An Exploration of Teachers' Conceptualisations and Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning: A Multiple Case Study of Seven Australian Primary Teachers

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Abstract

The teaching of social and emotional learning (SEL) is internationally regarded as supporting a range of short- and long-term student outcomes, including improved academic performance and increased prosocial behaviour. Teachers are widely acknowledged as critical to delivering SEL in schools and students' SEL outcomes. Despite SEL's increasing presence within Australia's education policy frameworks, school programs and the national curriculum, few studies have investigated Australian primary (K–6) teachers' professional SEL knowledge or practices. A better understanding of teachers' interpretations and implementation of SEL is required to inform evolving research, programming, teacher training and policymaking in this area. The study uses a qualitative experiential research approach to address gaps and identified needs in the SEL literature. This involves multiple case study methodology and teacher-centred data collection methods—including interviews, observations and video-stimulated reflective dialogues—to generate detailed insights about how teachers understand, plan and teach SEL. The findings of this study showcase teachers as central to the creation and development of SEL-enhancing learning environments. The findings indicate that teachers facilitate SEL based on what they know and value, in response to their students' needs, in line with their school programs, and with their colleagues' support. The findings support and extend existing SEL literature. They highlight the significant influence that teachers' combined personal knowledge, personal and professional experiences, and school-based relationships have on their teaching of SEL. Insights from this study support emerging directions for the practice and programming of SEL initiatives in schools and further theoretical discussions of the role of teachers' social and emotional competence (SEC) in existing teacher knowledge and professional training models.

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List of Abbreviations

AC	Australian Curriculum
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
AI	Appreciative inquiry
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ASD	Autism spectrum disorder
BPS	Brumbies Primary School
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
EAL/D	English as an additional language or dialect
FATF	Five Awarenesses of Teaching Framework
FSP	Friendly Schools Plus
HPS	Hilltops Primary School
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
ITE	Initial teacher education
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBL	Positive behaviours for learning
PCM	Prosocial classroom model
PLCs	Professional learning communities
SEC	Social and emotional competence
SEL	Social and emotional learning
US	United States
VSRD	Video-stimulated reflective dialogue
WPS	Woodlands Primary School

Chapter 1: Introduction

> If we want all students to actually learn in the way that new standards suggest and today's complex society demands, we will need to develop teaching that goes far beyond dispensing information, giving a test, and giving a grade. We will need to understand how to teach in ways that respond to students' diverse approaches to learning, that are structured to take advantage of students' unique starting points, and that carefully scaffold work aimed at more proficient performances. (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 7)

1.1. Introduction

Over the last decades, schools worldwide have become increasingly responsible for responding to students' social, emotional, behavioural and health needs. Despite this, there are ongoing calls to understand better how to provide effective social and emotional learning (SEL) interventions for students (Brush et al., 2022; Cornell et al., 2017; Dobia et al., 2020; Hayashi et al., 2022; Osher et al., 2016; Schonert-Reichl, 2019). This is especially true in Australia, where, despite years of policy reform, there remains continuing concern about the prevalence of child mental health problems and low levels of subjective wellbeing (Bowman et al., 2017; Dyson et al., 2021; Laurens et al., 2022; Redmond et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2020). This study of teachers' SEL knowledge and practices in Australian primary (K–6) schools responds directly to such calls.

According to Hickey et al. (2022), "a primary site for observing hopeful responses to Australia's existing [education] reform agenda is located *within* schools. Further, it is with the work of teachers that fundamental school-based pedagogical innovation might commence" (p. 20). Therefore, this research seeks to uncover and understand how a group of experienced Australian teachers conceptualise and implement SEL within the primary classroom context. In doing so, the study investigates teachers' experiences with SEL, including their conceptualisations of SEL, their planning and decision-making methods, their approaches to SEL implementation and the critical factors that affect their teaching of this area.

The study aims to gain insight into teachers' understanding and delivery of SEL as an Australian Curriculum (AC) component. The purpose is to develop a deeper awareness of the information, influences and experiences affecting teachers' SEL knowledge and

implementation within the Australian primary classroom context. It is anticipated that such an awareness can be used to help primary schools and teachers better implement the teaching of SEL at a stage of life and learning critical to a child's holistic development.

In this chapter, I introduce the research, define the key concept of SEL and explore the research focus. In doing so, I present the research aim and questions, share my background as a teacher-researcher and discuss the empathetic insider perspective underlying this research. I follow with an overview of central aspects of the research design, including multiple case study design, teacher participant recruitment, data collection methods and phases of thematic data analysis. The next significant section, Situating the Research, establishes the critical need for the current research in the local and global education landscape. Finally, I outline the thesis structre, including a description of each chapter, and then summarise this introduction.

1.2. Defining SEL

Internationally, several terms encompass teaching social and emotional processes in schools. These terms are often used interchangeably in education policy, literature and research. Examples include "life skills," "personal and social capability," "wellbeing and health education," "moral and character development," and "attitudes and values" (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2013; Cefai et al., 2018; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). While there is significant overlap between these terms, they can also be interpreted differently. The current research will use the term "social and emotional learning" (SEL), along with its original and most cited definition from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Cefai et al., 2018). The current study defines SEL as:

> The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2023a).

1.3. Research Focus

1.3.1. Aim and research questions

In response to previous gaps in the SEL literature, this study provides a new detailed understanding of the SEL conceptualisations, decision-making and pedagogy of Australian primary (K–6) teachers. The following research questions guide this research study:

RQ1: *How do the participant teachers conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped their understanding?*

RQ2: *How do they make decisions about their teaching of SEL?*

RQ3: *What approaches do they use to implement SEL in the classroom context?*

RQ4: *What factors promote or impede their implementation of SEL?*

1.3.2. Research rationale

As discussed in the literature review (see Chapter 2), teachers are widely acknowledged as playing a critical role in the uptake, implementation and impact of SEL teaching and programming initiatives. However, teachers' implementation of SEL remains inconsistent (Dyson et al., 2021). Given the need to understand teachers, their decision-making and pedagogy in the classroom, an experiential qualitative approach to the research design was selected (see Sections 3.2 & 3.4 for more detail on this rationale and the research design). This approach focuses on participants' interpretations—their understandings, beliefs, experiences and practices—with these first-hand perspectives prioritised in reporting research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This decision also heralds a call for greater understanding and inclusion of teachers' SEL perspectives, knowledge and practices to inform ongoing SEL policy and practice reforms (Blewitt et al., 2021; Dyson et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2019).

According to Jones et al. (2019), to support authentic SEL integration within education policies and programs, research investigations must be designed "in close partnership with practitioners so that they are responsive to on-the-ground needs" (p. 135). Likewise, Blewitt et al. (2021) add that exploring teachers' SEL perspectives can assist in identifying the existing positives and pitfalls of current SEL practices and highlight ways to improve SEL programming for enhanced student outcomes. Given this, I considered it imperative to position SEL teachers at the centre of my research.

1.3.3. The researcher: A personal journey

Central to my decision to pursue this research was a reflection on my own decade-long experience as a primary teacher. The specific motivation for my study arose from my interest in—and occasional struggles with—ensuring my teaching practices supported my students' social and emotional development. Despite my university training, post-graduate study and professional work experience in schools, I was taught little about how to meet children's social

and emotional needs. My knowledge in this area proved incidental to my understanding of core content areas such as English and Mathematics.

Consequentially, after a particularly challenging couple of years working with several students presenting with a range of social and emotional needs, I began investigating SEL programs to bolster my teaching practices. As my theoretical reading expanded, I became increasingly aware of the difficulty teachers experience keeping up with current, evidence-based SEL practices in an ever-changing education policy and curriculum landscape. Further, I was one of them. So, I embarked on this research journey to investigate teachers' understanding and implementation of SEL to generate rich, contextualised case study findings to inform my practice and contribute new evidence-based understandings to the broader research community.

1.3.4. Embodying an empathetic insider-researcher perspective

Therefore, my study embodies an empathetic insider-researcher perspective (Ross, 2017). This reflexive, non-neutral position values and supports shared understandings, similar experiences and the development of trusting relationships between a researcher and research participants. My positive, empathetic leanings towards teachers and their work also encouraged my practitioner-focused approach to the research. Empathetic research such as this is synonymous with achieving a shared understanding and appreciation of a participant's circumstances and lived experiences (Gair, 2011; Hedican, 2008). Such a focus is not about "sameness" but "genuinely enriching research relationships and illuminating the voices of research participants" (Gair, 2011, p. 140). In tandem with enacting an empathetic researcher stance, my research approach was informed by the process of appreciative inquiry (AI). An AI stems from the principles of positive psychology and is aligned with "the growing field of positive change" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 1). Further explanation of the strengths and concerns about such approaches is provided in Section 3.2.2.

From my position as an empathetic insider-researcher and following a qualitative research design, my research approach encouraged participants to share and explore their SEL knowledge and practice safely and with a supportive and growth mindset. Teachers are critical to students' SEL outcomes and central to the success of SEL in schools (Gimbert et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2013; Sethi & Scales, 2020). By placing teachers and their perspectives at the centre of my research and engaging in positively framed conversations about their pedagogy,

they are well-positioned to illuminate the many strengths and contributions they bring to the SEL space within their schools.

1.4. Research Design

My study is a qualitative investigation of teachers' processes and experiences with SEL. The research is inductively driven. It is premised on constructivist assumptions that a teacher's knowledge base and teaching practices are socially constructed, and that teachers' unique understandings and interpretations of their knowledge and practice contribute essential aspects to the data. Accordingly, my research values how the participant teachers "construct and understand their experience, how their intentions and perceptions affect how they act in specific situations and how they make sense of what they do" (Simons, 2015, p. 175).

1.4.1. Multiple case study design

Aligned with this qualitative and empathetic research approach, I used a multiple case study methodology to pursue this investigation of teachers' SEL knowledge and pedagogy. I was guided by Yin's (2018) replication approach to conducting a multiple case study in which individual cases are purposefully selected to predict similar or contrasting results. The findings of each individual case are then compared, contrasted and synthesised into a culminating multiple case report or summary (Yin, 2018).

1.4.2. Teacher participants

The findings of this study will represent data collected from seven classroom teachers working across five school sites from one urban education district in Australia. The teacher participants were selected as cases based on school principals' recommendations in response to pre-established inclusion criteria:

- >5 years of experience as a classroom teacher of primary school children; that is, from Kindergarten (5–6 years of age) to Year 6 (11–12 years of age)
- positive disposition towards students' social and emotional development
- commitment to professional and personal development
- comfortable sharing about their professional SEL understanding and practice
- comfortable being audio and video recorded.

All teacher participants are identified by pseudonyms, with no personally identifying information included in this research.

1.4.3. Data collection methods

The data collection methods I employed in this study included individual semi-structured teacher interviews, video-recorded lesson observations and video-stimulated reflective dialogues (VSRDs). I collected data over two phases during the 2019 Australian school year, which includes four school terms from early February to mid-December. The first data collection phase took place in Terms 1 and 2 and included two in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each teacher, totalling 14 interviews. The second phase occurred during Terms 3 and 4 and involved two video-recorded lesson observations and two corresponding VSRDs with each participant. Phase 2 of data collection resulted in 14 observations and 14 VSRDS. Section 3.5 provides a comprehensive description of the data collection methods used.

1.4.4. Phases of thematic data analysis

Data analysis also occurred across two phases. First, I analysed the individual case data from each teacher participant using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This included six distinct phases of data review and interpretation for each case, throughout which I identified, refined and compared relevant themes extracted from the transcribed data.

Following my thematic analysis of each case, I conducted a cross-case thematic analysis of all seven teachers' cases. This resulted in a final cross-case report. The same analytic processes (as outlined above) were followed during this second analysis phase. This allowed for comparing the themes generated from each of the seven case reports and identifying significant thematic patterns. As such, the final cross-case analysis centres around identifying concepts that represent more expansive notions of teachers' processes and experiences with SEL. A comprehensive, step-by-step procedure documenting my analytic process and thematic development is presented in Section 3.6.

1.5. Situating the Research

1.5.1. SEL in a changing international education landscape

The world we share is diverse, complex and ever-changing. Since the late-20th century, extraordinary global advancements in science, engineering, and technology have forced traditional education models to adapt continuously to rapidly evolving living and working conditions. According to the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), "as technology reduces the need for workers to complete routine, manual tasks, they will spend more time focusing on

people, solving more strategic problems and thinking creatively" (as cited in Lamb et al., 2017, p. 3).

Alongside these advancements, significant education research has highlighted the role of emotions and relationships in teaching and learning environments, noting their irrefutable influence on students' early learning and behavioural outcomes. According to Jones and Kahn (2017) in a report commissioned by the Aspen Institute, an educational and policy studies organisation focused on empowering individuals and communities for improved societal impact, "academic skills in the first years of schooling are entwined with the ability to regulate emotions and behaviour and to engage in positive social interactions with peers and adults" (p. 7). As a result, education researchers and policymakers worldwide now widely propose a more "holistic" view of schooling—an approach supported by the promotion of "vital" skills and dispositions, including thinking skills, social and emotional skills and attitudinal skills (e.g., motivation, self-efficacy), beginning with our youngest learners (Cefai et al., 2018; Lamb et al., 2017; OECD, 2019; Scott, 2015).

Calls for progressive reform in response to a changing education landscape have resulted in the rise and prominence of SEL as a priority learning area worldwide (Cefai et al., 2018; Lam & Wong, 2017; OECD, 2015; Schleicher, 2016). As outlined by CASEL (2023a), the main objective of SEL is to "help all young people, and adults thrive personally and academically, develop and maintain positive relationships, become lifelong learners, and contribute to a more caring, just world." At its heart are five core competencies that define SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2023a).

Extensive international research has confirmed that adopting SEL programs and explicitly teaching SEL competencies in schools can facilitate both short- and long-term positive academic, behaviour and health outcomes for students (Durlak et al., 2011; Jones & Kahn, 2017; Osher et al., 2016). In particular, primary school settings provide a "critical context" for explicit SEL teaching and learning (Jones & Kahn, 2017, p. 9). Effective SEL implementation—as evidenced by students' positive academic and behavioural outcomes—hinges on several contributing factors. Of these, the role of classroom teachers has been increasingly regarded as central to delivering successful SEL instruction. Numerous studies have shown that students' social and emotional competence (SEC) development depends on teachers' systematic SEL instruction, positive student–teacher relationships and teachers' own

beliefs about and competence with SEL (see Gimbert et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Scott, 2015; Sethi & Scales, 2021). This is opposed to instructing them how to teach SEL skills and use specified SEL programs. Teachers also need the 'knowledge, dispositions, and skills for creating a safe, caring, supportive and responsive school and classroom community' (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; p. 142).

However, SEL can be challenging for teachers to instruct due to crowded curriculums, intense time pressures and a lack of pre-service SEL training (Bowles et al., 2017; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Dyson et al., 2021). While research suggests teachers are widely supportive of including SEL practices in their teaching (Oberle et al., 2016), Scott (2015) notes that these types of skills and competencies are regularly regarded as "complex and often challenging to teach" (p. 2). Therefore, Weissberg (2017) affirms that future SEL research should further consider "the best ways to prepare and support teachers ... to implement and continuously improve SEL programming for students" (p. vii). The current study reflects this next stage of SEL research. Its exploration of teachers' SEL conceptualisations and pedagogy will provide insightful information to assist teachers in dealing with perceived challenges associated with teaching SEL.

1.5.2. SEL in the Australian context

Australia has actively embraced SEL in education (ACARA, 2013; Frydenberg et al., 2017; Slee et al., 2011). Over the last decade, SEL programs, policies and initiatives have been trialled and introduced into the Australian education system and curriculum (Frydenberg et al., 2017). Understanding teaching SEL in an Australian context is essential to help teachers successfully deal with the social and mental health issues currently impeding students' social, emotional and academic development and overall success at school (Bernard et al., 2007; Bowman et al., 2017; Dyson et al., 2021; Laurens et al., 2022; Redmond et al., 2016; Slee et al., 2011).

As the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2011) outlines, Australian-trained teachers must demonstrate an understanding and support of students' social and emotional development as part of their professional requirements. This includes teaching SEL as a component of the national AC alongside other curriculum content areas. In this way, Australian teachers are expected to integrate SEL within their teaching of the "personal and social capability," a general capability area of the AC that spans across the Foundation to Year 10 (F–10) content areas (ACARA, 2013; McGaw, 2013). While the placement and structure of

SEL in Australian school programs are decided by individual schools and guided by their corresponding education jurisdictions, classroom teachers typically handle most SEL content planning and delivery (Bowles et al., 2017). This means schools, students and their families rely mainly on teachers' professional SEL knowledge and instruction to support students' SEC development.

This research brings together literature about teachers' SEL knowledge and practices, including what is known specifically about SEL teaching in Australia. While SEL is widely recognised as a valued learning area, in-depth, case-based accounts of Australian primary classroom teachers' professional experiences with teaching SEL are scarce (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016). A lack of in-depth knowledge about teachers' current understandings and practices related to SEL hinders the success of the policy, curriculum and professional development reforms in this area (Bowles et al., 2017; Dyson et al., 2021; Graham et al., 2011; Lamb et al., 2017; Slee et al., 2011). Simons (2015) explains how detailed accounts resulting from in-depth case study evaluation can assist in "identifying the key issues to evaluate and reveal the conditions in which policies are enacted to argue more strongly for policy development that would make a difference" (p. 174).

Responding to the call for a greater understanding of Australian teachers' knowledge and perspectives on SEL (Blewitt et al., 2020; Graham et al., 2011) and their observed SEL pedagogical practices (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Dyson et al., 2021), this research will present unique, detailed insights into a group of Australian teachers' thinking and decision-making about SEL in the primary school learning context. It will also provide in-depth knowledge about what information these teachers use to plan for SEL and their implementation approaches. My investigation will add new knowledge to the emerging SEL literature base in Australia by providing rich, case-based accounts of teachers' SEL knowledge and practices. The findings from this study will advance current conversations about SEL teaching and policy implementation within the Australian context.

1.6. What Lies Ahead: An Outline of the Thesis Structure

This thesis is organised into 12 chapters. In this first chapter, I have introduced my study. Next, in Chapter 2, I situate my research within a review of extant SEL literature concerning teachers' SEL knowledge and practices. The chapter begins with an overview of SEL findings and developments, including a discussion of the critical factors that influence teachers' and

students' experiences with SEL, leading to a review of SEL in the Australian context. The chapter ends with a discussion of contemporary issues related to SEL policy and implementation in Australia.

Chapter 3 details my methodological approach and research study design. The chapter includes an overview of the research participants, a description of the qualitative research methods and data collection procedures, and a step-by-step procedural outline of the thematic analysis approach. The chapter also outlines my rationale for using multiple case study methodology and discusses my role as an insider teacher-researcher. Finally, it reviews the ethical considerations for this study and discusses how I ensured the rigour and the trustworthiness of my findings.

In Chapters 4–7, I present individual case reports (Cases 1–4). In these reports, I identify the themes extracted from my analysis of each case. These are supported by rich, illustrative examples from the participants' data sets, including extracts from participant interviews, reflections and observational vignettes. The reports are organised according to each research question and supported by thematic diagrams that depict key themes derived from the data and their relationships. Each report concludes with the participant's reflection on their research engagement.

Chapter 8 provides a thematic summary of the significant cross-case thematic findings identified from a thematic analysis of Cases 1–4. The themes presented are supported by cross-case data and reflect key similarities and differences in how these four participant teachers conceptualise, plan and implement SEL. They capture the personal and professional influences on the teachers' SEL knowledge and outline several promoting and impeding factors on their SEL practices.

Chapter 9 combines the case reports for Cases 5–7. In these reports, I outline the themes extracted from my thematic analysis of each remaining case. While these reports follow an abridged format, they remain illustrated by relevant case data and examples, are organised according to each research question, and include thematic diagrams to illustrate the key themes and their relationships.

In Chapter 10, I summarise the major cross-case thematic findings from Cases 5–7. The key findings are compared and discussed in relation to the previous cross-case themes identified from Cases 1–4 (Chapter 8). The final themes represent significant commonalities in how all

seven participant teachers think about and implement SEL. They also reflect key personal and professional influences on the teachers' understandings of SEL and present several factors identified to enhance or inhibit the teachers' SEL teaching.

Chapter 11 presents a final cross-case analysis report and integration of findings in which I identify and draw cross-case conclusions from all seven cases. The report is organised thematically, with my conclusions synthesising the thinking, observations and reflections generated from each case. Like the individual case reports, the cross-case findings are supported by thematic diagrams and corresponding examples from the data. This chapter also presents insights about the research methods, particularly participant evaluations on the conduct and effectiveness of the VSRDs and the empathetic insider approach to the research.

In Chapter 12, I discuss the cross-case report findings, including a review of the main research findings as they relate to the current SEL literature base. Succeeding this and grounded in the research findings, I discuss significant research implications and future considerations needed to support teachers' SEL planning, decision-making and implementation. Finally, I revisit the purpose of the research and the theoretical and practical significance of my findings, finishing with important recommendations for future SEL research and concluding comments.

1.7. Summary

This chapter has introduced the components of the research focus and design. As outlined, the current study has been designed to provide new knowledge about Australian teachers' conceptualisations of SEL and ways to develop teachers and their implementation of SEL more effectively with primary school children. Its presentation will add to the existing research-based knowledge concerning teachers' SEL thinking, implementation and professional development in Australia.

At the core of this research project is the problem of identifying how teachers' interpretations of and approaches to SEL delivery correspond to what is already known about effective SEL implementation in classrooms. This study is significant as there are currently very few case-based accounts of Australian primary teachers' professional understandings of and experiences with teaching SEL (Blewitt et al., 2021; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016). Detailed insights into how teachers conceptualise and implement SEL are essential in informing SEL policy,

developing curriculum tools and identifying actions to support teachers in their understanding and teaching of SEL (Dyson et al., 2021).

This study will therefore provide new understanding and information about Australian teachers' processes and experiences with SEL. Data from this multiple case study will reveal those elements that shape teachers' SEL knowledge and teaching. The data will also identify teachers' approaches to implementing SEL. The findings from this study have both theoretical and practical benefits. They highlight contemporary issues related to teachers' SEL knowledge, planning and delivery in schools and will broaden our understanding of how teachers conceptualise and implement SEL. The results of this study will provide an evidence-based background for recommendations concerning teachers' professional SEL training and development, as well as a basis for suggested improvements to the SEL policy systems and tools currently in place in Australia and more broadly.

In summary, this chapter has established the call for, and the need for, the SEL research as designed within Australian education and a changing international education landscape. In the next chapter, I will review the SEL literature concerning what is currently known about SEL as a curriculum area and research concerning teachers' SEL knowledge and pedagogy. The chapter explores and critiques the relevant literature and its influence on the current research foci and design.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction and Scope

The most effective teachers demonstrate the ability to connect with, respond to and care for students' personal, social and emotional needs (Meyer & Turner, 2007). Extensive research has confirmed the teacher's role and influence on students' social, emotional and academic learning and outcomes (Hargreaves, 2001; Jones et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2017). Together, these inquiries have enriched our contemporary understanding of teachers' and students' affective experiences in the classroom. However, while inquiries are progressing, more areas needing research examination have been identified.

Hargreaves (2001) argues that teaching is an "emotional practice"—a profession "*irretrievably* emotional in nature" (p. 1056) and characterised by the interplay between "emotion and cognition, feeling and thinking, combin[ing] together in all social practices in complex ways" (p. 1056). If we agree with Hargreaves, we must continue to acknowledge the importance of, and seek to better understand and build upon, the dynamic ways effective teachers socially and emotionally engage with their students. We must also explore the deeper processes beneath how teachers understand, plan for and deliver relevant instruction to facilitate students' holistic learning and development. As cited in the opening to this thesis, Darling-Hammond's (1996) seminal piece on the development of teachers' democratic teaching practices declares:

> If we want all students to actually learn in the way that new standards suggest and today's complex society demands, we will need to develop teaching that goes far beyond dispensing information, giving a test, and giving a grade. We will need to understand how to teach in ways that respond to students' diverse approaches to learning, that are structured to take advantage of students' unique starting points, and that carefully scaffold work aimed at more proficient performances. (p. 7).

Darling-Hammond (1996) further attests that "such powerful teaching and learning require schools that value and evaluate serious intellectual performances, that support responsive teaching, and that allow teachers to build strong, long-term relationships with students" (p. 7). More than 25 years on, despite considerable advances in these areas, this poignant call to educational research action still resounds across learning communities worldwide. It implores researchers to investigate how teachers consider students—including their lives, needs and abilities—when structuring and delivering quality instruction to address their combined social,

emotional and academic development. The last two and a half decades have been marked by substantial and ongoing research into instructional methods, frameworks and programs developed to support students' affective and cognitive learning needs. One example of this research is the rapid uptake, standardisation and promotion of SEL frameworks and programs worldwide (Frydenberg et al., 2017).

The following review of literature situates this study within the contemporary yet ever-evolving SEL research and practice landscape. It provides an overview of SEL as an education area, outlining key SEL research developments, definitions and evidence-based findings. It then reviews significant factors concerning the implementation of SEL in schools, including the influence of different SEL approaches and teachers' SEL knowledge and pedagogy on students' SEL learning. Next, it critically considers the extant literature concerning SEL in the Australian context, including its placement within the AC and relevant SEL policy initiatives across states and territories. Following this, issues identified from research inquiries related to teachers' SEL training and obstacles to SEL implementation in Australia are addressed. The chapter ends with a discussion of future directions for SEL research and existing critiques. Accordingly, areas for increased SEL research attention are presented, establishing a case for the current study.

2.2. Developments, Definitions and Evidence-Based Findings

2.2.1. SEL as an evolving research area

Schools are collaborative, relation-based settings where students' social and emotional welfare is supported and developed in collaboration with teachers, peers, families and other pastoral care providers (Cefai & Cavioni, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011; Oberle et al., 2016; Zins et al., 2007). The origins of SEL began over a century ago. They can be traced back to prominent leaders in the field of progressive education, such as John Dewey and Jane Addams, who promoted the "importance of social competence and its relationship to a democratic society and self-directed, socially responsible behaviour" (Osher et al., 2016, p. 647). However, it was not until before the turn of the 21st century that more formal consideration of students' SEC development began to appear more prominently in schools' formal teaching and learning goals (Osher et al., 2016).

A well-established international research base now better supports the current understanding of students' personal and social development in schools. This research includes significant

theories and frameworks related to teacher–student relationships (Goldstein, 1999; Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006), classroom emotional climates (Hargreaves, 1998; Hargreaves, 2001; Reyes et al., 2012), social and emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2004, 2008; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and student engagement and motivation (Meyer & Turner, 2006; Pekrun, 2013). Emerging from these collective insights, SEL has burgeoned as an umbrella learning area across education settings globally. SEL unites several sub-fields (i.e., psychology, neuroscience) to incorporate a range of health, wellbeing and education interventions (i.e., anti-bullying programs, character education, positive mental health promotion) (Hoffman, 2009; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Osher et al. (2016) explain that SEL:

> Serves as a coordinating field that aligns other areas with which educators, researchers, and policy makers are familiar. These fields address students' capacities to coordinate cognition, affect, and behaviour to navigate daily changes and succeed in college, careers, and life. (p. 645)

As a "coordinating field," SEL also supports a variety of short- and long-term attitudinal, behavioural and academic outcomes for students (Durlak et al., 2011; Frydenberg et al., 2017; Weissberg et al., 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007). According to Weissberg et al. (2015), SEL "inhabits a world of kindred educational approaches that aspire to promote children's social-emotional-cognitive competence and enhance the environmental conditions and contexts that influence their learning and development" (p. 10).

While SEL research and practice initially emerged in the United States (US) and Europe, its prevalence now spans the globe (Frydenberg et al., 2017; Weissberg, 2017, p. vi). The last decade has seen SEL research grow within numerous contexts and countries, including Australia (Frydenberg et al., 2017). The spread of SEL research has resulted in substantial shifts and gains in how we view SEL and its benefits to students, implementation processes and potential for long-term societal change (Cefai & Cavioni, 2015; Collie et al., 2017; Durlak et al., 2015; Zins & Elias, 2007). Various SEL programs are now implemented across thousands of schools internationally, with SEL continuing to gain influence in education curricula, programs and policies worldwide (Cefai et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2015; Frydenberg et al., 2017; OECD, 2015).

However, Scott (2015) contends that "in spite of worldwide agreement that learners need [SEL-related] skills such as critical thinking and the ability to communicate effectively, innovate, and solve problems through negotiation and collaboration, pedagogy has seldom adapted to

address these challenges" (p. 1). More specifically, Scott (2015) declares, "the question of how best to teach these skills is largely overlooked" (p. 1). Similarly, Weissberg (2017) affirms that further SEL research must consider "the best ways to prepare and support teachers, student support personnel, and administrators to implement and continuously improve SEL programming for students" (p. vii). Accordingly, the succeeding literature suggests the benefits of SEL are globally acknowledged, and the positive influence on students' learning and behaviour is increasingly evidenced. However, a lack of understanding remains about how teachers acquire, develop and implement their SEL knowledge and pedagogy. This partly stems from the wide range of interpretations and definitions for SEL.

2.2.2. Defining SEL

Across the international research landscape, several terms signify the teaching of social and emotional processes in education programs and curricula. Some of the more popular terms include "social and emotional skills," "life skills," "personal and social education/ development," "social emotional education," "citizenship education," "personal and social capability," "moral and character education" and "wellbeing and health education" (ACARA, 2013; Cefai et al., 2018; Collie et al., 2017; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). As its foundation and to ensure consistency, this study uses the term "social and emotional learning" (SEL) and its original and most cited definition, as presented by CASEL (Cefai et al., 2018). As stated in Chapter 1, SEL is defined in this study as:

> The process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2023a).

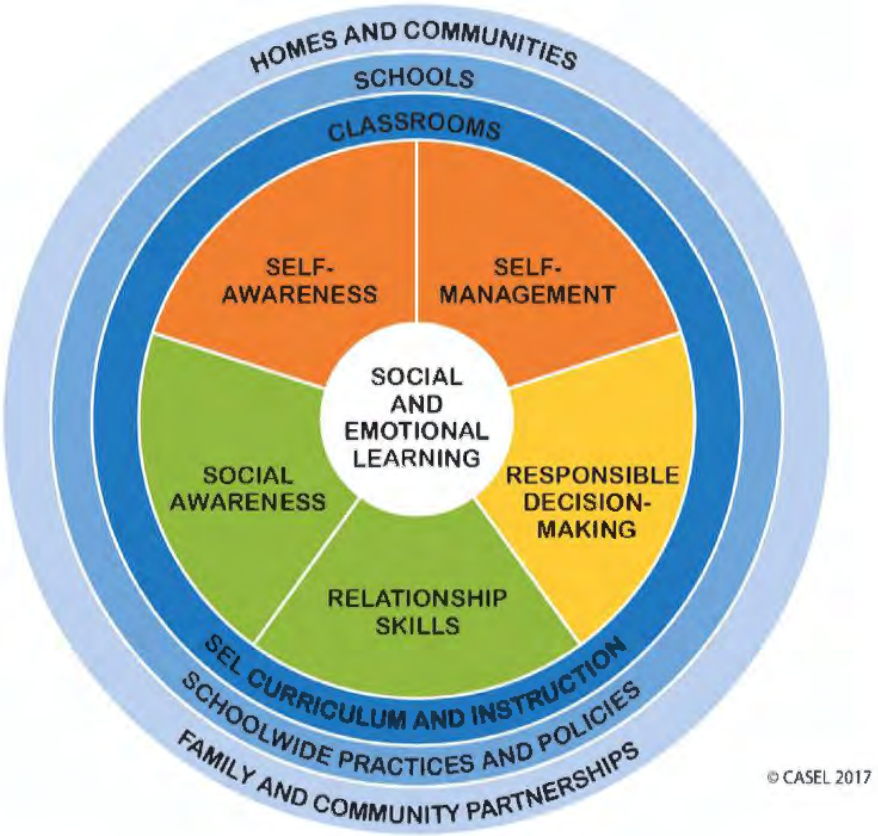
Designed to "cultivate skills and environments that advance students' learning and development" (CASEL, 2023a), CASEL's conceptual framework (or "wheel") for SEL (see Figure 2.1) is used widely across the US, Australia, Asia and Europe (Cefai et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2015; Frydenberg et al., 2017).

Within its "systemic" framework, CASEL (2023a) identifies five "core competencies" that encourage students' personal, social and cognitive abilities across "key settings": self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. The development of these competencies increases one's SEC; that is, "the mechanism that individuals use to manage their intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions and experiences effectively" (Collie et al., 2017, p. 2). Each core competency is further defined by

a connected set of SEL skills and qualities (Yoder, 2014, p. 4, see Table 2.1). Therefore, each competency represents "a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values successfully applied to face-to-face, virtual or mediated encounters with people" (OECD, 2018, p. 7).

Figure 2.1

CASEL's Systemic Framework for SEL (CASEL, 2023a)



According to Osher et al. (2016), "these core competencies are malleable and can be effectively taught using a variety of approaches and formats" (p. 646). Most commonly, SEL is facilitated at the classroom level through its placement in learning curricula and school programs via teachers' explicit instruction of SEL skills and informal teacher–student interactions in the classroom (Collie et al., 2017). Additionally, SEL is promoted by governments, local districts, schools and communities by ensuring adequate resources are available, garnering commitment and support, establishing effective programming and monitoring ongoing progress (Collie et al., 2017; Weissberg et al., 2015; Yoder, 2014). SEL has thus "become a coordinating framework for how educators, families, and communities partner to promote students' social, emotional, and academic learning" (CASEL, 2023a).

