell into, like, culture and behavior management.” Being introduced to SEL as a content area made salient for her that it’s not completely up to her to “manage” her students’ behavior; rather, she can help them learn to take more responsibility for their own behavior. Similarly, Ms. B, a 2nd grade
teacher in her 2\textsuperscript{nd} year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, explained that “being at this school and using this program has been kind of eye opening” in terms of understanding that she can teach her students how to solve their own problems and that, as a result, her students won’t need to rely on her to solve so many “little problems that they can deal with on their own.” Ms. A, a 6\textsuperscript{th} grade teacher in her 12\textsuperscript{th} year of teaching, also implementing Second Step, summed up this idea when she said, “the accountability is now on the students.”

Ms. W, a 4\textsuperscript{th} grade teacher in her 4\textsuperscript{th} year of teaching, and implementing Second Step, also felt that the program exposed her to a new way of thinking about behavior management that involves giving the students a more active role in the process. Interestingly, she pointed out that the difference between the old way and the new way is sometimes quite subtle, involving the same language (e.g., “choices”) but with a different purpose:

[U]sually when you’re tellin’ a child that you are reprimanding them, you know, “Make a better choice,” for hittin’ Johnny in the head, and then it’s negative, you’re scolding them, you’re getting on them. But in [program], it’s, “Okay let’s talk about that, what could you have done differently?” And then they’re giving you the choices.

Although not all teachers experienced this paradigm shift—either because they were already familiar with SEL, they already thought in ways that were compatible with SEL even though they had never encountered it before, or for other reasons—for those that did, it very much paved the way for other teacher-level changes that will be discussed later.

5.2.2.2. **Increased commitment to teaching SEL**

Many teachers recalled feeling immediately excited about implementing an SEL/prevention program with their students; some also recalled feeling somewhat reluctant initially— either upon
learning about the program or during their first year of implementation. ³ Reluctance stemmed from both general concerns—e.g., will this new thing work?—and specific concerns related to *time constraints, program relevance*, and *underlying reservations about the place of SEL in schools*. As teachers took a more flexible approach to implementation in response to time constraints and perceived program shortcomings, they began to see positive changes in their students that they attributed either to the program or to SEL more generally. These changes, in turn, alleviated any reservations that teachers may have had about the place of SEL in schools, and increased their commitment to teaching SEL in some capacity.

5.2.2.2.1. **Initial concerns**

5.2.2.2.1.1. **Time constraints**

Often, initial reluctance was tied to concerns about how to fit one more thing into an already busy schedule. These time constraints connect back to the focus on standardized tests discussed earlier, which may explain why the Pre-K teacher indicated that time was not such a concern for her when it came to implementing Second Step, whereas she knew that time was a challenge for her colleagues in the upper grades. Additionally, time constraints were associated with how the program was being implemented at the school-level. In particular, for teachers at schools with an SEL block built into the schedule, time was typically less of a concern. Elsewhere, teachers found themselves faced with decisions about how and where to fit the program in.

5.2.2.2.1.2. **Program relevance**

Teachers recalled having a variety of concerns about specific characteristics of the program they were implementing, and all of these concerns related either directly or indirectly to program relevance.

³ Not surprisingly, this reluctance was not discussed by the teacher who was involved in the decision to adopt the program at her school, and who co-led her schools’ SEL leadership team.
For instance, many teachers perceived the program they were implementing to include scripted elements. Although some perceived those scripts to be more of a guide, others felt that the expectation was that they read the script verbatim. A number of teachers in the latter group indicated that having a script for SEL felt incongruous. Ms. K, an 8th grade language arts teacher in her 10th year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, recalls, “I was probably, and I’m not proud of it, I was probably a little bit m-, like, too skeptical. When I was just like, ‘Ok, this is it, this is the SEL curriculum. This. That book. Ok.’” She explained:

[T]o even receive a script to teach SEL seems really kind of ridiculous to me. Because again, if you’re socially and emotionally in tune, if these are the things that you’re supposed to be modeling and talking about, to have me standing in front with my little binder and reading through a script …. it takes out the emotional component…. this is not that subject area … you can’t just put a script in front of somebody and expect it to be effective. You gotta, you have to be involved a little bit more.

In fact, Ms. K and several other teachers expressed concerns about the effectiveness of scripted lessons in general, not just about scripted SEL lessons. In part this was because they felt that students perceive teachers as unprepared when they use scripts—and students are less invested as a result—and in part because they felt that scripts limit a teacher’s ability to make the content relevant to the particular students in the room.

Other concerns about program relevance were tied to specific student or school characteristics. For instance, Ms. J, a 3rd grade teacher in her 8th year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, felt that, at times, the program was a bit “hokey” for her students, who were getting to be “that age where it’s not as fun to put your hands on your belly.” Similarly, Ms. Mu, an 8th grade math teacher in her 18th year of teaching, who was implementing Caring School Community, explained that the program was designed for K-6 but being used for K-8 at her school, and “the content was maybe too kiddish for
the eighth grade…. ‘cause in eighth grade they’re dealing with adult problems.” A few teachers raised concerns about a mismatch between their school context and the school context portrayed in the program materials, explaining that this made it harder for their students to relate to the program. Ms. A, a 6th grade teacher in her 12th year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, explained that 6th graders at her school still follow more of an elementary school model, yet the 6th grade version of the program depicts a “middle school model. So they don’t even know what it means to leave something in your locker and forget it and then suffer the consequences for it.” One last example comes from Ms. K, an 8th grade language arts teacher in her 10th year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step and found that students had a hard time relating to the scenarios depicted in many of the videos that came with the program. She remembered one, in particular, that featured a conflict over a broken eyeliner, and noted that half the class (i.e., all the boys) were completely disengaged.

Additionally, one teacher was concerned with what he saw as a missing component that would relate the program content to his students’ lives. Mr. T, a 6th grade math teacher in his 5th year of teaching, who was implementing Olweus, explained that the program was already in place at his school when he arrived, and although the students seemed to have internalized the concepts being taught, they also seemed to be lacking in the skills to apply them:

[I]t struck me as it needed another, a third element, or some other element that takes it into a more realistic, uh, situation. ‘Cause a lot of the, uh, a lot of the things that were covered, the situations that were being talked about in the program, um, were very abstract to our students and not necessarily about their lives. So it struck me as, like, a great idea, and I, I wanted it to work. So I knew that I had to do something in order to, uh, still follow the general essence of what it was and the ideas that it was presenting, but also, uh, create experiences for students that they actually got it and it worked their way into their day-to-day lives and conversation, rather than students just kinda
brushing it off as, yeah, well, “Oh, he’s being a bystander,” or just being able to use the vocabulary versus being, uh, able to, um, implement it.

5.2.2.2.1.3. **Reservations about SEL**

For a few teachers, the initial reluctance described above stemmed, at least in part, from underlying reservations about the value of SEL or the appropriateness of asking teachers to do SEL with students. As discussed earlier, most teachers felt strongly that SEL *should* be part of their job; however, there was some variation in regard to this issue, particularly at the beginning, when teachers first encountered the program.

A 6th grade teacher in her 12th year of teaching, Ms. A recalled worrying about time constraints when she first encountered Second Step, but her comment suggested that she may also have felt unsure about the extent to which SEL was aligned with the learning goals of school:

[I]t’s a binder, and it, you know, it has these things, and you’re like, “When am I gonna fit this in?” You know. That’s your immediate thought as a teacher, honestly [laughs], with anything. So, yeah, I’m pretty sure we were like, “Oo-kay,” you know, “When am I gonna fit this, when am I gonna find twenty-five minutes out of my day?” You know. “I’m tryin’ to get the kids to learn, you know.”

A colleague of hers recalled having a similar concern, about it perhaps being beyond the purview of teachers to do this type of socialization with students:

I was like, “So now I have to teach them reading, math, science, social studies, and how to act? [laughs] Oh, ok. So now I’m the parent.” That’s what I thought. I was like, “So now I’m gonna be an-, an-, another parent. So how am I going to mix that in, mix the strategies from Second Step in from what they’re already learning at home?”

—Ms. G, 4th grade, in her 14th year of teaching
5.2.2.2. **Addressing concerns through flexibility/authenticity**

Over time, buy-in for SEL/prevention programs increased as teachers took an overwhelmingly more flexible approach to implementation. Ms. Mo, a 3rd grade teacher in her 3rd year of teaching, who was implementing Caring School Community and also was co-leader of her school’s SEL leadership team, indicated that flexibility had been very important for teacher buy-in at her school: “I truly think that there’s a lot of modification going on to the curriculum that makes, makes it ok. Like, um, that makes them not complain if they even [laughs], if they do have complaints.”

Beyond buy-in, flexibility was also key to teachers enjoying this work, finding it meaningful, and feeling that it came alive for their students. Ms. B, a 2nd grade teacher in her 2nd year of teaching, explained that implementation of Second Step at her school was initially quite rigid. However, in response to teacher feedback largely related to pacing, an administrator gave teachers explicit permission to implement the program in whatever way they felt was most appropriate for their students. She found that this dramatically altered her experience with implementation because it gave her the ability to make the program relevant (she uses the word “authentic”) to her students:

> And that’s been so, so wonderful, and has made a big difference because it’s made, um, teaching SEL feel a lot more, um, authentic. Rather than just being like, “Today we’re learning self-management. Self-management is when you manage…” [laughs]. You know, like, it makes it more like, “I noticed that so-and-so and so-and-so, they’ve been fighting a lot about who gets to have the red markers first. Well guess what. I’m gonna teach you how to solve this problem all by yourself so you don’t even have to ask me” [laughs]. Um, and that’s been really good.

Some teachers took this more flexible approach on their own, adapting and differentiating their delivery of the program just as they do—and are typically expected to do—with everything they teach. Others collaborated with their grade-level teams or administrators (like Ms. B, above) in order to
problem-solve ways to address time constraints or concerns about program relevance. On their own or in collaboration with others, teachers discovered ways of fitting the program into their schedule, either by cutting into other content areas (e.g., replacing a social studies lesson once a week), integrating the program content into other lessons (e.g., “blending subjects”),⁴ or modifying the program in various other ways rather than implementing it exactly as packaged.⁵ To address concerns about program relevance, teachers improvised to various degrees rather than following the script verbatim, they implemented lessons out of sequence in response to their perceptions of their students’ needs, and they supplemented with other materials or activities that they felt would make the program content more relevant to their students’ lives. In short, they adapted both the programs and their teaching practice in countless ways based on time constraints and their judgments about what would be most effective for their students.