Table 2.1

Social-Emotional Skills Relating to Each SEL Competency (adapted from Yoder, 2014)

Social-Emotional Competency	Social-Emotional Skills
Self-awareness	- Label and recognise own and others' emotions - Identify one's emotional triggers, analyse own emotions and consider how they affect others - Accurately recognise own strengths and limitations - Identify own needs and values - Possess self-efficacy and self-esteem.
Self-management	- Set plans and monitor progress towards personal and academic short- and long-term goals - Overcome obstacles and create strategies for more long-term goals - Regulate emotions and manage personal and interpersonal stress - Maintain optimal work performance through attention control - Seek help when needed and use feedback constructively - Exhibit positive motivation, hope, and optimism and advocate for oneself - Display grit, determination or perseverance.
Social awareness	- Identify social cues (verbal, physical) to determine how others feel - Predict and evaluate others' feelings and reactions - Respect others (e.g., listen carefully and accurately) and understand other points of view and perspectives - Appreciate diversity (individual and group similarities and differences) - Identify and use resources of family, school, and community
Relationship management	- Demonstrate capacity to make friends, communicate effectively and evaluate own communication skills - Exhibit cooperative learning and work toward group goals - Manage and express emotions in relationships, respecting diverse viewpoints - Cultivate relationships with those who can be resources when help is needed - Provide help to those who need it - Demonstrate leadership skills when necessary, being assertive and persuasive - Prevent interpersonal conflict, but manage and resolve it when it does occur - Resist inappropriate social pressures
Responsible decision-making	- Identify decisions one makes at school - Discuss strategies used to resist peer pressure and reflect on how current choices may affect the future - Identify problems when making decisions, implement problem-solving skills and generate alternatives - Become self-reflective and self-evaluative - Make decisions based on moral, personal, and ethical standards and negotiate fairly - Make responsible decisions that affect the individual, school, and community

By using the word "learning," Oberle et al. (2016) suggest the term SEL "implies that social and emotional competences can be acquired, practised, enhanced, improved and fostered in all children" (p. 282). Other SEL researchers use the term "social emotional education" within their investigations, arguing it "shifts the focus away from individual students and onto the contexts in which they learn and grow" (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017, p. 86). Cefai et al. (2018) similarly explain that identifying SEL as a form of education emphasises "the conditions and processes that contribute to the development of social and emotional competence, including both a curricular- and cross-curricular-based approach, as well as an embedded classroom and whole-school climate perspective" (p. 39). Although strong similarities are apparent across these terms, Jones et al. (2019) argue the need to use "precise terminology when conducting and communicating [SEL] research [to] help to minimize confusion and maximize the applicability of SEL research and practice across contexts" (p. 137). While the term "SEL" is used within the current study to represent a set of specific competencies and skills, the conditions, processes and contexts that promote SEL are viewed as no less relevant to the research aims, questions and outcomes.

In addition to CASEL's defining SEL framework, numerous other conceptual models and frameworks for SEL presently exist. Although each is unique in its focus, scope and representation, each demonstrates "remarkable congruence with how SEL is defined" (Schonert-Reichl, 2019, p. 223) and considers the diverse influences on and outcomes of SEL instruction. For example, the conceptual model of SEL in educational settings presented by Weissberg et al. (2015) depicts various combined contextual influences on teachers' SEL instruction and student outcomes. These influences include classroom curriculum and instruction; school climate, policies and practices; family and community partnerships; state policies and supports; and federal policies and supports. As such, this model positions "students' social, emotional and academic competencies [as] enhanced through coordinated classroom, school, family and community strategies" (Weissberg et al., 2015, p. 8).

Rimm-Kauffman and Hulleman (2015), in turn, present a conceptual framework for SEL in classrooms that "depicts how effective use of SEL intervention core components in classrooms sets new classroom experiences into motion" (p. 153) and affects students' "proximal" and "distal" outcomes. Within this framework, the authors identify three pivotal "intervention core components" that facilitate students' improved social and academic performance: teachers'

explicit SEL-skill instruction, integration of SEL with other academic learning areas, and using SEL classroom teaching practices (i.e., collaborative learning opportunities).

Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) prosocial classroom model (PCM) positions the influential role of teachers as central to successful SEL teaching. More specifically, these authors explain that teachers with well-developed SEC successfully facilitate positive learning environments and enhance students' social, emotional and academic outcomes. In this way, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) postulate that strong teacher SEC supports the development of positive teacher–student relationships, teachers' use of effective classroom management strategies, and the successful implementation of SEL. Given that the current study aims to explore classroom teachers' individual SEL knowledge, decision-making and instruction, Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) PCM will underpin discussions concerning the participating teachers' SEL teaching processes. These models are complementary in addressing different components of SEL education: systems, instruction, teachers, students and outcomes.

2.2.3. The case for SEL: Embedding a holistic approach to education

Schools worldwide are increasingly responsible for responding to students' social, emotional, behavioural and health needs. Traditionally, student support in these areas was offered through myriad programs and practices, including drug and alcohol awareness programs, conflict resolution efforts, school safety measures, anti-bullying campaigns and student leadership opportunities (Zins & Elias, 2007). While prevalent, such traditional efforts have been disjointed and ad hoc, as they were generally positioned alongside rather than within schools' curricula and teaching programs (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). Brackett and Rivers (2014) argue that "these efforts have been limited in that they … are introduced in a piecemeal, unsystematic fashion" and are typically too narrow in focus (p. 4). For Zins and Elias (2006), such disjointed approaches to SEL result in "lost opportunities to reinforce skills across programs and activities, as well as competition for resources" (p. 3).

As such, despite these previous efforts, increased research attention to SEL in schools has identified young students' increasing lack of social and emotional skills. Jones and Bouffard (2012) found that "many young children are entering school without the social and behavioural skills necessary to succeed" (p. 3). Researchers have also noted the rising incidence of teachers supporting at-risk students, including those from diverse cultures or marginalised backgrounds or those with identified mental health issues, emotional and behavioural disorders and learning

disabilities (Cefai & Cavioni, 2015; Cefai et al., 2018; Dobia & Roffey, 2017; Martin et al., 2017; Roffey, 2017).

Within Australia, there is a continuing concern about the prevalence of child and adolescent mental health problems, including depression, suicide, anxiety and substance abuse disorders (Bernard et al., 2007; Bowman et al., 2017; Lawrence et al., 2015; Redmond et al., 2016; Slee et al., 2011). In a national survey of over 6,300 Australian families with children aged 4–17, Lawrence et al. (2015) found that close to one in seven 4–17-year-olds (or 560,000 Australian children and adolescents) had been diagnosed with a mental disorder in the year prior. Likewise, a summary report of findings presented by the Australian Children's Wellbeing Project (Redmond et al., 2016) confirms "a significant proportion of young people in their middle years [ages 8–14] have low wellbeing and are missing out on opportunities at this crucial time." Specifically, the findings of this report indicate students' "high levels of health complaints; experiences of bullying; low levels of engagement at school; low levels of subjective wellbeing; [and] low levels of social support" (Redmond et al., 2016, p. 1). There are also ongoing calls to provide early social and emotional interventions (Cornell et al., 2017; Slee et al., 2011) and inclusive education for all students, including Australian Indigenous student populations (Dobia & Roffey, 2017; Roffey, 2017; Slee et al., 2011), involving students' schools, families and broader communities (Redmond et al., 2016).

Such concerns require urgent research to identify pragmatic ways society, health providers and, in the current study context, schools and teachers can help resolve such issues within the education system. In a Survey on Social and Emotional Skills (SSES) conducted by the OECD (2021), results indicated a strong relationship between students' social and emotional skills and their perceived psychological wellbeing or mental health. CASEL (2023c) suggests that SEL encourages "protective factors" to mitigate students' mental health risks. Likewise, Roth and Erbacher (2021) iterate a strong relationship between SEL and student mental health. These authors explain that supportive teacher-student relationships and SEL-positive learning environments promote students' mental health outcomes by encouraging social and emotional safety and providing scaffolded skill development.

Accordingly, contemporary teachers and schools should support students' holistic development by intentionally teaching critical social and emotional skills (Cefai et al., 2018; OECD, 2021; Roth & Erbacher, 2021; Schleicher, 2016; Scott, 2015). Research indicates this involves encouraging students' participation and productivity using personalised learning

opportunities (Cefai et al., 2018), embedding evidence-based strategies (CASEL, 2023c), and ensuring students' SEL skills and competencies are developed over time and "in the context of daily life as social challenges, and other teaching opportunities arise" (Jones & Bouffard, 2012, p. 3).

To this end, students' skill development should extend beyond securing their capacity to access content, memorise information or apply simple procedures to include more effective SEL abilities, such as self-reflection, collaboration and effective communication with others (Scott, 2015). As Gueldner et al. (2020) propose, developing SEL skills and competencies provides a means to address and promote children's mental health and academic success in the classroom. This study provides tangible ways to improve teachers' abilities to teach and develop SEL in the classroom. The study also heralds the call to support students' holistic development and, in turn, promote more positive wellbeing and address potential issues with children's mental health (Cefai et al., 2018; Gueldner et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2016; Scott, 2015).

SEL can overlap with the aims and definitions of other well-known mainstream holistic education approaches (Hoffman, 2009; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Osher et al., 2016; Shriver & Weissberg, 2020; Weissberg et al., 2015). For example, it can be conflated with the teaching and implementation of anti-bullying, resilience building (i.e., growth mindset), positive education and wellbeing efforts in schools. As such, reasonable conceptual and pedagogical intersection exists between SEL and trending holistic education approaches, many of which inform school policy and programs. To this point, Shriver and Weissberg (2020) contend that CASEL's SEL framework and implementation guidelines "are specific enough to encourage consistency among programs" while ensuring local contextual relevance for schools and their wider communities.

As is outlined in Section 2.4, SEL in Australia is formally embedded within the AC, enacted through school-selected programs and underpinned by several national and local wellbeing frameworks, including the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (Education Council, n.d.; Osbich, 2018). Given the general flexibility Australian teachers have over their implementation of SEL and noting varied interpretations of what SEL is or is not, this study aims to investigate how some Australian teachers personally understand SEL as a teaching and learning area, including its connection to students' mental health and wellbeing, and what has led them to such perspectives.

2.2.4. Evidence-based findings of SEL interventions

Extensive research findings support systematic SEL facilitation and implementation in schools. The positive effects of SEL on students' attitudes, behaviours and school performance are well-documented (Cefai et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2022; Frydenberg et al., 2017; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; OECD, 2015; Taylor et al., 2017). Durlak et al. (2011) report that consistently implementing standardised SEL programs by trained school staff has proven successful across educational levels and locations (urban, suburban and rural) and can enhance students' perceptions of school and their performance. Evidence of students' improved attitude towards school and increased academic performance—measured as an 11-percentile point gain from students' grades and test scores—are particularly significant to securing the SEL agenda within educational policies and learning communities worldwide (Durlak et al., 2011). Jones and Bouffard (2012) confirm:

> Although there has been much debate about the relative importance of academic versus social and emotional skills, this is actually a false dichotomy; decades of research show that social, emotional, and academic skills are interconnected (p. 9).

These conclusions are supported by another OECD (2015) longitudinal data analysis examining students' social and emotional skill development across various countries and education levels.

Additionally, in their most recent review of 12 meta-analyses of universal, school-based SEL programs involving around one million students worldwide, Durlak et al. (2022) confirm that SEL continues to enhance students' social, emotional and behavioural outcomes both in life and schooling. Their extensive review highlights that the specific variables contributing to such positive SEL outcomes for students remain unknown. As such, these authors indicate some key avenues for future SEL research. These include paying increased attention to and better reporting of the qualitative and quantitative features of SEL program implementation; eliciting a better understanding of how teachers are trained to administer SEL; gathering more information concerning how the SEL model has been adapted by schools within different contexts to ensure racial, ethnic and cultural relevance; and considering more deeply the role of parents and the home environment on students' SEL.

Research evidence also indicates that the noted SEL benefits for students endure beyond the duration of SEL program implementation. Results from a 2017 meta-analysis concerning the follow-up effects of 82 school-based SEL interventions involving almost 100,000 international

students indicate that school-based SEL programs can result in ongoing, long-term student benefits (OECD, 2015). Taylor et al. (2017) found that "students in school-based SEL interventions continued to demonstrate significant, positive benefits in seven outcomes collected, on average, from 56 weeks and up to 195 weeks (i.e., 3.75 years), following program participation" (pp. 1164–1165). Weissberg et al. (2015) outline numerous short- and long-term student outcomes from SEL instruction. Identified short-term outcomes for students include more positive attitudes towards self, others and tasks; increased prosocial behaviours; reduced emotional distress; and improved academic performance. Long-term benefits of SEL for students include increased graduation rates, college/career readiness, improved mental health, reduced criminal behaviour and engaged citizenship (Weissberg et al., 2015). Research findings by the OECD (2015) also confirm that social and emotional skill development can increase individuals' income gain, improve university attendance and completion rates, and decrease self-reported obesity, alcohol consumption and depression.

International SEL research further demonstrates that the benefits of SEL instruction are not partial to any specific student population. For example, Jones and Bouffard (2012) note that positive effects from SEL interventions "are usually larger for high-risk students than for universal populations or low- to moderate-risk students" (p. 6). Taylor et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis reveals consistent positive follow-up SEL outcomes in diverse student populations, including those from "different racial groups and socioeconomic statuses, and for both domestic and international student bodies" (p. 1166). Carroll et al.'s (2020) recent study of over 500 Australian primary school students suggests that "a universal SEL program can be associated with measurable improvements among students who may be identified as having more significant social and emotional regulation or internalizing and externalizing problems" (p. 211).

Taylor et al. (2017) caution against endorsing a "one-size-fits-all" approach regarding SEL interventions. They argue that SEL program developers and researchers must examine strategies to design and implement interventions in culturally competent ways (p. 1166). This position is echoed by Roffey (2017), Dobia and Roffey (2017) and Cefai et al. (2018). Collie et al. (2017) likewise affirm "a need for more research examining the relevance and influence of SEL among unique populations to understand the extent to which mainstream and/or targeted efforts are the most effective approaches for promoting SEC among different subgroups of students" (p. 9). Increasing evidence from various countries demonstrates that

SEL can be implemented cross-culturally in unique ways to suit the varied needs of international populations (Cefai et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2015; Frydenberg et al., 2017; OECD, 2015). Following this research, the current study will investigate how a group of experienced Australian SEL teachers conceptualise and implement SEL within their classrooms with diverse students (i.e., language backgrounds, learning needs).

Additional research shows schools implementing SEL programs demonstrate "higher degrees of warmth and connectedness between teachers and students, more autonomy and leadership and less bullying among students, and teachers who focused more on students' interests and motivations" (Brackett & Rivers, 2014, p. 16). Therefore, the outcomes of SEL are not limited to benefiting individual students' social, emotional and academic growth. They also improve teachers' instructional practices, teacher–student relationships and shared learning environments (Oberle et al., 2016). In this way, Weissberg (2017) proposes the "SEL competencies … offer critical ingredients that are foundational for a bright future for more people" (p. viii).

Durlak et al. (2011) surmised that SEL "may affect central executive cognitive functions … that are the result of building greater cognitive-affect regulation in prefrontal areas of the cortex" (p. 418). Similarly, a review concerning the plasticity of social emotions found that targeted emotional training "can strengthen positive affect and neural activations in the brain's medial orbitofrontal cortex and striatum" (Klimecki, 2015, p. 466). Klimecki (2015) argues that her findings "underline the malleability of the emotional brain by showing that even short-term training of different emotional capacities in adults can lead to reliable and specific changes" (p. 472). Further, in a study utilising questionnaires to evaluate students' experienced emotions and learning strategy selections, King and Areepattamannil (2014) found "students who frequently experienced the positive emotions of enjoyment, hope, and pride were more likely to use various cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies" (p. 22). The positive outcome of research into the effects of SEL on the student's brain is a significant and worthy future area for research, especially for our primary school-aged learners.

2.2.5. The importance of SEL during primary school

Children's brains develop rapidly during the primary school years as they begin to think "in complex ways about self, their environment, and others" (Gerdes et al., 2013, p. 3). Primary schools are important settings for explicit SEL teaching and learning (Jones & Kahn, 2017). The beginning of primary school marks students' transition into formal schooling, where

foundational skills for ongoing academic and social success are developed by explicitly teaching curriculum content and frequent and diverse social interactions with peers (Garner, 2010; Jones et al., 2017; Jones & Kahn, 2017). Therefore, the present study aims to deepen understanding of how experienced Australian SEL school teachers plan for and implement SEL with primary-aged students.

According to Jones et al. (2017), "the social domain dominates during this developmental period [as] the social group and peer interaction become increasingly important" (p. 62). Likewise, research identifies strong connections between students' early academic and social skill development and their positive emotion regulation, academic habits and social interactions in the later years (Jones & Kahn, 2017). As Jones and Kahn's (2017) report explains, "some skills act as building blocks, serving as a foundation for more complex skills that emerge later in life … This suggests that children must develop certain basic social, emotional, and cognitive competencies before they can master others" (p. 8). Moreover, it is argued that since "the elementary [primary] years span a great many environmental and developmental transitions, SEL programs should take care to focus on the skills appropriate to each grade and age, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach" (Jones et al., 2017, p. 49). In this way, social and emotional skills develop over time and with regular and applied practice.

As such, SEL researchers propose that the explicit teaching of SEL skills should begin early, build on students' prior competence and skill development and remain responsive to the dynamic social, emotional and cognitive demands placed on students (Jones & Kahn, 2017). Consequently, the current study focuses on Australian primary teachers' SEL knowledge and instruction to better understand how teachers meet and develop students' SEL needs at this critical developmental stage. The findings are anticipated to shed light on how other teachers can hone these emerging skills and SELs. In so doing, they provide further positive opportunities for children's brain development, positive learning experiences and socially responsible patterns of interactions with others.

2.2.6 A critical appraisal of SEL

SEL critics present several pertinent issues concerning SEL's progress and prospects in mainstream education. Eden (2022) cautions that SEL, as a research and policy area, has become "an ideologically charged enterprise" and its claims of being evidence-based have "been vastly oversold." He challenges the internal and external validity of the large-scale

studies that have informed and accelerated SEL's rapid advancement and uptake in schools, specifically those touting SEL's role in improving students' academic achievement.

Other SEL critics point to a lack of ethical consideration within SEL research and instruction (Burroughs & Barkauskas, 2017; Ozawa-de Silva & Frazier, 2019). They suggest that SEL should be bolstered and administered in line with students' ethical competence development to include greater emphasis on students' "cultivation of ethical mindfulness" and "our common humanity and interdependence" (Ozawa-de Silva & Frazier, 2019, p. 44). In response, Ozawa-de Silva and Frazier (2019) outline Social, Emotional and Ethical Learning (SEE Learning) as one such program that expands SEL aims to facilitate students' "ethical intelligence" (p. 45). According to these authors, SEE Learning combines several evidence-based approaches (i.e., trauma and resilience-informed education, systems thinking, and peace education) to extend students' "capacity to discern situations and act in ways that are in the best long-term interests of oneself and others" (p. 45).

With the dramatic increase of SEL within ever-evolving socio-politically charged environments, some SEL researchers question the (in)capacity of SEL teaching and research to respond to systemic injustices (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021; McMain, 2023). According to McMain (2023), "the growing interest in SEL is often celebrated as a sign of 'progress' without being contextualized in the systems of power (e.g., settler-colonialism, heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, human supremacy) that constrain the goals and meaning of education" (p. 147). As such, McMain (2023) suggests paying increased attention to the "reform/revolution" context of SEL (p. 162). Likewise, Camangian and Cariaga (2021) regard SEL as grounded in "ahistorical" objectives (p. 901) and opine that it further substantiates ongoing power imbalances within schools and communities. These authors offer "humanization" as a differing approach to "disrupt the hegemony of SEL." They describe this approach as "anti-oppressive and counterhegemonic," "motivated by social justice" and grounded in students' increased "knowledge of self, solidarity, and self-determination" (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021, p. 902).

While Shriver and Weissberg (2020) regard such critiques of SEL as valid and important, they counter that "concerns about equity" have informed SEL reforms from the beginning and "a lack of attention to students' social and emotional needs was at the heart of [US] public education's failure to serve children from non-mainstream backgrounds." Likewise, from a global perspective, Asah and Singh (2019) describe SEL's role as successful in facilitating

students' emotional resilience and prosocial behaviour in support of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

A selection of more extreme and opposing SEL critics consider SEL an invasive avenue towards student indoctrination and manipulation (McWilliams, 2022). Largely based in the US, these critics attest that SEL perpetuates a leftist political agenda to "psychologically manipulate" students emanating from the tenets of critical race theory, culture pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching (McWilliams, 2022). According to McWilliams (2022), the purpose of SEL "is fundamentally political, aimed at deconstructing the foundations of law and citizenship." In this way, many SEL critics and supporters alike agree that future SEL research must continue to investigate more deeply the progress and (im)possibility of SEL to transform and respond to social justice issues (Asah & Singh, 2019; McMain, 2023; Williams & Jagers, 2022).

Finally, according to Eden (2022), data collection for SEL research can infringe on students' privacy. For example, he warns that sensitive student information collected about their moods, beliefs, families and identities (i.e., data garnered from extensive scale surveys) can be easily compromised and misused. While agreeing that schools and educators play an indispensable role in supporting students' social and emotional development, Eden (2022) cautions that without adequate research protocols, educator guidelines and standardised training, SEL can be likened to "unlicensed therapy." McMain (2023) also proposes that teachers engaging in SEL teaching and research should take a more proactive approach to understanding and critiquing SEL "to embrace their own deeper and layered perspectives around SEL" (p. 163). In this way, looking closely at teachers and getting them to understand their own predispositions toward SEL provides an avenue for discussion and exploration of influences—personal, social or political—on their own thinking and those underlying SEL programs. To these ends, the current study seeks to better understand how some teachers conceptualise and implement SEL, and what training has informed their teaching and perspectives on this area.

2.3. Implementing SEL in Schools

2.3.1. Competence promotion versus relational approaches to SEL

To date, the uptake and facilitation of SEL in schools globally, including Australia, have been predominately guided by the highly programmatic SEL structures emerging from the US (Cefai et al., 2018; Durlak et al., 2015; Frydenberg et al., 2017; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Such an

approach promotes school- or district-wide adoption and implementation of research-based SEL programs. Reeves and La Mare (2017) identify this approach to SEL facilitation as "competence promotion", explaining that it embodies "a wide array of programs addressing various aspects of social competence … [with] an emphasis on directly teaching children discrete cognitive and behavioural skills that are believed to mitigate negative and support positive social interactions" (p. 86). Jones and Bouffard (2012) add that these "SEL programs often take the form of short lessons, implemented during one weekly half- or hour-long section of language arts, social studies, or other class" (p. 7).

Jones and Bouffard (2012) reveal deficits concerning the programmatic diffusion of SEL. These include insufficient delivery time and dosage, minimal application to the academic curriculum, poor reinforcement across the wider school environment and limited staff training. They conclude that "many schools have not integrated SEL in meaningful ways," consequentially highlighting "the importance of integrating SEL into daily interactions, relationships, and school practices" (Jones & Bouffard, 2012, p. 7). Reeves and La Mare (2017) echo these sentiments, arguing that providing SEL instruction in such programmatic ways facilitates limited integration with the academic curriculum and requires little teacher preparation.

According to Durlak et al.'s (2011) meta-analytic findings, effective SEL teaching and programming must be both "well designed and well conducted" (p. 418). They recommend four "SAFE" practices to teach SEL:

- **S**equenced: use of a "connected and coordinated" set of activities
- **A**ctive: use of "active forms of learning" to apply learned skills
- **F**ocused: on the development of personal and/or social skills
- **E**xplicit: program targets specific SEL skills (p. 410).

The authors also identify two crucial factors that promote successful SEL implementation from their research:

- "interactive" teaching practices (i.e., coaching, role-playing, structured activities)
- developing safe, caring and engaging learning environments with high expectations for all students.

Jones and Bouffard (2012) further note that increased integration of SEL in schools and improved "implementation fidelity and quality [of instruction]" are essential to ensuring

effective SEL for students (p. 6). As such, they propose four distinct guiding principles to ensure more integrated approaches to SEL facilitation:

1. greater continuity and consistency of SEL delivery
2. more purposeful integration of social, emotional and academic skills
3. increased focus on developing students' SEL skills within social contexts
4. the establishment of whole-school commitment and culture to support SEL.

Brackett and Rivers (2014) similarly affirm the need to authentically embed SEL within larger school structures and environments, stating that "the success of any attempt to educate the whole child is dependent upon the extent to which learning occurs in a caring, supportive, safe, and empowering setting" (p. 6). Building on the need to support integrated SEL instruction in school contexts, Reeves and La Mare (2017) propose a wider adoption of a "relational approach" to SEL.

A relational approach to SEL considers students' authentic contexts and interpersonal relationships critical to their social and emotional development. It does not rely on "standardized instructional scripts or scope and sequence curricula" (Reeves & La Mare, 2017, p. 86). However, the limitations of this approach include measurement difficulties and a current deficit in our understanding of how teachers' "relational pedagogy can best be encouraged" (Reeves & La Mare, 2017, p. 87). Nevertheless, its benefits demonstrate increased potential for "the contextualized realities of the experience of schooling [to] become apparent, negotiated and grounded" for students and teachers alike (Hickey et al., 2022, p. 293). Hickey et al. (2022) further suggest that in using a relational pedagogy approach to teaching, "the dialogic and embodied pedagogical encounter gives shape and form to hopeful reform agendas that remain realist in their concern for student learning" (p. 293). The current study responds to Hickey et al.'s (2022) notion of the dialogic and embodied pedagogical encounter for SEL by examining the actualised ways teachers think about and teach SEL, including the specific role students and teacher–student relationships play in these processes. The findings may also inform understanding of more relational approaches to SEL teaching.

2.3.2. Social and instructional SEL strategies and practices

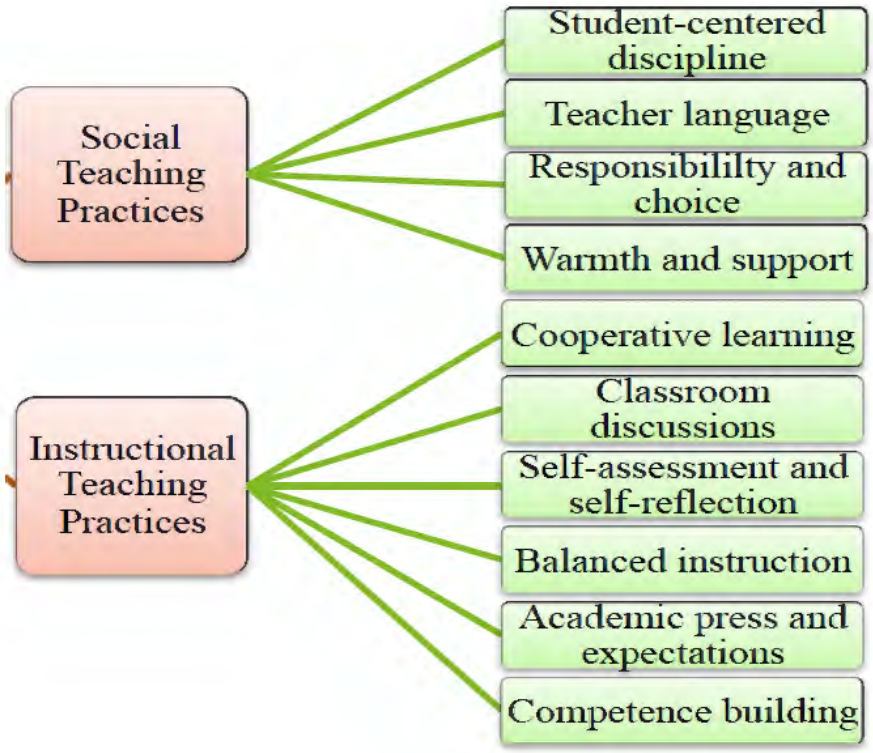
Jones and Bouffard (2012) recommend that "schools need specific strategies that they can use in addition to, as part of, or instead of full-scale, comprehensive SEL programs" (p. 12). Such strategies would support schools and teachers to embed SEL flexibly, authentically and in response to their students and contexts. Likewise, Yoder (2014) notes that teachers need

"access to adequate systematic supports" to ensure optimal SEL instruction (p. 6). In research produced by the Centre on Great Teachers and Leaders in the US, Yoder (2014) specifies several "action steps" for states, districts, schools and teachers to follow to ensure the effective establishment and delivery of SEL for students. However, Roffey (2017) reasons that despite the research attention and literature on SEL, "the primary emphasis … has been on 'what' should happen, rather than 'how'" (abstract, p. 59). While attention to SEL has developed, the literature demonstrates that concern remains about how best to teach SEL and support SEL teachers. Such concern equally applies to the Australian SEL setting and the present study.

For teachers, the first step is to "use specific instructional strategies and classroom management techniques, including those that foster a supportive, caring classroom environment" (Yoder, 2014, p. 7). In support of this recommendation, Yoder (2014) presents 10 distinct teaching practices (see Figure 2.2) collated from an extensive literature review of the most prevalent evidence-based SEL programs. Yoder (2014) proposes that teachers' combined use of these SEL strategies can encourage positive classroom environments and promote students' social, emotional and academic competence development. The 10 SEL teaching practices are divided into two categories: "social teaching practices" and "instructional teaching practices."

Figure 2.2

SEL Teaching Practices (Yoder, 2014, p. 10)



In describing the relevance of these strategies to support SEL instruction, Yoder (2014) elaborates:

> Even though these teaching practices are commonly used, they are rarely thought of in terms of SEL. For example, a teacher may implement cooperative learning groups but may not focus on ensuring that students are working together using positive relationship skills … [T]hrough these ten practices, [teachers] can connect what they already are doing to also promote student social-emotional competencies. (p. 18)

Yoder (2014) also suggests these practices can assist school leaders in evaluating and assessing teachers' SEL practice, providing feedback on their SEL pedagogy, and informing conversations about students' social, emotional and academic skill development.

These collated SEL teaching practices thus provide a useful starting point from which school leadership and researchers can begin to observe and investigate how SEL is currently being facilitated within classrooms and schools on a day-to-day basis. Specific attention to teachers' use of these practices may also assist in supporting or extending teachers' SEL facilitation and implementation within classrooms, schools and broader contexts. Understanding these practices provides useful methodological information for the present study.

2.3.3. The role of the teacher

2.3.3.1. Teacher–student relationships, knowledge of students and emotional exchanges

Teachers are critical in promoting students' positive SEL outcomes (Bracket & Rivers, 2014; Cefai & Cavioni, 2015; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Yoder, 2014). Durlak et al. (2011) found that SEL facilitated by trained class teachers consistently achieved positive student results across six outcome categories: SEL skills, attitudes, positive social behaviour, conduct problems, emotional distress and academic performance. Conversely, SEL programs instructed by trained personnel from outside the school produced noteworthy results for students in only three areas: SEL skills, positive social behaviour and reduced conduct problems. These findings confirm that "[SEL] interventions can be incorporated into routine educational practices and do not require outside personnel for their effective delivery" (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 417).

The findings also suggest an inherent connection between teacher–student relationships, teachers' knowledge of students and effective SEL interventions. Jones and Bouffard (2012) assert that positive interactions between students and teachers encourage "a sense of security

that supports active engagement in the classroom" (p. 10). Schonert-Reichl (2017) observe that "warm classroom environments and positive teacher–student relationships promote both academic learning and SEL" (p. 141). Further, Ferry et al. (2011) contend that teachers' "social and emotional knowledge" of students "does not exist separate from thinking and decisions about their teaching—rather, it is an integral part of their work" (p. 13).

In their multiple case study investigation of physical education teachers' "social and emotional knowledge" of students, Ferry et al. (2011) note that contributing components to teachers' instruction and support of students include the students' community/family/cultural backgrounds, home environments, parental relationships, religious affiliations, language abilities, developmental levels and physical capabilities. They suggest teachers use a broad accumulated knowledge base about students to inform their "social and emotional pedagogy," tailor content instruction and establish and maintain "an emotional pulse" when teaching (Ferry et al., 2011). As Brackett and Rivers (2014) explain:

> Teachers, as the primary actors in classroom settings, have a significant opportunity to affect the positive development of youth not only through the content of their instruction but also through the quality of their social interactions and relationships with youth, including how they both manage the behaviour in the classroom and model social and emotional processes. (p. 7)

Ferry et al.'s (2011) findings are supported by later research that identifies teachers as vital contributors to students' SEC development, academic success and relationship-building skill development (Brackett & Rivers, 2014; Hen & Goroshit, 2016; Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Emotional dialogic exchanges between teachers and students are also important in teaching SEL. Research suggests that experiencing positive emotions when learning may support students' selection of specific learning strategies (King & Areepattamannil, 2014; Pekrun, 2006). For example, Boekaerts (2011) explains that students' "feelings of positivity or negativity towards a learning task may amplify, moderate, reduce, or combine with the cognitive information to determine effort allocation and effort management" (p. 414). Underlying this notion, Pekrun's (2006) "control-value theory of emotions" suggests students' emotions can be positively influenced by fostering their perceptions of competence and control over academic activities and outcomes. This is achieved by "shaping their appraisals of the values of these activities and outcomes" (Pekrun, 2006, p. 334). Likewise, according to Downer et al.'s (2015) attachment theory, the "provision of an emotionally supportive and safe environment in which children know that adults are available for needed support cultivates

self-reliance and the confidence to try new things and take risks" (p. 725). According to these researchers, while dialogic exchanges are to be expected, the environment created by the teacher and how the teacher reacts within the SEL classroom can influence students' emotions and their positive or adverse reactions to the teaching content and activities undertaken.

In this way, Meyer and Turner (2007) identify that teachers' "discipline, instruction, and emotional support are organizing dimensions of teacher-child interactions that also predict children's social and emotional behaviours" (p. 241). Resultingly, Becker et al. (2014) argue that "teachers need to acknowledge the power of their emotions and that teaching involves more than just instructional behaviour" (p. 25).

This means ensuring teachers are not only able to teach SEL in line with specific programs or strategies but they can also consider how their own "emotional geographies" and exchanges with students support—or inhibit—students' SEL outcomes (Hargreaves, 2001). Following these findings, the research methods chosen in the current study were designed to provide purposeful opportunities for teachers to discuss, observe and reflect on the emotional exchanges within their classroom and their SEL instruction.

2.3.3.2. Teachers' SEC

There is growing consensus that for teachers to deliver effective SEL instruction and create the positive classroom climates and teacher–student relationships required to promote students' successful SEL outcomes, teachers must develop their own SEC (Collie, 2017; Garner, 2010; Gimbert et al., 2021; Jennings & Frank, 2015; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Lozano-Peña et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2015). Like Jennings and Greenberg (2009), Hen and Goroshit (2016) consider a teacher's SEC as "the necessary skill base and dispositions" needed to encourage positive teacher–student relationships, successful classroom management and effective SEL instruction (p. 2). More specifically, teacher SEC concerns the ability to model positive social and emotional behaviours, enact healthy relationship strategies and reflect on their teaching practices (Gimbert et al., 2021). In addition to supporting effective SEL instruction and positive classroom interactions, research suggests teachers' SEC development can also increase teachers' overall effectiveness, personal sense of professional "thriving" and success with stress management strategies (Collie & Perry, 2019; Dorman, 2015; Jennings et al., 2017; Lozano-Peña et al., 2021).

In this way, teachers' SEC, including varied levels of self-awareness concerning their own emotions, can positively or negatively affect their commitment and response to addressing students' emotional needs (Collie & Perry, 2019; Collie et al., 2015; Denham et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2011; Katz et al., 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2020;). According to their PCM, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) argue:

> Teachers with higher SEC will implement social and emotional curriculum more effectively because they are outstanding role models of desired social and emotional behaviour. Their social and emotional understanding supports their ability to apply extensive process-based activities in everyday situations as they naturally occur in the classroom. (p. 493)

Therefore, teachers modelling SEL skills influence students' SEL development (Jones et al., 2013). For Jones et al. (2013), "students learn from the way teachers manage frustration, maintain control of themselves and the classroom, stay focused in the face of distractions, and shift tactics when needed" (p. 63). Thus, Jones and Bouffard (2012) assert that "it is difficult, if not impossible, for adults to help students build skills that they themselves do not possess" (p. 14).

In this way, Schonert-Reichl (2017) identifies "teachers [as] the engine that drives SEL programs and practices in schools and classrooms" (p. 138), with their own SEL skills "vital" to effective SEL instruction (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Positioning teachers at the centre of this study will provide a valuable opportunity to investigate teachers' own SEL skills and their influence on classroom interactions and SEL instruction.

2.3.3.3. Teachers' SEL training and development

Hagenauer et al. (2015) describe teacher SEC "as a competence cluster that requires training just like other teacher competencies" (p. 398). However, Katz et al. (2020) warn that "most educators are not prepared in any formal way for the daily strains of constantly managing their own emotional reactions and expressions in order to meet the demands of classroom performance" (p. 7). In this way, more researchers argue that teachers' SEL training must go beyond teaching them how to instruct SEL skills and use specified SEL programs. Specifically, "they also need the knowledge, dispositions, and skills for creating a safe, caring and supportive and responsive school and classroom community" (Schonert-Reichl, 2017, p. 142). Lam and Wong (2017) explain:

> In order to be an "agent of change" for young children … it is important for teachers to be resourceful in terms of their own internal strength and recourses. They need

> to be socio-emotionally mature and well-developed, with a good understanding of their own emotions and be able to express them appropriately and articulately. (p. 11)

To better integrate SEL within teachers' daily practice, Jones and Bouffard (2012) posit that teachers require their own SEL training in "how to interact positively with students, react effectively to emotional and social challenges and conflicts … communicate clear expectations for student behaviour, and set up the conditions for supportive school cultures and climates" (p. 13). Several training programs, supports and interventions are identified in the literature to enhance teachers' SEC development, including emotion-focused training, SEL coaching, mindfulness courses, relationship-skill training and higher education courses (Dorman, 2015; Jennings et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2017; Yoder & Gurke, 2017).

Likewise, Rodriguez et al. (2020) argue that teachers are equal participants and stakeholders in the SEL teaching and learning process and should be supported and developed as such. Further, they contend that successful reforms to classroom-based practices can only occur when a deeper understanding of teachers as learners is realised, and teachers must also deeply understand themselves as learners. In support, these authors promote Teaching Brain Theory (TBT) and their Five Awarenesses of Teaching Framework (FATF) as practical foundations for understanding teachers' dynamic and cognitive process for teaching. According to TBT, teachers "develop their skills over time and in relation to their context" (Rodriquez et al., 2020, p. 942).

As such, just like their students—and to support them—teachers require regular and dynamic opportunities to practise and develop their social and emotional skills to enhance their SEL instruction (Katz et al., 2020). By investigating teachers' SEL knowledge and pedagogy, including the personal and professional influences affecting their conceptualisations and practices, this study will highlight potential pathways to improve teacher training and development for SEL.

2.4. The Australian Context

2.4.1. SEL in the Australian Curriculum

Over the past 15 years, Australia has directed increasing interest towards better understanding and integrating SEL in schools and within its education policies, programs and curriculum design (Frydenberg et al., 2017). A range of SEL initiatives has been introduced in schools

beginning as early as preschool (Cornell et al., 2017), including students from diverse student populations (Frydenberg & Muller, 2017; Roffey, 2017).

In December 2008, Australia formally committed to supporting and strengthening all students' SEL, development and wellbeing as part of the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008). This was a significant step, as previous research had warned that around one in every five Australians would experience emotional or behavioural problems such as anxiety, depression, aggression or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as children or adolescents. As stated in the declaration, "schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4). As such, it marks Australia's initial commitment to supporting students' SEC development as a national education priority.

The declaration also shows Australia's education leaders are committed to devising a national shared curriculum. The aim is to "enable students to build social and emotional intelligence, and nurture student wellbeing … [and to provide] a solid foundation in knowledge, understanding, skills and values on which further learning and adult life can be built" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 13). Therefore, beginning in 2008, the F–10 national AC was drafted to include three core elements: key learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. Within the AC, SEL was positioned within the "general capabilities" as "personal and social capability" (ACARA, 2013, p. 4). As presented in Figure 2.3, it includes four organising elements: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social management. According to ACARA (2013), developing personal and social capability encourages students to "learn to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives and work and learning more effectively" (p. 2).

Figure 2.3

Organising Elements for Personal and Social Capability (ACARA, 2018)

According to the AC, teachers are expected to integrate students' personal and social capability development within their teaching of all curriculum learning areas, including health and physical education, the arts, technologies and English, and across all year levels (ACARA, 2013, p. 3). As such, it is assumed that Australian-trained teachers instructing the F–10 AC can implement teaching strategies relevant to specific content areas and support all students' personal and social capability development. However, no specific curriculum examples or guidelines indicate how teachers might integrate specific cross-curriculum content and SEL skills in their teaching. These decisions are at the discretion of Australia's individual states and territories (Bowles et al., 2017). Accordingly, this study is positioned to investigate how Australian teachers interpret their teaching of SEL according to the AC, including what resources they use and how they do so with primary-aged learners across a range of year levels.

2.4.2. Past and present Australian SEL policy and education initiatives

2.4.2.1. KidsMatter Primary and "Be You"

In addition to the AC, many SEL initiatives and programs have emerged within Australia over the last 15 years. These initiatives have supported students' SEC and mental health development and helped guide SEL facilitation in schools and other educational settings (Askell-Williams et al., 2013; Frydenberg et al., 2017; Roffey, 2017; Roffey & McCarthy, 2013; Slee et al., 2011; Trinder et al., 2009).

An earlier example is KidsMatter Primary, an Australian government-funded initiative that provided a framework to enhance Australia's youngest students' mental health and wellbeing. As Australia's first national mental health promotion initiative, KidsMatter Primary was established in 2006 to support Australian primary schools to "select and enact a clearly structured social and emotional learning curriculum for all students covering the five-core social and emotional competencies" (Slee et al., 2011, p. 40). Its framework addressed four key areas: positive school community, SEL for students, parenting support and education, and early intervention for students experiencing mental health issues (Slee et al., 2011). KidsMatter Primary's two-year pilot implementation phase lasted from 2006 to 2008 and involved 101 schools across Australia (Trinder et al., 2009). It supplied participating schools with "a comprehensive framework of evidence-based strategies … [and] a structured and supported process for whole-school [SEL] implementation including professional learning and ongoing guidance for school staff" (Trinder et al., p. 22). Results indicated that the KidsMatter Primary SEL initiative led to significant improvements in students' mental health; increased levels of parent and caregiver confidence in supporting students' social and emotional issues; and improved teacher knowledge, competence and confidence in delivering SEL instruction (Slee et al., 2011; Trinder et al., 2009)

Upon review in 2014, KidsMatter Primary was amalgamated (with four other programs) into Australia's current "Be You" national mental health in education initiative (Australian Government, 2023). According to the "Be You" website (https://beyou.edu.au/), it was concluded that merging existing services and programs into one larger initiative supporting Australia's young people's health and wellbeing would be more effective for their long-term outcomes. Formally established in 2017, "Be You" combined a range of health and wellbeing initiatives for Australian schools and students, including initiatives related to "education,

mental health, suicide prevention, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, research and evaluation, behaviour change and implementation science" (Australian Government, 2023). While not an official government mandate, schools and educators could freely join the "Be You Community" to access materials, complete training modules and work towards whole-school implementation of SEL-related programs and services in schools. In this way, "Be You" provides information to assist Australian educators and their leadership in understanding and implementing SEL in schools.

2.4.2.2. The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework and Student Wellbeing Hub

Following a comprehensive review of Australia's National Safe Schools Framework, the Australian Government Department of Education (DET, 2020) formally presented the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework in 2018. Its goal was to promote schools' increased awareness of student safety and stronger links to the AC (Osbich, 2018). The framework combines evidence related to student safety, wellbeing and learning to support schools in promoting students' overall health and wellbeing (Education Council, n.d.). Aligned to the AC and informed by national and local policies, the framework "seeks to support all students and their families through a systemic whole-school approach to wellbeing, with tiers of support that emphasize appropriate early intervention" (Education Council, n.d., p. 3).

In doing so, the framework presents five key integrated elements: leadership, inclusion, student voice, partnerships and support. Each element identifies a range of overarching principles and implementation practices. These address the role of various stakeholders in promoting a shared approach to students' wellbeing in schools, including school leaders, teachers and community members. While not tied to any specific SEL program(s), the framework outlines suggestions for schools to promote students' SEL development systematically.

To complement the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (DET, 2020), an electronic Student Wellbeing Hub was also established (https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/), providing free online materials for students, teachers and parents related to student health, safety and wellbeing in schools. These include videos of professional practice, professional learning courses, live webinars, current news articles, school checklists, policy reports and various F–10 teaching resources. Together, the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework and the Student Wellbeing Hub help inform the implementation of SEL in schools. However, their actual

interpretation and application are entirely up to individual teachers' and school leaders' engagement and discretion.

2.4.3. SEL in Australian schools: Diverse state and territory approaches

In Australia, it is up to the local (or state) education directorates and their schools to decide how national SEL-related frameworks and the AC are interpreted, supported, implemented and assessed in schools (Bowles et al., 2017). This flexibility towards SEL adoption in Australia contrasts with other countries, such as the US (Bowles et al., 2017; Collie et al., 2017). For example, the AC's personal and social capability learning continuum in Australia is isolated from the curriculum's key learning area descriptors. Therefore, individual schools and educators are left with decisions about how these capabilities and related skills should be taught within classrooms and across year levels (Bowles et al., 2017). Resultingly, "there is an absence of a single, cohesive, nationwide approach to the teaching of SEL" in Australia (Bowles et al., 2017, p. 3). For instance, Lamb et al. (2017) note that in the Australian state of Victoria, the Victorian Curriculum "has codified concepts with content descriptors and achievement standards mapped from Kindergarten to Year 10 (K–10) [and] teachers are expected to assess and report student progress on these measures across the learning continuum" (p. 40). However, this is not necessarily the situation across other Australian states and territories.

A review and comparison of Australia's online state and territory education policy documents conclude that they present the same overall interpretation of SEL defined by CASEL's five main SEL domains. Yet, how each education directorate promotes and implements SEL in its schools varies widely. This is due to the complex sociocultural contexts of Australian schools. As Bowles et al.'s (2017) comparative review of SEL implementation in Australia against the three other countries confirms, factors such as the geographic, multicultural and socioeconomic diversity of its schools and students and the realities of competing public and private education systems influence the delivery of SEL in Australia. The authors also call attention to "the stratified provision of educational services that are nationally funded but administered and governed by eight separate states and territories, each with a different focus on varying degrees of common curriculum offerings" (Bowles et al., 2017, p. 2).

Thus, in each Australian state and territory, different SEL policies and programs are embedded in schools. For example, New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (QLD) have compiled their state-based wellbeing frameworks for use in schools, despite the existence of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (NSW Government Education & Communities, 2015; State of

Queensland, 2018). In Victoria, the education department has mapped the AC's "personal and social capability" descriptors within its state curriculum and aligned these for teaching against one main SEL program—Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships (State of Victoria, n.d.). In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), a long-term SEL-related initiative, Positive Behaviours for Learning, is being implemented across all territory schools to encourage a shared, district-wide approach to SEL (ACT Government, n.d.). While collective nationwide support for SEL in Australian schools is strong, its implementation is highly varied.

Lamb et al. (2017) raise an ambiguity: "schools have the autonomy to decide whether or not professional learning or additional resources are required to better support key skills within their teaching and learning" (p. 40). This ambiguity prompts questions about how the "general capability" skills, including SEL, are incorporated and monitored within teachers' training and ongoing teaching practice (Lamb et al., 2017). What is less clear is how (Australian) policy statements and aspirations are being translated into practice (Lamb et al., 2017). Thus, it is against this policy backdrop that the current study investigates Australian primary teachers' knowledge and facilitation of SEL and the supporting or impeding factors that influence their SEL commitment and instruction.

2.5. Current SEL Issues in Australia

2.5.1. Assumptions about teachers' SEL knowledge, training and current practices

Curriculum documents, SEL programs and whole-school approaches support Australian teachers' understanding and facilitation of SEL (Durlak et al., 2015; Frydenberg et al., 2017). Of concern are the unchallenged assumptions and implied expectations in significant Australian education policy documents and programs that all teachers are well-positioned—that is, they possess the knowledge and skills—to contribute to students' SEL by delivering specific SEL programs and integrating SEL concepts into a range of curriculum areas (Blewitt et al., 2021; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Freeman & Strong, 2017). In addition, teachers are expected to model SEC through their pedagogical approaches and conduct of relationships within the school (Freeman & Strong, 2017; Lamb et al., 2017). Lamb et al. (2017) further question "whether or not there is a deep enough understanding of expected learning outcomes at different stages of learning and development for teachers to use and to support assessment [of these SEL skills]" (p. 57).

SEL is a relatively new area of the curriculum, and to expect the implementation of reforms without adequately preparing teachers is unlikely to lead to success (Lamb et al., 2017). To illustrate, a review of teacher training programs in the US and Canada found that "limited to no time [is] allocated to implementing SEL for students or to the development of preservice teachers' own social emotional competency" (Freeman & Strong, 2017, p. 415) Similar deficits have been noted in Australia, yet it appears little action has been taken to address such deficits (Blewitt et al., 2021; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016). The current study's examination of successful SEL teachers will address the professional development practices and needs of participating SEL teachers. The study is anticipated to provide information to confirm or refute the assumptions concerning practising teachers' preparation to implement SEL in the classroom.

Previous Australian research using a multiple case study of Australian teachers' perspectives and practices of SEL indicates that "wellbeing programs [in line with SEL] are given less consideration in the classroom" (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016). Therefore, while "many teachers express a strong interest in integrating SEL into their practices with children … they need the support and resources to do so" (Oberle et al., 2016, p. 279). Additionally, there is a need for increased "knowledge about how to promote teachers' buy-in and quality of [SEL] implementation" (Osher et al., 2016, p. 663). Findings by Djambazova-Popordanoska (2016) suggest SEL should be placed more prominently within Australian schools' policies and curriculums to facilitate a whole-school approach that better supports the needs of teachers and students.

It is also important to highlight research by Collie et al. (2015), who find "not all teachers have positive or identical beliefs about SEL" and teacher beliefs and commitment to SEL instruction may be influenced by their "teaching or subject priorities, their own social-emotional competence, and/or the overarching climate within their school, region, or country" (p. 148). Likewise, Schonert-Reichl (2017) argues that "any discussion of teachers and SEL should begin by asking whether they accept the notion that education should explicitly promote students' SEL. Simply put, do teachers agree that SEL should be part of education?" (p. 140). The notion of teachers' personal 'buy-in'—or their authentic and sustained support of SEL—is thus critical to its success in Australian schools and is a focus of this research study.

Blewitt et al. (2021) suggest there is a current underrepresentation of Australian teachers' "perceptions of how they encourage SEL in the early learning environment, and there is a lack

of research investigating the barriers and enablers for SEL delivered as part of [their] everyday practice" (p. 4). Further, exploring Australian teachers' SEL perspectives could "uncover important strengths and limitations in current practices, highlighting opportunities to support the sector to improve outcomes for young children" (Blewitt et al., 2021, p. 4). Djambazova-Popordanoska's (2016) study concludes that "further research could combine teachers' interviews with classroom observations of their pedagogical approaches and classroom practices related to SEL, in order to inquire more reliably [into] teachers' actual classroom approaches towards students' SEL" (p. 197). As reflected in this study, such research would provide an improved understanding of Australian teachers' actualised, day-to-day facilitation of SEL and implicit perceptions about SEL and its implementation. Such research would illuminate an understanding of teachers' current thinking, decision-making and practices in this area, including the factors that promote and inhibit teachers' SEL teaching (Blewitt et al., 2020; Blewitt et al., 2021).

2.5.2. Obstacles to SEL implementation

Despite the support of established SEL programs and initiatives, research literature identifies obstacles that inhibit effective SEL implementation in Australian schools (Bowles et al., 2017; LaRocca & Bartolino Krachman, 2018). Slee et al. (2011) identify personal and social conditions that influence a school's engagement and success with SEL, including:

- teachers' background knowledge
- existing SEL programs
- availability of resources
- leadership commitment to the aims of the initiatives (p. 42).

Djambazova-Popordanoska (2016) identified poor representation of SEL within schools' current policy documents and an "insufficient amount of time allocated to SEL within the school curriculum" (p. 188). Bowles et al. (2017) suggest that a more "clear and relevant definition of SEL" in Australia is needed to advance successful SEL policies and teaching initiatives. They further contend that "social and emotional benchmarks [need to] be developed that are reflected, explored, and developed in a curriculum that is sequenced, active, focused, and explicitly contained to SEL constructs" (Bowles et al., 2017, p. 4). Additionally, from the current researcher's personal experience in this area, insufficient training, high levels of staff and student turnover, and limited parent engagement, are factors that can impede cohesive and enduring SEL initiatives in schools.

Schools are complex settings. Resultingly, SEL program implementation is often conducted by staff with different pedagogical expertise, often not in the respective program area. As such, key program components can easily be overlooked or modified in ways inconsistent with the program's intent. Such issues can lead to inconsistencies in program implementation (Slee et al., 2011). Thus, enhanced teacher education and adequate resourcing are needed to encourage and maintain the consistency and success of schools' SEL initiatives (Slee et al., 2011). These authors note the need for increasing the amount of evidence-based research or "practice-based evidence" of SEL teachers (p. 45). Accordingly, the current study is designed to elicit information about Australian teachers' in-situ SEL practices, thinking and decision-making. One intent is to investigate, examine and identify ways to inform and enhance future SEL practice and development initiatives.

2.6. Future SEL Directions and Existing Critiques

2.6.1. SEL for a changing world

The influence of SEL and its placement within teaching and learning contexts shapes curriculums, policies, professional learning programs, research projects and assessment measures worldwide (Durlak et al., 2015; Frydenberg et al., 2017; OECD, 2015; Schleicher, 2016). Looking ahead, 21st-century schools will increasingly need to serve a culturally diverse student body with varying abilities and motivations (Durlak et al., 2011). The OECD PISA Global Competence Framework (2018) aspires for all students to embody "globally competent individuals [who] can examine local, global and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact successfully and respectfully with others, and take responsible action toward sustainability and collective wellbeing" (p. 4). Future SEL teaching and assessment efforts must respond diligently to the world's rapidly changing educational climate and societal needs (Cefai & Cavioni, 2015; Miyamoto et al., 2015). Brackett and Rivers (2014) assert that students' development of SEC should be considered part of their educational experience, situated within, not separate from, their academic learning goals.

The challenge of such learners must be reflected in changes to teacher education and in-service professional development practices. Current and future educators must be adequately trained to respond appropriately and support students' diverse academic, social and emotional needs (Katz et al., 2020). Schleicher (2016) warns:

> A generation ago, teachers could expect that what they taught would last for a lifetime of their students. Today, schools need to prepare students for more rapid economic and social change than ever before, for jobs that have not yet been created, to use technologies that have not yet been invented, and to solve social problems that we don't yet know will arise. (p. 1)

Hickey et al. (2022) also contend that "a peculiar feature of current reform agendas is the devolution of teachers' professional practice to enact approaches to teaching that might respond to the embedded needs of students and 'situated' peculiarities of schools" (p. 293). This research study of experienced teachers will shed light on the realities of 21st-century SEL teaching. It will consider how teachers address their students' diverse social and emotional needs and what information and supports they use to craft and deliver relevant SEL instruction.

2.6.1.1. "Transformative SEL" efforts

Emerging "transformative SEL" initiatives embody a critical shift implied in the changing world of SEL teaching, research and policymaking. These initiatives uphold SEL as a lever to promote educational equity and excellence for all students (Jagers et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2021; Loftus, 2021; Soutter & Timmerman, 2022; Williams & Jagers, 2022). SEL research critics have long questioned the "cultural subtext" and applicability of SEL for students from diverse, non-Eurocentric backgrounds and cultures (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020; Hoffman, 2009; Williams & Jagers, 2022). In this way, recent transformative SEL initiatives seek to address education, social and economic inequities and meet the complex social and emotional needs of students from communities of colour and marginalised backgrounds (Jagers et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2022; Williams & Jagers, 2022). Such research suggests transformative SEL involves "individuals [going] beyond being prosocial to their neighbor [to] participate in actions that attempt to resist, disrupt, and dismantle the inequities perpetuated by dominant culture that keeps their neighbor in an oppressed, marginalized position" (Williams & Jagers, 2022, p. 193).

Transformative SEL researchers and practitioners argue that their approach strongly aligns with the emerging research of culturally responsive teaching (Jagers et al., 2019; Katz et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017, 2019). They suggest an imminent long-term convergence between transformative SEL and culturally responsive teaching aimed at promoting a more culturally inclusive and aware society (Jagers et al., 2021). In line with these recent advancements, CASEL (2023a) updated its original definition for SEL. It moved SEL beyond the traditional instruction of five core social and emotional competencies. CASEL's (2023a) revised definition views SEL as an opportunity to "help address various forms of inequity and

empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy and just communities" (Niemi, 2020).

In response to these advancements, there is a loud call from transformative SEL advocates for teachers to engage in transformative introspection and critical self-reflection. That is, to identify and explore their own internal biases, privileges and positionalities, which shape their language, perceptions and actions in today's diverse, multicultural classrooms (Gimbert et al., 2021; Jagers et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2020; Soutter & Timmerman, 2022). However, while positive in intent, this call must be matched by research designed to investigate experienced SEL teachers' conceptualisations of SEL and implementation methods. This study is designed to commence such an inquiry.

In research on transformative SEL for teachers, SEL progress is discussed in relation to student outcomes. However, the teachers' own SEL growth is equally important—indeed foundational—to successful SEL initiatives for students (Soutter & Timmerman, 2022). While encouraging SEL for teachers is not a novel idea, teacher preparation models for SEL must begin leveraging the newly expanded transformative SEL frameworks to cultivate teachers' transformative SECs. Doing so will support teachers in championing an "equity-grounded, culturally sustaining vision of social emotional learning in their classrooms" (Soutter & Timmerman, 2022, p. 52). In this way, preparing teachers for transformative SEL instruction requires an intentional focus on their own sense of "identity, agency and belonging" (Williams & Jagers, 2022, p. 194).

Promoting teachers' critical exploration of "self" for transformative SEL is particularly relevant to the Australian education context and this study. While SEL policy and programming initiatives in Australia have demonstrated some stamina and success over the last two decades, many SEL-related programs and teaching approaches adopted into Australian school settings remain heavily tied to Eurocentric interpretations of social and emotional norms (Frydenberg et al., 2017). For success, they must be adapted for more comprehensive cultural inclusion and suitability (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020). To ensure appropriate inclusion and representation of Australia's multicultural students in SEL education, Australian SEL policymakers, programmers, and educators must begin to explore and adopt transformative SEL practices and focus on developing educators' critical and cultural SEC for SEL (Williams & Jagers, 2022). This will require further research into how teachers' subjective perspectives, lived histories,

personal identities, and cultural influences affect their knowledge and teaching of SEL (Baek et al., 2022; Blewitt et al., 2021), as well as targeted teaching training (Katz et al., 2020).

2.6.2. Assessing and measuring SEL

Many SEL researchers (Frydenberg et al., 2017; LaRocca & Bartolino Krachman, 2018) continue to call for improved "assessment and accountability systems for SEL programs in relation to student outcomes" (Durlak et al., 2011, p. 421). To this end, a US policy report suggests using a "data-informed approach" to better "infor[m] the system-wide integration of SEL into school culture and practice, and [to] hel[p] educators invest in strategies that work for all students" (LaRocca & Bartolino Krachman, 2018, p. 3). This approach collects SEL data using various methods, including "culture and climate surveys" and "school-level needs assessments" to generate information about learning environments and student needs concerning SEL (LaRocca & Bartolino Krachman, 2018). CASEL (2023b) has also committed to "advance progress toward establishing practical SEL assessments that are scientifically sound, feasible to use, and actionable as a key priority for the field."

However, not all practitioners, policymakers or researchers agree with the standardisation of SEL teaching and assessment practices (Cefai & Cavioni, 2015; Evans, 2017; Hoffman, 2009). Cefai and Cavioni (2015) caution that "a performance-oriented, examination-driven curriculum may directly conflict with the nature of social and emotional education, potentially increasing examination stress and decreasing self-esteem" (p. 237). In this way, formative SEL assessment measures could include rubrics, observations, reflections, checklists, discussions and journaling to encourage students to "develop their competencies according to their developmental readiness by identifying their strengths, needs, and areas for improvement" (Cefai & Cavioni, 2015, p. 237). Evans (2017) likewise proposes using a more "developmental assessment approach" to track students' SEC development. This approach responds to "questions surround[ing] the morality of compelling young people to emote in alignment with a normatively prescribed criterion and the lawfulness of creating emotional hierarchies in light of the disparate contexts and needs of individual lives" (Evans, 2017, pp. 197–198). Such development-focused assessment examples reflect an approach to SEL assessment more aligned with relational SEL instruction than programmatic and standardised SEL.

2.6.3. Enhancing teachers' SEL training

As this review has demonstrated, schools and SEL teachers have the potential to promote and improve the lives of young people. However, little is known about how SEL teachers conceptualise SEL, the influence of these conceptualisations and, notably, how SEL teachers implement SEL in the classroom. To date, the SEL research focus has been on developing SEL programs for implementation. Research confirms that successful reforms to classroom-based practices can only occur when a deeper understanding of teachers as learners is realised. As such, calls from the SEL research have heralded the need for more evidence-based study of SEL teachers and their teaching. It is anticipated that the outcomes of such a study will signal new directions and ways to develop a more effective capacity within the SEL teaching workforce (Freeman & Strong, 2017).

SEL research shows that teachers support SEL interventions for students (Bridgeland et al., 2013). As Bridgeland et al. (2013) report, in a comprehensive survey of over 600 US teachers commissioned by CASEL, 93% felt it was fairly or very important to encourage students' social and emotional skill development in school, and doing so would positively affect students' future career success, relationships and active citizenship (pp. 14, 29). However, only 44% of teachers surveyed reported that social and emotional skills are being taught as part of a systematic SEL program, and just over half had received training in social and emotional skills (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p. 34). Accordingly, Jennings and Frank (2015) argue that due to the limited number of teacher preparation programs that include SEL training, while supportive of SEL in schools, "many teachers are not well prepared to deliver SEL curricular content, generalize SEL concepts to their classroom management efforts and interactions with students, and integrate SEL concepts into other curriculum areas" (p. 424). Katz et al. (2020), Schonert-Reich, (2019), and Blewitt et al. (2021) share this view.

Pre-service offerings in teachers' SEL training remain highly varied. According to Schonert-Reichl (2019), "research on the extent to which preservice teacher education includes information and/or training directly in SEL is in a nascent stage" (p. 229). While teachers may be supportive, teacher preparation programs need to change. Katz et al. (2020) propose more rigorous preservice teacher training to promote SEL as "the cornerstone in our teacher education programs" (p. 3). Further, they assert "re-evaluation of the courses in which SEL becomes embedded in the program is a must" and call for "an epistemological and ontological

paradigm shift in what we think effective preparation programs should deliver" (Katz et al., 2020, p. 3).

In line with these concerns and responses to the increased status of SEL in schools, Australian SEL researchers have begun to trial and investigate ways to develop pre-service teachers' SEL knowledge and skills (Freeman & Strong, 2017; Main, 2018). For example, Main (2018) presents findings on a "situated learning" inspired teacher education course designed to increase preservice secondary teachers' SEC. She explains that throughout the course, "tutors 'walked the talk' and set the tone of the classroom and clearly modelled how to embed a range of competencies in their teaching without distracting from the core content to be taught" (Main, 2018, p. 142). Resulting from this intervention, 39% of the 342 participating teachers demonstrated an increased awareness of SEL skills, a better understanding of their connection to students' academic progress and more relevant ways of incorporating SEL skills across curriculum areas (Main, 2018). In addition, a compulsory teacher training unit on social and emotional wellbeing was recently established at the University of Southern Queensland to ensure teachers' preparation to teach SEL (Student Wellbeing Hub, 2020) and a Master of Education (Student Wellbeing) is now offered at the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education (Freeman & Strong, 2017). Promoting early teachers' SEL training in these ways suggests Australia's emerging commitment to formally enhancing teachers' knowledge, ability and confidence to facilitate SEL.

In a recent study of Australian early childhood educators' SEL knowledge and practices, Blewitt et al. (2021) found that "although social—emotional development is a priority for early years professionals, there is inconsistency in training and application of support to enable this to occur" (p. 12). This context appears especially true following the compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' and teachers' stress and anxiety levels. According to Katz et al. (2020), "the difficulties suffered by teachers and students [during the pandemic] shine a spotlight on how important social and emotional wellbeing is for teaching and learning, and how unprepared our educational systems are to provide social and emotional support" (p. 2).

Time constraints, feelings of isolation, crowded curricula and increasing professional demands are commonly cited impediments to teachers' SEL teaching and training (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Dyson et al., 2021; Graham et al., 2011). Therefore, researchers suggest "integrating SEL through schoolwide activities and classroom instruction could support

teachers in achieving their goal of SEL implementation while not significantly adding to their time burdens" (Bridgeland et al., 2013, p. 31). Schonert-Reichl (2019) also cites the importance of teachers having a sound understanding of child and adolescent development to facilitate learning experiences supporting students' social, emotional and academic outcomes. Additionally, Blewitt et al. (2021) advocate for building on educators' personal knowledge through "explicit, documented techniques [to] integrate [their] formal learning with personal experience" (p. 19). Yoder (2014) suggests such an approach to teachers' SEL education and training should be "integrated *into* existing teacher evaluation and professional development systems … [to] avoi[d] overburdening educators by layering on yet another separate initiative" (p. 1).

Moreover, various online, self-paced and module-style professional development opportunities exist to support Australian teachers' SEL knowledge and pedagogy. These can be accessed through the National Student Wellbeing Hub and other state and territory resource hubs and websites. Some teachers receive SEL training alongside their schools' adoption of specific SEL programs. While not mandatory or part of any teacher training qualification, such development opportunities can inform and guide teachers' SEL understandings and practices. However, they represent informal channels for teachers' SEL training—namely relying on teachers' personal interest and engagement with self-directed learning about SEL. Accordingly, as Lozano-Peña et al. (2021) argue, "if one wants to advance towards a trans-versal development of SEC in education, the incorporation of an explicit approach in teacher training is unavoidable" (p. 13). As such, calls remain for Australian teachers to receive formal SEL training.

So, too, does the question of how SEL is translated into teachers' regular, ongoing teaching practice for those who may not have formal SEL training. These areas remain underexplored within the SEL literature. Bridgeland et al. (2013) propose that "focusing resources to research and analyse the benefits of systemic schoolwide SEL programming plus classroom-based instruction could help ensure more effective SEL programming in schools" (p. 31). Likewise, as noted earlier, Osher et al.'s (2016) key directions for future SEL research include increased "knowledge about how to promote teachers' buy-in and quality of [SEL] implementation" (p. 663). The current study is therefore positioned to explore teachers' classroom-based instruction in these ways.

2.6.4. (Re)defining and researching SEL

Finally, "as with many aspects of education and psychology, SEL [research] is susceptible to poor measurement and methodology" (Martin et al., 2017, p. 463). SEL researchers warn that a lack of clarity, consistency and scope in the definitions used across SEL investigations, policies, frameworks and programs can detract from the success and application of SEL research (Bowles et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2019). For Jones et al. (2019):

> Using precise terminology when conducting and communicating research can help to minimize confusion and maximize the applicability of SEL research and practice across contexts. Emphasizing precision and transparency will drive our field to develop a better understanding of which skills and competencies are the same, which are different, and which overlap across disciplines, ultimately allowing us to move beyond fads and quick-fix approaches to closer alignment between research and evidence, programs and strategies, and assessment and evaluation. (p. 137)

Additionally, Martin et al. (2017) argue that SEL research often stems from "convenience and small samples, thus limiting the capacity to generalize" (p. 463). It can also lack comparison groups, thus impeding researchers' ability to credibly identify SEL interventions' success or effectiveness. As a result, calls for larger-scale research investigations of SEL in Australia, especially concerning the overall effectiveness of SEL programs and policies, would present an opportunity to better understand current SEL issues at the local, state and national levels and generate a more consistent nationwide definition of and approach to SEL (Bowles et al., 2017).

However, given the complex nature of Australian schools (Bowles et al., 2017) and the understanding that SEL is characterised by distinct interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions, intimate yet rigorous research investigations also provide meaningful insights concerning SEL in schools (Blewitt et al., 2021). Such investigations are especially helpful in understanding teachers' SEL perspectives and practices and how these can relate to and inform existing SEL programs, policies and future research (Blewitt et al., 2021; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016). They can also provide a deeper, more focused look at how larger, systemic SEL issues trickle down to affect the smaller micro-contexts of school settings, including individual classrooms and teachers (Dyson et al., 2021). Compared to large-scale quantitative SEL studies, Dyson et al. (2021) argue that "qualitative methods help elicit the nuanced contextual opportunities and challenges educators experience when it comes to understanding and practically implementing SEL pedagogies holistically" (p. 625).

Qualitative SEL researchers suggest working collaboratively with teachers to gauge their authentic understandings and perceptions of SEL (Blewitt et al., 2021; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Dyson et al., 2021). Resulting from these partnerships, SEL researchers can also assist in informing teachers' ongoing teaching and learning processes positively. In this way, Jones et al. (2019) explain:

> The steps involved in designing research activities in partnership with practitioners can be demanding and time consuming, but they arguably result in research that is both more useful for participants and that more closely adheres to principles of ecological validity (p. 136).

However, smaller-scale investigations must avoid presenting "opinion and anecdote" so SEL practitioners can locate relevant, evidence-based findings to inform their practice (Martin et al., 2017, p. 464). Thus, Martin et al. (2017) encourage "researchers to develop clear, practitioner-friendly guidance on core criteria that can be used to identify what programmatic advice has merit and what does not" (p. 464). These suggestions support the key aim of this research: to investigate teachers' applied SEL knowledge, interpretations and practices—in depth and in partnership alongside teachers—to identify how these complement or contrast with what is known about effective SEL instruction.

2.7. Conclusion

This review of SEL literature has presented various discussion points about SEL, including an overview of SEL's historical development, key evidence-based findings and its contemporary significance in schools. Key research developments concerning SEL programs, instructional SEL strategies and the role of teachers in facilitating SEL were also outlined and reviewed. The review also discussed SEL implementation in Australia, including current research and practice issues, and closed with an outline of existing critiques and proposed future directions for ongoing SEL research and practice in Australia and globally. Summated calls in the literature for new SEL research informed the development and design of the current research. Where appropriate, reference was made to those calls and highlighted links to the current research foci and design.