In general, teachers were not concerned that these types of adaptations would be perceived as problematic with regard to the expectations that their administration, or program trainers, had for them. Most teachers emphasized that their changes did not affect the ideas central to the program, and therefore seemed to feel they were permissible. For instance, Mr. T, a 6th grade math teacher in his 5th year of teaching, said: “[W]e ended up implementing, uh, almost like an essence of what, uh, Olweus is. We still tied in the, the major concepts....” However, Ms. Mu, a 6th-8th grade math teacher in her 18th year of teaching, emphasized instead that the ways in which she adapted the classroom meetings did not affect the structure provided by the Caring School Community program; she seemed to feel that this was what mattered most: “The structure was kept faithfully. Um, it was, like, from their kit. The

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⁴ In some schools, this type of integration was a feature of implementation from the very beginning.
⁵ Although interesting, the specific types of adaptations identified throughout the interviews are beyond the scope of this paper.
examples that were used or the omission of stuff, um, but the structure was always kept in place.”

These differing perceptions relating to, essentially, what it means to implement with fidelity, may be, in part, a function of program differences; whereas Olweus classroom meetings do emphasize certain topics (e.g., what bullying is, what different forms it can take, what it means to be a bystander, etc.), the Caring School Community classroom meeting kit includes lesson cards that can be used, as needed, to address different issues or problems that might arise within the classroom over the course of the year.

Teachers also received no criticisms from administrators or program trainers about program adaptations. In fact, Ms. Mo, a 3rd grade teacher in her 3rd year of teaching, indicated that she was observed by a coach or trainer who provided her with constructive feedback only about her overall tone, and not about how closely she followed the Caring School Community lesson card. Again, the expectations around implementation likely differed for different programs, and all four teachers at Ms. Mo’s school seemed to perceive that although they were expected to hold regular classroom meetings, there were no hard and fast expectations about how those meetings should look.

5.2.2.2.3. **Perceived effectiveness**

Over time, teachers began to notice positive student outcomes that they attributed to the program or to SEL in general, and as they did, any reservations teachers may have had about SEL or about the programs dissipated and their commitment to teaching SEL increased.

For many teachers, this perceived effectiveness was inextricably linked to implementation flexibility, discussed above. Earlier I included a quote from Ms. B, a 2nd grade teacher in her 2nd year of teaching, whose school had initially approached Second Step implementation in a very structured, rigid way, but then, in response to teacher feedback, the administration gave teachers a lot more discretion with regard to implementation. When I asked her to compare the two styles of implementation—more structured versus more flexible—she emphasized the difference in perceived effectiveness and how that influenced her own subjective experience with implementation:
I didn’t feel frustrated with it, I just felt bored with it. And I think it wasn’t as enjoyable to teach because I wasn’t really seeing as much, um... I wasn’t really seeing it make a big difference. I think that when you... I think that this is true of any lesson you teach, whether it’s math, science, social studies, or social-emotional learning—but perhaps more important ... than anything else for social-emotional learning—you can’t just read the card and go through the lesson as written... social and emotional skills are inherently like the most intimate thing that you can teach; if you don’t make it personal, and you don’t make it real, and you don’t make it authentic, I might as well just be like speaking in German for 20 minutes.... But when it has, when, when I read it and then I put the card down, and then I really make sure that I engage the kids and think of real things that are really happening in the classroom now, and adapt it in that way, then it becomes a lot more interesting for the kids and it becomes a lot more effective.

For Ms. Mo, however, a 3rd grade teacher in her 3rd year of teaching and co-leader of her school’s SEL leadership team, the opposite was true for the classroom meeting component of the Caring School Community. She perceived that a more structured implementation (i.e., decreased flexibility), resulting from solicited trainer feedback, improved outcomes both in her own classroom and in those of her colleagues. She felt that there were often a lot of issues to discuss during classroom meetings, that the kids “wanna talk,” and that she and other teachers didn’t really know how to end the conversation, or how to keep the kids accountable with respect to the solutions that they generated together. She felt that the more structured meetings helped her and her colleagues keep to the time allotted, and helped them use brief “check-in” meetings more strategically, to hold their kids accountable. That said, even for this teacher, increased flexibility with respect to other program components (e.g., the buddy component, the parent component, etc.) was perceived to improve the effectiveness of those components.
Teachers made numerous references to the overall effectiveness of the program they were implementing and/or of teaching SEL in general—e.g., “it works”—but also noted specific, positive changes that they had observed in their students. The most frequently cited changes were improved student attitudes and behavior, and a more positive school climate. For instance, Ms. A (6th grade, 12th year of teaching, implementing SS) noticed that students “know right from wrong, and... how to show empathy,” and that “they kinda respect each other like a little bit better than I’ve had in previous years.” Some teachers also noted that students were better able to talk about their feelings. For instance, Ms. J (3rd grade, 8th year of teaching, implementing SS) said, “I think it’s amazing how they talk ... about their feelings. It really is....I’ve seen kids not be able to verbalize how they’re feeling and then, coming here, where they’re saying, ‘I’m really, I’m feeling really frustrated with you.’” Some teachers even noticed a difference in their students on a day-to-day basis, depending on whether or not they had had an opportunity to talk about their feelings that day. For instance, Ms. Mo, a 3rd grade teacher in her 3rd year of teaching, explained:

Um, I definitely see the benefit. Like, I see, you know, when I started to do ... Caring School Community, I saw the days where I, we weren’t having classroom meetings, and we were, and I saw the difference in the students those days. Like, their, just their attitude was com-, like, switched. So, um, because they weren’t getting an outlet, they didn’t have an outlet. You know ... they kept everything inside and it was affecting them, and they wanted to talk to each other and they, they didn’t have that opportunity, so they were, you know...

Ms. C, a Pre-K teacher in her 3rd year of teaching, implementing Second Step, echoed this idea, explaining that this, for her, was one of the key takeaways from using the program—an understanding that kids need both the opportunity and the tools (i.e., the words) to talk about their feelings, and that some challenging behaviors may in fact stem from an absence of these things:
Well it just lets me know that sometimes, you know, kids are gonna act out, maybe because they can’t express, you know, what they really feel....in dealing with this curriculum, it helps me to see that there are some things that kids need to talk about, and they may not always have the words for, you know, t-, to say what’s bothering them.

Some teachers also perceived that the program they were implementing, or SEL in general, had improved students’ academic performance via these improvements in behavior and/or climate. They described several pathways by which they believed behavior affected academics. For instance, Ms. Mo (3rd grade, 3rd year of teaching, implementing CSC) explained, “They’re getting along better, there’s less disruptions, there’s more learning going on as a result.” Ms. Ra (4th grade, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC) said, “If they’re happy, and they’re comfortable and safe ... in the classroom, they’re able to perform better.” Lastly, Ms. Mu (6th-8th grade math, 18th year of teaching, also implementing CSC) explained, “Kids come in with problems and, you know, when something’s on your mind there’s no way you can focus.”

In fact, several teachers were under the impression, or had been told explicitly, that students’ test scores had increased in conjunction with doing SEL. For instance, Ms. G (4th grade, 14th year of teaching, implementing SS) commented, “I do think that uh their behavior infractions have gone down in the past few years because of it.... and then the scores have increased.” One teacher even felt that the Caring School Community program may have been brought into her school specifically because of this connection between SEL and academic performance. Ms. Mo (3rd grade, 3rd year of teaching) recalled that she and Ms. Ra had both begun doing morning meetings in their classrooms in response to behavior issues, two years before the Caring School Community program was brought into their school, and that the principal had been impressed by the academic growth in their classrooms relative to others in the school:
At the end of that year ... when our NWEA results came back, our classrooms .... were the ones who grew the most and who had more attainment. And so, after the principal saw that, she’s like, “We ha-, you know, the entire school needs to be doing this. It’s, it, we need a curriculum, we need it now, and the entire school needs to do it.”

Interestingly, one teacher expressed confidence that the program would ultimately have a positive impact on students’ academic performance, but not right away: “I mean, that’s the idea of, like, the pilot ... we’re not gonna see that much academic growth, but because we’ve learned these skills, now next year those skills are gonna carry on to ... their learning” (Ms. Me, K-8 resource/technology, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC).

In general, however, it was the behavioral changes that seemed to impress teachers the most. Ms. Mo (3rd grade, 3rd year of teaching, implementing CSC) explained that even without being told, “Because you’re using SEL, your test results went up 11%,” she felt that, “if I see things improving in my classroom or there being a change in the student, which I have seen, that’s evidence enough for me.” It may be that teachers especially appreciate the ways in which improvements in student behavior effectively improve the learning environment of the classroom, making it easier for the teacher to teach and for the students to learn. Or it may simply be that dealing with student behavior problems is one of the more challenging and/or taxing aspects of a teacher’s job. For instance, Ms. B, a 2nd grade teacher in her 2nd year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, explained that she was drawn into trivial student conflicts far less often as a result of teaching her students how to solve problems themselves: “I’m glad that I’m not solving, ‘He took my puzzle piece!’ problems anymore. It gives me—especially because I have to do lunch and recess—it gives me some time to breathe [laughs].”

One teacher was a bit more reserved in her evaluation of the program and SEL more generally. When asked if she felt that Second Step was having an impact on her students, Ms. K, an 8th grade literature teacher in her 10th year of teaching, replied:
It’s tough to say. Have we had good discussions? Yes. Have there been very valuable things that have come up? Yes. Whether or not that what’s being discussed here is being transferred when they walk out of the building—I don’t know, I don’t know. And that, to me, is always kind of the big question mark...

Another teacher shared this uncertainty around the extent to which students apply their newfound SEL skills outside of school. She also expressed concerns about whether these skills are even suitable for other domains of students’ lives:

We can do all the conflict resolution we want in school, and have them ready, um, but when they go out there, it’s like … survival mode… And so, that’s great for them to know that within our walls, but … it worries me to know when they’re put in a situation like that outside of school, is somebody gonna listen to what they’re saying?

-Ms. C, Pre-K, 3rd year of teaching, implementing SS

Additionally, several teachers noted that although many or even most students seem to have benefited from the program they were implementing or from SEL more generally, not all of them have, depending on individual student characteristics and/or the dynamics of particular classes or cohorts.

For instance, Ms. B (2nd grade, 2nd year of teaching) perceived that Second Step has been effective for those students “who can listen and sit next to each other and … follow directions on the carpet for ten minutes,” but not for those with “extreme social, emotional, behavioral needs.” This is largely consistent with the goals of these types of programs, as they are designed primarily to prevent social, emotional, and/or behavioral problems rather than to intervene with students who are already struggling with such problems. However, Ms. B went on to discuss a related concern about the extent to which, perhaps, her school administrators were relying too heavily on social-emotional learning and overlooking other important social, emotional, and behavioral supports for those few students who
might need them. She described an incident involving a violent student who had almost injured himself and Ms. B, and said:

The kid wasn’t even sent home or suspended. It was... I mean, and scary things happen like that. This year, it, he got expelled and then [district] appealed it because they said, “You didn’t do enough to try to support him.” And I was like, “I’ve done everything to support him.” But I tried so hard to get him an IEP, and our dean of SEL was like, “We need to keep on trying social and emotional strategies with him, and teaching him how to do better.” Yes, and I was like, “No, this kid is really sick.”