Although significant steps have been taken to legitimise SEL internationally, many aspects of SEL would benefit from further research and development. As outlined, these areas relate to exploring teachers' current understandings and use of pedagogical strategies to facilitate SEL. They are also concerned with the best ways to support teachers' ongoing professional

knowledge and development for SEL. This is especially true given the identified current understanding of Australian teachers' SEL delivery in the primary school context. The current study will add to the existing research-based knowledge concerning SEL thinking and implementation in Australia. Based on selected needs identified in the literature, the study will focus on experienced primary school teachers' understandings of SEL and related pedagogical approaches using a unique combination of qualitative methods and a teacher-centred research approach. The results will provide evidenced-based data from practising SEL teachers in Australia that will be used to discuss the current context of SEL thinking and practice, related professional development and any unforeseen issues that may arise. The following chapter will provide a detailed outline and justification of the research process, including the study methods and analysis procedures.

Chapter 3: The Research Process

3.1. Introduction

In response to the literature, this study was designed to investigate and provide a detailed understanding of the SEL conceptualisations, decision-making and pedagogy of Australian primary (K–6) teachers. The following research questions guided this research study:

> ***RQ1:*** *How do the participant teachers conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped their understanding?*
> ***RQ2:*** *How do they make decisions about their teaching of SEL?*
> ***RQ3:*** *What approaches do they use to implement SEL in the classroom context?*
> ***RQ4:*** *What factors promote or impede their implementation of SEL?*

In this chapter, I explain my approach to the research, including the overall study design and processes. The chapter begins with a rationale for the choice of methodological approach and the selection of the research participants. An overview of the research design and timeline follows, supported by a discussion of the data collection methods and procedures. I then present the data analysis, interpretation and reporting procedures. Ethical considerations and a chapter summary conclude the chapter.

3.2. Choice of a Methodological Approach

3.2.1. Experiential qualitative research

Given the need to understand teachers and their decision-making and pedagogy in the classroom, an experiential qualitative approach to the research design was selected. Qualitative research explores and interprets real-life experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As such, it involves carefully considering people or sites to assist in unveiling meaning (Creswell, 2012; Krauss, 2005). More specifically, experiential qualitative research focuses on participants' interpretations—their understandings, beliefs, experiences and practices—with these first-hand perspectives prioritised in reporting research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this way, education researchers embrace qualitative research as an "insightful or illuminative means of understanding more fully the people and processes involved in education" (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 23).

As reviewed in the previous chapter, teachers are acknowledged as playing a critical role in the uptake, implementation and impact of SEL teaching and programming initiatives. Consequently, SEL researchers call for greater understanding and inclusion of teachers' SEL perspectives, knowledge and practices to inform ongoing SEL policy and practice reforms (Blewitt et al., 2021; Dyson et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2019). According to Jones et al. (2019), "for SEL to become fully integrated into educational policy and practice, it is essential that researchers intentionally design research activities in close partnership with practitioners so that they are responsive to on-the-ground needs" (p. 135). Given this, I positioned teachers at the centre of my research. This decision also supports the view that teachers are "rich and unique sources of knowledge" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, p. 8) and should be regarded as experts in their fields (Wells, 2012). Likewise, it reflects the opinions of education researchers and SEL proponents who "believe that deep changes in practice can only be brought about by those closest to the day-to-day work of teaching and learning" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2012, p. 2). By adopting an experiential qualitative research approach, I therefore positioned teachers as critical interpreters of their professional SEL knowledge and practice. Consequently, the research will amplify the unique and individual voices and meanings of the teachers involved (Creswell, 2012; Krauss, 2005).

3.2.2. Insider-research: An empathetic and appreciative perspective

Engaging with and seeking to understand better the perspectives and experiences of teachers comes naturally to me because I am one. As such, throughout this study, I was uniquely positioned as an insider teacher-researcher (Fleming, 2018; Gair, 2011; Ross, 2017). While collecting data for this project, I considered my skills, experience and training gained from many years as a primary teacher as reliable strengths in my role as a researcher. This self-assessment was validated by those who participated in my research, who identified my social skills and sensitivity as key attributes that enabled the development of mutual trust and understanding during the research process. More specifically, the participating teachers acknowledged my strong social skills, emotional sensitivity and knowledge of teachers' professional demands. These attributes and trust also aided the ease and flow of our dialogue during the in-depth interview and reflection sessions.

Being an insider teacher-researcher offered several research advantages. Like Ross (2017), I quickly developed a rapport with the participants. During observations and video review discussions, recounts and analysis, I could emphasise and more easily comprehend the range

of idiosyncratic thinking and contexts individual participants reported and encountered in their classrooms. As such, through my questioning and joint reconstructions with the individual participants, we—the participants and I—gained a deeper contextualised understanding and perspective of their subjective SEL knowledge and teaching practices. Such information will be presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 within the participants' case reports. Sharing familiar experiences between myself as an insider-researcher and my participants led to what Gair (2011) explains as "perceptive, empathetic understanding" (p. 134). For example, one teacher participant commented: "You've come and observed a whole range of different things, and you've picked up on things I wouldn't even pick up on" (Summer, VSRD2, p. 20).

In enacting such an approach, the research design involved multiple opportunities for the participant teachers to discuss, model and reflect on their SEL practice. I ensured these engagements occurred in teachers' preferred locations and were scheduled at their convenience. By including three qualitative methods—semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and VSRDs—I enacted a teacher-centred, exploratory approach to investigating teachers' SEL knowledge and practices. These methods are outlined in Section 3.5.

An empathetic research perspective is generally synonymous with a shared understanding and appreciation of a participant's circumstances and lived experiences (Gair, 2011; Hedican, 2008). However, Gair (2011) cautions that "this specific focus on empathy is not about 'sameness'. It is about genuinely enriching research relationships and illuminating the voices of research participants" (p. 140). Likewise, in tandem with enacting an empathetic researcher stance, my research approach was informed by the process of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI stems from the principles of positive psychology and aligns with "the growing field of positive change" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). It is a "positive, strengths-based approach to organisation development and change management" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 1) and, as such, it values strength-based explorations of organisations and their people. It counters "problem-based" research methods by prioritising positive information-seeking, meaning-making, solution-focused dialogue and forward-looking actions through storytelling, open-ended questions and sharing positive perspectives (Banton et al., 2022; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). According to Cooperrider and Whitney (2007), in AI, "meaning is made in relationship using words, language and questions as primary tools of creation" (p. 285). Therefore, AI's collaborative reflexive techniques align well with qualitative research and this study (Banton

et al., 2022; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). They allowed me to tap into participants' rich accounts of SEL-related thinking and experiences in life and the classroom context.

However, Hedican (2008) notes a loss of "objectivity" and potential "overidentification" as possible difficulties stemming from such an empathetic perspective in qualitative research. While Gair (2011) describes empathy as "an indispensable ingredient in perceiving the lived experience of another person" (p. 134), it must not override a researcher's quest for understanding and representation. Throughout the different phases of the research my ongoing reflexivity as a researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Burton & Bartlett, 2011; Gair, 2011) served to ensure that the subjective voice of each participant remained central in my inquiry. Therefore, heeding Hedican's (2008) warning, I maintained reflective and other processes to safeguard empathetic objectivity and minimise overidentification with participants. These included journaling, regular discussions with critical higher-degree students, initiating member checks (see Birt et al., 2016) of processes, data interpretations, and regular meetings, debriefings and guidance from my supervisory panel.

3.2.3. Multiple case study methodology

Aligned with this qualitative and empathetic research approach, I used a multiple case study methodology to pursue this investigation of teachers' SEL knowledge and pedagogy. Case study methodology enables a researcher to deeply explore an identified research issue within its relevant, situated context (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Mishra, 2021; Mishra & Dey, 2022; Simons, 2009, 2015; Yin, 2014; Yazan, 2015). Hartley (2004) further identifies the case study as a dependable and flexible research strategy to "understand everyday practices and their meanings to those involved, which would not be revealed in brief contact" (p. 325). Additional benefits of case study research include the ability to obtain detailed descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2013), gain an in-depth understanding of programs and policies (Simons, 2015), develop a rapport with research participants (Ponelis, 2015), explore educational initiatives within authentic environments (Simons, 2009) and investigate research questions concerning "contexts, relationships, processes and practices" (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 23). Given the aim of my research, I considered the case study methodology well-suited to uncover key facets of teachers' perceptions, processes and practices regarding their teaching of SEL.

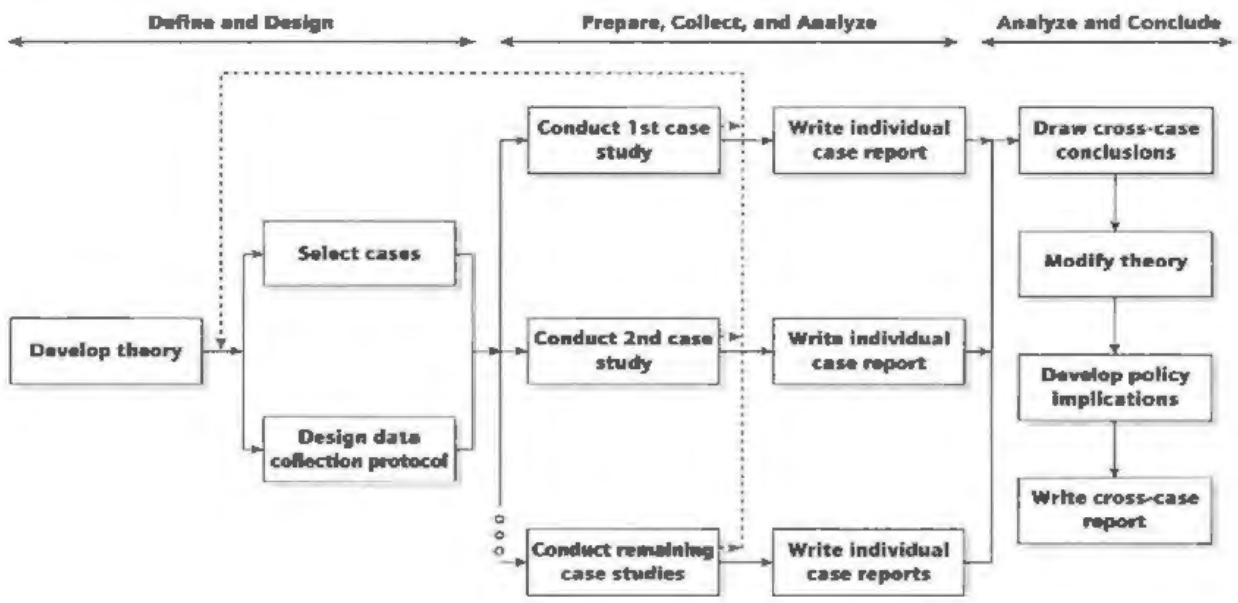
Researchers engaged in case study research can draw from one or several cases to address their research question(s). While a single case study depicts a single, bounded unit within a defined

context (Ponelis, 2015), a collective case study describes and compares several cases (Creswell, 2012, p. 465; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). Yin (2018) refers to these as multiple case studies and explains the evidence generated from multiple case research is usually more comprehensive and convincing than from a single case. By integrating several in-depth perspectives to elicit a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of a research issue, multiple case studies can also improve comprehension and better theorising about a topic (Creswell, 2012; Lewis, 2003).

Therefore, I was guided by Yin's (2018) replication approach to conducting a multiple case study in this research (see Figure 3.1). Using replication logic, Yin (2018) explains that individual cases are purposefully selected to predict similar or contrasting results. The findings of each individual case are then compared, contrasted and synthesised into a culminating multiple case report or summary (Yin, 2018). Thus, as Takahashi and Araujo (2020) describe, "there is a search for patterns of convergence and divergence that permeate all the cases, as the same issues are explored in every case" (p. 103).

Figure 3.1

Replication Approach to Multiple Case Studies (Yin, 2018, p. 58)



The findings of this study represent data collected from individual teacher cases. While I used the same data collection and analysis protocols for each case, my analysis and write-up of the cases were conducted in two stages. Based on initial impressions of data, I first selected and analysed the data for four participants, Cases 1–4. These four participants were selected for initial analysis because they provided the maximum diversity of years of teaching experience and contextual factors to illuminate responses to my research questions (Palinkas et al., 2015). They were drawn from four distinct school settings, each teaching students from different year levels (K, Year 1, Year 3 and Year 6), and included early career to highly experienced teachers with mixed professional training backgrounds and diverse subject area expertise (i.e., Japanese, outdoor education and as otherwise outlined within the individual case profiles). The diversity of these four teachers' contextual factors coloured their unique and varied interpretations and experiences of SEL, as demonstrated in their case reports.

I then conducted a midpoint cross-case analysis of Case Studies 1–4. Satisfied with the diversity of data and emerging preliminary themes, I analysed the data for the three remaining participants, Case Studies 5–7. Such an approach is consistent with Yin's (2018) multiple case study replication approach and Braun and Clarke's (2013) analysis procedure, and the analysis provided the opportunity to confirm, challenge and extend the analytical findings from Case Studies 1–4. This process of multiple case study analysis is likened to a recursive or cyclical approach to analysis whereby identified themes are grouped and tested against new data until theoretical saturation is reached (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012; Takahashi & Araujo, 2020). Further detail regarding data analysis is provided in Section 3.6. Although each case report is pertinent, the cross-case findings present a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the research questions.

3.3. Research Participants

3.3.1. Rationale

Multiple case studies are generally acknowledged as time and resource-intensive as they are designed to elicit rich data from individual participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Yin, 2018). Time, data management and data saturation influenced the number and range of teacher cases I recruited for this study. Braun and Clarke (2013) note that qualitative researchers must collect sufficient data to adequately represent the research issue while simultaneously ensuring quality and timely engagement with the data. Additionally, research with narrower topics studied in

depth through repeated engagements typically demands fewer participants than broader topics that employ large-scale data collection methods. Accordingly, from the literature and on advice, I reasoned that an in-depth investigation of 6–8 experienced teachers' SEL knowledge and teaching practices across several school sites would provide sufficient and diverse data to illuminate meaningful similarities and differences concerning my research questions while remaining a manageable dataset for individual and cross-case analysis.

3.3.2. Participant recruitment and selection process

Therefore, I used a combination of purposive, convenience and snowball recruitment procedures to recruit and select suitable teachers for this multiple case study (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling is expected in case study research and describes the purposeful selection of participants whose profiles allow for a thorough exploration of the research issue (Creswell, 2012; Palinkas et al., 2015). Braun and Clarke (2013) explain that purposive sampling enables researchers to gain a detailed understanding from those with first-hand experience relevant to the research question(s). Palinkas et al. (2015) also explain that it involves recruiting participants who are "especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest" (p. 534). Moreover, it is important to recruit available individuals willing to participate and "ab[le] to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 534). Therefore, preferred case characteristics or inclusion criteria were developed (Braun & Clarke, 2013) to recruit participants with exemplary SEL practices. The criteria were:

- >5 years of experience as a classroom teacher of primary school children; that is, from Kindergarten (5–6 years of age) to Years 6 (11–12 years of age)
- positive disposition towards students' social and emotional development
- commitment to professional and personal development
- comfortable sharing about their professional SEL understanding and practice
- comfortable being audio and video recorded.

To assist with recruitment, I contacted selected primary school principals within one education authority to recommend teachers who satisfied the inclusion criteria to be approached regarding involvement in this study. I provided them with a summary of the study (see Appendix A). This decision constitutes a convenience sampling approach, favouring the recruitment of participants most accessible or convenient to the research and researcher (Braun & Clarke,

2013; Creswell, 2012). The principals were chosen based on their demonstrated commitment to students' social and emotional development, as evidenced by their public involvement and schools' current strategic plans. Selecting participants from the one education jurisdiction ensured familiarity with local curriculum and programming demands and allowed me, as an insider-researcher, to facilitate all required site visits and meetings. I secured five teachers from four schools through this principal recommendation process.

In addition, during the recruitment process, snowball sampling (Creswell, 2012) unintentionally occurred twice. Akin to convenience sampling, snowball sampling or "friendship pyramiding" involves reliance on a researcher's professional networks (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Creswell (2012) explains that snowball sampling can help recruit additional participants for a study but may also limit the amount of control a researcher has over participant selection. Due to critical friend recommendations, two additional teachers were referred to me. Both teachers met the selection criteria and agreed to participate in the study after discussing my research aim and procedures. In sum, seven teachers volunteered to participate in the study.

3.3.3. Participant profile overview

The seven teacher cases selected for this study represent a variety of school contexts, personal perspectives and professional experiences. A brief profile overview of the participants is presented in Table 3.1. The participants included four female teachers, two male teachers and one teacher identifying as non-binary. This gender breakdown reflects the gender distribution cited in the 2019 Australian teaching workforce data (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The teachers' professional teaching experience ranged from six to 43 years. At the time of the study, the teachers were teaching across different primary school year levels (Kindergarten, Year 1, Year 2, Year 3 and Year 6) in five different schools. Three teachers began teaching as an initial career, while four transitioned to teaching following other professional pathways. Additionally, one teacher was a designated language specialist and trained overseas. In selecting these teachers, I aimed to capture a broad selection of teachers' professional backgrounds, perspectives and experience to facilitate maximum diversity in response to my research questions (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Table 3.1

Profile Overview of the Teacher Participants

Teacher Name*	Beau	Karen	Alex	Celeste	Lucy	Seb	Summer
Case #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gender & pronouns	Male he/him/ his	Female she/her /hers	Non-binary they/them/theirs	Female she/her /hers	Female she/her /hers	Male he/him/his	Female she/her /hers
Age	25–30	45–50	30–35	> 60	50–55	30–35	25–30
Years of experience	7	6	10	43	9	6	6.5
Year Level & Teaching Role	Year 3 Class teacher	Year 1/2 Class teacher	Year 6 Class teacher	Kinder-garten, Japanese specialist	Year 3 Class teacher	Kinder-garten Class teacher	Year 6 Class teacher
School Name*	Brumbies Primary School	Hilltops Primary School	Mount Sacred Primary School	Woodlands Primary School	Lakeside Primary School	Woodlands Primary School	Woodlands Primary School

** All teacher and school names have been replaced with pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of the participants*

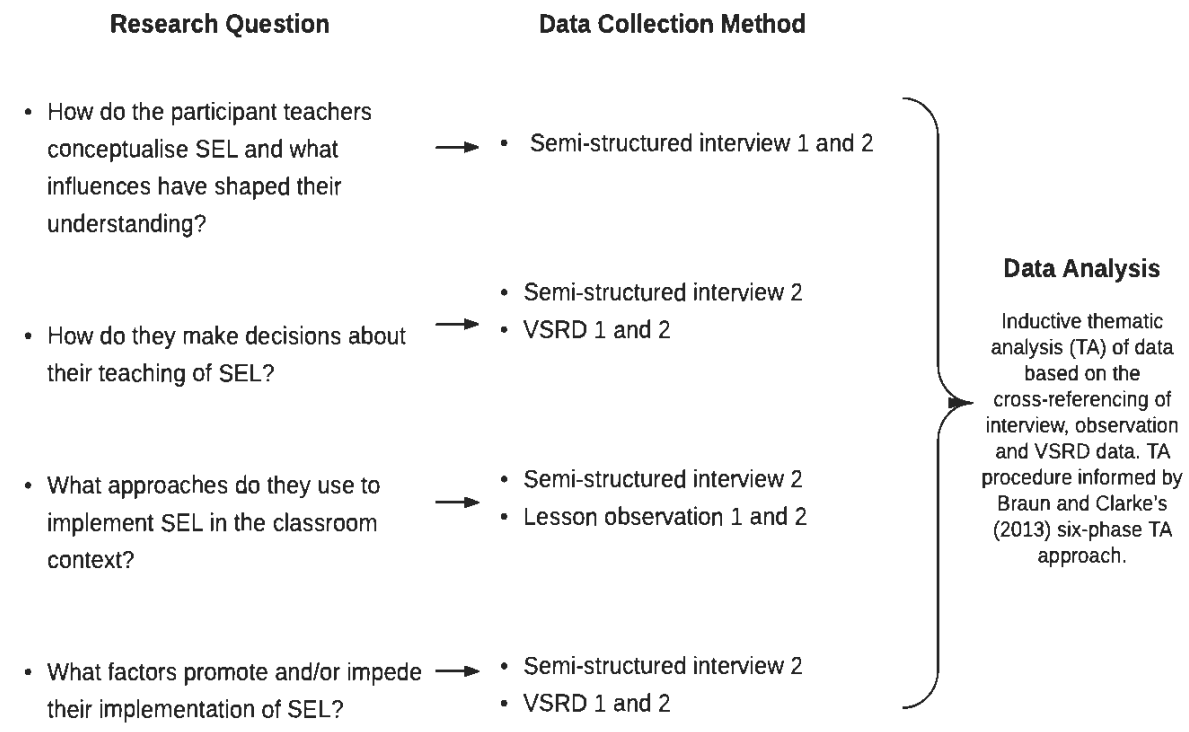
3.4. Research Design and Timeline

Case study methodology relies on a researcher's purposeful combination of varied research methods to illuminate key questions (Yin, 2014). Meyer and Turner (2006) similarly argue that research involving teacher practice must portray "multiple perspectives and multiple measures if the ultimate goal is to understand classroom contexts" (p. 385). Hence, my research approach included a purposeful triangulation of qualitative research methods (see Section 3.7.1). This approach assisted me in obtaining rich and relevant data concerning the four research questions (Creswell, 2012) and ensured the trustworthiness of the data collected (Birt et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Nowell et al., 2017). The methods for each case included two semi-structured teacher interviews (King, 2004; Legard et al., 2003), two lesson observations (Waddington, 2004; Yin, 2014) and two VSRD sessions (Moyles et al., 2002; Nind et al., 2015). Including several research methods in my research design gave the participating teachers varied and authentic opportunities to discuss, demonstrate and reflect on their SEL knowledge and

practices. Figure 3.2 highlights the relationship between each research question and the data collection methods.

Figure 3.2

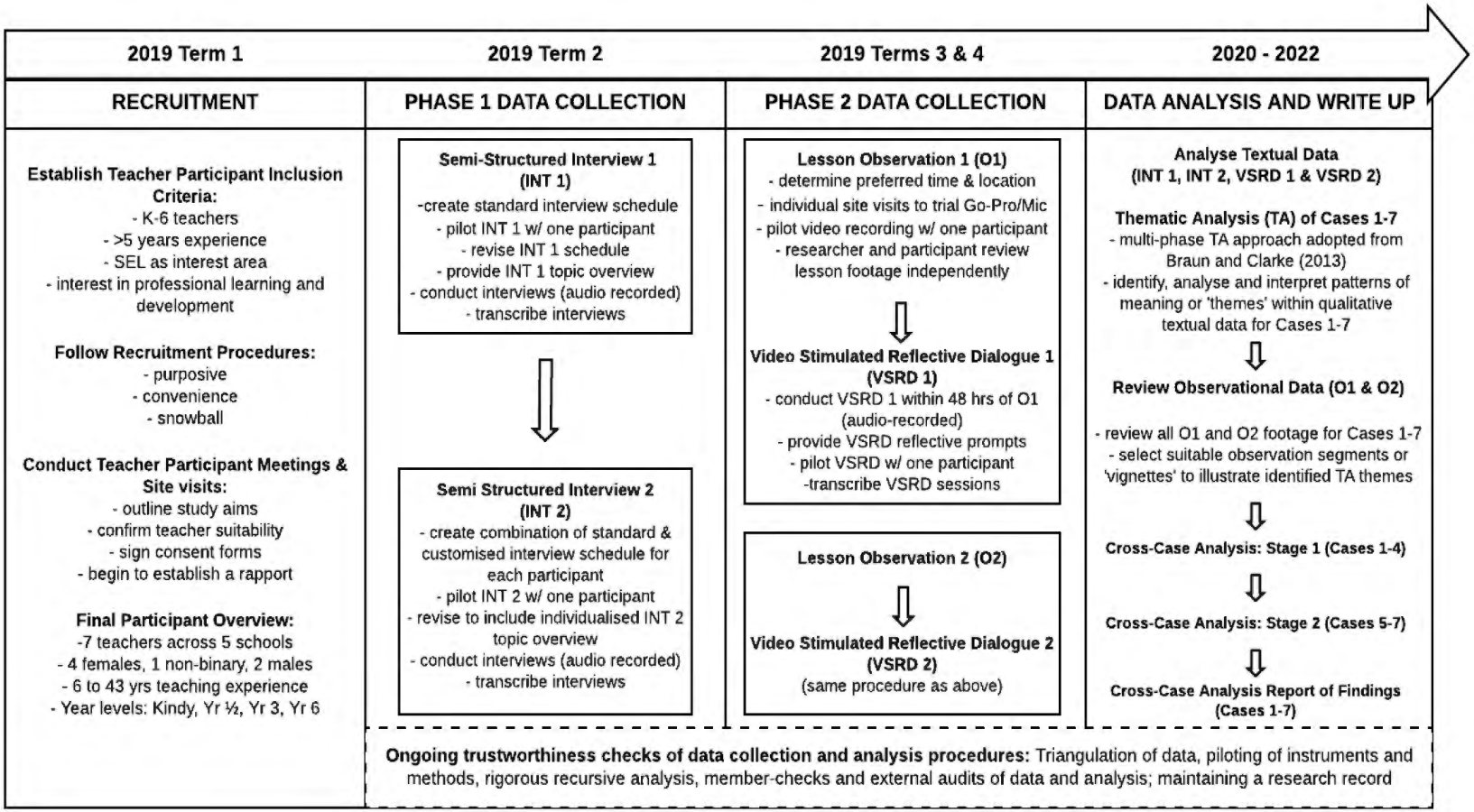
Relationship Between Research Questions and Data Collection Methods



As shown in Figure 3.3, this research occurred during one Australian school year (February–December 2019). Beginning in Term 1, I recruited the teacher participants, held initial meetings to confirm their interest and participation in the study and organised school site visits to familiarise myself with the teachers and their preferred meeting spaces. During Term 2, I began Phase 1 of data collection and held all teacher interviews (Int. 1 & Int. 2). Following this, throughout Terms 3 and 4, I conducted all lesson observations (Observation 1 & Observation 2) and subsequent VSRD sessions (VSRD 1 & VSRD 2). Meeting each participant semi-regularly several times throughout the school year encouraged a sense of collegiality and familiarity. All data were collected by December 2019, after which I began the process of data analysis and case write-up (2020–2022). Ongoing trustworthiness checks of data collection and analysis procedures, including participant review of final transcripts, also occurred during this time.

Figure 3.3

Research Design and Timeline



3.5. Data Collection: Methods and Procedures

3.5.1. Teacher interviews

Following participant recruitment, the first data collection phase occurred during Term 2 of the 2019 Australian school year, which included two semi-structured interviews with each participating teacher (see Figure 3.3). Appendix B provides an example of the schedules used for Interviews 1 and 2. Sometimes referred to as "qualitative research interviews" (King, 2004) or "prolonged case study interviews" (Yin, 2014), semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore topics in depth and from the personal perspectives of the interviewees (King, 2004). My intention in using semi-structured interviews was to provide a directed yet flexible way to investigate factors related to the teachers' SEL knowledge and practices, including their values, opinions and beliefs (Legard et al., 2003). As Rubin and Rubin (2012) state, "asking everyone the same questions makes little sense in qualitative interviewing. An interview is a window on a time and a social world that is experienced one person at a time, one incident at a time" (p. 14). Therefore, my design structure and delivery of the interviews were individually responsive to each teacher's experiences and interests (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

As such, the teacher interviews were "guided conversations rather than structured queries" (Yin, 2014, p. 110). With the support of an interview topic schedule for each interview, I asked the participants specific questions related to the study's key topics and research questions while remaining open to and building on their responses (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Burton & Bartlett, 2011; King, 2004; Morse, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each first interview began with 5–7 ground mapping questions "designed to encourage spontaneity and to allow the interviewee to raise the issues that are most relevant to them" (Legard et al., 2003, p. 148). I then used dimension mapping questions to "focus on each of the dimensions or topics raised by the interviewee" (Legard et al., 2003, p. 148). The second interview was a follow-up conversation to the first interview (Legard et al., 2003). While still guided by an interview schedule, many questions I asked during the second interview were unique to each teacher's initial responses.

The teacher interviews were audio-recorded using an Olympus WS-852 digital voice recorder and took place in each teacher's classroom or other preferred location (i.e., university meeting room, staff room, café). Legard et al. (2003) stress the importance of recording interviews to capture the "depth, nuance and the interviewee's own language as a way of understanding meaning" (p. 142). Using a voice recorder also allowed me to participate actively in the

dialogue and with total concentration, knowing I had a recorded backup of the proceedings. In sum, I conducted 14 teacher interviews ranging from 28 to 90 minutes; 11 hours of interview data were collected across all seven participants.

3.5.2. Lesson observations

The second data collection phase occurred during Term 3 and Term 4 of the 2019 school year. It included two video-recorded lesson observations of each teacher (see Figure 3.3). Direct or recorded observations enable researchers to study the in-situ experiences, interactions and behaviours of research participants (Waddington, 2004) and can elicit different perspectives on a research issue (Yin, 2014, p. 114). As Reitano and Sim (2010) suggest, "while teachers plan and design their teaching, it is in the delivery—their practice—in particular, that is important evidence of their professional knowledge and understanding" (p. 215). Other data sources should be considered to counter "problems of bias, poor recall and poor or inaccurate articulation" within interviews (Yin, 2014. p. 113).

For this study, the primary purpose of the lesson observations was to capture teachers' professional practices and approaches to teaching SEL. The current research incorporated lesson observations in response to findings and recommendations from a prior case research of Australian teachers' SEL perceptions and practices (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016). For each observation, I encouraged all teachers to select lessons they thought would best illustrate SEL content or their SEL teaching practices; no other specific parameters were given. The recorded lesson observation footage served as a critical stimulus to subsequent reflective conversations with the participants about their SEL teaching (see Section 3.5.3), and was used to illustrate the teachers' SEL pedagogy and practices within their case reports.

Additionally, the lesson observation footage allowed me to identify key SEL-related experiences and challenges in the classroom to discuss during the corresponding VSRD sessions (see Section 3.5.3). Teacher participants were given a set amount of time to review and reflect on their observation recordings. While focusing on SEL teaching and pedagogy, teachers often identified related aspects of management, environment or context that affected the lesson. Throughout the VSRD review, the teachers maintained control of the sections of the lesson observation video they viewed as pertinent. The researcher's role was to support, probe and clarify those explicit aspects of the teaching and pedagogy and the teachers' reflections without judgement or direction. After each VSRD session, the teacher and

researcher reviewed and agreed on the observations and teacher interpretations of teaching and pedagogy.

The lesson observations were video recorded using a GoPro Hero 4 video camera and its associated smartphone application. In addition to the GoPro's embedded microphone, I used a roaming Removu M1 + A1 microphone. It was connected via Bluetooth to the GoPro camera and attached to the teacher's lapel to capture their spoken dialogue. Lessons were recorded in each teacher's classroom or other preferred location (i.e., outdoors, music room) at a time and date chosen by the participants. I sat in each lesson observation, maintaining a non-participatory role and taking field notes to support the lesson recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Yin, 2018). In six of the seven cases, I positioned the camera in a fixed location within the teacher's regular classroom (i.e., on a desk or windowsill). However, I handheld the GoPro camera for two lesson observations while accompanying a participating teacher's (Alex) class on two SEL-related outdoor excursions. In this way, the minimalist set-up of the recording devices allowed me to cater flexibly to different learning environments. Overall, I conducted a total of 14 lesson observations. The length of each lesson observation ranged from 41 minutes to 120 minutes; 13.5 hours of recorded lesson observations were collected across all seven participants.

3.5.3. Video-Stimulated Reflective Dialogues (VSRD) sessions

Following each lesson observation, I conducted one-to-one VSRD sessions with each participant teacher (see Figure 3.3). These VSRD sessions allowed the teachers to describe and reflect on the teaching and learning exchanges captured during their lesson observations. Within this study, the VSRD method was used to uncover and make meaning concerning the teachers' thinking, decision-making and practices regarding SEL (Krauss, 2005). Research literature has explored the combined use of video and reflective professional dialogue and found it to be a helpful research method within teaching and learning contexts (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Hepplewhite, 2014; Moyles et al., 2002; Nind et al., 2015; Reitano & Sim 2010). However, to date, no other study of teachers' SEL appears to have included VSRD as a research method.

The VSRD method assisted teachers in identifying and explaining elements of their teaching pedagogy by scaffolding teachers' recall of their teaching with a pre-recorded video prompt and a set of reflective questions (Nind et al., 2015; Powell, 2005). Following each lesson observation, the teacher was asked to independently review the lesson footage in full and

consider responses to several reflective questions (see Appendix C). These questions were adapted from the *Social and Emotional Learning Coaching Toolkit* (Yoder & Gurke, 2017) and supported a "focused conversation" approach (Stanfield, 1997) to teacher reflection. We then met within 48 hours of the lesson observation to reflect on the events within the lesson. As with the interview topic overviews, I emailed participants the VSRD instructions and reflective prompts before their scheduled sessions to allow for preparation and transparency. During each VSRD session, the corresponding lesson footage was available on my laptop for easy shared viewing if required.

Some teachers came to the VSRD sessions more prepared than others, clearly identifying specific lesson segments that stood out to them or they wanted to discuss. I could replay the footage in these cases while the teacher shared more about the specific interaction(s). In most cases, however, the teachers spoke more broadly about the events of the lesson and did not identify specific video segments to review. As such, like the teacher interviews, the reflective prompts served as a general roadmap for the discussion while allowing participant flexibility and individual contributions.

The VSRD sessions took place in the teacher's classroom or another teacher-preferred location (i.e., university meeting room, staff room, café). The sessions were audio-recorded using the same Olympus WS-852 digital voice recorder used in the interviews. Overall, 14 VSRD sessions were conducted. Each VSRD ranged from 29 to 63 minutes, with 9.5 VSRD hours collected across all seven participants.

3.5.4. Data transcription

An independent professional transcriber was used to transcribe all interview and VSRD audio recordings verbatim. The researcher and one supervisor independently cross-checked transcriptions against the original audio and VSRD recordings. Within the transcripts, all participant names were de-identified, as well as the names of any students and schools. Any information deemed sensitive was redacted, and punctuation was added to assist with clarity of meaning and ease of reading during analysis. All transcripts were first member-checked by the participants for correctness, clarification and fair representation to ensure the transcripts' trustworthiness and credibility (Burton & Bartlett, 2011; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Wells, 2012; Yin, 2014). Two teachers requested minor changes to their final transcripts. One teacher asked to clarify their personal background information, and another requested to rephrase a particular comment about a student interaction. The few minor change requests

received following this process were discussed with participants, and the transcript was modified.

The video recordings of lesson observations were not transcribed. However, following participant reviews, the researcher and one supervisor independently examined the interview audio and the VSRD recordings against the respective transcripts. This process involved returning to video footage to check understandings and interpretations reported in VSRD transcripts. These were discussed, agreed and modified before data analysis.

3.6. Data Analysis, Interpretation and Reporting

3.6.1. Analytic generalisation

Yin (2018) considers case study research valuable to illuminate theoretical concepts or principles. He describes this process as "analytic generalisation," noting that the findings of a case study should aim to generalise at a conceptual level higher than any individual case (Simons, 2015; Yin, 2018). Case studies should not attempt to assess the frequency or likelihood of a phenomenon, nor should their findings be considered statistically generalisable across an entire population or data pool, as the number of cases selected will undoubtedly be too few (Yin, 2018). Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier (2013) note "the subtle ways in which case study research can produce a resonance for those in similar contexts, with similar issues, providing insights to help them understand, more fully, the nature of their own problems" (p. 145). To support the analytic generalisation of research findings, I analysed the case study data on two levels—within individual cases and across cases—using a multi-stage thematic analysis approach.

3.6.2. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis has been widely recognised as a flexible and valuable analytic approach for application across a range of research fields and qualitative data sources, including case studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Lapadat, 2010; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Simons, 2009; Swain, 2018). Braun and Clarke (2006) specifically commend its accessibility to beginning qualitative researchers and usefulness in summarising essential information, including similarities and differences across data sets.

A thematic analysis relies on a researcher's repetitive engagement with their data to unearth repeated patterns of meaning and provide a thematic descriptor(s) to represent such "salient [data] in a text at different levels" (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). As an analytic method, thematic analysis assists researchers in identifying, organising, describing and reporting their data, thereby supporting their interpretation of key aspects of research within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Within this study, I was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis approach, which includes:

1. becoming intensely familiar with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts
2. systematically generating initial codes across the entire data set
3. collating codes and searching for themes
4. reviewing themes and identifying any thematic relationships
5. defining and naming themes
6. writing the final report using carefully selected and representative extracts as evidence for the identified themes.

While these steps provide a guide, the process is iterative, notably in the final phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017; Swain, 2018). Thematic generation is data-driven and akin to inductive reasoning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Simons, 2009; Swain, 2018). For example, in this study, specific instances of teacher behaviour or reflective statements present in the data were selected, coded and then grouped based on the similarity of behaviour, content or form. These groupings were then reviewed, refined and confirmed by further instances until a generalised thematic label or description for each group of similar instances was developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2012; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Simons, 2009). Finally, relevant themes were reported (see Section 3.6.3.7) representing a "level of *patterned* [*sic*] response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82).

3.6.3. Individual case analysis procedure

In line with Yin's (2018) replication approach to multiple case studies (see Figure 3.1), the first level of analysis for this multiple case study involved individual case analysis. This involved thematically analysing and reporting each participant's case before moving on to the next. In

this first level of analysis, the data corpus I used for each case included the transcribed textual data from the teacher interviews and VSRDs. Lesson observation footage was used to confirm and illustrate themes generated from my thematic analysis of the interview and VSRD data. As such, the lesson observations provided a useful cross-check on my analysis of the teachers' interview data (i.e., did the teachers demonstrate what they self-reported about their teaching of SEL?) and were an essential basis for the VSRDs. In this way, the lesson observations extended the analysis beyond the teachers' self-reported SEL understanding and experience into the teachers' enacted SEL pedagogy.

In the following sub-sections, I illustrate how I enacted the six phases of this analytic approach, supported by examples illustrating the analytic procedure used in Case 1 (Beau).

3.6.3.1. Pre-analysis: Data preparation

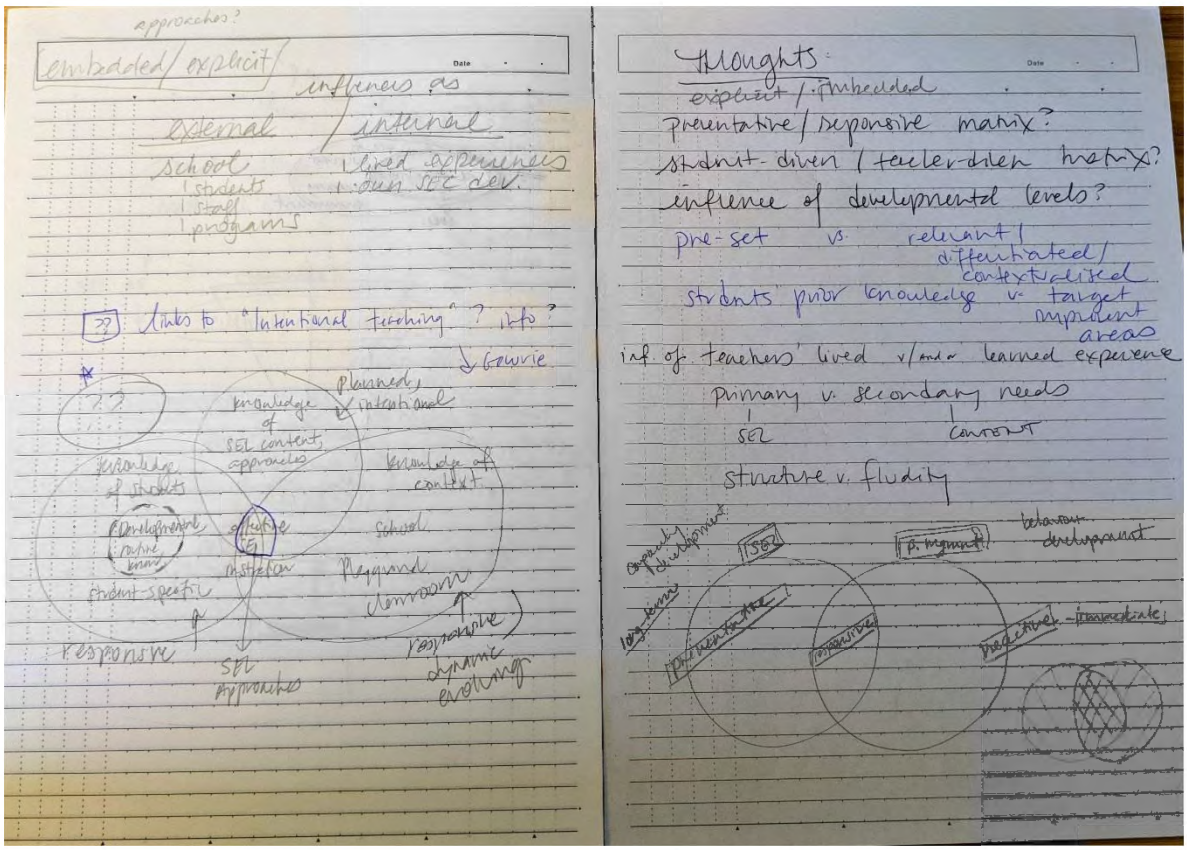
Before beginning the analysis, I organised each participant's data corpus into two sets: 1) the teacher interviews and 2) the VSRDs. Following transcription and member-checking, I formatted the data sets to include a code column alongside the transcribed dialogue. I then printed and bound the data sets into two separate booklets per case, allowing easy access to the data. I initially engaged with the data by hand, using pen-to-paper methods, but later used word processing and visual communication software to refine and represent my analysis.

3.6.3.2. Phase 1: Data familiarisation

To begin the analysis process for each case, I read both data sets and wrote initial, first-impression "noticings" or notes to myself (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These notes were kept in a separate case booklet and included preliminary questions, thoughts, simple diagrams and links to known concepts or frameworks (see Figure 3.4). I added to these regularly throughout my analytic process to document, confirm and extend my interpretations of the data. Braun and Clarke (2013) regard this process as necessary for "refining and developing" one's analytic ideas (p. 215).

Figure 3.4

Example of First Impression Notes to Self (Phase 1, Case 1, Beau)



3.6.3.3. Phase 2: Data classification and initial coding

Next, I re-read each data set multiple times through the specific lens of the research questions. During this process, I identified and classified segments of the data (i.e., words, sentences, paragraphs) that directly corresponded to each of my four individual research questions. For example, I highlighted all participant data relating to RQ1 in pink, all responses relating to RQ2 in yellow and so on. In some instances, I classified data segments as relating to more than one research question, signalling initial relationships within the data.

I also wrote initial codes alongside each highlighted text segment to identify features of interest within the data. Coding is considered an essential analytic step to break down or reduce data within qualitative research (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2013). I used an open coding approach, with codes developed and adapted inductively from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Swain,

2018). For example, Table 3.2 lists some of my initial codes from Case 1 (Beau) in response to RQ1a. Speech marks noted codes that reflect the participant's wording.

Table 3.2

Examples of Initial Codes (Phase 2, Case 1, Beau)

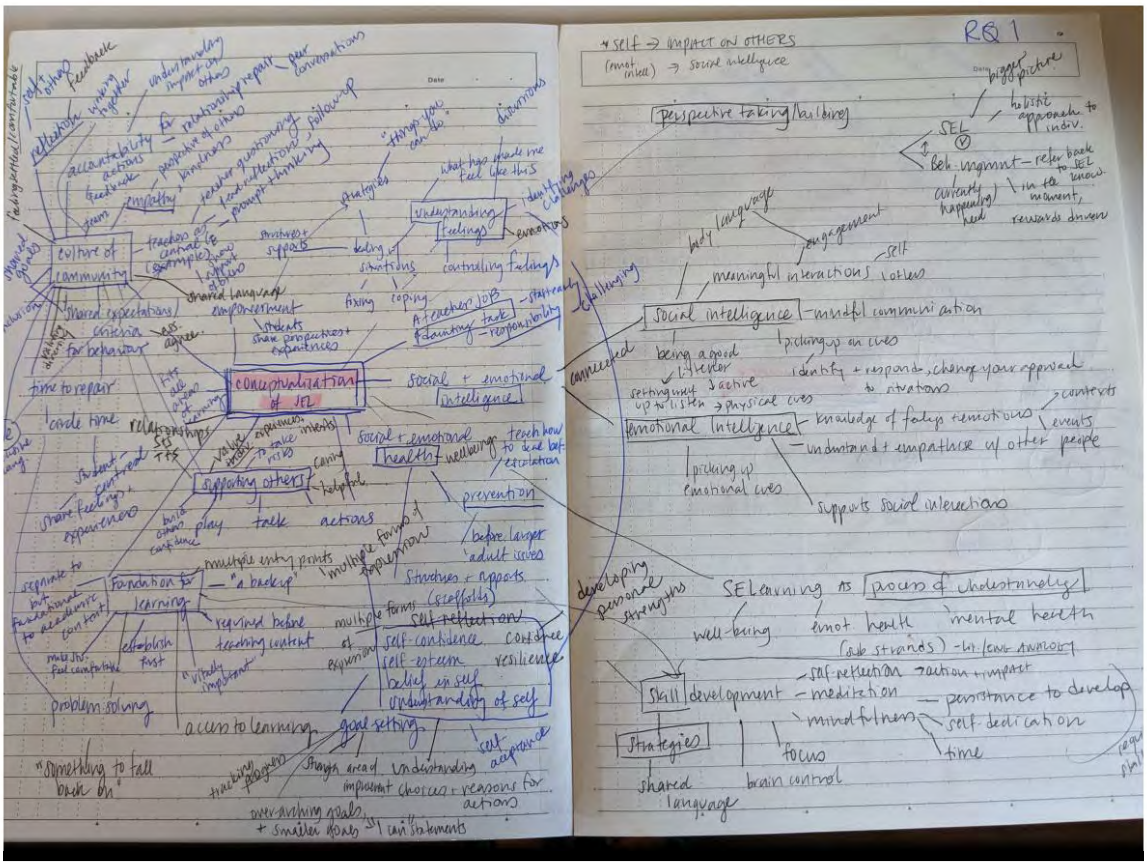
Research Question 1a: How do the participant teachers conceptualise SEL?	student comfort "working together" understanding and controlling feelings "social and emotional intelligence" "social and emotional health" empowering, preparing children scaffolds and supports for students SEL as preventative "culture of we are a community" teachers as central shared expectations SEL as foundation to learning, "vitally important." self-reflection problem-solving empathy and perspective-building goal setting fluid to contexts

3.6.3.4. Phase 3: Reviewing codes and searching for themes

Following initial code generation, I compiled a code map or "free-form concept map" for each research question (see Figure 3.5). Like mind mapping, concept mapping allowed me to organise the codes and identify connections between them (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). I could then generate larger "code clusters," potential themes, and other thematic relationships (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Simons, 2009).

Figure 3.5

Example of a Code Map (Phase 3, Case 1, Beau)



After compiling code maps for each data set and each research question, I transferred all significant codes and developing themes into a case analysis table (see Figure 3.3). Within the table, I organised codes into more formal clusters according to each research question and assigned them initial theme headings. This process provided an additional way for me to visualise and review the codes and to consider more carefully the relationships between them (Swain, 2018). As a result, I could merge related codes and review any anomalies.

3.6.3.5. Phase 4: Reviewing and synthesising the themes

Next, I created an overall case analysis table for each case (see Table 3.3). A case analysis table was a helpful tool to synthesise the identified themes across both data sets and concerning the four research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Swain, 2018). I revisited both data sets to select segments of text that aligned with the identified themes for each research question. I then copied and pasted these extracts into the case analysis table and colour-matched them to

specific themes (see Table 3.4). This process was insightful and served to ground and cross-check my emerging thematic analysis, ensuring I had not strayed from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Nowell et al., 2017). It also confirmed whether I had identified themes that appropriately encapsulated and summarised my participants' voices, meanings and ideas.

Table 3.3

Example Case Analysis Table with Emerging Themes and Code Clusters (Phase 3, Case 1, Beau)

RQ1a: Conceptualisations of SEL -- Themes and codes	
SEL as Foundation for Content Learning Need to start early "Vitally important" SEL allows "access to learning" A "back up"; "Something to fall back on" Establish first; required before content Base for learning academic content SEL as "relevant across all areas of learning" "Multiple entry points" (through inquiry learning) **SEL as a Culture of Community** Student to student relationships Teacher to student relationships Supporting others; Working together Peer conversations; Seek and provide feedback Essential agreement Shared language, goals and behaviour expectations Relationship repair; problem-solve Meaningful interactions; Engagement w/ others	**SEL as "process of understanding."** SEL has sub-strands: "Social and emotional health," Mental health, Wellbeing Social & emotional intelligence connected Emotional intelligence foundation for social intelligence, supporting social interactions **Understanding self (Emotional intelligence)** Understanding feelings/emotions Understanding and acceptance of self; Self-reflection Noting & developing personal strengths & improvement areas Controlling feelings; Developing Resilience Understanding personal impact on others Tracking progress; goal setting **Understanding others (Social intelligence)** Empathy Caring; helpful, kind Including and understanding others Valuing diversity; exposure to others' ideas and opinions Building confidence in others

Table 3.4

Example of an Overall Case Analysis Table Including Corresponding Themes and Text Extracts (Phase 4, Case 1, Beau)

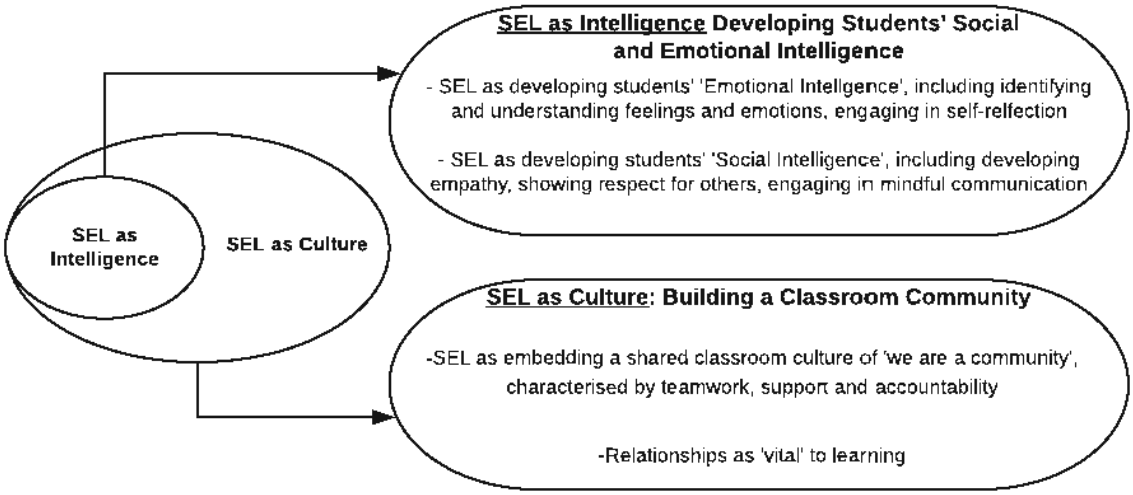
CASE 1 Overall Analysis Table + Text Excerpts to Support Themes		
RQ 1a **Conceptualisations of SEL** *How do the teachers conceptualise SEL?*	**SEL as Culture – Classroom Community** - **SEL as an educational avenue to facilitate and embed a shared classroom community culture and to encourage personal and social accountability** - Relationships and teamwork as critical - SEL as foundation for content learning - SEL as distinct from but related to behaviour management —holistic approach **SEL as Content – Social and Emotional Intelligence** - **SEL as a content area designed to encourage: the exploration and development of essential skills and attitudes towards self and others** - SEL as a broad umbrella term, encompassing various areas of mental health, emotional health, wellbeing - **SEL as Emotional Intelligence** - Understanding & describing feelings/ emotions - Understanding self, self-reflection - Using prior knowledge of feelings & emotions (esp in relation to certain events and contexts) - Self-reflection on behaviours, impact on others - Understanding of self – interests, strengths as basis for learning - **SEL as Social Intelligence** - display and develop empathy, consider others' perspectives - respect and care for others, acceptance, open-mindedness - developing listening skills, appro. body language ("mindful communication" – pick up on social cues) - determine appropriate interactions/approaches and take social responsibility	PAR: I feel like unless you've got that as your back up, like unless you have actually incorporated the social emotional development of those students in your teaching, then they are not really going to learn anything anyway. So I feel like that is for me, it never used to be but now it is, becoming more of this is what I need to establish first and then I can teach the content. (Int. 2, p. 9) So I think it is about building, as I said, that community around that we are all a team, we are all a community within the classroom, outside the classroom. Everything nice that you do for someone else, hopefully it will come back around. (I1, p. 21) but I think it is about building that culture of we are a community and we are here to support each other and everything we say or everything we do impacts someone in some way so I think really making them accountable for their actions each day and what they say to people. (I1, p. 11) PAR: Yeah, and I think trying to get children to understand that just because one child is like that how much you can offer that person just by being able to help them or just having a conversation with them or just playing with them at lunch time. Just those little actions. (I1, p. 11) but I think it is really about you know once again taking that responsibility beyond that you know this is my action it only affects me but actually looking at the bigger picture. You know if you are talking and being disruptive or you're being too loud, XXXX, for instance, in our class has sensory problems with hearing so 'do you think it's fair that you know', looking at it in terms of showing empathy towards other people. 'How do you think XXXX would feel if this is how loud it is? Do you think you would be able to concentrate?' And actually acting those things out, not just talking about them, but actually delving deeper into what it would be like. (I1, p. 11) **Importance of relationships** INT: can you please share with me your **personal perspective on relationships with students and forming those**? PAR: (39:06) I think relationships are essentially our core business as teachers. I think unless you have a relationship with a student they are not going to learn anything or want to be in your class. And I think a lot of the times when there are issues it is because there has been a relationship breakdown so I think even as teachers it is really important that we know our students and we know *why* that has happened. And you know, sometimes yes we are the cause of that as well as teachers. Like some days we are tired and worn out as well. I think it is building that relationship that they understand you as well as you understanding them. So for me relationships are vital for the success of any classroom and it goes above and beyond. It is like any layer, like being able to have a relationship with your exec, for instance, if you don't have that relationship amongst your team then the team fails and it is the same principle in the classroom as well. (I2, p. 22) I wouldn't teach necessarily content until I've built that relationship because if you do move too quickly, particularly at the beginning of the year (I2, p. 30) I think term 1 for me is all about relationships. Like if I get, yeah so hopefully I do get some content done, which we always do—but you know what I mean because we've got to report—but at the same time there's a massive focus on relationships and building those (I2, p. 30)

3.6.3.6. Phase 5: Defining and depicting the themes

During this phase, I continued to review the themes and make further refinements and adjustments to them in line with the data. Eventually, I decided on clear titles and descriptions for each theme. Further, "to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these themes" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387) and assist me in telling the "overall story" of my analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87), I chose to summarise the main themes for each research question visually. I created thematic diagrams by distilling the defining components of each theme into a simple graphic (see Figure 3.6). This process facilitated the "methodical systematisation of textual data" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 386).

Figure 3.6

Example of a Thematic Diagram (Phase 5, Case 1, Beau)



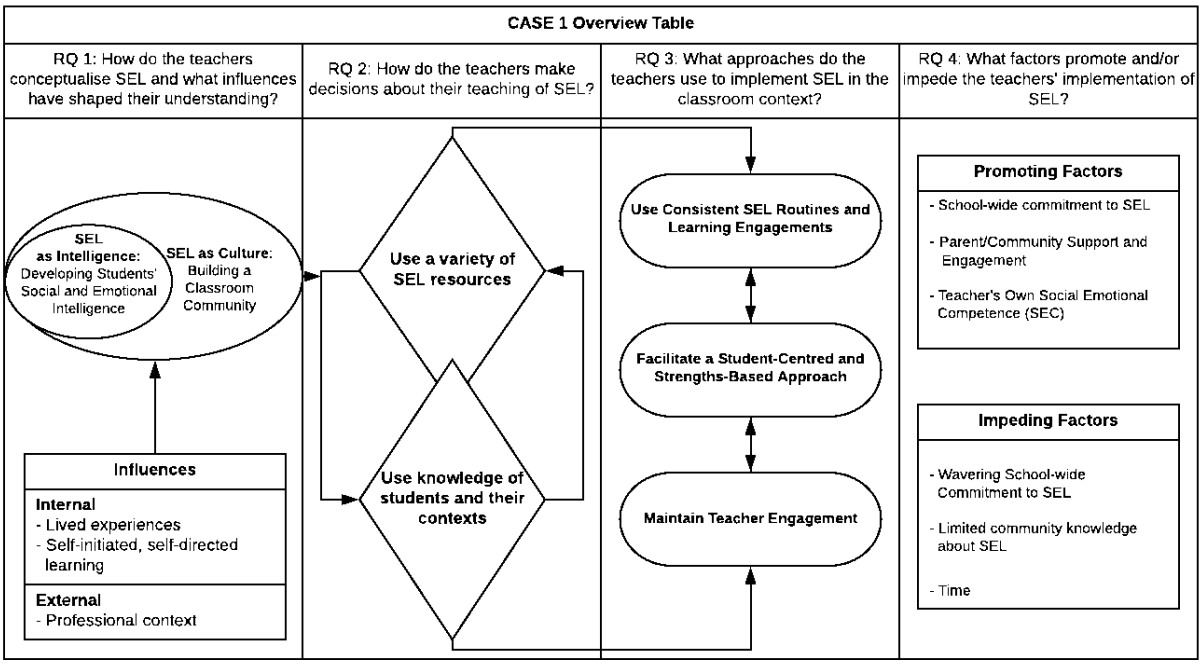
3.6.3.7. Phase 6: Producing the case report

Finally, to organise and summarise my case analysis findings, I compiled the thematic diagrams for each research question into a case overview table (see Figure 3.7). Each diagram in the overall table represents a key thematic piece of the broader case analysis story. Though different in form, these overview tables have much in common with what Attride-Stirling (2001) refers to as "thematic networks" or "web-like illustrations (networks) that summarise the main themes constituting a piece of text" (p. 386). Creating an overview table for each case helped me synthesise key themes and represent thematic relationships within and across the

four research questions. The case overview tables were also valuable as an organisational tool to map and guide my writing for each case report (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Figure 3.7

Example of a Case Overview Table (Phase 6, Case 1, Beau)



Accordingly, I systematically reported my findings for each case identifying initial themes for each research question, moving from left to right across the overview table. All thematic diagrams and the final case overview table are included within each case report, along with "compelling extract examples" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87) and observational vignettes to illuminate the voices and practices of the participants.

This individual case analysis procedure resulted in seven case reports, the findings of which are presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9. Following this, I cross-analysed the key themes from all individual case reports (see Chapters 8 & 10) to produce a final cross-case summary report in Chapter 11. The procedure followed is detailed below.

3.6.4. Cross-case analysis procedure

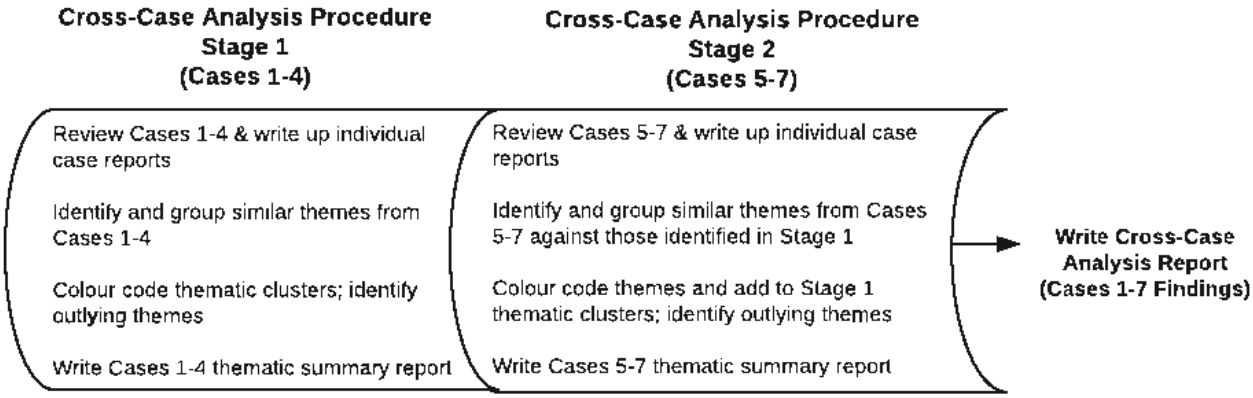
The second level of analysis involved cross-case report writing (Yin, 2014, 2018) utilising pattern-based analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This process included comparing individual case reports and searching for patterns within the thematic labels or descriptions. A cross-case

analysis report intends not to portray participant cases individually but to "draw a single set of 'cross-case' conclusions" (Yin, 2018, p. 17). These conclusions are "interpretive" (Braun & Clarke, 2013) in nature and synthesise the significant thinking, observations, lessons and reflections generated from each case (Yin, 2014, 2018). Unlike the specific content, context or behaviours represented by thematic labels in individual case reports, a cross-case analysis highlights concepts that could represent deeper abstractions of incidents, behaviours, practices or happenings (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

The cross-case analysis involved two stages (see Figure 3.8). Stage 1 involved an initial cross-case analysis of Case Studies 1–4. This analysis summarised the significant patterns of similarity and difference across the four case studies in each research question area.

Figure 3.8

Two-Stage Cross-Case Analysis Procedure



Themes were generated that reflected the different patterns. For example, Chapter 8 presents a thematic summary report of findings for Cases 1–4. For Stage 2, I juxtaposed the collated cross-case findings from Cases 1–4 with the individual themes identified from Cases 5–7, using a cross-case analysis table (see Table 3.5). Then, using a colour-coding process, I identified the related themes from all seven cases and collated them into cross-case thematic clusters. This process enabled me to identify pertinent thematic similarities and differences across cases, review their depth and relevance, and remove any outlying themes.

Table 3.5

Segment of the Cross-Case Analysis Table

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS TABLE CASES 1-4 + 5, 6 and 7				
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	**CROSS-CASE THEMES** *Collation of main themes identified from Cases 1-7*	**CASE 5 THEMES** LUCY (Lucy), Year 3	**CASE 6 THEMES** Seb (Seb), Kindy	**CASE 7 THEMES** SUMMER (Summer), Year 6
Conceptualisations of SEL	**SEL AS CONTENT (Skill-Building and Attitude Development)** SEL as Intelligence: **Developing students' Social and Emotional Intelligence** (Beau) SEL as **Skill Development** (Karen) Students' Personal and Social **Skill Dev.** (Alex) SEL as a **Specific Need Area** (Karen) SEL as developing **'skills for life'** (Lucy) SEL as promoting **'pro-social' behaviours** (Seb) SEL as **real-world knowledge and skill-building** (Summer) **SEL AS POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT (Culture, Collaboration and Relationships)** SEL as Culture: Building a **Classroom Community** (Beau) SEL as a **Positive Classroom Environment** (Karen) **Safe Learning Environment** (Celeste) **A Supportive Learning Environment** (Alex) **Positive Teacher-Student Relationships** (Celeste) SEL as **relationship building** (Lucy) SEL as **positive teacher-student relationships** (Seb) SEL as **positive learning environment and relationships** (Summer) **SEL AS A TEACHER'S CORE RESPONSIBILITY (Influence, Commitment and Responsibility)** Influence of the Teacher (Celeste) A Teacher's **Responsibility** (Alex) SEL as **'part of being a teacher'** (Lucy) Classroom **teacher as central** to students' SEL progress (Seb) SEL as **a teacher's main responsibility** (Summer)	**SEL as developing key attributes & 'skills for life'→** SEL lessons usually focused on specific personal/social skills & attributes: "caring, respect, being friends"; considers these "the basics"; desire for students to develop as "rounded, resilient, kind, caring" people; focus on kindness, happiness & resilience as "they all link together" and support relationships; Investigate ways of coping, communicating and problem-solving, standing up for oneself and demonstrating resilience SEL content described as having "no answers" and "nothing solid" as it stems from personal experiences and varied perspectives; SEL can be challenging for students, open-ended, personal **SEL as Supporting Relationships** **a way to develop student trust and confidence** Way to nurture, help children, reduce anxiety; big focus on reducing students' anxiety; anxious about getting things wrong; scared of taking the risks; use of growth mindset language, positively framing what we can/can't do YET; SEL as developing trust, getting to know students better; easier to teach students if you know their interests, have a connection; allow them to feel valued **SEL as "Part of being a teacher" →** teaching it "incidentally for years"; views teaching as "all tied in together", across the subjects; fluid, flexible and responsive to students' interests and progress. Learning needs to be meaningful and relevant. Strong opinions about 'life skills' and what is important for students to know; ideas about what concepts/topics would flow on naturally from week to week	**Promotion of "pro-social" behaviours** **SEL as Social and Emotional Attitude/Skill Development to Support Student Wellbeing** Opportunity to promote positive, pro-social behaviours; Develop respect, kindness, caring; Practicing mindfulness, awareness of own thoughts/actions; building student resilience to circumstances/interactions; Key SEL traits and SEL attitudes/attributes identified: **SEL as Positive Teacher-Student Relationships** foundation to success with students; "a teacher's responsibility" to ensure and develop relationships with students; relationships enable students to feel trusted and cared for; relationships as a way to set expectations, show belief in them, develops mutual respect and supports mgmnt of high-end negative behaviours; increase student feeling of value; relationship development is an "ongoing thing all the time" **Classroom Teacher as Central to Students' SEL progress** teacher has to value it; classroom teacher and school culture as driving force behind students' SEL progress and well-being; SEL as a "Critical" Foundation for "Good Teaching"; **SEL as a continuous interactions and expectations→** SEL as embedded in language, interactions, expectations, and engagement with students (ongoing, all the time); often naturally embedded in teacher practice, natural and fluid	**SEL as promoting real-world knowledge and skill-building** *Self-awareness & social awareness:* SEL as learning about yourself and the needs of others; Emotional understanding and awareness of our/others' emotions; self-awareness, self-perception, awareness of our/others' strengths *Social skill development:* Learning social skills to apply in/to real contexts; Relationship development and management **SEL as a positive learning environment** **SEL as basis for a collaborative classroom culture** SEL teaching not as "an explicit practice"→rather, it is embedded in conversations and reflections with students; can become "engrained in the culture" of a school SEL Skills (self-management, self-regulation) form the basis for collaboration; collaboration across small/large group settings; need for active listening and understanding others' points of views **SEL as Supported by Positive Teacher-Student Relationships** SEL teaching and addressing SEL related issues are reliant on T-S relationships; SEL also strengthens these relationships; deep knowledge of and connection with students is required; Good relationships help students to verbalise what they are feeling or experiencing rather than internalise it; positive T-S relationships can influence students' work ethic and motivation, as well as encourage risk-taking in learning environment and engagement; act as role model as well as their teacher; pick up on cues as to when a student wants a relationship with you; **SEL as a Teacher's Main Responsibility** considers SEL a "the most important thing" a teacher will do Meeting students' SEL needs as a priority/basis for their academic learning; SEL>Content
Influences	**PERSONAL (Internal)** - **lived experiences** (Beau) - self-initiated, **self-directed learning** (Beau) - becoming **a mother** (Celeste) - former **teaching role-models** (Celeste) - **personal values,** ideas and identity (Alex) - **personal experience and values** (Lucy) - **personal strength and interest** area (Seb) **PROFESSIONAL (External)** - **professional context** (Beau)	**Personal:** **Personal experience and values:** a mother herself; understanding of children and their interests and home life Strong opinions about 'life skills' and what is important for students to know; ideas about what concepts/topics would flow on naturally from week to week	**Personal** **SEL as a personal strength and interest area** - regards himself as "highly empathetic" - belief that emotional dev. of children is of upmost importance - interest in finding resources related to neuroscience; very reflective; sees lack of reflection as neglect **Professional**	**Professional Influences** **- Knowledge of school's SEL-related programs** SEL programs as "so embedded" within the school and its behaviour management approach: Restorative Practices, PYP IB Learner Profile, Positive Education Character Traits and curriculum **- Prior experiences with students** learn from engagements with prior students; some strategies and programs work for some students and not others.

Next, I revised and refined the specifics of each theme and related implications (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process ensured each cross-case theme accurately represented and encapsulated the data across all seven cases. Then, as in the individual case analysis procedure, I created thematic diagrams for each cross-case theme. I compiled these within a cross-case summary of findings diagram of Cases 1–7 to summarise my analytic findings (see Figure 11.1). Finally, in writing the final cross-case summary report (see Chapter 11), I extracted rich examples from the case data to illustrate my findings. These significant cross-case findings are discussed and supported with links to relevant academic literature in the final chapter, Chapter 12: Discussion and Conclusion (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004; Yin, 2014). Overall, the cross-case findings I report were derived inductively and iteratively from the data and supported with relevant information from the separate cases (King, 2004; Yin, 2014).