Teachers clearly felt that SEL was beneficial for their students, their classrooms, and their schools, but that it should not be viewed as a comprehensive solution for addressing students’ social-emotional needs.

Despite concerns about the inherent limitations of teaching SEL to students, teachers generally described a personal process of: a) having come to understand, or understand better, through their experiences with the program and/or with SEL in general, that students benefit from having opportunities to talk about their feelings and from developing social-emotional skills, and b) as a result of this new or reinforced understanding, teachers became committed, or more committed, to incorporating SEL into their teaching practice in some shape or form. Ms. A, a 6th grade teacher in her 12th year of teaching, who was implementing Second Step, summed up how her own commitment to teaching SEL had changed over time as a function of seeing, first-hand, the positive impact it had had on students:

[A]t first, you know, teachers are hesitant, you know, it’s like one more thing added to the day. You know, we couldn’t see the, the benefit-, or the value. But I think over time, definitely doing those lessons, and now I have students that have had it since second or third grade. So you really do get to see how, how they’ve been influenced by it....
Although it is time-consuming ... we find the time ... we make sure that we do it because we know the benefits now, but looking back we didn’t.

In fact, almost every teacher I interviewed expressed that they will continue to use the program (if permitted) or specific strategies from the program, or they will continue to incorporate SEL into their future teaching careers in other ways, essentially because they believe it works. While some teachers felt that the program they were using was, itself, beneficial for students—e.g., “I would like to take the cards with me [laughing], but I know I can’t...because that’s property of the school” (Ms. C, Pre-K, 3rd year of teaching, implementing SS)—others made a point of saying that their commitment was to SEL and that they could take or leave the program:

I never gave Caring School Community this much thought. You know? I’ve never been like, “Oh wow, like, this is my, my vehicle to achieve SEL.” I feel like it’s given me a structure, but I don’t necessarily feel like it’s my only way of fulfilling it.... there’s so many other things that you could do to fulfill it and I, I just appreciate the fact that it gives me a structure in our meetings, and it gives us, um, ideas of what we can be doing.... a lot of the, the other things come in from your own creativity.

-Ms. Ra (4th grade, 2nd year of teaching)

In fact, even Ms. A, who was clearly referring to the Second Step program lessons in the quote at the top of the previous page, later described her commitment to “including SEL practices” in her classroom and integrating “SEL competencies into instruction, particularly literacy” more so than to the program itself.

5.2.2.3. **Improved social and emotional competencies**

During the interviews, one teacher indicated that she had experienced a type of personal transformation as a result of being introduced to SEL: “[T]his to me is new, I mean, it’s, it’s transforming me as a person” (Ms. Me, K-8 technology/resource, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC). Later she explained that the Caring School Community program had inspired in her “a lot of self-reflection,” and
that she felt the program had been beneficial to her in various domains of her life. She gave an involving a colleague with whom she sometimes co-taught:

I really had to practice my SEL competencies when, you know, I’m in the same room with someone who’s saying things to students like... you know, just kind of no, there being no structure.

Although this idea didn’t come up in other interviews, I specifically asked about it during the member-checking process and found that several other teachers felt that they, too, had developed their social-emotional competencies alongside their students. In particular, two of Ms. Me’s colleagues felt similarly. Ms. Mo (3rd grade, 3rd year of teaching) explained in a recent email:

[I]t did help me grow on a personal level. I think explicitly...teaching SEL competencies and how to communicate with others helped me apply it in my personal life. I think it just gave me a push to use tools I didn’t know I had. It gave me more empathy, definitely.

Another colleague, Ms. Ra (4th grade, 2nd year of teaching) suggested that there may have been something about how the program was presented at their school that contributed to this type of impact on teachers: “I would say both SEL PD's [sic] and working it through with students helped me identify my emotions and address the [sic] in healthy ways.” Indeed, Ms. Me shared that their principal had set the expectation that “we have to work through it before we expect the kids to work through it.... this is not just for the students, this is for the adults as well,” because adults need to model competent social and emotional behaviors for students. To support this expectation, teachers were provided with numerous professional development opportunities focused on improving their own social-emotional competencies:

[I]n the past my PDs have always been, like, data, data, data. I’ve, I’ve sat in PDs, like, at least four or five PDs this whole year where it’s just SEL for adult competencies. And it’s
like, “Ok, sit down and talk to this person, and we’re gonna talk about, like, you know, ways that we are more receptive to communication.” And, like, so it’s like, she makes us do these activities sometimes, like, um... when she starts noticing, she’ll just call a PD. Like, start noticing that people are either talking about each other, spreading rumors, saying things...

-Me. M, K-8 technology/ resource, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC

Although professional development may have contributed to increased social and emotional competencies for some teachers, a teacher at another school, implementing another program, who, to my knowledge, did not receive this type of professional development, also felt that she had benefited from SEL on a personal level. Ms. J (3rd grade, 8th year of teaching) explained in a recent email:

I would definitely say that working with an SEL program (Second Step) and explicitly teaching social emotional coping skills to students has made me more self-aware of the social emotional skills that I use on a daily basis. As an adult, I don't remember explicitly being taught when and how to use these skills so I wasn't really aware that I was employing so many in my daily life.

For Ms. Me (K-8 technology/ resource, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC), this personal transformation seemed to be the part of the experience that she valued most; it seemed that teaching SEL to her students primarily served to reinforce her newfound understanding(s) of relationships and interpersonal behavior:

[I]t transcended into my personal life, you know, my, my home life and with friends.... and seeing how, the effect of things, and how your words can affect people ... that’s now just ingrained in, in my philosophy as a human being, you know? Like, and, and I think that all those supplements and, I mean, just working with kids just gave it more meaning...
A colleague of Ms. Me’s noted the connection between teacher SEL competencies and buy-in for SEL. When asked how she thought her experience with the Caring School Community program compared to that of other teachers at her school, Ms. Ra (4th grade, 2nd year of teaching) responded:

I’m pretty outspoken in our meetings….I’m like, “I can’t stress how important this social-emotional learning is in our class. Like, that’s the only reason my students were able to grow academically, and also they’re able to sit in a chair this year, and listen, and want to learn ... because of it...” I don’t know, trying to get those skeptical folks, like, a few of them.... and just trying to get that buy-in.... we all value what social-emotional learning, even in our own lives. But I do know that there’s folks that maybe are not there, and they’re still trying to get there. It’s a process of growing.... that also goes back to, “Where are you in your development, and are you in touch with your emotions,” right?

Ms. Ra also emphasized the value for students of this teacher transformation: “I support the SEL programs because it worked for me both professionally and personally. I accepted that in order to serve my students, I had to take care of myself.”

5.2.2.4. The acquisition of skills for handling students’ social and emotional difficulties

Several teachers expressed feeling unprepared by their certification programs to handle students’ social and emotional difficulties. For instance, Ms. W (4th grade, 4th year of teaching, implementing SS) explained that the focus in her certification program was on classroom management rather than thinking about the problems underlying student behavior and trying to help students work through those problems or cope better:

‘Cause typically we get, “This is how you set up your classroom, this is how you manage your kids in terms of order, and how to line up your papers and all that,” but not how to deal with the kid that doesn’t have parents, you know, is homeless, just has these issues that you probably can’t relate to. That would’ve been, would’ve been helpful. ‘Cause I
hadn’t thought about some of those things until I got in the school. And I was like, “Oh, but I got my lesson plans, you know, everything’s color-coded. But how do I deal with these issues that Johnny has over here?”.... I wish there would have been something at school that kind of broke down, um, you know those different topics and strategies...

Several teachers also felt that their experience with an SEL/prevention program served to fill this gap, introduce new strategies, and help them cultivate the skills needed for handling their students’ social and emotional difficulties. Very much related to the paradigm shift discussed at the beginning of this section—teachers generally felt that their certification programs had prepared them to manage student behavior, whereas their experiences with SEL at their schools had taught them that they “can, and how to, explicitly teach these skills” (Ms. B, 2nd grade, 2nd year of teaching, implementing SS). Ms. B also said:

And I think, like, when I go to another school ... I think I would still use a lot of these things that I’ve learned from Second Step. I don’t know if I would use the exact lessons, but I think I would use my go to, “Use a strategy,” when they come to me with a personal problem, and I think that I would, you know, try to teach strategies.

Indeed, many teachers felt that they would continue to use, in their future teaching careers, the skills that they developed in conjunction with implementing an SEL/prevention program. For instance, Ms. J, a 3rd grade teacher in her 8th year of teaching, and a colleague of Ms. B’s, explained:

[I]t is so strong to explicitly be teaching how to deal with conflicts, and how to deal with calming down, and ... if I went back to a school that didn’t have it, I would love to bring it and do it. And if I couldn’t, I would love to use the skills that I’ve learned to teach that to my scholars.... because I think they’re effective.
In summary, while the SEL movement, more generally, has expanded the role of the teacher, SEL/prevention programs have helped to orient teachers so that they are better able to navigate this expanded role.

5.2.3. **Transformation of the Teacher’s Practice**

My analyses suggest an additional category of unintended, unassessed program outcomes or “ripple effects”—namely, the ways that teachers perceived their teaching *practice* to be indelibly transformed as a result of their own, personal transformation. This transformation of the teacher’s practice was the result of an ongoing interaction between teacher and student, involving the ways that teachers processed and responded to what they observed in their classrooms, and then students responded accordingly. Specifically, a teacher’s level of commitment to SEL and/or the ways in which s/he thought about SEL may have influenced student outcomes, making the process described earlier—of perceiving effectiveness and then becoming more committed to SEL—a dynamic one.