3.7. Ensuring Research Rigour and the Trustworthiness of Findings

When enacting a qualitative research approach, it is essential to assure stakeholders that data have been collected, organised and analysed using credible research methods and a rigorous approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2012; Nowell et al., 2017; Tuckett, 2005). Due to the subjective nature of conducting qualitative experiential research from an insider stance, using several checks and balances is encouraged to ensure the accuracy and depth of the analysis and the trustworthiness of the findings presented (Nowell et al., 2017). Within the study design, I achieved this by triangulating my methods of data collection; piloting my chosen research instruments and methods; enacting a rigorous and recursive analysis approach; seeking member-checking of data and an external audit of my analysis; and maintaining a research record (Creswell, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Nowell et al. 2017; Tuckett, 2005; Yin, 2018). Further details concerning how I enacted these checks of trustworthiness are outlined below.

3.7.1. Data triangulation

Data triangulation refers to using two or more methods of data collection or data sources to investigate a research issue (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) assures that by collecting evidence from a range of sources, a researcher is more able to "pursue a critical methodological practice" and "develop converging lines of inquiry" (p. 127). In employing a replication approach within this multiple case study, I collected data from seven individual teachers on six separate occasions to capture "multiple 'voices' or 'truths'" (Braun

& Clarke, 2013, p. 286) about my research questions. I elicited and verified this data using several methods, including teacher interviews, lesson observations and VSRDs. Using multiple methods across several encounters ensured I represented each teacher's perspective truthfully, assisting in the corroboration of my research findings (Yin, 2018). I ensured robust and compelling accounts of the research phenomenon by triangulating data across seven individual teachers and three distinct data collection methods.

3.7.2. Piloting the research instruments and methods

Before beginning formal case study research, Yin (2018) advocates using a pilot case study to trial and refine data collection procedures and content. Yin (2018) notes the usefulness of a pilot study when working within a team of researchers to encourage uniform method procedures and analytic interpretations. However, piloting increases the resource and time demands on a single researcher, with Braun and Clarke (2013) suggesting that "in small projects, there is limited scope for formal piloting" (p. 85). Unfortunately, this was the situation for me; as a single researcher with full-time employment, I did not have the time to seek another teacher to trial all elements of my research design. Additionally, knowing the professional load and time demands placed on teachers throughout a school year, I prioritised starting my data collection procedures as early into the year as possible to increase the likelihood of sustained participant interest and availability.

Therefore, while acknowledging the benefits of conducting a pilot case study, I was encouraged to pilot—or pre-trial—my research instruments and methods on a rolling, semi-formal basis with several participants. Pre-trialling my methods in this way presented critical opportunities to refine and add to my data instruments and collection procedures before implementing each method with all participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Yin, 2018). In total, I conducted four pilots with three different participants. This included pilots of Interview 1, Interview 2 and the Observation 1 and VSRD 1 processes. Different participants were selected for each pilot to facilitate a range of input and feedback. The inclusion of each pilot is noted within my research design and timeline (see Figure 3.3), and an overview of the main changes or observations I made in response to each pilot is presented in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6

Overview of Enacted Pilots, Their Purpose and Resulting Changes to the Data Collection Procedure

Pilot (intended purpose)	Changes and/or observations resulting from the pilot
Interview 1: Trial Interview 1 schedule and procedure	- Send interview guide to participants in advance, so they feel more comfortable and prepared - Decrease the number of questions; increase use of prompts to elicit and extend participant responses (i.e., Can you tell me more about…? What do you mean by…?) - Reword questions to include less formal language/academic jargon - Work on maintaining eye contact while notetaking to enhance "conversation" feel - Be prepared to stop/pause recording due to interruptions (i.e., colleagues stopping by to chat, students entering the room to retrieve something, loudspeaker announcements) - Agree to interview location ahead of time and where to meet participants
Interview 2: Trial Interview 2 schedule and procedure	- Use of interview "topic sections" was helpful in guiding the flow of the interview and reminding participants about their previous input - Good mixture of standardised questions, personalised questions and interview prompts to support a semi-structured approach with a conversation feel - Set phone timer to keep better track of time across interview topics
Observation 1*: Test set-up and functionality of all recording devices within an active classroom environment (GoPro camera, GoPro phone application, roaming Bluetooth microphone) Review quality of video-recorded data Determine time required for equipment set-up and lesson observation data transfer to USB **The data collected from this pilot was not used or analysed for this study**	- Recorded GoPro footage is clear and includes sound - GoPro phone application shows live video recording of the lesson but *without* sound; I must be present within the classroom to take field notes during lesson observations - Roaming Bluetooth microphone is non-intrusive and effectively captures the teacher's voice even with ambient classroom noise - Bluetooth microphone disconnects if teacher goes out of range (i.e., to collect students from the playground); turn on and give to teacher only once they are in classroom and ready to teach - Reconsider GoPro camera positioning to capture "teacher" over "whole-class" footage; be prepared to move camera around the room as needed (i.e., if teacher moves from front of class to back of class to work with a small group, or if children play with it) - Approximately 10 minutes is needed to set-up and test recording devices prior to lesson - Approximately 40 minutes is needed to transfer lesson video footage from GoPro to USB for teacher review; need to find a secure spot to sit on-site during this time
VSRD1*: Trial VSRD procedure and reflective questions **The data collected from this pilot was not used or analysed for this study**	- Teacher had not reviewed the lesson observation footage or the corresponding reflective questions prior to the VSRD session; reflective discussion was, therefore reliant on the teacher's memory of lesson rather than stimulated by video recording - Refine the VSRD instructions and reflective prompts to be clearer and more concise. Include an explicit statement asking teachers to review the recording ahead of the VSRD - Send a brief reminder email to teachers noting their scheduled VSRD date/time and asking them to review their lesson footage in advance of the VSRD session

For example, to pilot Interview 1, I met with one teacher (Alex) approximately two weeks before beginning data collection with all participants. During the pilot, I followed the draft Interview 1 schedule I had devised. Immediately following the interview, I asked Alex for their feedback on the interview questions and process. In conjunction with my reflection and observations, I used their input to amend the Interview 1 schedule and procedure before using the schedule with the remaining six participants. As noted in Table 3.6, changes resulting from my pilot of Interview 1 included sending the interview guide to participants ahead of time, cutting down the number of questions, and amending the wording of several questions. Further, I identified procedural elements to consider when interviewing, including managing interruptions and maintaining eye contact while notetaking. I followed a similar piloting procedure for Interview 2 with Karen and Observation 1/VSRD 1 with Summer.

In addition to piloting my research methods and instruments, I met with several critical friends throughout my data collection. These included my supervisory panel and other teacher-researchers engaged in doctoral study. They assisted me in reviewing and refining my interviewing and observation techniques. We also discussed the best methods of lesson recording and data transfer. Together, their input informed my research approach and procedures.

3.7.3. Enacting a rigorous and recursive analysis approach

According to Nowell et al. (2017), researchers need to be transparent and systematic about their analytic assumptions, procedures and choices to guarantee the trustworthiness of research findings generated from thematic analysis. Therefore, to authenticate my participants' experiences and ensure the validity of analytic findings, I enacted several triangulation checks of trustworthiness during my analysis (Nowell et al., 2017), as documented in Sections 3.6.3, 3.7 and 3.7.4, including:

- a systematic and recursive review of the raw data sets, including several re-reads of the case transcripts against my documented researcher notes and emerging findings
- documented use of several successive stages of analysis to ensure an ongoing review, reorganisation and refinement of codes, themes and thematic clusters
- use of tables and diagrams to organise, compare and present my coded data and resulting themes, allowing for analytic transparency
- peer debriefing, member-checking and external auditing to review, question, confirm and ensure the accuracy, depth and relevance of my findings.

Together, these systematic and ongoing checks of trustworthiness supported the thematic analysis procedures, and the credibility, dependability and confirmability of findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.7.4. Member-checking and external auditing

Qualitative researchers stress the importance of sharing collected data with participants—or "member-checking"—to allow increased understanding and ensure accurate interpretations and representations of data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Burton & Bartlett, 2011; Creswell, 2012; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Wells, 2012). Member-checking of all data is critical to ensuring the trustworthiness and credibility of the research findings. Therefore, following each data collection phase, I offered participants the chance to review their transcripts and provide any clarifications, elaborations or feedback. As noted in Section 3.5.4, two teachers requested minor changes to their final transcripts: clarifying personal background information for one teacher and reframing a particular comment about a student interaction for another. On request, I also provided a one-page summary of the study findings to the participating teachers.

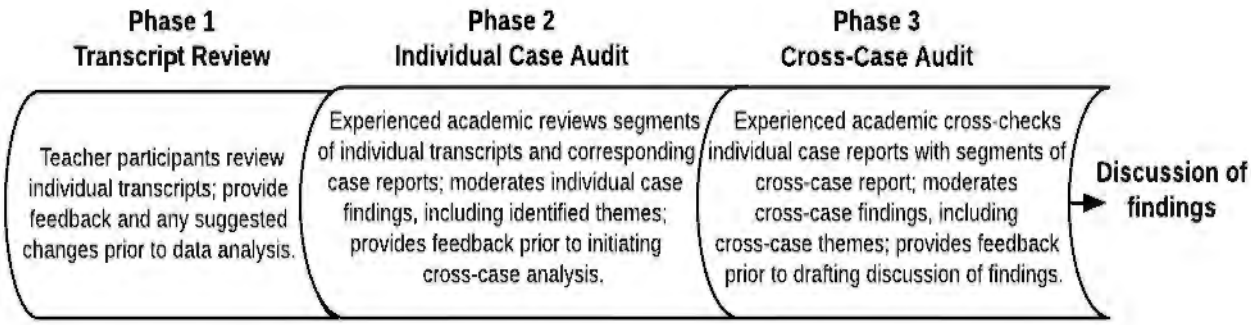
Additionally, my regular engagement with the participants throughout the data collection process offered them multiple opportunities to review and provide feedback on their study participation and contributions. For example, I conducted the first several minutes of each interview and VSRD "off the record," using this time together as a brief opportunity to "touch base." This pre-interview chat (Braun & Clarke, 2013) allowed participants to reaffirm their ongoing consent and raise any questions or concerns about the study procedure or their involvement. It also supported the development of trust and rapport with the participants and eased them into more focused research conversations.

Member-checking can also involve sharing one's research information and analysis with knowledgeable others, including critical friends and experienced researchers (Creswell, 2012; Tuckett, 2005). Creswell (2012) refers to this process as conducting an "external audit" (p. 260), during which specific aspects of the research project are peer-reviewed and moderated. As such, my participants' transcripts and individual case analyses were meticulously peer-reviewed by my supervisors. Knowing my research aims and questions, they reviewed segments of my research transcripts in line with my case report drafts to interpret the data and moderate my analysis. We discussed their detailed critique and feedback before my final case constructions and reporting. Overall, this moderation process ensured my findings were soundly grounded in the data (Creswell, 2012). Similarly, my cross-case analysis report

was cross-checked for accuracy and trustworthiness. Overall, I engaged in three phases of member-checking or moderation, as outlined in Figure 3.9.

Figure 3.9

Three-Phase Moderation Process



3.7.5. Case study recording: Maintaining a chain of evidence

Throughout this study, I maintained an ongoing record of my research progress and processes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This record includes an overview of my recruitment timeline and procedures, a list of data collection dates and visits, a record of participant email correspondence and notes on participant cancellations/changes. This record serves as an "audit trail" of the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 71) and enables this study to be similarly executed again if required (Yin, 2018). Additionally, I kept reflective "notes to self" to document distinct observations and feelings from my research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I consulted these regularly during the thematic analysis procedure. Finally, I audio-recorded my supervisory meetings during the data collection and analysis phases so I could revisit our conversations to cross-check or revise my research procedures or findings as necessary.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

I planned and executed this study with full ethical consideration of all teacher participants' and students' rights and welfare. Before commencing this research study, I sought and received ethics approval (see Appendices D, E & F). This study presented minimal risks to participants; the potential risks to participants I considered related primarily to low-stake social and

inconvenience risks, which were outlined in the study's plain language statement, participant information letters and consent forms (see Appendices G, H, I & J).

3.8.1. Social risks

Due to the nature of case study research, the final case reports may contain details other professionals may recognise as relating to someone they know. However, no personally identifiable information is presented in the final thesis or any other publication resulting from this research. I have replaced the names of all participants and their corresponding schools with pseudonyms. I also offered participants the opportunity to member-check their interview and VSRD transcripts to ensure they were comfortable with the level of detail included. When any sensitive information was shared throughout the study, I reminded participants that this information would be de-identified and handled with care.

3.8.2. Inconvenience risks

This study asked teachers to participate in two interviews, two lesson observations and two VSRD sessions. This equated to approximately five face-to-face research hours per participant and presented some inconvenience risks. To minimise these risks and ensure maximum comfort and convenience for participants, I offered each teacher choice regarding the date, time and location of each interview, observation and VSRD session. I also reminded participants they could skip any question(s) they felt uncomfortable answering or cease their involvement in the study at any time.

3.8.3. Ethical considerations for students

While students were not participants in this study, they were part of the recorded classroom lesson observations. As such, I provided a parent/carer information letter and opt-in consent form for distribution to all students and their parents/carers (see Appendix K). Students whose parents did not consent for them to be present during the recorded lesson observations were relocated to a partner classroom within their same year-level cohort for the duration of each recording. The students were appropriately supervised by a familiar classroom teacher and included in comparable learning activities. This occurred with three students across three cases and did not significantly disrupt the students' learning or the data collection procedures.

Further, I did not intentionally interact with any students during my research visits, and I did not gather any personal data about them. While some teachers referred to specific students

during the interviews or VSRD sessions, all student names and personal or sensitive details were changed, redacted and de-identified in the interview transcripts. No personally identifiable information about students is included in the final thesis or any other publication resulting from this research.

3.9. Summary

In this chapter, I shared my research process, including the specific thinking and procedures behind my methodological approach and data collection methods. I provided evidence-based justification for my qualitative experiential approach to multiple case data collection and discussed my empathetic position as an insider-researcher. I outlined my recruitment procedures, overviewed my participants' profiles and summarised my research design and timeline. Then, I provided a detailed account of the analytic approach I used to interpret individual and cross-case data, including specific examples of how I engaged with the six phases of thematic analysis. Finally, I shared the procedures I followed to ensure my research findings' credibility, generalisability and transferability before examining my response to ethical considerations. In the following chapters (Chapters 4–7), I present each participant teacher's individual case report findings. These chapters include rich and detailed accounts of the individual teachers' SEL understanding and practices in response to my research questions.

Chapter 4: Case Report 1—Beau

4.1. Participant Profile

Beau (he/him/his) has seven years of teaching experience across Years 3, 5 and 6. Originally from a rural township, Beau has always had a passion for teaching and pursued it as a way to help people. After completing a four-year bachelor's degree, Beau began teaching at Brumbies Primary School (BPS), which follows an accredited inquiry-based teaching approach to the AC. He gained his first five years of teaching experience there before transferring schools to act as an executive teacher. Following this one-year executive placement, Beau returned to BPS as a full-time classroom teacher, citing the school's positive culture and local community as influencing his return. BPS has a population of around 500 students, with 28% identifying as having a language background other than English and 2% identifying as Indigenous. During this study, Beau taught a Year 3 class with 17 students, a few of whom had been diagnosed with learning needs, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and were on Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).

4.2. Overview of Findings

4.2.1. RQ 1: How does Beau conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped his understanding of this learning area?

4.2.1.1. Conceptualisations of SEL

Beau's conceptualisations of SEL encompass two main themes, which I have defined as "SEL as intelligence" and "SEL as culture" (see Figure 4.1). These themes include SEL as developing students' social and emotional intelligence through SEL-related content and skill instruction; and SEL as establishing a classroom community culture. In our first research interview, I asked Beau to define SEL and what it means to him as an educator. As he responds:

> Social-emotional learning, I guess means being able to understand the way you feel and why you feel it and then how to actually control the way you feel or to deal with situations. It is that social intelligence and the emotional intelligence, so to be able to actually understand: "Okay, I feel this way because of this and this is what I can do to fix it or this is what I can do to cope with it." (Int. 1, p. 6)

When invited to elaborate on his use of the term "emotional intelligence," Beau explains:

> It is about using your prior knowledge of feelings and emotions to be able to draw upon before you approach a social interaction, I guess, or before you problem-solve something … So, I think it is just about understanding the emotions and feelings that are related to certain contexts and certain events that might happen. (Int. 2, p. 10)

Additionally, when asked to explain his understanding of social intelligence, Beau states:

> So, social intelligence I guess for me [is] being able to, I guess, socialise in a way that is meaningful to the individual themselves but also meaningful to the person that you are socialising with and being able to pick up on cues (Int. 2, p. 7).

Therefore, Beau considers SEL as an avenue to enhance students' social and emotional intelligence through exploring feelings and emotions and considering how these relate to social contexts and interactions.

During subsequent research conversations, Beau outlined some of the specific SEL-related strategies and qualities he uses to support students in developing their social and emotional intelligence. These include practising mindful communication (Int. 2, p. 7), engaging in self-reflection (Int. 2, p. 27), and showing empathy towards other people (Int. 1, p. 11). As an example, at the start of our second interview, Beau shares his weekly SEL intention for the week:

> It was a lot about respect this week and persistence as well. Just persevering and getting through. That was kind of what we set it around, being a risk-taker, being open-minded and really just trying to develop those qualities. (Int. 2, p. 1)

Beau also identifies students' social-emotional development as a critical foundation for learning, noting "this is what I need to establish first, and then I can teach the [academic] content" (Int. 2, p. 9). In this way, he considers the benefits of including SEL practices within his teaching as "something to fall back on" (Int. 2, p. 9), noting:

> When you have taught the [social and emotional] strategies and the ability for them to understand certain things that they are feeling or doing, that gives you that kind of something to go back to when it all falls apart (Int. 2, p. 19).

In addition to SEL as intelligence, Beau understands SEL as the development of a shared classroom 'community' culture characterised by teamwork, support and accountability. He elaborates:

> I think it is about building that culture of we are a community, and we are here to support each other and everything we say or everything we do impacts someone in some way. So, I think really making them accountable for their actions each day and what they say to people. (Int. 1, p. 11)

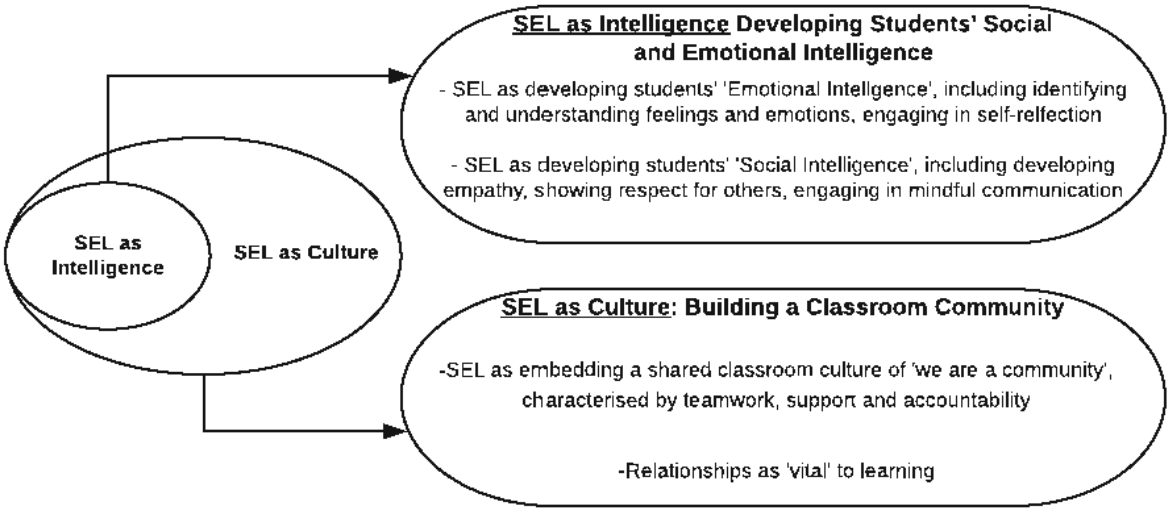
The high value and commitment he gives to developing relationships with and among students is central to Beau's notion of a classroom "community" culture, "where everyone is accepted, everyone is equal" (Int. 2, p. 1). He illustrates this in our second interview:

> I think relationships are essentially our core business as teachers. I think unless you have a relationship with a student, they are not going to learn anything or want to be in your class. And I think a lot of the times when there are issues it is because there has been a relationship breakdown. So, I think even as teachers it is really important that we know our students and we know why that has happened. … So, for me relationships are vital for the success of any classroom. (Int. 2, p. 22)

Beau confirms, "I wouldn't teach necessarily content [*sic*] until I've built that relationship" (Int. 2, p. 30).

Figure 4.1

Beau's Conceptualisations of SEL



Overall, Beau conceptualises SEL to develop the student's social and emotional intelligence and build a positive classroom "community" culture. As reported, he promotes students' learning of several SEL-related strategies and qualities, including identifying feelings and emotions, practising mindful communication behaviours and engaging in self-reflection. He also demonstrates a strong commitment to developing positive relationships with and among students, regarding these as vital to student learning.

4.2.1.2. Influences on SEL understanding

Two main types of influences have shaped Beau's understanding of SEL, which I have categorised as personal and professional (see Figure 4.2). Concerning personal influences, Beau describes how his personal lived experiences have influenced his conceptualisation of SEL. For example, when reflecting on his childhood during our first interview, Beau states:

> There was never a lot of talk around social-emotional health. Like mental health was never really a big thing when I was a teenager.… If you had a mental problem you were kind of looked at as a bit different.… So, I feel like we should be educating [*sic*] because kids still come with that stigma to school that: "I am not allowed to cry" or "I'm not allowed to be upset about something" … So, I think it is about really teaching children, in particular, about that there are things that you can do when you're feeling this way, or this is how you can find out why you are feeling this way. (Int. 1, p. 7)

Additionally, Beau shared openly about his one-year executive teaching placement's impact on his understanding of and appreciation for SEL:

> Last year I learned a lot about myself in the exec role. I hated it. Like the pressure that was put on me as a new leader was really, really difficult, and for the first time in my life I actually felt what it was like to be in that spot where I didn't want to talk about it.… But to actually come out and own up and say, "Yeah, okay I am struggling with this" was a massive challenge. So, I want children, as well, to know that that's what they can do. (Int. 1, p. 7)

Likewise, Beau emphasises how his lived experience prompted him to increase his focus on SEL and develop students' confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem as learners:

> I understand now that for you to be able to actually achieve something you need to be confident in yourself and have that self-esteem to be able to actually act upon what you want to do.… I feel like unless you understand yourself, you can't understand anything else.… So, it would be awesome to be able to have children who are more confident and more able to do that at a younger age. (Int. 1, p. 13)

When asked what contributed to his understanding of SEL, Beau notes the combined influence of his lived experiences and personal engagement with "self-driven" learning:

> I use the Wellbeing Hub a lot and do a lot of reading from that, but I think it came about as well from when I had my own personal experiences. So, trying to get myself to understand why I was dealing with things in a certain way or how I could deal with things in a certain way.… I haven't done any sort of formal professional learning; it has all just been kind of self-driven. (Int. 2, p. 11)

In this way, Beau confirms how personal influences have enhanced his "understanding of the importance of having those [social and emotional] structures and scaffolds in place for kids because … if there is nothing there to support them it all falls down" (Int. 1, p. 8).

In relation to professional influences, Beau identifies how his professional context and experiences—including school SEL programs, staff engagement and student interactions—have informed his understanding of SEL. For example, he references BPS's use of the Friendly Schools Plus (FSP) SEL program to inform teachers' explicit SEL instruction, and notes his participation as a BPS SEL committee member:

> At staff meetings, a different committee will present once a term. So, we presented a couple of weeks ago and I developed just from the curriculum like a rubric that we can use to track students' social-emotional health. (Int. 1, p. 10)

Additionally, Beau describes how specific student cases within the school context have influenced his understanding and support of SEL instruction:

> There's a kid in Year 3 who is going through a massive mental health issue at the moment, and for us that is like really confronting, to see him like that. Once again, that's another experience that has said to me we need to be teaching kids how to deal with these issues before they go too far. (Int. 1, p. 10)

Figure 4.2

Influences on Beau's Conceptualisations of SEL

Figure 4.2 lists the main personal and professional influences on Beau's conceptualisations of SEL. As reported, Beau's lived experiences and engagement in self-directed learning have informed his commitment to SEL. Specifically, these internal influences have encouraged him to promote students' self-esteem, self-awareness and confidence. Beau's understanding of SEL has also been externally influenced by his professional context, including his engagement with school SEL programs, staff committees and specific student cases.

4.2.2. RQ 2: How does Beau make decisions about his teaching of SEL?

Beau makes decisions about his teaching of SEL by using a variety of SEL resources and by incorporating his knowledge of students (see Figure 4.3). These two themes are highly interrelated and support him in planning explicit and sequential SEL lessons and ensuring SEL content relevance for his students. For example, in the second interview, Beau explains how he and his teaching team use the FSP SEL program resources to "map" their teaching of SEL while also remaining flexible to student issues as they arise:

> Well, from the Friendly Schools Plus book, they do overviews of each of the five key [SEL] areas. So, we've actually this year mapped [*sic*]—like we've pre-mapped what we want to teach, kind of, just so that we make sure we cover all the areas over the terms. But then we've kind of come back and started now to go back to certain elements of it, and we are just kind of planning it as an issue arises.… So, there are three of us each week and one of us will be responsible for picking up on whatever has been going on and planning a lesson that kind of links to one of those areas but also links to what's been happening. (Int. 2, p. 16)

Similarly, Beau reported sequencing his SEL lessons to build from students' prior SEL learning. He also makes purposeful connections to other academic content areas. For example, when asked to explain what led to the planning of his second lesson observation, he cites links to a current inquiry unit:

> Well, it's kind of following on from previous lessons around bullying and how do we respond to bullying. But I wanted to—we've been looking at, in our unit of inquiry at the moment—How We Organise Ourselves—we're looking at like cause and effect essentially. So, we're kind of looking at choices have consequences, whether they're good or bad. So, I think that's kind of, yeah, where it came from. (VSRD 2, p. 9)

Beau also creates purpose-built resources around the personal and social capability strand from within the AC. This includes his construction of a teaching and assessment rubric to "track students' social-emotional health" (Int. 1, p. 10). Further, Beau accesses SEL resources through the Australian Government's online Student Wellbeing Hub to "bolster" his SEL teaching content. As Beau elaborates:

> I use a lot of different resources.… I also access the Wellbeing Hub as well. I do a lot of reading from there. I do like Bullying No Way, those sorts of things. So, I guess there is a lot of stuff on the internet now which is very handy.… Our school is trying to drive us to just do the Friendly Schools Plus, but I don't think that's deep enough, if that makes sense. So, I try to bolster it up by accessing other things. (Int. 1, p. 9)

Additionally, he states that "SEL kind of fits through all the areas of learning, whether it be through goal setting, whether it be through reflections" (Int. 1, p. 9). Beau explains he often connects SEL concepts and his school's inquiry-based "approaches to learning," which focus on developing students' thinking, communication and research skills.

When making decisions about his teaching of SEL, Beau also invites student input and incorporates his knowledge of students and their contexts. For example, to address their ongoing social and behavioural needs, Beau shares how he invites his students to contribute to a class SEL "goal" each week:

> Each Monday morning, we establish—like we have a class meeting for around about 20–25 minutes and we'll talk about: "Okay, what do we think we did well last week? What do we need to work on this week?" And we'll actually set a class goal around, "Well, this week we want to be more of this. We want to be more caring because last week we did this." Just trying to get that dialogue started so that we've got that to fall back on. (Int. 1, p. 23)

Additionally, during our first reflective dialogue, Beau elaborates how his knowledge of students and their contexts influenced his decision to pursue a SEL focus on "bullying" with his students during Terms 1 and 2:

> So, at the end of last term there was quite a lot of like behavioural issues coming back in from the playground; they weren't necessarily bullying but … like high levels of harassment and just general kids picking on other kids for the fun of it.… At the end of last term there was a real focus around building like just our classroom culture around making sure that if you see someone in the classroom who's looking worried or upset or whatever that we need to look after each other because we are essentially a family in a class together. And then this term … was really identifying what is bullying, because once that sort of started to happen, that was the word that was being thrown around, was that I'm being bullied. (VSRD 1, p. 4)

Accordingly, Beau strives to ensure his SEL lessons are "individualised" and "interactive" for students by "trying to draw in their prior knowledge and experience" (Int. 2, p. 15). During our second interview, Beau outlines how he often adapts SEL activities and content, including pre-written role-play scenarios, to make them "a little bit more meaningful by making it things [*sic*] that we know have happened within our classes or within the school" (Int. 2, p. 15). For instance, when asked about the planning of his first lesson observation, he states:

> The reading and the scenarios came from the [FSP] book directly, but I changed some. When we did that final activity, I changed some of the scenarios to actually meet some of the discussions that had been happening in our—like around the school, particularly the bus one. So, the bullying on the bus is a big issue at the moment … So, yeah, I was just trying to, I guess, … connect a little bit more to those scenarios. (VSRD 1, p. 5)

In this way, Beau uses his knowledge of students to find ways to adapt, connect and relate SEL content to students' ongoing individual experiences.

Beau is also responsive to spontaneous student wellbeing issues as they present and is willing to prioritise these over teaching academic content as necessary. He shares:

> Some days I think well I've got my structure, my timetable for the week, but you know what? Stuff it. We've got to do a wellbeing lesson this morning because I can't teach until I've spoken to the class about whatever happened yesterday. So, I think it is about sometimes you've got to be just able to go: "You know what, that's not important today." Being able to learn how to write a paragraph is not important this morning because this is all going on. (Int. 2, p. 28)

Beau also uses his knowledge of students' strengths, interests and social networks when determining collaborative groupings during SEL lessons. He does this to encourage student relationships, increase collaboration and facilitate perspective-building during SEL-related discussions and activities:

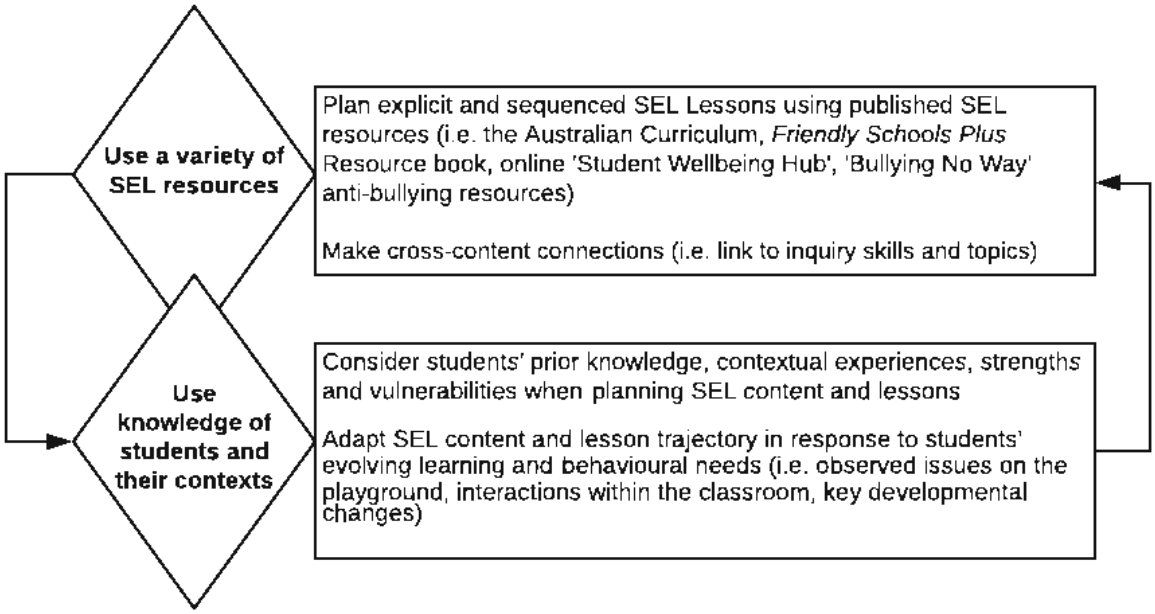
> So, for me it is about maybe necessarily [*sic*] grouping people who you wouldn't normally group together, together [*sic*], so they can actually see why someone might say this or act in that way. So, not just putting all of my extroverted together and all of my introverted together and kind of coming up with two totally different ideas. But trying to get them to understand that they can both work together to get to a certain point. (Int. 1, p. 22)

Thus, Beau uses his knowledge of students to support their development of key SEL skills and make SEL "a little bit more engaging and get a little bit more buy-in" (Int. 2, p. 14) from students.

Figure 4.3 provides an overview of the complementary range of SEL resources and student knowledge Beau uses to inform his teaching of SEL. These include published curriculum and SEL program materials such as the AC's personal and social capabilities, the FSP resource book and the online Student Wellbeing Hub; students' prior learning and input gathered during weekly class meetings; and information concerning students' needs, strengths and contextual experiences. As evidenced, Beau uses these resources and knowledge to increase student "buy-in" and provide SEL content and lessons that are sequenced, "relevant" and "interactive" for students.

Figure 4.3

Beau's Decision-Making About SEL



4.2.3. RQ 3: What approaches does Beau use to implement SEL in the classroom context?

Three main approaches characterise Beau's implementation of SEL: his use of consistent SEL routines and learning engagements, his facilitation of a student-centred and strengths-based approach, and his ongoing engagement with students (see Figure 4.4). These three themes are highly interrelated and build on Beau's use of SEL resources and knowledge of students to plan for SEL.

4.2.3.1. Consistent SEL routines and learning engagements

In defining his first approach, Beau implements consistent SEL routines and a range of mind and body learning engagements to support his students' SEL development. He outlines:

> We always start Mondays with our social-emotional learning. So, it's always the first thing, and then it kind of flows through the rest of the week. So, we do little like follow on activities throughout the week that kind of branch from that first lesson. (VSRD 1, p. 3)

In this way, Beau suggests SEL "has kind of just become part of what we do now" (VSRD 2, p. 11).