Several teachers felt not only that the positive changes they observed in their students had reinforced their own beliefs about the value of SEL and their own commitment to teaching SEL, but also that changes in their own thinking *were responsible for* those positive changes in their students. For instance, Ms. A (6th grade, 12th year of teaching, implementing SS) said simply, “I think that it definitely has changed, you know, the way the teachers think and then the way that our students behave.” Ms. Me (K-8 technology/resource, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC) felt that her own attitude towards SEL, and perhaps her embracing of SEL on a personal level, was central to the outcomes she had observed in her students:

[T]his to me is new, I mean, it’s, it’s transforming me as a person, so I, I’m imagining, you know, that ... had I not bought into it, or just really believed in it, and really started to adapt it myself, you know, who knows if I would’ve ... felt this much growth in students and in myself.
There are a couple of ways, at least, in which these teacher-level changes could have influenced students. On one hand, it may have had something to do with how, or how well, teachers implemented their respective SEL/prevention programs. Ms. Ra (4th grade, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC) said that although she wished the program provided a magic formula or set of steps that would ensure positive outcomes for her students, she realized that implementation takes place “in real life and anything can happen.” She went on to say, “So I think that’s where it felt it relies a lot on how loyal you are to just the purpose of SEL and CSC in general.” By this I believe she meant that because students will inevitably throw curve balls, a teacher must truly understand and internalize the purpose of SEL in order to be able to respond appropriately; in other words, the orientation of the person delivering the program makes a difference, both in how it is implemented and how effective it can ultimately be. Ms. Me (K-8 technology/resource, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC) confirmed this understanding when she said:

[W]hen you pull up your classroom meeting ... guidebook ... they give you facilitation questions and then possible answers you’d get. But it doesn’t, you know, cover everything. So ... you need to be actively, like, part of those conversations and, you know, that, that follow-up component is, is important too...

On the other hand, it could be that teachers did other things differently, outside of the program, and that these changes, in turn, had an impact on students. For instance, Ms. Mo (3rd grade, 3rd year of teaching, implementing CSC) explained that as a result of her experience implementing an SEL program, she thinks about things differently, and this new way of thinking has led her to take a different approach to addressing student behavior problems in her classroom. She felt that this different approach led to positive student outcomes perhaps more so than the program itself:

I had a student this year who, at the beginning of the year was, oh my goodness. And ... I don’t think it was because of Caring School Community. It’s because of that mindset
that I [emphasis] had because of it, of Caring School Community. You know, we came up with the plan for him, there was daily communication between the parents and me, and, and myself. And, and the student, he started the year to be, like, he’s a completely different student, you know? Is that because of Caring School Community? I don’t, I can’t say it is, because there were things that I did outside of Caring School Community to help him. You know what I mean? But, did my mindset change because I know of an SEL program and I know what SEL is and I know you have to talk to students, and, you know, get them to share and ... the more they talk and the more that they can talk about how they feel, then the less ... stress they have or the less, um, problems they’ll have, i-, if they’re able, able to recognize it, then that helped me come up with the plan for him, you know? Being con-, being, wanting to help, believing in SEL as a whole and not necessarily the Caring School Community.

Other teachers echoed this idea that their overall approach to behavior management had changed as a result of their experience with SEL. For instance, Ms. A (6th grade, 12th year of teaching, implementing SS) explained that she is now much more inclined to have discussions with students about the choices they’ve made and what they can do differently in the future: “Years past, it was, ‘I’m writin’ you up, you know,’ these, this is what I have to do, you know.’ It wasn’t trying to get to the bottom of why the student was doing what they’re doing.” When I asked if she would continue to take this approach in the future, she replied, “I would, definitely, I would definitely try to because I, it works, you know.” Ms. Ra (4th grade, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC) similarly indicated that she had begun responding differently to behavioral problems in her classroom, adding that she also used such opportunities to practice, and model, her own social-emotional competencies:

I responded to student behavior differently because I knew there was a reason behind it. Also when I lost my patience, I had to be self-aware, identify my emotions, and step
away from my class. I would then come back and talk to my students about how their actions made me feel.

Finally, engaging in certain types of SEL-focused activities with students—as part of the program they were implementing or as a supplement—also helped teachers get to know their students better and as a result be more sensitive or responsive to their students’ needs. For instance, Ms. Ra (4th grade, 2nd year of teaching, implementing CSC) explained that having conversations with her students about their feelings “also facilitates my teaching,” because it makes her aware of situations in her students’ lives that may affect their ability to focus on learning. Ms. A (6th grade, 12th year of teaching, implementing SS) took this one step further, explaining that SEL activities have given her the opportunity to get to know her students on a different level and to build a closer relationship with them; she then uses this new information, this more intimate understanding of her students, in order to tailor her teaching approach based on individual needs:

I get to hear the, um, students’ thoughts about the issues, and then I’m kinda processing, like, what they’re, um, saying and thinking, and then that [inaudible] to, “Oh, ok, maybe I won’t use that tone with her,” you know what I’m sayin’, or, “Maybe I need to watch what I say and how I say it as, as a teacher,” because, you know, they, they’re affected by those things too. So you get to know them and then you’re like, “Ok, well maybe I shouldn’t, or maybe I should push back,” or, “That explains why they’re not doin’ homework,” or “That explains why...,” you know, whatever the case may be.

Teachers felt confident that in the future, with or without a formal SEL program, they would continue to address student behavior problems in these new ways, as well as continue to incorporate, into their classroom, SEL activities that facilitate building close relationships with their students.

In summary, teachers noted a variety of ways in which they felt that their experience with an SEL/prevention program had activated changes in their own thinking and subsequently in both their
commitment to teaching SEL and their teaching practice more generally, which in turn led to changes in their students. These student-level changes further informed teachers’ thinking and practice, highlighting not only the reverberating nature of the program’s effects but also the dynamic way in which teachers and students influence one another.
6. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this project, like other qualitative research, was not to produce generalizable findings applicable to all teachers. Rather it was to describe the experiences of this particular set of teachers in order to shed light on aspects of their experience that may warrant further exploration, and to generate insights that may be potentially relevant to other research and/or practice.

I pursued this research out of concern, essentially, for how teachers were handling having one more thing added to their plate—evidence-based, classroom prevention programs. I expected to find that teachers felt stressed about the additional responsibility, and that they felt somewhat resentful of the structure imposed by packaged programs. What I found was largely the opposite—teachers were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences with these programs. However, it is a bit misleading to say “with these programs,” because the programs themselves were not the focal point of the teachers’ experiences. Rather, the programs primarily served to introduce teachers to SEL, and it was SEL that shaped teachers’ experiences. So although this study was intended to explore teachers’ experiences with evidence-based prevention programs, what it ultimately illuminated was teachers’ experiences with SEL programs and especially with SEL as a content area.

There are three related but distinct points to make about this development. First, given the programs that I selected for inclusion in this study, it is not surprising that most teachers viewed them more as SEL programs than as prevention programs; as noted in the introduction, one might argue that SEL is the mechanism through which these types of prevention programs are designed to function (Greenberg et al., 2003). Second, as noted in the results, it seemed that the SEL-ness of the programs was much more salient to teachers than the fact that the programs were evidence-based, likely because SEL as a content area was new for many teachers, whereas many teachers perceived that every program or curriculum they are given is evidence-based.
Third, despite having a formal SEL program, much of what teachers shared with me related more to “doing SEL” with their students, or “teaching SEL” to their students, than to implementing their particular program. On one hand, this may be a function of program adaptations, or the flexible way in which most teachers implemented their program. The teachers I interviewed each spoke about their experiences with a particular program, yet a consistent part of that experience involved departing from the structure of the program—by necessity (e.g., due to time constraints), by choice (e.g., to enhance relevance), or because they were asked to do so by an administrator—and teaching SEL in other ways. Therefore, teachers’ abstract references to “doing SEL” rather than to “implementing Second Step,” for example, could reflect their own recognition that they had implemented something that resembled the program but was not exactly the program.

On the other hand, although some teachers felt that the program they were using was itself valuable, most teachers expressed seeing more value in SEL as a content area than they did in the program itself. So, regardless of flexibility/adaptation, they may have thought about what they were doing in terms of SEL rather than in terms of the program, much like they probably think about teaching math more so than about teaching Everyday Mathematics (a particular math curriculum), for instance. Just like one can teach math, reading, science, or social studies with or without a formal curriculum, one can also teach SEL with or without a formal program. And although one might view “doing the program” and “doing SEL” as distinct activities, in this case they may simply be different ways of talking/thinking about the same activity. For many teachers in this study, “doing SEL” is how they experienced, and what they took away from, implementing an SEL program.

I never asked teachers to define what “doing SEL” meant to them exactly. Depending on the particular strategies employed in the program that they used, teachers may have implicitly equated “doing SEL” with a certain type of approach, such as a person-centered (e.g., skills instruction) or environment-focused (e.g., creating a supportive classroom culture) approach. That said, I understood
their comments, as a whole, to reflect a diverse set of practices that teachers perceived to be consistent with the underlying goals of the programs that they had encountered, and that resembled, to varying degrees, the practices outlined in those programs. I understood “doing SEL” to include making time for talking about feelings, explicitly teaching social and/or emotional skills, engaging with students in a more sensitive and emotionally supportive way, and perhaps more.

6.1. **SEL Enriches the Teaching Experience**

Despite an initial reluctance felt by some teachers, related to issues such as time constraints, program relevance, and their role as emotion socializers (Zinsser et al., 2014), teachers in this study found enjoyment in, and derived meaning from, bringing SEL into their classrooms. Previous research has found that most teachers perceive SEL to be beneficial for students and therefore perceive SEL to be an important focus for schools (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013). The present study extends this research by highlighting that teaching SEL also enriched the teaching experiences of teachers in this study, because it gave them permission to nurture their students in a more holistic way and to address important student needs that they felt there previously wasn’t space to address. This may help to explain why Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2011) found that the SEL culture of a school predicted teacher commitment both to the school and to the teaching profession.

Urban schools are plagued by problems of teacher stress, burnout, and turnover (Feitler and Tokar, 1982; Guarino et al., 2006; Ingersoll, 2004; Tokar and Feitler, 1986). Numerous factors have been found to contribute to these problems, including low levels of job satisfaction (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008; Ingersoll, 2004). The finding, of the present study, that teachers found SEL to be one of their “favorite” and “most impactful” parts of the job, suggests an alternate approach to addressing problems of teacher stress and burnout—namely, moving beyond person-centered interventions that emphasize coping more effectively with stress (e.g., Roeser et al., 2013; Żołnierczyk-Zreda, 2005), and thinking instead, or in addition, about ways to make the job of teaching more enjoyable and rewarding. In other
words, why not target teacher job satisfaction, which may be an important mediator between occupational/environmental stressors and burnout (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008), and make the job of teaching more satisfying? This may still involve person-centered approaches—such as helping teachers reframe behavior as something that they can teach their students to be accountable for—but it may also involve broadening the role of the teacher so as to make this an explicit part of their job, prioritizing this type of teaching/learning alongside test preparation, and building adequate time for it into the school day and/or school year.

Following the passage of the Children’s Mental Health Act of 2003 (“the Act”), the Illinois State Board of Education formally adopted social-emotional learning standards in 2004, making Illinois the first state to set priorities for social-emotional learning and thereby communicate an expectation that teachers help students develop their social-emotional competencies (Gordon et al., 2011). Other states have followed suit over the past decade. The very existence of these standards—which were likely one of the impetuses for the development and implementation of SEL programs such as the ones included in this study—suggests that some states may indeed be moving in the direction of broadening the role of the teacher so as to make SEL an explicit part of their job, and prioritizing this type of teaching/learning.

Despite the appearance of gaining ground in this regard, the extent to which school districts are, in fact, acknowledging and addressing existing social-emotional learning standards is unclear. Moreover, caution is warranted due to the potentially slippery slope between standards and standardization. The Act specified, “Every Illinois school district shall develop a policy for incorporating social and emotional development into the district's educational program. The policy shall address teaching and assessing social and emotional skills....” (Children’s Mental Health Act of 2003). Although the experiences of the teachers I interviewed suggest that the assessment piece is not happening at their particular schools, social-emotional assessment tools do exist (see Denham et al., 2010, for a compendium of existing measures). As unlikely as it might seem today, I can’t help but wonder if it’s
only a matter of time before SEL assessment becomes standardized much like assessment in the core content areas. Although a discussion of the costs and benefits of standardized testing is beyond the scope of this paper, it is relevant to point out that allowing the testing movement to invade the SEL realm would pose a risk to the enjoyment that teachers in this study experienced when teaching SEL. That enjoyment was quite clearly related, in part, to feeling free to truly teach their students rather than prepare them for a standardized test. Teachers expressed feeling that the testing movement had pushed them to think of their students as data points, whereas SEL gave them permission to engage with their students as human beings.

6.2. Teachers Value Flexibility

One aim of this study was to understand the kinds of decisions that teachers encounter when implementing evidence-based programs, and the ways in which they go about making those decisions. What I found is that teachers in this study implemented their programs in a flexible manner for a variety of reasons (e.g., to work around time constraints, to enhance program relevance, or to comply with administrator requests), and perceived this flexibility to be inextricably linked to program effectiveness. They described how much more effective they thought their program was as a result of changes that they had made, particularly changes aimed at enhancing program relevance. However teachers also shared with me that flexibility is important to them in their teaching practice more generally. In fact, although not included in the results section because it wasn’t an explicit focus of this study, several of the teachers I interviewed indicated that they adapt everything they are given, as a matter of course, either to make it relevant to what’s happening in the classroom, to respond to how students are engaging with the material, or simply to put their own spin on it—all of which likely boil down to teachers’ implicit beliefs about what is or will be most effective. In other words, some teachers expressed that they always adapt programs, and their comments suggested that this may be because they implicitly equate adaptation with best practice.
There is accumulating research evidence that adaptation of school-based interventions is the norm rather than the exception (e.g., Datnow and Castellano, 2000; Dusenbury et al., 2005; Larsen and Samdal, 2007; Ozer et al., 2010; Ringwalt et al., 2003), and some evidence to suggest that this may be more characteristic of teacher-delivered interventions than those delivered by trained outside providers (St. Pierre and Kaltreider, 2004). The literature-to-date has identified a number of reasons that school-based interventions are adapted, including teacher beliefs about the effectiveness of the intervention, principal support for implementation, issues of “fit” or relevance for the target population, and logistical challenges (Ozer et al., 2010; Ringwalt et al., 2004; Solomon, unpublished data). The present study adds to this literature. All teachers in this study acknowledged adapting the program that they were using, and doing so for some of these same reasons. But what’s interesting is that, for some teachers, there may have been another reason that had nothing to do with the program itself or any contextual factors—namely, an underlying belief, perhaps relating back to their training in differentiated instruction, that the most effective delivery of anything is an adapted delivery. Of course, this is largely speculative; more research is needed to explore how common this belief might be among teachers, and the extent to which it has an impact on the implementation of teacher-delivered programs.

A small body of research has found that flexibility to adapt and/or adaptations themselves can enhance the effectiveness (e.g., McGraw et al., 1996) and sustainability (Berman and Pauly, 1975; Han and Weiss, 2005; Scheirer, 2005; Smith and Caldwell, 2007) of interventions. Flexibility may: (1) help to increase the relevance of the intervention for the target population (Castro et al., 2004; Ozer et al., 2010); (2) make it possible to adapt to changing circumstances (Han and Weiss, 2005); and (3) help to fully integrate an intervention into the structures and routines of a school (Adelman and Taylor, 2003). Another potential benefit of flexibility with regard to teacher-delivered interventions, in particular, is that flexibility may pave the way for integration and reinforcement. In the present study, a number of teachers described weaving or “blending” SEL into other subjects, either in addition to or in place of
delivering stand-alone program lessons. Moreover, a number of teachers described reinforcing concepts from the program throughout the day, such as when conflicts arose between students. There is evidence to suggest that programs may be most effective when they include practices that support the generalization of skills outside of skill-based lessons, and, further, that these types of practices may be more important than adherence to lesson components (e.g., Hirschstein et al., 2007). In short, there may be multiple advantages to teachers implementing programs in a flexible manner, the way that teachers in this study did.

This underscores a tenacious flaw in our collective thinking. Despite the regularity with which adaptations take place and the potential advantages of them, even those researchers who take a moderate stance in the fidelity/adaptation debate still place a rather high priority on fidelity and recommend keeping adaptations to a minimum. This is based on the notion that the evidence underlying any evidence-based program is tied to a particular version of that program, namely a high fidelity version; therefore, effectiveness may be compromised to the extent that changes are made. Of course, those familiar with this debate know that it has evolved, and the issue of “core components” now plays a central role. The dominant perspective emphasizes that fidelity or adherence to the core programmatic components or causal mechanisms is highly important, and that adaptations that do not threaten those aspects of an intervention are permissible or even potentially desirable (e.g., Bauman et al., 1991; Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, 2002; Green and Glasgow, 2006).

The practical challenge of this is that few interventions adequately delineate their core components, making it difficult to determine whether an adaptation is or is not permissible (Durlak and DuPre, 2008; Elliott and Mihalic, 2004). I did not set out to evaluate implementation in any way in this study, and so I cannot speak to how “well” teachers implemented their programs. I did find, however, that teachers in this study felt that they were implementing their programs with a reasonable level of fidelity despite the adaptations that they made. Each teacher I interviewed described changes that she
had made to her respective program, but emphasized that, depending on the program, she had either focused on teaching and reinforcing what she felt were the concepts embodied in the program, or had modified the content but faithfully maintained the structure (e.g., of the classroom meetings) outlined in the program. This sounds rather like adhering to core components, but only if teachers adequately understood what those core components were.

Perhaps even more important than the challenges associated with core components is that fidelity and related constructs (e.g., adherence, dosage) have dominated the field of implementation research, casting adaptation as the opposite of fidelity rather than as a phenomenon in its own right. Relatively little research has compared different versions of the same school-based intervention to assess differences in effectiveness. Further, although many implementation studies report on the impact of fidelity on intervention outcomes, almost none report on the impact of adaptations (Durlak and DuPre, 2008). This is likely because adaptations are seldom measured, which may itself be related to limitations of existing implementation measures. The extent to which fidelity checklists capture potentially beneficial adaptations—such as practices that support students’ generalization of skills outside of program lessons—is unclear and likely varies by program.

Given the extent to which teachers value flexibility, and, as this study and others suggest, will implement programs flexibly under “real world” conditions, we need to recognize that adaptations may be as important as fidelity in understanding the quality of implementation, and therefore embrace adaptations—not as a necessary evil, but rather as an integral part of the implementation process that deserves focused, systematic attention.

6.3. **Teachers Don’t Just Deliver Programs, They Experience Them**

Although evidence-based classroom prevention programs are thought to primarily target student outcomes, teachers in this study were also affected by these programs. They discussed feeling both personally and professionally transformed as a result of encountering and implementing an SEL
program. They described changes in their thoughts, feelings, and skills—some of which seemed to have taken place early in the experience, around the time that they first encountered SEL, but most of which seemed to have evolved more gradually. Moreover, teachers felt that their teaching practice had been transformed in ways that would extend beyond implementation of the program.

There is potentially much value in the types of teacher-level change identified in this study. For instance, some teachers felt that their own social-emotional competencies had developed alongside their students. There is evidence that teachers’ social-emotional competencies might help them cope better with stress, reducing the likelihood that they will experience burnout (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Jones et al., 2013), as well as increase teachers’ levels of positive affect, in turn increasing their job satisfaction (Brackett et al., 2010). Research suggests that teachers’ social-emotional competencies are also key to creating a classroom environment conducive to learning (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009; Jones et al., 2013). Additionally, some teachers in this study felt that their approach to handling student misbehavior had evolved in connection with learning about and implementing SEL, and research suggests that effective behavior management may be a critical predictor of student behavior (Cappella et al., 2012; Raver et al., 2011) as well as an important factor in stress (Shernoff et al., 2011) and burnout (Abel and Sewell, 1999) among urban teachers. Given the radiating impacts of teacher stress and burnout on students (Becker et al., 2014; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009) and other teachers (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2000), the teacher-level changes identified in this study could potentially have far-reaching effects.

Although seemingly beneficial, are the program impacts on teachers identified in this study surprising, or are they to be expected? I would argue that the answer is: both. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), widely regarded as the leading authority on SEL, teacher-level outcomes are not an explicit goal of SEL programs:
The short-term goals of SEL programs are to: one, promote students’ self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship, and responsible decision-making skills; and two, improve student attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school. These, in turn, provide a foundation for better adjustment and academic performance as reflected in more positive social behaviors and peer relationships, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved grades and test scores. (CASEL, 2015)

However, CASEL describes three approaches upon which SEL programs may be built, alone or in combination: (1) explicit SEL skills instruction, (2) integration [of SEL] with academic curriculum areas, and (3) teacher instructional practices (CASEL, 2015). Although the last of these is not defined on the CASEL website or in the 2013 CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs (“the Guide”), information in those sources suggests that it refers to: (1) training teachers “to be more emotionally supportive of their students or to use positive discipline practices to respond to students’ needs,” and/or (2) fostering “safe, caring, engaging and participatory learning environments” (CASEL, 2015, http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/promotion/). Given this, different types of programs could be expected to target teacher-level change to different extents, and it is not entirely surprising that teachers in the present study felt that they had changed or grown in connection with implementing an SEL program.