For example, at the start of each school day, before entering the classroom, Beau's class participates in a 15-minute "morning run" as a way to get students' brains "active" and "help them settle back into the day" (VSRD 1, p. 20). He also facilitates daily mindfulness sessions of approximately 20 minutes, usually after lunch, to support students' SEL-related skill development, including self-regulation and active listening skills. As an additional learning engagement, Beau often has students role-play SEL-related scenarios to engage with content and practice target skills. One example involves his use of finger puppets with students:

> So, we had to act out—we were looking at being caring and being helpful—so, they had to act out different scenarios using finger puppets so that they could, so that they didn't have to feel like they were in that situation. (Int. 2, p. 10)

Most notably, throughout our conversations, Beau refers to his use of explicit goal-setting and reflection routines with students. These routines guide students' SEL content learning and skill development. For example, during his first lesson observation, Beau clearly outlined three explicit learning goals for the week's planned SEL lesson (see Observation Vignette 4.1). In our second interview, Beau also shares how students set, plan for and reflect on their own learning goals:

> In my class, my goals are normally weekly. It just depends on the unit and what we are doing.… Like, we'll talk about like what action we can take to be able to get to this goal. So, they kind of formulate their own plan.… We will reflect on them [their goals] at the end of that, whether it is the session or the week. (Int. 2, p. 17)

Additionally, as evidenced in Observation Vignette 4.1, Beau supports students in breaking down larger SEL concepts into smaller learning tasks using "I can" statements. According to Beau, these "I can" statements "are just taken from the curriculum, so the curriculum content descriptors, and we turn them into goals" (Int. 1, p. 3). He states, "it is a way of getting the curriculum into the classroom, and the terminology and the language around the curriculum, in a really child-friendly way" (Int. 1, p. 3). Beau also explains how "I can" statements can be adapted to suit individual student "levels":

> So, it depends on the level of the student. So, sometimes for instance in maths, … we'll have an "I can" statement maybe from Year 2, Year 3 and Year 4 so you can see the progression across them, and it allows then obviously for children to pick where they feel like they would fit and kind of where they want to go to next. (Int. 1, p. 3)

Observation Vignette 4.1: Beau's introduction to SEL lesson purpose and goals

[Beau sits at the front of the classroom, adjacent to the classroom interactive whiteboard with a keyboard on his lap. Students are sat in front of Beau, looking at a PowerPoint slideshow projected on the whiteboard. The first slide shows a learning timetable for the day. Beau waits for all students to be quiet before introducing the lesson.]

Beau: (5:56) Okay, guys, so we are going to do our SEL this morning. Alright? And we are focusing once again on *[Pauses his speech. Looks at and waits for attention from a student, saying their name twice to get their attention. Waits for the student's eye contact, then begins speaking to the whole class again.]*—Alright, so last week we started looking at 'what is bullying' as part of our SEL focus. So, this week we are following on from that, and this week we are looking more in depth at 'how can we respond to bullying or harassment'? Alright? So, for our SEL today, I want you to think about what we focused on last week, alright, around 'what does bullying sound like? Look like? And feel like?' Alright, because last week you used some really, really rich vocabulary to describe what it is like to be bullied. Or, if you hadn't been bullied, what you think it would be like to be in that situation. Okay? So, today we're looking at that, but we're taking it to the next step where you have to be critical thinkers—[*Looks across at the same student again, and says their name once to confirm their attention*.]—about how would you respond to a situation? Alright? Where either you, or somebody else, was in not such a good place, either inside the classroom or outside of the classroom. Okay?

(7:07) *[Skips to the next PowerPoint slide. Three SEL goals are listed clearly alongside three dot points.]* So, I want you to start thinking about these three goals, alright? [*Reads aloud the goals from the slide*.] So, we're looking at: I can identify feelings others may experience as a result of being bullied. I can describe the possible physical and mental effects of bullying behaviour. I can demonstrate actions I can take to discourage bullying behaviour. Are there any words up there that you're not quite sure about what they might mean, before we move on? [*Calls on Student 1*.]

Student 1: Discourage?

Beau: Ahh, does anyone know what discourage means? If we're discouraging it? *[Points to the whiteboard and re-reads the third goal statement, placing an emphasis on the word 'discourage'.]* What do you think, [Student 2]?

Student 2: Like courage, but the opposite?

Beau: Alright, so, to stop it from happening, yeah? Alright, so we're looking at what can we do to make sure that bullying behaviours aren't taking place. Alright? So, discourage means to stop it. Yeah? So, there are our three goals, and particularly this last one is going to be the main focus of today's lesson, alright? So, it's looking at actions that we can take, alright, to be able to help us to overcome any kind of bullying behaviour.

(8:10) [*Beau skips to the next slide.*] Alright, so this is our overview for our SEL skills. So, as you can see, I've highlighted in red again the skills that we are focusing on. So, for social awareness we are looking at accepting and valuing others. For relationship skills we are looking at seeking help and different types of bullying. And for social decision-making we are looking at considerations for others. Alright? So, we're looking at considering others when we're doing things, we're looking at seeking help, types of bullying and accepting and valuing others.

[Beau moves on to explain how the lesson will be structured and what materials students will need.]

Further, Beau recounts how he assists students in reflecting on shared and independent learning goals and how this process of reflection can shape future SEL lessons:

> We do a lot of self- and peer reflections. We do a lot of videos … So, we record our video and we come back and watch it, and at the end of every lesson we try and have a whole group discussion around the things that we've learned, the

> language that we've used and whether or not we feel comfortable, or whether we feel like we need to have a little bit more work in that area. Sometimes that leads to groupings as well. So, the next time I might have like an "expert" group, and a group that needs a little bit more work in that area working together. (Int. 1, p. 3)

Beau stresses the importance of making the reflection process "simple" and straightforward to facilitate students' independent self-reflection:

> I don't want it to be too confusing for them. I just try to keep it fairly basic in terms of getting them to actually say: "Okay, first of all was I successful, yes or no?" And then provide the why, or why not. (Int. 2, p. 18)

Accordingly, Beau encourages student self-reflections and uses these to inform his decision-making for his SEL teaching.

4.2.3.2. A student-centred and strengths-based approach to SEL

In addition to and in support of using explicit SEL routines and learning engagements, Beau practises a student-centred, strengths-based approach to SEL. Within this approach, Beau prioritises the development of positive relationships with and among students. To support these relationships, Beau reflects on the importance of allowing students opportunities to "build respect for each other" (VSRD 2, p. 14) and share their own "individual experiences" (Int. 2, p. 22):

> I like to sometimes get … them to actually talk about their experience so that other kids can actually understand it, because I feel like sometimes teachers take that role for them (Int. 1, p. 12).

Beau also notes how his knowledge of students and their social and emotional needs can shape his teaching interactions. For example, during our first reflective dialogue, I asked Beau about a particular student's engagement during a SEL discussion about bullying. In response, he explains:

> He's going through a lot at the moment in terms of his parents have just split up.… So, we're really encouraging him to try and express—like to actually express his emotions—because he used to just bottle them up and then get really angry. So, I think this is kind of the time [during SEL] where I kind of allow him a little bit more freedom, I guess, to actually be able to get out what he has to say. (VSRD 1, p. 9)

Beau values students' personal input and aims to include their voices within SEL lessons: "I think it comes back to that whole, I guess appreciating and allowing children to express themselves" (Int. 2, p. 23).

As an additional part of his student-centred, strengths-based approach to SEL, Beau implements student-centred discipline and rewards systems to guide and acknowledge students' SEL progress. When asked during our second interview if he sees any differences between SEL and behaviour management, Beau responded: "Yeah, I think so. I think it [SEL] is a more holistic approach to individuals, where behaviour management, for me, is dealing with the incident in that moment" (Int. 2, p. 19). To guide this "holistic approach" to student behaviour, Beau works with students at the start of the year to create an "Essential Agreement" or a shared set of "class principles." Beau explains how the Essential Agreement is constructed:

> So, it is derived a lot from what the students have—what their prior knowledge is of what makes a good community and a good classroom and a good context for learning.… We develop our Essential Agreement around that. So, they become simplified statements that are easy to draw upon that are simple for kids to understand, but it encompasses all of their prior knowledge and experiences. (Int. 2, p. 21)

When asked how the Essential Agreement is incorporated within his teaching, Beau states: "We read it every day and then some weeks we might add to it … like if we've noticed that we need to improve on something" (VSRD 2, p. 7). Beau also facilitates "class meetings" to address specific "issues within the class" and notes the benefit of "letting the children run the conversation.… So, actually making it relevant, rather than this is just a lesson that we are teaching" (Int. 1, p. 23). Similarly, he uses "circle time" discussions as an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning or to resolve particular classroom concerns:

> If it [student behaviour] falls apart, sometimes we will do like a circle time and sit down and actually break it down to: "What happened? Why did this happen? Why does someone have to feel this way? What can we do better next time?" So, I think looking and delving deeper into it, rather than just kind of saying: "Well, that behaviour wasn't good enough" and then letting it go, but actually making them think about it. (Int. 1, p. 12)

Also, Beau incorporates a classroom rewards system to recognise when students are "showing the attributes of the Essential Agreement" (Int. 2, p. 21). Acknowledged behaviours can include, for example, "if they intervene in something and help to solve someone else's problem, or they are kind to each other" (Int. 1, p. 19). To reward these behaviours, Beau assigns "points," which add up to "minutes" of student "reward" time:

> So, people who are doing the right thing, they can earn individual minutes for things or they can earn whole-class minutes for things. For instance, we do on our Chrome books—we've got a game called Prodigy—and they love it! (Int. 2, p. 21)

Further, Beau explains this reward system can be personalised for students on ILPs and tailored to incorporate students' individual goals. Beau shares that his intention in using a rewards system is to make students' social and emotional development as "equally valued as everything else" (Int. 1, p. 19) and add "that little extra level of salience" (Int. 1, p. 20).

An additional element of Beau's student-centred, strengths-based approach to SEL is his use of "multiple entry points" into learning, which includes providing students with "open-ended tasks" and "the opportunity to actually express themselves in multiple ways" (Int. 2, p. 5). As Beau explains:

> So not just saying, "Okay, we're doing this activity" … but allowing them to be a little bit unique in how they do it.… Not every kid is a great writer or a great reader, so what other ways can we allow them to express themselves that they feel comfortable in? … So just giving them—understanding where they are coming from and really building on those strengths. (Int. 2, p. 5)

Overall, Beau reports that by incorporating students' strengths and using open-ended learning tasks, he can "develop their self-esteem" (Int. 2, p. 3) and increase student "buy-in."

4.2.3.3. Ongoing engagement with students

As a third and final identified approach to SEL implementation, Beau actively maintains teacher engagement with his students. For example, he involves students in "little discussions" or "check-ins" about their academic and social learning. He provides them with targeted and ongoing feedback. When asked about his student engagement in this way during his first lesson observation, Beau reflects: "I kind of just tried to get around to all of them and have a discussion with each group as I go around—making sure I've checked in with everybody" (VSRD 1, p. 22). During these brief discussions, he uses prompts and questions to extend students' thinking about SEL topics.

On reflection, Beau considers his ability to get children "to think beyond just their initial response" (VSRD 2, p. 5) a personal strength of his SEL teaching. He further describes how his use of questions and prompts can help to build and challenge students' perspectives about SEL topics. For example, when reflecting on his strengths during his second lesson observation, Beau shares:

> So, I think that was probably—just the little discussions I had with groups around, you know, what they would do in that [bullying] situation rather than just: "We wouldn't do anything." Actually making them kind of accountable for coming up with a choice. (VSRD 2, p. 5)

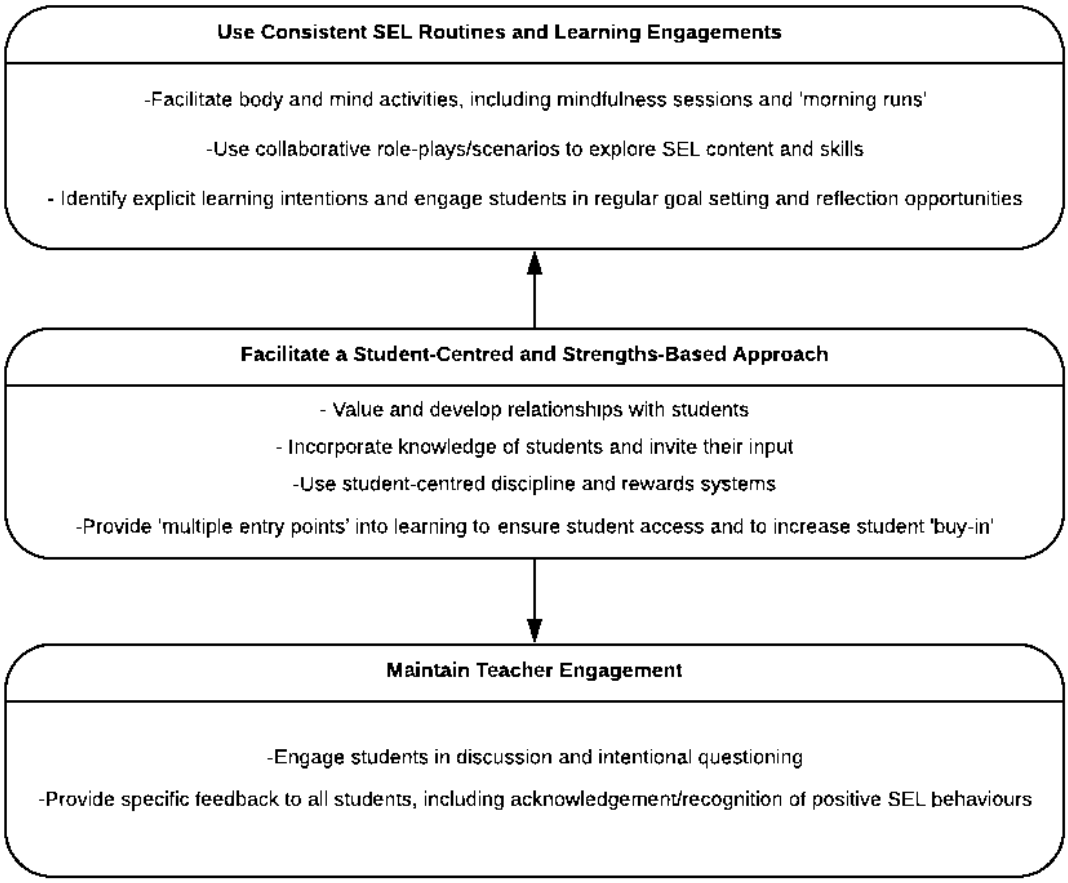
Beau also prioritises providing "explicit" and "in the moment" feedback on students' SEL development:

> It has to be instant feedback, particularly when it is to do with that [SEL] … I think by making it explicit as well.… Not just saying: "Oh, it is really good that you cared for that person." But then also talking about the impact of that on other people. So, … expanding their understanding of what their action has actually achieved and giving that feedback in a little bit more detail.… I think by being really explicit and in the moment, it has a lot more power. (Int. 2, p. 25)

By maintaining engagement with students during SEL lessons, Beau can provide detailed and immediate feedback on their social and emotional development.

Figure 4.4

Beau's Approaches to SEL Implementation



As summarised in Figure 4.4, Beau was found to use three main approaches when implementing SEL:

- using consistent SEL routines and learning engagements, including mindfulness lessons, role-plays, and explicit goal setting and reflection opportunities
- facilitating a student-centred, strengths-based approach by promoting positive student relationships and embedding student-centred discipline procedures
- maintaining teacher engagement by regularly checking in with students and providing them with instant and explicit feedback.

As reported, these three approaches are highly interwoven and engage students in explicit, active and relevant SEL instruction.

4.2.4. RQ 4: What factors promote and/or impede Beau's implementation of SEL?

4.2.4.1. Promoting factors

Three main factors promote Beau's implementation of SEL (see Figure 4.5). These include his school's commitment to a school-wide SEL approach, parent and community support and engagement for SEL, and Beau's own SEC. During our first interview, Beau overviews BPS's uptake of SEL as a school-wide initiative:

> So, we are kind of at the beginning here. It got put into our annual action plan this year as a school to really drive SEL because we found from our climate surveys that kids didn't feel safe here.… So yeah, it is a big focus for us this year. I am on the SEL—like we have a committee—so there's a committee of about 10 of us that we get together two or three times a term and go over things and develop resources or send out information or readings about social-emotional learning. (Int. 1, p. 9)

In this way, Beau suggests BPS's whole-school commitment to SEL has sparked his professional engagement with SEL. As a member of his school's SEL committee, Beau engages in creating resources to increase and support teachers' SEL instruction:

> To try and get more people on board, we are trying to develop packs that we can send out to classrooms. So, they [teachers] could literally pick up the pack and they could teach the lesson, or whatever. Just to get people doing it regularly. (Int. 1, p. 18)

To support his teaching of SEL, Beau also notes the benefits of "team teaching" and embedding a "collective approach." For example, when considering past interactions with students with specific social and emotional needs, Beau shares: "It burns you out very quickly if you don't get people in to help you and to support you" (Int. 2, p. 23). Likewise, Beau notes the benefits of parent and community support for SEL. When asked directly in our first interview what he

needs to feel successful in this area of his practice, Beau states: “I think generally for the community to value social-emotional learning and understand what it actually is” (Int. 1, p. 16).

Accordingly, Beau explains how BPS’s facilitation of bi-annual three-way interviews and a yearly “Learning Journey” supports “communication with parents” (Int. 2, p. 5) about SEL and increases their understanding of students’ social and emotional development. During our second interview, Beau outlines the three-way interview process:

> So, the three-way interviews at the beginning of the year are all around SMART goal setting. So, you set an English, numeracy and a personal or social SMART goal. So, within the three-way, it is the teacher, the student and the parents are all together. So, it’s not like just a parent/teacher interview sort of thing. And you go through—you kind of reflect on the previous year and set goals based on areas that they [the parents and student] want to work on as a collective, I guess. (Int. 2, p. 6)

Thus, Beau regards parents as a “really powerful tool” in students’ SEL development.

As a final promoting factor, Beau’s own SEC development has positively influenced his implementation of SEL. As previously noted, Beau’s lived experiences and self-directed learning have increased his personal “buy-in” to teaching SEL and the value he places on students’ SEL development. He states: “It [SEL] starts for us as educators now. Like I feel like it is our job to do, like it is our responsibility” (Int. 1, p. 16). More specifically, Beau underlines the importance of adhering to his “personal vision and values” as an educator, specifically regarding prioritising SEL:

> I think it is really deciding about what you value as an educator and then actually being able to stick up for yourself in terms of why do I believe this? Because you are going to have to have those tough conversations with leadership and management about why you’ve done certain things certain ways. But at the end of the day, it has to reflect your classroom context and your personal vision and values around education. (Int. 2, p. 29)

Beau also explains how his practice with specific SEL-related skills, such as mindfulness and meditation, has assisted him in teaching these skills to students:

> I know from my own personal experience that I used to be very anti-meditation. … So, for me, it took me a lot of, I guess, persistence and self-dedication to actually be part of it and to actually be involved in mindfulness. So, I think it is just me passing on my experiences in being able to actually unpack: “What does it mean to be mindful?” And how that actually affects your wellbeing and the importance of it. (Int. 2, p. 13)

Moreover, as evidence of his own SEC, Beau notes the value of being open and transparent with students and how this can support positive relationship-building:

> It is okay to be open with your class—that's part of that relationship-building, I think. It's letting them know on the days where you are not feeling great, or you are upset about something … It's actually talking about that and not just hiding it. (Int. 2, p. 28)

In this way, Beau emphasises the importance of modelling SEL skills for students and suggests: "As a teacher who has actually gone through that process [burn out], and actually understands a little bit more now, we are really valuable in schools" (Int. 2, p. 29).

4.2.4.2. Impeding factors

Several factors are identified as impeding Beau's implementation of SEL: his school's shifting SEL priorities, limited community knowledge about SEL, and time. Notwithstanding his acknowledgement of BPS's recent and increased commitment to SEL, Beau notes some ongoing challenges the school faces in this area. For example, he lists a range of previous SEL-related initiatives at BPS that he describes as having "disappeared" or "died off." Examples include staff yoga classes, professional coaching and using restorative practices with students. When discussing restorative practices at BPS, Beau explains:

> Well, we say we are a restorative practice school … but I would say we did restorative practice training in 2014, so five years ago, and a lot of staff have changed since then. So, you know, kind of things drop off the mantle a little bit. So, we are raising that as a committee at the moment to try and get that training again for everyone who wasn't here and for everyone that was here to get a bit of a refresh. (Int. 1, p. 14)

Thus, Beau notes the importance of ensuring consistent staff training for SEL-related programs to ensure they do not fall "off the to-do list" (Int. 1, p. 16). Additionally, Beau suggests: "I feel like sometimes it [SEL] gets left behind and gets caught up in the whole, you know, 'we have to teach the curriculum, the content is more important'" (Int. 1, p. 5). An example he raises is students receiving awards at school assemblies:

> When they hand out awards for instance, it is all about academic stuff.… Very rarely is it about what they [students] have done in terms of maybe their own social-emotional health or maybe someone else's. So, I feel like maybe that's a shift that we can do to make it [SEL] a little more valued amongst students. (Int. 1, p. 19)

Beau also identifies "getting community on board" (Int. 1, p. 17) as a "big challenge" to SEL implementation. For example, he states: "For some parents, social-emotional learning is probably a whole new concept for them" (Int. 2, p. 20). He describes how specific cultural or religious differences can inhibit parent and student understanding of the main SEL concepts.

Specifically, during our second reflective dialogue, Beau shares an example related to implementing SEL with students from diverse cultural backgrounds:

> I know last year when I was at [School's Name], we had some kids in my class who were from Middle Eastern backgrounds who weren't allowed to necessarily talk about some of the things they did at home because of their religious customs or whatever it might be. So, that was hard at times.… Trying to break down those barriers is a lot more difficult. (VSRD 2, p. 14)

As a final challenge to implementing SEL, Beau describes teachers as "time poor," suggesting it can be difficult to find time to implement SEL alongside other academic content. In this way, despite "feel[ing] pretty confident in doing it [teaching SEL]," Beau describes integrating SEL with other curriculum content as "a pretty daunting task though … when you are trying to support 24 or 25 students socially and emotionally in one day, as well as teach them about content and whatever else" (Int. 1, p. 13). Further, he notes some teachers consider SEL "another thing we have to assess" and are thus resistant to fully engage with SEL programs and resources.

Figure 4.5

Promoting and Impeding Factors on Beau's SEL Implementation

Promoting Factors	Impeding Factors
- Increased School-wide Commitment to SEL - Inclusion of SEL in school's Annual Action Plan - Increased Staff engagement (i.e. SEL committee) - Creation of shared SEL resources **- Parent/Community Support and Engagement** - Conversations about and exposure to SEL (Three-way interviews, Learning Journey) **- Teacher's Own Social Emotional Competence (SEC)** - Personal practice with SEL competencies and skills (self-awareness, self-reflection) - Personal prioritisation of SEL as a critical learning area	**- Wavering School-wide Commitment to SEL** - Shifting SEL priorities & initiatives - Academic content prioritised over SEL - Lack of authentic staff buy-in **- Limited community knowledge about SEL** - Cultural/religious implications - Limited prior SEL knowledge/exposure **- Time** - Teachers as busy and 'time poor' - SEL considered an additional task, resulting in low teacher buy-in

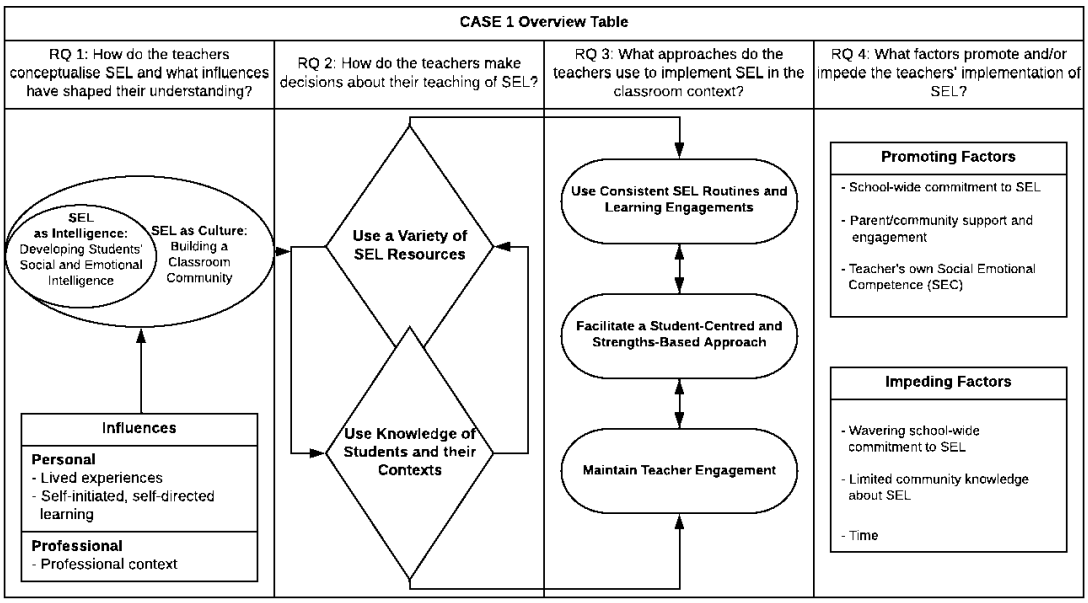
Figure 4.5 provides an overview of the main factors Beau's data indicate as promoting or impeding his teaching of SEL. Beau reports his SEL teaching and knowledge are enhanced by his school's increased commitment to SEL, ongoing community engagement and his own SEC development. Conversely, his school's shifting SEL priorities, cultural barriers within the community and time challenges can impede his SEL implementation.

4.3. Summary of Case Findings

Beau's synthesised case findings are presented in Figure 4.6. In summary, Beau conceptualises SEL as a way to cultivate students' social and emotional intelligence and as a foundation for building a positive classroom community. Several personal and professional influences have shaped his understanding of SEL, including his lived experiences, self-initiated learning and professional context. As reported, Beau uses a range of SEL resources in conjunction with his knowledge of students to plan explicit, sequenced and relevant SEL lessons. Beau uses consistent and explicit routines to model and develop students' SEL skills when implementing SEL. Additionally, as indicators of a student-centred, strengths-based approach, he prioritises positive student relationships, seeks student input and facilitates student-centred discipline procedures. Beau also engages students in regular discussions about SEL concepts and provides explicit and immediate feedback on their learning. Beau's implementation of SEL is positively influenced by his school's increased commitment to SEL, parent/community engagement and his own personal SEC. However, he notes inconsistencies within the school's approach to SEL, limited community awareness and staff time challenges can act as barriers to SEL delivery.

Figure 4.6

Summary of Beau's Case Findings



4.4. On Reflection

Beau's participation in this study elicited several critical reflection points about his SEL teaching and the usefulness of the study's methods. He states: "I've actually seen quite a lot out of the two observations, particularly about my style of teaching, but also about just, I guess, the engagement level of the class, too" (VSRD 2, p. 16). For example, when reflecting on his first lesson observation, Beau shared how he had not noticed two students "just playing with something up the back" as "I can't see that from where I am" (VSRD 2, p. 16). As such, he describes the recorded footage as "evidence to show you what behaviours are being shown" (VSRD 2, p. 18).

When asked if the study had any influence on his SEL teaching practices, he said:

> It's made me more aware around making sure that I am continuously checking in and re-focusing because I feel like I love talking, so I talk a lot, and I get carried away. (VSRD 2, p. 16)

By reviewing and reflecting on his lessons, Beau was able to identify critical areas of improvement for his SEL teaching. These areas included monitoring student engagement and "getting them to contribute more" (VSRD 2, p. 16), as well as modifying lesson sequences, lesson timing and student grouping. For instance, when asked if there were anything he would change or add to his first lesson, following observation, he answered:

> It [the lesson] kind of went for a bit too long. So, maybe I would split the lesson up next time and just focus on one activity—like just do the activity on the floor and then do something more around that. Then I would do the scenario thing another time just to kind of break it up a little bit more because I felt like it was a lot to take in for them. Where I feel like if I had of broken it up, maybe I could have explored the elements within that story a little bit more as well. (VSRD 1, p. 18)

Beau also considers the combined act of video recording and reviewing his teaching as a valuable professional development process. He contrasts this with more traditional, in-person teacher lesson observations conducted by peers or leadership:

> I think it's more effective to do it this way where you record it [a lesson], both watch it independently, you know, think about some questions, come back and talk about it, rather than just [an executive teacher] sitting in the classroom observing me, and then giving me feedback and me reflecting on what I think happened. I think it is much more powerful to actually stop and watch something and then be able to come back and give feedback and talk about why things happened and that sort of thing.… I think it gives you a more deeper [*sic*] reflection rather than just feeling like you're being watched. (VSRD 2, p. 17)

Finally, Beau suggests the recorded lesson footage could be used as a “powerful” reflection tool with students. Concerning his second lesson, he explained:

> I would have loved to have shown them [the students] [the lesson recording]—like particularly when we were on the floor, and they were meant to be listening …—making them accountable. So, those people who were not focused at the back. I think it would be very powerful.… Yeah, cos, it would be interesting to get them to reflect at the end of the lesson and then show them the video and get them to reflect again. (VSRD 2, p. 18)

In summary, Beau considers his involvement with this study—specifically the processes of observation and video-stimulated reflection—as having made valuable contributions to his professional thinking about and teaching of SEL.

Chapter 5: Case Report 2—Karen

5.1. Participant Profile

As a mature teacher and mum to four children, Karen (she/her/hers) transitioned into teaching from a previous career in public service. She is among the least experienced participant teachers, with six years of teaching experience across Years 1–4. Karen began teaching at Hilltops Primary School (HPS) and has remained there for her entire career. HPS has a population of around 400 students, with 21% identifying as having a language background other than English and 6% identifying as Indigenous. During this study, Karen taught a combined Year 1/2 class of 26 students, several of whom had diagnosed learning needs, including social anxiety, and were on ILPs.

5.2. Overview of Findings

5.2.1. RQ 1: How does Karen conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped her understanding of this learning area?

5.2.1.1. Conceptualisations of SEL

Three themes encapsulate Karen's conceptualisations of SEL: SEL as establishing a positive classroom environment, SEL as meeting an identified area of need, and SEL as developing students' social and emotional skills (see Figure 5.1). During our first interview, I asked Karen to describe what SEL means to her:

> Well, I guess I view it from two perspectives: the students' perspective and the teacher's perspective. So, from the students' perspective it's obviously an important area for them to develop skills in. For their future they need to have a self-awareness of what they are feeling, what their emotions are, how to manage those, and how to interact with others; how to develop positive relationships... And then also as a teacher, obviously you've got kids coming in every morning with different needs and I have to set up a positive classroom environment that meets those needs and helps them become successful learners.… I think it is important that as part of developing a positive classroom environment that we address those social-emotional needs. (Int. 1, p. 4)

When asked to elaborate on her notion of a positive classroom environment, Karen describes a classroom in which "all students feel welcome and part of; free to contribute their ideas and

be accepted. A class where we are a learning community, we all have a shared goal" (Int. 2, p. 6). When further prompted to define her class's shared goal, she replied: "that we do our best in our learning, we do quality work and that we have a sense of belonging that this is our class" (Int. 2, p. 6). She specifically highlights the attention she pays to developing a positive and authentic teacher–student relationship:

> Students will respond positively to a teacher that they like … I want their experience of this classroom and of me to be positive and enjoyable. I want them to feel that I really want to get to know them. (Int. 2, p. 14)

Acknowledging their social and emotional needs is central to Karen's positive relationships with students. In our second interview, she explains:

> [SEL is] just meeting that area of need in the student … if they are not feeling comfortable and their social-emotional needs aren't being met, they're not going to be in the right frame of mind for learning, so I think it is just acknowledging that and trying to meet those needs and it is a way, an effective way of me forming a relationship or a bond with the students. (Int. 2, p. 12)

In this way, Karen highlights the importance she places on "valuing every student as an individual and believing that every student can learn" (Int. 2, p. 18).

Karen also emphasises social and emotional skill-building as an essential component of SEL. She argues that SEL skills are critical for children to develop "so that they are successful in future life, so they have positive relationships with others, so they have resilience and they have skills to be successful learners" (Int. 1, p. 1). Throughout our research engagements, Karen identified several SEL-related skills she encourages her students to develop, which I classified as falling broadly under personal, social and problem-solving skills. For example, Karen identifies self-awareness and problem-solving as key skills for her Year 1/2 students to develop:

> Self-awareness is acknowledging that you feel that way and then being able to perhaps recognise that it is not a useful emotion to be expressed in the classroom. I guess it is about finding an appropriate way to express it and problem-solving.
>
> … [I'm] trying to teach them the difference between a small problem and a big problem, create some self-awareness around that … And then trying to develop in them some problem-solving skills because a lot of them still are struggling with how to deal with the emotions that they are feeling. (Int. 2, p. 3)

Additionally, she identifies empathy—"understanding that other people have points of view and that they like to be listened to" (Int. 2, p. 5)—as an essential albeit challenging social skill

for her Year 1/2 students to practise when engaging in classroom conversations and their sharing of "news."

As shown in Figure 5.1, Karen was found to conceptualise SEL as a way to meet students' social and emotional needs. From a teacher's perspective, she creates a positive classroom environment and culture. She also emphasised the importance of SEL in developing students' social and emotional skills. As reported, the classroom culture supported such skill and behaviour development. In particular, she stresses the importance of building authentic relationships and valuing students as individuals.

Figure 5.1

Karen's Conceptualisations of SEL

5.2.1.2. Influences on SEL understanding

Karen's main identifiable influence on understanding SEL is her school's shared approach to student wellbeing (see Figure 5.2). In our first interview, she confirms, "the school has put a huge emphasis on wellbeing over the last couple of years" (Int. 1, p. 7). According to her, the school's approach incorporates several SEL-related initiatives, programs and models and offers ongoing staff training and engagement opportunities. Karen describes how her school has

enacted a more holistic, consistent and proactive approach to students' social and emotional development by integrating new and existing initiatives:

> I think that there was a conscious decision to integrate them [school's SEL initiatives] and to explicitly teach the children how they are integrated and work together, and I think it was recognised a couple of years ago that we needed a stronger focus on wellbeing at the school and this was one of the ways that we decided to do it. (Int. 1, p. 6)

Throughout our conversations, Karen frequently describes SEL-related initiatives, programs and models HPS uses to support student wellbeing. She identifies these as the Glasser Model; Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL); Bounce Back; an established school values system; and a purpose-built, supervised Wellbeing Space. For example, she illustrates in the first interview how three of these elements—the school values system, PBL and the Glasser Model—have fused to inform her understanding of and approach to teaching SEL:

> Every year at the beginning of the year, our integrated unit is on values and on our school value system. So, we have the [HPS] values and then just over the last 18 months we've become a PBL school, so we teach them what our PBL expectations are, what that looks like in the classroom and as part of this unit setting the kids up for success in the beginning of the year we talk about the needs and we use the Glasser chair as a metaphor. (Int. 1, p. 5)

To support a whole-school approach to SEL, Karen affirms the school has offered ongoing staff training and engagement opportunities. For example, when discussing the school's decision to create a targeted Wellbeing Space on campus, she confirms: "there have been staff updates provided regularly on what's happening … They have sought feedback from teachers; they want it to be a helpful thing, so they sought our feedback" (Int. 1, p. 9). Additionally, as a member of the school's PBL Task Group, Karen outlines how school staff have been invited to offer input during the school's PBL certification process.