What is surprising is that only one (Caring School Community) of the four programs used by teachers in this study is coded in the Guide as employing a “teacher instructional practices” approach to SEL (CASEL, 2012). Unfortunately, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is not included in the Guide, so it is not clear how it would be coded by the same system; however, it is marketed as a “whole-school, systems-change program,” so one might expect to see teacher-level change with that program as well ( Hazelden, 2007, p. 4). Still, the other two programs implemented by teachers in this study—Second Step and the 4Rs—are both coded as employing an “explicit SEL skills instruction” approach, and the 4Rs
additionally employs an “integration with academic curriculum areas” approach. According to the Guide, neither of these programs target teacher-level change, yet some of the teachers who implemented them described experiencing change (e.g., their own improved social-emotional competencies, changes in their behavior management approach) in conjunction with program implementation.

It may be that teacher-level impacts are unintended, or it may be that the goals and/or theories of change underlying SEL programs have not been sufficiently articulated. For instance, although the explicit goals of SEL programs are framed in terms of student outcomes, a prominent SEL scientist communicated that enduring teacher-level change is indeed a goal of many people in the field (Weissberg, 2016, personal communication). Another example, which relates to program mechanisms rather than goals, is that the Guide (created by experts in the field) does not characterize the 4Rs program as employing a “teacher instructional practices” approach, however, in an experimental evaluation of the program, Brown, Jones, LaRusso, and Aber (2010) characterized its theory of change as follows:

...helping teachers more deeply assimilate, find utility in, and become skilled at practicing the concepts of the 4Rs Program in their own lives and teaching them in their classroom through the consistent delivery of lessons from the 4Rs curriculum and the provision of greater social-emotional learning opportunities in which students can practice the component skills and be supported in applying them in real-life situations.

(p. 157)

A final example relating to program mechanisms comes from the present study. One of the teachers who implemented Caring School Community attributed some of her personal growth not to components of the program that target teacher instructional practices but rather to the skills instruction component: “Teaching SEL competencies and how to communicate with others helped me apply it in my
personal life. I think it just gave me a push to use tools I didn’t know I had. It gave me more empathy, definitely.” This suggests that some teachers in this study may have benefited, from teaching SEL, in ways that the program developers and SEL scientists may not have anticipated.

Domitrovich et al. (2016) noted three possible pathways by which, alone or in combination, a student intervention may impact the teacher: (1) once achieved, the targeted student outcomes could, in turn, impact the teacher (i.e., secondary effects), (2) the teacher could learn or internalize the intervention content through teaching it (i.e., exposure), and (3) if the intervention includes professional development or coaching opportunities, the teacher could be influenced by those elements. What the teacher above described—about gaining social-emotional competence through teaching it—aligns with the second path noted by Domitrovich and colleagues (2016). Indeed, anyone who has taught, raised children, or even helped a classmate or colleague understand something better, knows that we reinforce our own understanding of things through teaching. This is why peer-tutoring is understood to be so valuable for students; both parties benefit (Dineen et al., 1977). In fact, research suggests that simply expecting to teach information—and not necessarily the teaching itself—changes the way in which a person engages with the information and improves his or her own learning (Nestojko et al., 2014). And so it makes sense that teachers could strengthen their own understanding of social-emotional processes, and perhaps even strengthen their own social-emotional competencies, through teaching social-emotional skills to their students.

Teachers in the present study also described coming to understand over time that SEL works, and with this evolving understanding, they became more committed to "doing SEL" with their students in the future, in some shape or form, regardless of there being a formal program in place. This finding aligns with prior research (Han and Weiss, 2005) and with the first pathway noted by Domitrovich et al. (2016), regarding secondary effects of the program’s main impact(s) on students. Together, the first two pathways seem to help explain why even the explicitly student-targeted components of these
programs may, in fact, have had an impact on teachers. More research is needed to explore the conditions under which SEL programs might impact teachers via these two pathways. Identifying those conditions could potentially strengthen and broaden intervention impacts, and also improve the efficiency with which interventions achieve their targeted outcomes.

A small body of literature has begun to explore the effects of student prevention programs on teachers’ feelings and beliefs, as well as aspects of their mental health. Together, these studies provide evidence that student-targeted interventions can have an impact on teachers, in particular with regard to several dimensions of self-efficacy (Fruth and Huber, 2015; Domitrovich et al., 2016), teachers’ feelings of competence and success in their job more generally (Domitrovich et al., 2016), and their job-related affective wellbeing (Tyson et al., 2009). In these studies, it appears that student prevention programs likely influenced teachers through coaching, the third pathway identified by Domitrovich et al. (2016). Teachers in the present study talked about being more effective with regard to student behavioral challenges, which aligns with the findings on self-efficacy from this group of studies; however, few teachers in the present study discussed receiving coaching in conjunction with implementation. Therefore, more research is needed to explore the conditions under which self-efficacy and related outcomes can be influenced by student SEL programs in the absence of coaching, as the present study suggests may be possible.

In addition to this very small body of literature addressing the impacts of student prevention programs on teachers’ personal/psychological development, there is also literature related to the changes in teacher practice suggested by the present study. In recent years, as interventions have increasingly targeted the teacher-driven classroom social processes (e.g., teacher-student interaction, emotional climate, behavior management) that have been found to predict behavioral and learning outcomes for students (Brown et al., 2010), research has begun to address the impact of those interventions on these classroom processes. Findings from this body of research generally suggest that
classroom social processes are indeed modifiable through intervention (e.g., Abry et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2010; Hagelskamp et al., 2013; Raver et al., 2008; Rivers et al., 2013), which lends support for the finding that teachers in the present study felt that SEL helped them get to know their students better and improved their classroom climate, and that their approach to handling student misbehavior evolved in conjunction with implementing an SEL program. However, the interventions studied in this body of literature, which impact teacher behavior and classroom social processes, do so by providing teachers with targeted professional development, coaching, and/or consultation. Again, few teachers in the present study discussed receiving this type of support, therefore more research is needed to explore the conditions under which classroom social processes such as behavior management can be influenced via other pathways, as the present study suggests may be possible.

Regardless of the approach or pathway, it could be argued that enduring teacher-level change really ought to be a goal of any classroom-based prevention program. First, as will be discussed later, there is evidence to suggest that in order for a teacher to effectively implement a student SEL program, her own social-emotional competence must be adequate “to create an environment that is conducive to SEL” (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009, p. 504). This, in turn, suggests that SEL programs must simultaneously address student and teacher social-emotional competence in order to be effective. Second, given the relatively short-lived nature of “programs” in schools, the sustainability of programs should not be tied to the programs themselves. Rather, programs should enhance the capacity of teachers and/or schools to promote the targeted outcomes in students. Altman (1995) defined intervention sustainability as including three elements: “interventions that are maintained, organizations that modify their actions as a result of participating in research, and individuals who, through the research process, gain knowledge and skills that are used in other life domains” (p. 527). I would argue that this definition is equally relevant for interventions that are not part of a research endeavor, and others have discussed these alternate conceptualizations of program sustainability as
well (e.g., Scheirer, 2005; Shediac-Rizkallah and Bone, 1998). Teachers in the present study perceived their teaching practice changed in enduring ways; future research should explore the conditions under which teacher practice continues to be shaped by programs—both those that have been discontinued and those that remain in a school setting—as well as the conditions under which these changes to teacher practice are beneficial for students (Beehler, 2012).

In summary, relatively little research attention has been directed towards the impact on teachers of SEL or other student prevention programs, and more is needed. The present study contributes to this nascent body of literature and helps to underscore that this line of research is appropriate to pursue, as there is preliminary evidence to suggest that teachers are indeed affected both personally and professionally by SEL programs. In order to understand the full range of potential program impacts, as well as to guide effective implementation, program developers and prevention researchers ought to: (1) clarify the goals and theories of change underlying classroom-based prevention programs, (2) measure the full range of proximal and distal outcomes influenced by programs, and (3) explore the different pathways by which programs impact those outcomes as well as the conditions under which those pathways are active. Finally, the few studies that have explored the impacts of SEL programs on teachers have measured specific teacher-level outcomes closely linked to the goals of those programs; however, the present study suggests that perhaps research in this area ought to be more exploratory, at least initially, in order to identify both intended and unintended outcomes of student SEL programs.

6.4. **Programs Don’t Implement Themselves**

Earlier I made the point that anyone who has taught, raised children, or tutored a classmate knows that we reinforce our own understanding of things through teaching. On the flip side, anyone who has done these things also knows that it’s difficult to adequately explain something that we don’t really have a grasp of ourselves. Not only did some teachers in the present study feel that they
strengthened their own social-emotional competencies as a result of their experience with an SEL program, some also detected that these competencies, along with a deep understanding of the ideas embedded within the program, in turn contributed to the impact of the program on students. In addition, teachers perceived that their increased commitment to teaching SEL, which evolved over time from perceiving that it was having a positive impact on students, as well as their altered approach to addressing behavioral problems, which also evolved over time, both further contributed to the impact of the program on students.

The research-to-date tends to suggest that a teacher has a particular understanding of the purpose and goals of a program, has a particular set of attitudes or beliefs about the value or utility of the program, buys into the program to a greater or lesser extent, has a particular set of expectations for the program, and ultimately implements the program in a particular way, depending on all of these personal factors and others, combined with a host of contextual factors such as the availability of time and other resources, the support of their principal, the attitudes of their colleagues, the amount of training and/or coaching provided, etc. In this way, the effectiveness of a particular teacher implementing a particular program, at a particular point in time and in a particular school, is thought to depend on a diverse set of factors that one could measure either prior to implementation (e.g., teacher attitudes, principal support) or during implementation (e.g., amount of training provided, fidelity of implementation).

What the present study adds to our understanding is that, through the experience of implementing a program, teachers may learn new strategies and/or develop new competencies, which may impact their teaching approach, which may in turn impact their attitudes and/or beliefs via seeing the impact on students of that new approach, and that each of these changes may also potentially impact their implementation of said program. The interplay among teacher, student, and program complicates our efforts to measure and understand the relationship between things like teacher
attitudes and implementation fidelity, for instance, because these things are not static. Despite such methodological challenges, attending to the dynamic environment surrounding implementation is absolutely crucial to understanding a program’s effectiveness.

6.5. Teachers Felt Unprepared to Handle Students’ Social and Emotional Challenges

The last key finding of the present study was that many teachers reported feeling unprepared by their certification programs to handle students’ social and emotional challenges, and also felt that the SEL program they implemented provided them with a blueprint for how to do that, even if they did not ultimately follow the blueprint exactly. Based on their experiences, it seems that SEL programs may be filling a gap created by teacher preparation programs.

This finding—that teachers felt unprepared upon entering the classroom to handle social-emotional issues that arose—is supported by recent research indicating that relatively few states require, for certification, that teachers receive training to develop students’ social-emotional skills (Schonert-Reichl and Hymel, 2013), and that relatively few teachers indeed receive formal pre-service training on how to teach social and emotional skills (Civic Enterprises et al., 2013). Unfortunately, bringing in proprietary programs to fill a skill gap seems like a rather reactive approach, not to mention an expensive one. Further, unless all schools are mandated—and held accountable—to implement such programs, this leaves countless students with neither a program nor a teacher trained to handle their social and emotional needs, which, according to the teachers I interviewed, can greatly interfere with a child’s ability to learn.

A more cost-effective and sustainable approach, as well as one that could potentially benefit more students, might be to work towards incorporating this type of training into teacher certification programs so that teachers do feel prepared for the types of social and emotional issues that might arise in their classrooms. Along with this, the mentoring of early career teachers should also address these issues, if it doesn’t already. By transforming teacher certification programs so that they better prepare
teachers and equip them with the necessary skills and strategies at the outset of their careers—before they ever enter the classroom—we may be able to reduce our reliance on programs. I believe that this shift may already be underway (Parker-Katz, 2016, personal communication); however, it has thus far been difficult to locate information about either the policies that may have influenced this or the specific ways in which training programs will change.

To support this shift in teacher preparation, it may be beneficial for the field of school-based SEL to move towards a more modular approach—much like what has been proposed by Chorpita, Daleiden, and Weisz (2005) in the field of child mental health, and by Rotheram-Borus, Ingram, Swendeman, and Flannery (2009) in the field of HIV prevention. Such an approach emphasizes effective practices and principles, rather than programs. It requires that we first identify elements that cross-cut existing evidence-based programs and develop a framework that would allow practitioners to select appropriate practices in a more customized way. A modular approach is consistent with the idea of conceptualizing interventions as events within systems rather than as static program packages that must be implemented in exactly the same way across settings (Hawe et al., 2009). Conceived of this way, interventions have a change process, or function, that should remain consistent across settings, while the form may differ based on local conditions (Hawe et al., 2009).

Whereas teacher certification programs couldn’t feasibly expose teachers to all of the SEL programs that are currently available, they could feasibly train teachers in the use of different practice modules related to student social-emotional development. In truth, the many existing SEL programs likely have more common than unique elements; we simply need to distill those elements down. Given the intersections of SEL and mental health, much of this work has already been done for us. For instance, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2009) conducted an extensive review of the literature on effective approaches to preventing specific mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders, as well as approaches to promoting mental health and positive development, and from this
outlined common principles of effective prevention as well as techniques that have consistently been found to help put those principles into action.
7. LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

This study was limited in that it captured the experiences of teachers who, by and large, bought into the program they were asked to implement, felt comfortable going beyond an academic role and engaging with students about things like emotions, had relatively “typical” classrooms with no more than one or two extremely behaviorally challenging students, and were inclined to adapt the program to meet their needs. Many teachers in my sample referred to colleagues whose experiences differed from their own. Several mentioned colleagues who either were not comfortable with the idea of SEL, were not particularly invested in it, or claimed to be invested but their behavior (e.g., in the hallway with students) suggested otherwise. Others referred to colleagues at their respective schools who had said, essentially, that the program wasn’t working for them; these participants shared the suspicion that their colleagues might be doing “straight script” and therefore not seeing results. One teacher indicated that a colleague with “lower” students had more behavior problems and therefore needed to “use” the program a lot more. Despite my best efforts, I was unable to establish contact with any of those colleagues, likely because teachers with less positive experiences are less inclined to participate in a project such as this.

This study additionally captured the experiences of teachers who were granted a fair amount of autonomy (Gorozidis and Papaioannou, 2014), at schools where teachers felt like their voices were heard (Rohrbach et al., 1983). Based on teachers’ descriptions, these schools had in common their “incredible,” “tight-knit,” and “supportive” professional climates, characterized by high levels of collaboration, collegiality, and “professional discourse” (Gersten et al., 2000), as well as strong organizational climates for implementation (Klein and Sorra, 1996)—namely strong leadership support for the program being implemented (Ransford et al., 2009; Rohrbach et al., 1983; Thaker et al., 2008) and the presence of individuals who may have served as “key opinion leaders” to encourage/support implementation within the school (Kelleher and Atkins, 2010), some of whom may have even
participated in this study. By most accounts, these schools would be regarded as high-level implementers; in fact, teachers at two schools indicated that their school was considered within the district to be a “model school”—either for SEL or for Second Step. In an attempt to introduce into my sample variation along this very dimension, I obtained a list from CPS of schools who were not yet “fully implementing” Second Step. Unfortunately, despite repeated attempts, I was unable to make contact with those schools. The story told in this dissertation would likely be quite different for teachers at schools with a different type of climate and/or implementing at a lower level.

Further, certain methodological choices limit the types of insights that can be gleaned from this study. For instance, had I focused more narrowly on a single program, I could have mapped that program’s intended goals and mechanisms of change onto teachers’ experiences in order to more precisely analyze the influence of that program on teachers. On the other hand, although including only one program may have facilitated a deeper understanding of the ways in which, and pathways by which, that program had an impact on teachers, this study suggests that different programs may have had similar impacts on teachers despite employing different approaches to SEL. In this way, the present study challenges us to think more critically than we have in the past about the goals and mechanisms of SEL programs more generally.

Because I prioritized understanding what teachers felt was important about the implementation experience, I didn’t ask about certain things that might have nevertheless been instructive to learn about. For instance, had I inquired about teachers’ understandings of the core components of the program that they used, this may have facilitated my understanding of their decision-making process related to implementation. Additionally, I asked about the kind of training they received, but didn’t explicitly ask about coaching. It’s possible that more teachers received coaching, but that only a few were impressed enough by it to mention it spontaneously. Knowing more about the types of ongoing
support that teachers received could help to put these findings into context and potentially help to
identify patterns that were not readily apparent in these analyses.

Finally, the fact that this study relied exclusively on participants’ perceptions is both a weakness
and a strength. It’s quite possible that participants’ memories, for instance, of their initial reactions to
the program that they implemented, were influenced by their subsequent experience with that
program. Moreover, participants’ perceptions of their own teaching practice may or may not be
accurate. I didn’t observe teachers in their classrooms before and after encountering an SEL program;
therefore, I cannot say whether the changes they perceived in their behavior management approach,
for example, were in fact improvements/steps toward more effective behavior management. There is a
chance that teachers may have perceived that they became more effective because of changes in the
way that they think about student behavior, rather than changes in the ways that they actually address
student behavior.

On the other hand, far too many studies approach teacher implementation, of anything, as
something that needs to be at best measured, and at worst controlled or improved. The discussion is
inherently judgmental, even if framed in terms of factors that facilitate implementation. The very
notion of implementation quality is imposed on teachers from outside; it is the concern of researchers
and program developers. In this study, I allowed teachers to describe their implementation experience
from inside that experience, to understand what was salient to them and what they felt was important.
If we are to move the needle on improving teacher wellbeing or student outcomes of any kind, we need
to do this more often; teachers’ perspectives, experiences, and expertise must be valued and given a
more prominent place in the discussion.
8. CONCLUSION

When initiating this project, I viewed the confounding of practice and programs as a potential threat to the teaching profession, in that I worried that it redefined teachers as instruments rather than agents of the educational process. This concern was not at all reflected in the experiences of teachers in the present study. Although only one teacher was involved in the decision to adopt the evidence-based prevention program at her school—and therefore one could argue that these programs were, by and large, imposed on teachers— the fact is that teachers appreciated having them. They did not feel pressured to implement these programs exactly as they were designed; in fact, they adapted them in a variety of ways, with little hesitation. Ultimately, teacher practice was shaped by teachers’ experiences with an evidence-based prevention program, rather than forced to accommodate such a program. For teachers in this study, the phenomenon of implementing an evidence-based classroom prevention program was more about encountering SEL and integrating it into their teaching practice than it was about the program at all.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

1. What does it mean to you to be an educator?
   (a) What is your educational philosophy?
   (b) Do you see education more as an art or as a science?

2. Could you briefly describe the culture/professional climate at your school?
   (Probe: relationships among colleagues, attitudes toward new initiatives)

3. Could you describe your relationship(s) with the administrator(s) at your school?
   (Probe: leadership style, supportiveness)

4. In thinking about all the different things that you do in your classroom, could you briefly tell me which types of things you generally have decision-making authority over, and which types of things you have been told that you have to do (e.g., by an administrator)?
   (a) Lessons/activities in core subject areas?
   (b) Lessons/activities outside of core subject areas (e.g., conflict resolution, character education, bullying prevention/awareness, other social/emotional/behavioral types of activities)?
   (c) Classroom management strategies?
   (d) Student assessments?
   (e) Other?

5. In thinking about program X, can you describe how you learned that you were going to be implementing the program?
   (a) Who told you?
   (b) What did they say?
   • Do you know who was involved in the decision to implement the program?
   • Do you know why that particular program was chosen/what types of things factored into the decision?
   • Do you know how many/which other teachers in your school were also asked to implement the program?

6. Was there ever any discussion of possible changes that might be needed in order to make program X work in this particular school environment? If so, please tell me about those discussions.
   (a) Who was involved?
   (b) When did they take place?
   (c) What types of changes were discussed?
   (d) Were any changes subsequently made?
   • If so, do you think they were helpful? Why/why not?
Appendix A (continued)

7. Please tell me about your experience with program X.
   (a) What kind of training did you receive?
   (b) Were you given a program manual? Did you read it? If so, how helpful was it?
   (c) Was there somebody you could contact if you had questions about the program?
   (d) Did you consult any of these (or any other) resources while implementing the program?
   (e) How familiar were you with the research behind the program?
      • What did you think of that research?
   (f) What was it like to implement the program?
      • What were some of the challenges that you encountered?
      • What did you like or dislike about the program?
      • Did you feel that the program was relevant and appropriate for your students?
   (g) How did your experience compare to that of your colleagues?

8. Did you feel that program X fit with your own approach to teaching? How so?
   (Probe: prior experience, education/training)
   (a) [If it did not fit well...] how did you handle this?
   (Probe: colleague support)

9. In what ways do you feel that you implemented program X “faithfully”?
   (a) What do you think contributed to this?

10. In what ways do you feel that you made changes to program X?
    (Probe: additions, subtractions, and/or modifications to content, format, language, etc.)
   (a) What do you think contributed to this?
    (Probe: tailoring to student needs/backgrounds, logistical issues, beliefs about effective
teaching, different objectives)
   (b) How did you go about making decisions about what to change?
    (Probe: planned vs. impromptu changes, regard for program’s underlying theory,
consultation with others)

11. How would you describe your role with respect to implementing program X?
    (a) Was your role what you expected?
    (Probe: autonomy, flexibility)

12. Did program X take time away from other things?
    (a) What types of things?
    (b) Were those things “lost” entirely, or were they done at other times during the
day/week/semester/year?
    (c) Do you see this as a problem? Why/why not?
Appendix A (continued)

13. Could you describe the circumstances surrounding the discontinuation of program X at your school?
   (a) Do you know who was involved in the decision to discontinue it?
   (b) Do you know what types of things factored into that decision?
   (c) How long was the program implemented at your school?

14. Do you feel that program X has influenced the way you think about things or do things in your classroom?
   (a) Was there anything in it that you still use, even now?
   (b) Where is the program manual now? Have you ever looked through it again, since implementation officially ended?

15. What are some things that come to mind when I say the words “evidence-based programs” or “evidence-based practices”?

16. Can you tell me a little bit about your history with these types of programs?
   (a) How many/what types... have you personally implemented in the past?
   (b) ...are being/have been implemented previously at this school?
   (c) How would you characterize your previous experiences w/programs?
   (d) What is the general feeling at your school about the introduction of new programs?

17. Do you feel that there are any benefits to implementing an existing program rather than something that you, the teacher, devise?
   (a) What do you think are the main benefits?

18. Do you feel that there are any drawbacks to implementing an existing program?
   (a) What do you see as the main drawbacks?

(The following questions will be asked at the end of the interview, but will not be audiotaped.)

19. Approximately how long have you been a teacher?

20. Approximately how long have you taught at this school?

21. What is your highest level of education?

22. What type of teaching certification do you hold?
   (e.g., Standard vs. Emergency, Elementary vs. Secondary, etc.)
Appendix B

Second Step

Program Design and Implementation Support

Second Step provides instruction in social and emotional learning with units on skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, friendship skills, and problem solving. The program contains separate sets of lessons for use in prekindergarten through eighth grade implemented in 22 to 28 weeks each year. The Early Learning program in Second Step also includes a unit for transitioning to kindergarten. Second Step uses four key strategies to reinforce skill development: brain builder games (to build executive function), weekly theme activities, reinforcing activities, and home links. Teachers are encouraged to give children daily opportunities to practice. Second Step also connects new skills to other areas in the curriculum (e.g., literacy, arts, dramatic arts) and provides a structure for each day of the week. The first day contains a script and main lesson. The second day includes a story and discussion. The third and fourth days involve practice activities in small and large groups. On the fifth day students read a book connected to the overall unit theme, and teachers send home a “Home Link” activity that gives students an opportunity to practice new skills with their caregivers. Second Step lessons and accompanying photographs incorporate a variety of cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Home Link activities are available in English and Spanish. Initial training for Second Step typically lasts one to four hours and is not required.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Range Covered</th>
<th>PreK-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade-by-Grade Sequence</td>
<td>⭕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Sessions Per Year</td>
<td>22-28 weekly topics/ across 5 days per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Approach to Teaching SEL</td>
<td>Explicit skills instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to Practice Social and Emotional Skills</td>
<td>⭕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom-Wide Context</td>
<td>⭕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Wide Context</td>
<td>⭕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Context</td>
<td>⭕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Context</td>
<td>⭕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools for Monitoring Implementation</td>
<td>⭕</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools for Measuring Student Behavior</td>
<td>⭕</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(CASEL, 2012, p. 60)
Appendix B (continued)

Caring School Community

Program Design and Implementation Support

Caring School Community, a program designed for use in kindergarten through sixth grade, is organized around four core educational practices: Class Meetings (30-35 per grade), Cross-Age Buddies, Homeside Activities, and Schoolwide Community-Building Activities. Class Meetings present a schedule of lessons and activities to be implemented throughout the school year. Forty Cross Age Buddies activities promote bonding between pairs of older and younger students while at the same time supporting exploration of a wide range of academic subjects. Homeside Activities are implemented once or twice a month. These are first reviewed in class, then completed at home with caregivers, and then reflected upon and concluded in class. Schoolwide Community-Building Activities are implemented throughout the school year to build relationships, share knowledge, and promote pride in the school environment. Caring School Community offers suggestions to support English Language Learners, and Homeside Activities are available in English and Spanish. Initial training for the Caring School Community program typically lasts half a day to two full days and is not required. Caring School Community offers a train-the-trainer system to support sustainability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Range Covered</th>
<th>K-6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade-by-Grade Sequence</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Sessions Per Year</td>
<td>Year-long, with 30-35 class meetings per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Approach to Teaching SEL</td>
<td>Teacher instructional practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to Practice Social and Emotional Skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom-Wide Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Wide Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools for Monitoring Implementation</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools for Measuring Student Behavior</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(CASEL, 2012, p. 45)
Appendix B (continued)

### 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution)

**Program Design and Implementation Support**

The 4Rs Program (Reading, Writing, Respect, and Resolution) provides read-alouds, book talks, and sequential, interactive skills lessons to develop social and emotional skills related to understanding and managing feelings, listening and developing empathy, being assertive, solving conflict creatively and nonviolently, honoring diversity, and standing up to teasing and bullying. 4Rs is a grade-specific program available for students in prekindergarten through eighth grade. Divided into seven units, each grade has approximately 35 lessons — one a week throughout the year. Units also include extension activities, infusion ideas, recommendations of other books, and 4Rs Activity Sheets to reinforce students’ understanding. The 4Rs program reinforces skills and concepts covered in each unit with a Family Connection activity that students take home to complete with their caregivers and 4Rs “Family Connections” parent workshops. Peer mediation and Peace Helper programs are also available to support classroom- and school-wide programming. All 4Rs stories incorporate a variety of cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Initial training for the 4Rs program typically lasts 25-30 hours and is required. 4Rs offers a train-the-trainer system to support sustainability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Range Covered</th>
<th>PreK-8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade-by-Grade Sequence</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Sessions Per Year</td>
<td>35 period-long classroom sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Approach to Teaching SEL</td>
<td>Explicit skills instruction Integration with academics (English/language arts)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY**

- Minimal
- Adequate
- Extensive

| Opportunities to Practice Social and Emotional Skills | 
|----------|-----------------|
| Classroom-Wide Context | ● |
| School-Wide Context | ● |
| Family Context | ● |
| Community Context | ○ |
| Tools for Monitoring Implementation | ✓ |
| Tools for Measuring Student Behavior | ✓ |

(CASEL, 2012, p. 43)
The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program
(U.S. Department Of Health And Human Services, n.d.)

“The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is a multilevel, multicomponent school-based program designed to prevent or reduce bullying in elementary, middle, and junior high schools (students 6 to 15 years old). The program attempts to restructure the existing school environment to reduce opportunities and rewards for bullying. School staff is largely responsible for introducing and implementing the program. Their efforts are directed toward improving peer relations and making the school a safe and positive place for students to learn and develop.”

“All students participate in most aspects of the program, while students identified as bullying others or as targets of bullying receive additional individual interventions.”

The program is designed to:

- Reduces existing bullying/victim problems
- Prevents development of new cases of bullying
- Improves peer relations at the school

The program involves:

“Schoolwide Interventions
- Administration of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire… (filled out anonymously by the students)
- Formation of a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee
- Staff training
- Development of schoolwide rules against bullying
- Development of a coordinated system of supervision during break periods

Classroom-level Interventions
- Regular classroom meetings about bullying and peer relations
- Class parent meetings

Individual-level Interventions
- Individual meetings with children who bully
- Individual meetings with children who are targets of bullying
- Meetings with parents of children involved”

“Implementation of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program requires significant and ongoing commitment from school administrators, teachers, and other staff. A first step is to establish a Bullying Prevention Coordinating Committee composed of administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the program’s onsite coordinator.”

“All school staff participate in a half- to 1-day training session. In addition, teachers are expected to—

- Thoroughly read the Teacher Handbook...
- Hold weekly 20- to 40-minute classroom meetings.
- Participate in regular Teacher Discussion Groups during the first year of the program.”
VITA

Bonnie J. Solomon

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Community & Prevention Research, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL, 2016
M.A., Community & Prevention Research, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL, 2010

RESEARCH & EVALUATION

May 2015 – Present
Educational Program Evaluation Coordinator
Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Affairs, University of Illinois at Chicago
Collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data to inform and evaluate programming aimed to improve undergraduate performance, retention, and graduation. Contribute to presentations, internal evaluation reports, research briefs, and academic papers. Write grant proposals and assist with submissions to the university’s internal review board.

Aug 2015 – Aug 2015
Sub Area Manager
F2 Solutions LLC, Office of Family Assistance Responsible Fatherhood Program
Remotely oversaw and provided guidance to two panels conducting an objective review of applications during a two-week federal grant session.

Sept 2008 – Aug 2012
Research Assistant, Links to Learning Project
University of Illinois at Chicago
Managed all student (N = 171), parent, teacher, and provider data for a longitudinal research study that tested a model of school-based mental health services for urban low income children. Served as the team’s database administrator for DatStat Illume, maintained and updated electronic data collection instruments at each wave of the study, and trained staff on the use of the platform. Communicated study’s research questions and data structure to an external team of statisticians, and provided ongoing support and consultation throughout data analysis. Trained and supervised research assistants in conducting direct assessments of student literacy. Conducted data collection involving teacher surveys, structured interviews with parents, direct assessments of student literacy, and observations of classroom quality. Prepared annual review documentation for federal funding agency and various internal review boards.

Sept 2008 – May 2009
Community Practicum Intern, Chicago Public Schools
University of Illinois at Chicago
Conducted qualitative and quantitative data analyses and wrote evaluation reports. Created portions of a survey construction guide to support district in program monitoring and evaluation.
*University of Illinois at Chicago*

Collaborated with program director to develop an evaluation of a pilot program that trains volunteers to serve as advocates for unaccompanied immigrant children taken into federal custody. Conducted and analyzed interviews and focus groups, and reviewed program documentation. Synthesized all data into a final report presented to the program director.

*University of Chicago*

Obtained teacher-reported assessments of over 500 children in a longitudinal, randomized intervention study of Head Start children’s emotional and behavioral adjustment as indicators of school readiness. Assisted in the development of a Kindergarten follow-up study: selected measures, coordinated with Chicago Public Schools, and collaborated with the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Independently carried out the Kindergarten follow-up study for the first cohort of participants. Coordinated and oversaw direct assessments of the social/emotional functioning of Head Start children, including the training and supervision of 15 part-time assessors. Conducted observations of classroom quality and student behavior.

*University of Illinois at Chicago*


**TEACHING**

Spring 2007 – Spring 2015  Graduate Teaching Assistant  
*University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL*

Fall 2001  Sixth Grade Teacher  
*MS 201, Bronx, NY*

Spring 2001  Teacher’s Aide  
*Catkins Montessori, Tukwila, WA*

**PUBLICATIONS**


PRESENTATIONS