Karen also references two professional learning opportunities that positively influenced her understanding of SEL, including attending training in circle time and the "You Are Fab" emotional coaching program. She affirms:

> [Emotional coaching] seemed to be a very effective strategy for dealing with students who are having emotional issues … it was all about connecting before you correct and facilitating the student to do their own problem-solving. (Int. 2, p. 4)

Further, Karen explains how emotional coaching supports her relationship-building with students:

> It obviously helps you foster a better relationship with the student because they see that you want to understand their problem and that you want to help them but that you are not forcing a solution upon them. (Int. 2, p. 5)

In later conversations, Karen recounts how she has begun trialling emotional coaching with three students who have difficulty with social interactions.

Figure 5.2

Influences on Karen's Conceptualisation of SEL

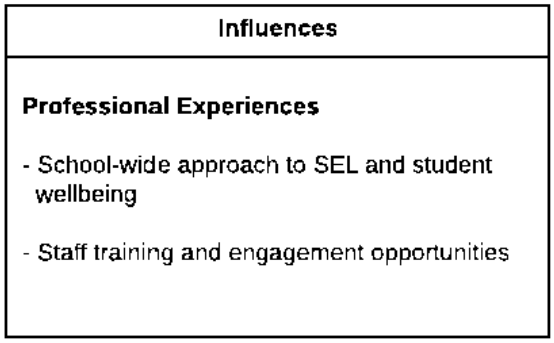


Figure 5.2 summarises the main influences Karen reported on her conceptualisation of SEL.

Following HPS's whole-school approach to SEL, Karen has engaged professionally with various initiatives designed to support students' social and emotional development. These include professional development training in SEL-related programs and models.

5.2.2. RQ 2: How does Karen make decisions about her teaching of SEL?

Karen makes decisions about her teaching of SEL by embedding her school's SEL-related initiatives, programs and models and by identifying and responding to students' needs (see Figure 5.3). For example, when asked to describe how she plans for and makes decisions about the SEL content she teaches, Karen explains:

> We have PBL expectations … So, each fortnight there will be a focus, so that's one way of planning. Usually, I would mention it in a circle time … 'this week's PBL expectation that this school is focusing on is respect.' At the beginning of the year we actually taught a values lesson, sorry, not a lesson, a whole unit of work … So, that really unpacks the PBL expectations and what they look like in the classroom and outside of the classroom for each age … So, it is quite explicitly taught in that unit. (Int. 2, p. 9)

Karen also often references the Glasser Model when describing her decision-making process about SEL, identifying the model as "the philosophy behind it [*sic*] which we use to inform our teaching practice" (Int. 1, p. 5). According to Karen, in adopting this model, "every student has needs and their behaviour is their way of meeting their needs … So, that's what we might be thinking in our mind while we are teaching" (Int. 1, p. 5). She also confirms she is "required to do the Bounce Back lessons, the more formal teaching" (Int. 1, p. 17) and explains how she plans for these specific lessons:

> We do use the Bounce Back resources. The library has most of the books but how each unit and how each teacher does it is flexible. We often do it as part of a unit Meet and Greet meeting where we read a book to the cohort and, you know, think pair, share, things like that. (Int. 1, p. 17)

Further to embedding school-wide SEL-related programs and models, Karen's decision-making regarding SEL is informed by her ongoing attention to students' needs and considering their interests and experiences. For example, when reflecting on the planning of her second observed lesson, she explains:

> I thought: What would be useful for my class? What do they need? And I then tried to relate it—I always try to get a lesson starter, I suppose, that can relate to their experience … I tried to find some videos … because I thought that might be engaging for them. (VSRD 2, p. 8)

Karen also affirms that she intentionally focused her second observed lesson—a Bounce Back lesson—on "having different sized problems … because that's the issue we're actually having in the classroom … once again to make it relevant" (VSRD 2, p. 3). In this way, Karen considers her students' developmental age when thinking about SEL content and instruction. As she states in reference to teaching self-awareness, "of course at this age you talk a lot about what they are good at, their strengths, what their interests are and how that might differ to people" (Int. 1, p. 10). By considering students' needs and interests, she seeks to increase student engagement in SEL lessons and the relevance of her content.

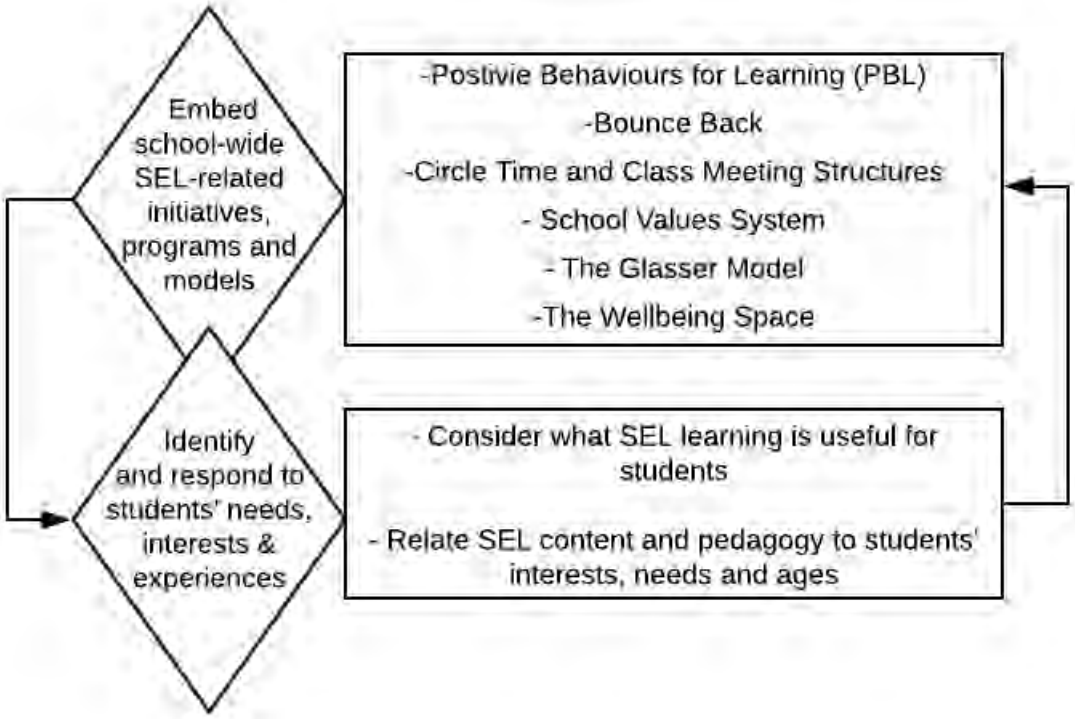
Notably, when discussing her decision-making processes concerning SEL, Karen made no reference to the AC. When asked if she uses the AC to inform her SEL planning or teaching, Karen explains:

> I wouldn't say regularly.… I am aware that it is one of the seven capabilities in the Australian Curriculum.… But I wouldn't say that that influences my everyday teaching. (Int. 1, p. 10)

In summary, Figure 5.3 illustrates how Karen incorporates her knowledge of a range of school-wide SEL-related initiatives, programs and models when making decisions about her teaching of SEL. Karen connects the school-based pedagogical initiatives, SEL content, and pedagogical decision-making with knowledge of her students' SEL needs, interests and experiences to make her teaching relevant and engaging. In turn, her reflection and assessment inform her understanding and practice of school-based SEL initiatives.

Figure 5.3

Karen's Decision-Making About SEL



5.2.3. RQ 3: What approaches does Karen use to implement SEL in the classroom context?

Karen uses three main approaches when implementing SEL in her classroom: explicitly teaching SEL skills, responding to students' needs and creating a positive classroom environment (see Figure 5.4).

5.2.3.1. Explicitly teach SEL skills

Stemming from her decision-making processes, Karen explicitly teaches SEL-related skills, expectations and values in alignment with her school's embedded programs and initiatives. She enacts this explicit approach through various pedagogical practices, including literature read-alouds, guided class discussions and student self-reflections. Karen shares how she uses books to address target SEL skills and values explicitly:

> I read books to the students all the time, like every day, a picture book. So sometimes, they [*sic*] would be a book that lends itself to a discussion about a particular value. It might be a PBL value or a Bounce Back skill. (Int. 2, p. 10)

She also explains how circle time discussions support students' SEL skill-building:

> [They] sit in a circle and we start with a check-in.… but being fairly young it took a while just to embed the listening skills. So, we have a talking tool, if you don't have the talking tool you are listening, and we had to really unpack what did it mean to be a good listener. We have a couple of kids in the class who … find it difficult to wait their turn and fidget and bang and talk to try and get the attention of others. So, we've had to talk about how it is polite to listen to the person with the talking tool and we need to ignore that person, and there I have brought in a little bit about Glasser's needs as well. (Int. 2, p. 2)

Similarly, Karen uses "class meetings" to "talk about the PBL expectation of the fortnight" (Int. 1, p. 2) or to "raise any issues" (Int. 2, p. 2) the students may be experiencing. For instance, Karen facilitated a class meeting during her first lesson observation, in which she asked her students to consider their recent learning time with a casual teacher. A transcribed portion of Karen's observed class meeting is presented in Observation Vignette 5.1. When reflecting on the video of the class meeting, Karen highlights where her students are seen demonstrating their developing SEL skills:

> So, with the class meeting there were lots of opportunities where I could refer to the Code of Cooperation and talk about why we have rules. I think that some of the comments that they made were fairly—showed a degree of self-reflection and awareness of what teachers expect and where they were and were not meeting those expectations. (VSRD 1, p. 6)

Karen also encourages individual self-reflection opportunities and visits to a Year 3/4 "buddy class" to explicitly reinforce students' SEL skills. She explains how these visits can encourage peer-modelling of SEL-related behaviours:

> The other teacher and I talked to our respective classes about how we are going to work together and what we are going to get out of it. So, she would be talking to her older students about modelling appropriate behaviour and helping the younger kids, and for us, it is using it as an opportunity to get to know other students in the

> school and learning from them, learning not only behaviour but whatever activity it is that we are doing … We talked about who would be writing this book, who would be the scribe, how they needed to take turns and collaboratively brainstorm. (Int. 2, p. 8)

Observation Vignette 5.1: Example of a class meeting facilitated by Karen

Karen: *So, our question today in our class meeting is what's been going well with the changes we've had and with Mr. X teaching you on Mondays and Tuesdays? So, what's been going well? If you put your hand up, I'll give you Boris [the talking toy, which is required for students to speak].*

Student 1: *I just want to ask you a question. And also, for people it's what's not been going well…*

Karen: *That's our second question. So, we'll do what's not been going well after we talk about what has been going well.*

Student 2: *Umm, Mr. X took us to the library, which is good because we haven't went [sic] in the library in ages.*

Karen: *Fantastic. Thank you.*

(Several students share about some of the positive engagements they have had with Mr. X, including learning new songs)

Karen: *Okay, thank you [class name] for sharing. Sounds like things have been going well. But now, I'd like to give you a chance to have a think about what hasn't been going so well because of the changes in our classroom, and what we might need to brainstorm a solution to so we can improve it. So, this is now the opposite of what can we can make better.*

Student 3: *Umm our listening…*

Karen: *Listening in general? Or when Mr. X is teaching the class?*

Student 3: *Umm both.*

Karen: *Okay, okay. Yup, that is true. And we've got our Code of Cooperation (points to a document hung on the wall). Number 1! Because I think it's the most important because I can't teach and you can't learn if we don't listen. Okay? Really important. Thanks, [student name].*

(Several students share concerns, including maintaining their reading goals, listening better and following the rules)

(Karen, Observation 1)

5.2.3.2. Respond to students' needs

Additionally, Karen uses a responsive approach to her implementation of SEL, focusing on students' individual and collective needs. In this way, she acknowledges students' social and emotional needs and authenticates their concerns as they arise, often through individual check-ins or ad hoc whole-class discussions. When asked in our first interview what she thinks contributes the most benefit to students' positive social and emotional development, Karen responds: "I think understanding children, I suppose taking the time to try and understand where they are coming from and what this behaviour might be reflecting" (Int. 1, p. 15). For instance, she elaborates on an interaction with a student during her first lesson observation:

> So, X had a sore chest … and I just acknowledged it really briefly … after his reading, he told me again about the sore chest and it was then that I said … tell me about it, and I actually listened properly and I asked him questions … I asked him questions not so much because I wanted to know, but because I wanted him to feel like I was taking an interest and caring about it. (VSRD 1, p. 2)

Further, Karen provides intentional support to students to assist with their needs, including teacher-guided instruction (1-to-1, small group) and emotional coaching. She explains how she is practising her emotional coaching training with a select group of students who regularly have "friendship issues":

> I say: "Alright take five minutes just to settle down" and they go and settle down on the couch at the back of the classroom, and once the class is working I try and check in with them … But rather than me rushing in problem-solving or getting cranky … I try to unpack it a little bit—"I can see you are upset" … and then guiding them to "Well, what can we do to fix it? What do you think needs to be done? How could we do that?" (Int. 2, p. 4)

Karen also emphasises the importance of relating SEL content to students by incorporating their interests and inviting their input:

> One way would be to ask students to share things, give them opportunities to share. So, make links. So, if we read a book about something then maybe the next day ask: "Well, did anyone go home and do this? Or did you do this on the playground?" And acknowledge that. (Int. 2, p. 16)

Karen also provides the following example of how she relates SEL concepts to students' needs and interests through storytelling:

> I decided to do a bit of a circle time today because yesterday was not a good day; lots of the class were just not listening! … So, I asked them to sit in a circle and to close their eyes … And I told them a story, a made up story, about a football team that had 25 players and a coach, which was obviously a symbol for our class and me and how the football team worked together from the beginning of the year and it was on the top of the table … And then you know some players decided that they didn't need to follow the coach's direction or work together as a team and they decided just to start doing what they liked as individuals … and the team fell apart and the coach was frustrated and they were losing games … And they said: "Is that true?" … And I said: "It wasn't true, it was actually a little story about our class and I want you to have a think how could that story be about our class?"… They all put up their hand and they were sharing about how bits related to our class and then I said: "Okay, well, what lessons can we learn from it and how can we improve our behaviour?" And they were great; they had lots of good ideas! (Int. 2, p. 16)

5.2.3.3. Create a positive classroom environment

Karen's third approach to implementing SEL is to create and maintain a positive classroom environment. She particularly emphasises the importance of building connections and relationships with students. When asked to describe how she connects with her students, she explains she enjoys "making jokes with them" (Int. 1, p. 12) and shares stories about her pets and her family. She also finds "opportunities to chat with them to find out about their interests, their personal lives" (Int. 1, p. 11). Karen prioritises recognising students' strengths, noting she acknowledges when students demonstrate positive, prosocial behaviours concerning the school values and PBL expectations. She confirms: "I acknowledge that when I see it" (Int. 2, p. 7). Karen also emphasises the value of establishing classroom rules, expectations and routines to promote a positive learning environment:

> I think setting expectations and routines up are really important. So, for example, class expectations and explaining why we need them.… that frees me up I suppose to be able to meet students' individual needs in the class. (Int. 1, p. 13)

When asked how her classroom expectations are created, Karen explains:

> We talked a lot about what would our classroom look like if everybody was being a successful learner and we all felt that we belonged to the classroom, and then we distilled that down into some rules basically. I find that just having those really simple rules helps. (Int. 1, p. 13)

Likewise, she notes that embedding "clear procedures" (Int. 2, p. 1) can support students' independent learning by developing their self-management skills. Moreover, she shares: "I think it [routine] gives the children clarity and certainty about what the expectations are in terms of work and flowing on to that behaviour" (Int. 2, p. 1). In the second interview, Karen describes her usual morning routine:

> I usually start with the bell task … they grab a whiteboard and a texta, they sit down and they know that they are going to start working … It took quite a while to get them into the routine … but once we got that established, you know, I think they just know what to do and what to expect. It works really well in the mornings. (Int. 2, p. 1)

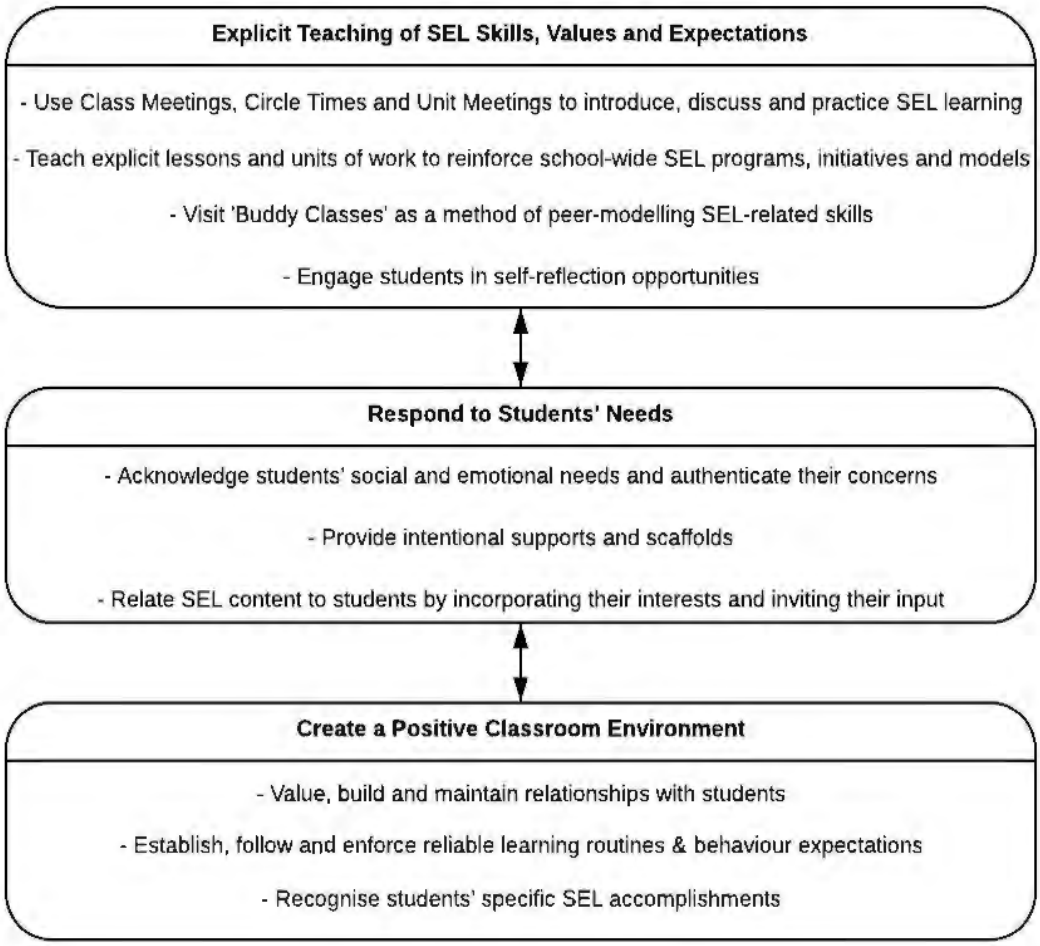
Karen was also observed to use additional routines to embed SEL-related skills, including weekly circle time discussions and daily "read-to-self" (independent reading) sessions.

Figure 5.4 provides an overview of the approaches Karen indicated and was observed to use in her teaching of SEL. Karen implements SEL in her classroom by explicitly teaching SEL-related skills, values and expectations; responding to students' needs and interests; and

establishing a positive classroom environment characterised by strong teacher–student relationships, clear behaviour expectations and reliable learning routines. These approaches are strongly interconnected and reflective of her decision-making processes, as mentioned in Section 5.5.2.

Figure 5.4

Karen's Approaches to SEL Implementation



5.2.4. RQ 4: What factors promote or impede Karen's implementation of SEL?

5.2.4.1. Promoting factors

Two main factors positively support Karen's implementation of SEL: her own SEC and HPS's whole-school approach to SEL (see Figure 5.5). Concerning her own SEC, Karen notes the

importance of “being consistent and fair” (Int. 1, p. 18), particularly in maintaining a positive learning environment and positive relationships with her students:

> I think the analogy that I find helpful is the umpire or the referee, that I’m just dishing out the consequences. I am following the rules. It’s not personal … it’s sometimes hard to do that, especially if you’re a bit cranky about what’s happened, but remaining impersonal about behaviour that has broken the rules, I suppose, is useful because it doesn't damage the relationship. (Int. 1, p. 18)

Additionally, she explains she has “an awareness, a really strong awareness that yelling and getting cranky with them will damage my relationship with the students and I don’t want to do that” (VSRD 2, p. 11). In this way, Karen demonstrates a keen sense of self-awareness and self-management.

An additional indicator of her SEC arises when discussing some distracting student behaviours presented during her second lesson observation: “I do feel frustrated, but I try to not show it. I try and remind them of the Code of Cooperation and not interrupt the lesson too much myself” (VSRD 2, p. 10). She is also “never afraid to say sorry” (Int. 2, p. 15), thus modelling important relationship skills for her students. Karen also notes “the importance of reflection and continual learning and improvement” (Int. 1, p. 18) to strengthen her teaching and address her students’ needs. She states:

> Over the years I’ve spent a lot of time reflecting, googling, reading, trying to find ideas I suppose for meeting students’ individual needs and helping them develop their social-emotional skills. (Int. 1, p. 14)

When further prompted to discuss the role of self-reflection in her practice, Karen confirms:

> It is very important to me. I guess just because I think I am far from perfect and I need to improve and I am looking for ways to do that because I want the students to do really well and I also want my days to be happy and smooth. I want to enjoy my teaching and some days I do and some days I don't. (Int. 2, p. 18)

Karen’s ability to identify and manage her emotions and reflect on her teaching practice supports her implementation of SEL in the classroom.

As an additional promoting factor to her teaching of SEL, Karen emphasises the positive influence of her school’s shared philosophy and approach to student wellbeing. When asked what she needs to feel successful in this area of her practice, she highlights the school’s integrated approach to SEL: “I think having that shared philosophy that the school has, and the proactive approach that we do have towards student wellbeing is helpful” (Int. 1, p. 13).

Namely, she references the school's creation of a central, purpose-built Wellbeing Space on campus to handle students' behaviour issues and wellbeing needs:

> Going back a few years we always had a teacher on call for dealing with behaviour issues, but I suppose it was a reactionary approach … So, two years ago say they introduced the Wellbeing Space, which has several jobs. It is a safe place where children can go at playtime if they just want a quiet place to play, or a supervised place to play where there will be … people who will talk with them, interact with them, help them play.… It is always open.… It also provides a lot of help and resources for parents. It can be a safe drop off place if the child is upset and not coming to class; they can be dropped off at the Wellbeing Space. One of the teachers gives wellbeing classes to the classes across the school. (Int. 1, p.7)

In this way, Karen suggests that by establishing the Wellbeing Space, the school can facilitate "a more consistent and preventative approach across the school where students would see a visual, fair, consistent approach" (Int. 1, p. 8). She further confirms, "that was the reason we introduced PBL as well. PBL is all about consistency; the same message from all the teachers" (Int. 1, p. 8). Karen also recounts how the school's greater integration of SEL-related initiatives, such as scheduling three-way interviews to discuss students' learning progress, has led to increased parent engagement within the school community:

> Obviously, it is great to have parents on board. I do try and develop a positive relationship with parents. We've just had our three-way interviews a couple of weeks ago so that's always a good opportunity. (Int. 1, p. 13)

Further, in line with the school's shared philosophy, Karen affirms the assistance she has received from the school staff and leadership in supporting students' SEL learning and wellbeing. To elaborate this point, she states:

> I think having the support of executive is really, really important. Not so much this year but in previous years I have had challenging situations, behaviour situations, and knowing that there was someone else I could get advice from or if I needed support with a meeting with a parent, anything like that, having support of executive is very important. (Int. 1, p. 13)

An additional school-wide support Karen mentions is her attendance at professional training in SEL-related areas (i.e., circle time, emotional coaching). She explains how staff are invited to contribute to the school's selection of such training:

> We've [school teaching staff] identified areas that we need to improve, like we had a circle time PL [professional learning] and that was a staff identified need. So, we do matrixes every year to say what we know really well, what we think we could teach others and what we would like to learn more about and that informs PL for the year. (Int. 1, p. 14)

Due to several school-wide supports, Karen confirms, “we don't feel that we are alone” (Int. 1, p. 16).

5.2.4.2. Impeding factors

Karen’s implementation of SEL is impeded by two main factors: time and the regular challenges to teaching. She mentions that classroom time is limited, and she often feels pressure to “get on to the next part of the lesson” (VSRD 2, p. 11). For example, when asked how she facilitates problem-solving with her students, Karen concedes:

> Well, it is quite tricky because you are limited by time in the classroom. Sometimes we talk about it at a class level in circle time, or I have ad hoc class meetings. I probably should have them more regularly, but just due to time constraints I tend to have them when there is a problem that is affecting the majority of the class (Int. 2, p. 4)

Also, she reveals how well-intentioned school SEL initiatives, such as the Student Representative Council (SRC) meetings, can sometimes fall by the wayside because of school staff being “time poor’”:

> The school hasn’t really been having the SRC meetings lately because of, I think just staffing pressure, staffing issues. The people who are supposed to run the meetings in the Wellbeing Space have just been too busy. (Int. 2, p. 11)

Karen notes that the time required to implement new SEL initiatives such as PBL can be lengthy. For instance:

> We’ve slowly begun introducing it [PBL] into the classrooms, but it’s been very slow. It’s something that we’re undertaking with the Directorate’s PBL Team … they’ve said that we’re pretty much ready to formally introduce it into the classrooms … but there’s probably a bit more training we need to do. (VSRD 2, p. 5)

In this way, Karen highlights the time and dedication it takes to transition to a whole-school, proactive SEL approach.

In addition to time impositions, Karen discusses various miscellaneous challenges that occasionally impede her implementation of SEL. Most prominently, she notes how regular student interruptions can veer her instruction off course or result in her needing to take time to address the issues presented. For example, when reflecting on her first lesson observation, Karen notes:

> One of the challenges that I noticed was that lots of students wanted to tell me things … And I think I only gave them the minimum time that I thought would

> satisfy them before moving on because I've got those other 24 kids. Like, if I'm focusing on one person, the other 24 are not being watched I suppose. And it's not necessarily meeting their needs. (VSRD 1, p. 2)

Karen also raised the issue of students transitioning from the playground into the classroom as a challenge to her maintaining classroom learning routines. For instance:

> It [the "bell task"] is less effective after lunchtime and recess because I think they are all full of what's been happening at playtime, and usually there are some children who have had difficulties at playtime. (Int. 2, p. 1)

Noting another challenge to her SEL implementation, Karen suggests it can sometimes be difficult to find appropriate SEL resources for a specific age group. For example, she explains her difficulty preparing for her second lesson observation: "I tried googling Bounce Back videos, and there were hardly any! … and it was hard to find some that were for the right age group" (VSRD 2, p. 8). Finally, Karen notes students' lack of SEL transfer as a "continual struggle" (Int. 2, p. 12) and describes how it can cause her frustration. More specifically, she suggests the need for contextualised SEL learning:

> I think that sometimes when we teach it [SEL], we teach a lesson on it, it is a little bit not real … I think it's difficult for the children to take that lesson and integrate it into their daily life.… So, I think that that is an ongoing challenge and I find that those more teachable moments or talking about things in context as they arise or perhaps in a classroom meeting because it's a problem in the class is more effective. (Int. 1, p. 17)

Karen thus describes her teaching of SEL as a continuous cycle of "re-teaching and supporting and reminding" (Int. 2, p. 12).

Figure 5.5 synthesises the factors Karen's data indicate influence her teaching of SEL. Promoting factors include her own SEC and her school's collective approach to SEL. Conversely, various time pressures and challenges to teaching impede her SEL implementation.

Figure 5.5

Promoting and Impeding Factors on Karen's SEL Implementation

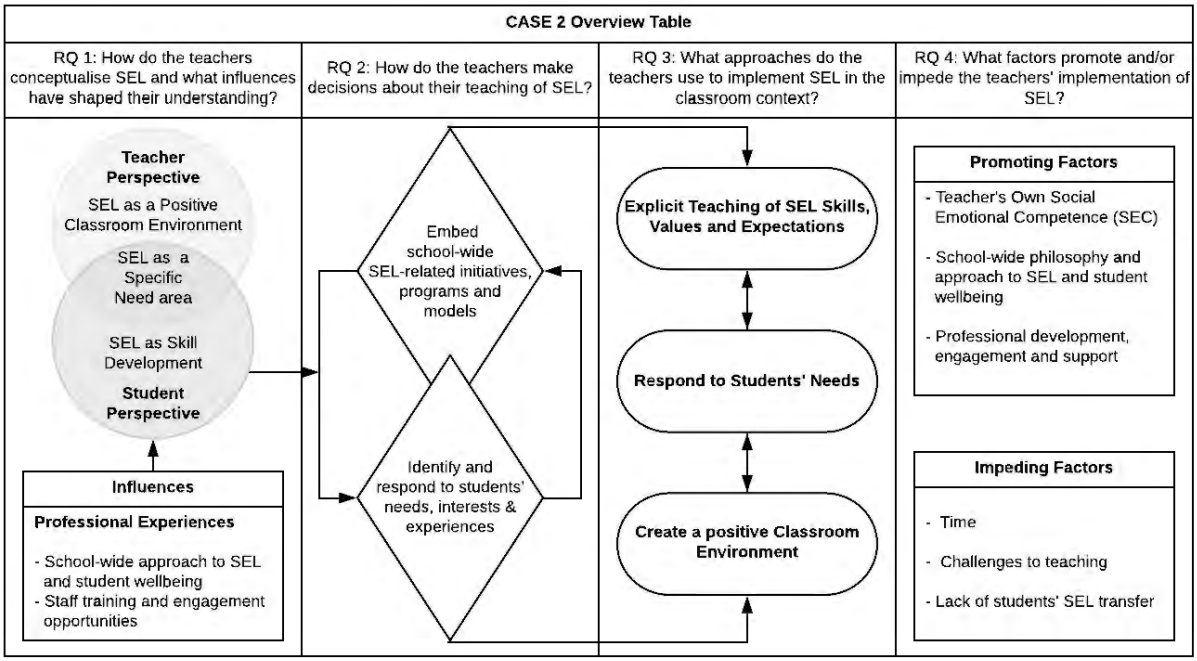
Promoting Factors	Impeding Factors
- Teacher's Own Social Emotional Competence (SEC) - Self-awareness, self-management and ongoing reflection on practice **- School-wide philosophy and approach to SEL and student wellbeing** - School shift to a preventative, proactive approach - Greater integration of SEL-related initiatives - Increased parent engagement/partnership **- Professional development, engagement and support** - Regular staff updates, input and SEL-related trainings - Supportive school staff and leadership	**- Time** - Classroom time is limited; teacher pressure to move along with planned lessons - School staff as time poor - Time and training required to implement new SEL initiatives (i.e. school transition to PBL) **- Challenges to teaching** - Regular interruptions from students (i.e. lack of self-management skills, late arrivals to class, challenging behaviours) - Difficult transitions from playground into classroom - Finding suitable SEL resources for age **- Lack of students' SEL transfer** - Need for contextualised learning opportunities

5.3. Summary of Case Findings

The collated case findings of research interactions with Karen are presented in Figure 5.6. Overall, Karen conceptualises SEL as a way to meet students' needs by creating a positive classroom environment and by supporting their social and emotional skill development. As a result of her school's recent shift to a whole-school approach to SEL, she has engaged professionally with several SEL-related programs and models and has also received some effective SEL training. As demonstrated throughout the preceding case report examples, these professional experiences have influenced her understanding and teaching of SEL. When implementing SEL in the classroom, Karen uses explicit instruction of SEL skills and values with her students' needs. She also prioritises key elements of a positive classroom environment, including teacher–student relationships and clear and consistent routines and expectations. While time restrictions and other general classroom challenges can sometimes restrict her teaching in this area, Karen's SEL teaching is supported by her own SEC and her school's integrated approach to SEL.

Figure 5.6

Summary of Karen's Case Findings



5.4. On Reflection

Participating in this study raised several professional considerations for Karen about her SEL teaching. She confirms during our last VSRD session: "The questions you have asked me have prompted me to think more deeply about the way that I'm planning and teaching and identifying gaps and areas for improvement" (VSRD 2, p. 16). For example, Karen describes how the process of reviewing her lesson footage provided a sort of mirror to her practice and gave her "the opportunity to reflect about how I might appear to the students—how I'm coming across, even though I am not meaning to" (VSRD 1, p. 13).

During our first VSRD session, Karen describes her demeanour throughout the lesson as "firm and serious" (VSRD 1, p. 8). Further to her physical disposition, she reflects on her engagement with students:

> It [watching the lesson observation] has highlighted to me that I need to think more deeply about how to meet their social and emotional needs, particularly when they all want to tell me things, which might be completely irrelevant to what we are trying to achieve in the classroom at that moment … How I can listen to that and appear fully engaged? Like, I want to be fully engaged, but it's just so tricky … It tends to happen in transition times—I noticed also from the video—when we stand up to move from one thing to the other, that's when they see their opportunity. (VSRD 1, p. 13)

By reviewing her lesson footage, Karen could also identify specific patterns of student behaviour for future consideration in her teaching. As another example, she notes how the video captured student behaviours "that I didn't know were happening. For example, there were a couple of students writing on the whiteboard here, but I didn't really realise at the time" (VSRD 2, p. 1). In this way, the video served as a sort of "third eye" within the classroom environment.

Finally, Karen suggests reviewing and reflecting on her SEL practice has "highlighted the importance of trying to integrate it [SEL] into everyday teaching and not just have a standalone lesson every now and again" (VSRD 2, p. 13). She asserts, "we can't just be focused on teaching maths and English … we need to be teaching this in as many ways as we can—explicitly in a formal lesson and also as issues arise" (VSRD 2, p. 13). She elaborates:

> So, we have been having the "Meet and Greet" sessions once a week but that's probably not enough. And as I said, it's probably more about explaining behaviours rather than proactively showing how to deal with them and giving them a practice of thinking through how they could deal with them.… And it just shows me they need lots more—lots more practice and guidance. And you asked me before who has social and emotional needs, well basically the same kids who had them at the beginning of the year.… It just shows that they still need help, and it still is a really important focus area. (VSRD 2, p. 13)

Overall, Karen notes how involvement in this study has prompted her to think more deeply about herself, her students and her implementation of SEL as a critical learning area.

Chapter 6: Case Report 3—Celeste

6.1. Preface

The following case report details the SEL knowledge and pedagogy of Celeste (she/her/hers), a primary (K–6) Japanese language teacher. Although presented in the same format as the preceding two cases, the content of this case is somewhat different in that Celeste was less direct in her responses and explanations regarding her professional SEL understanding and practices. As the cited transcript quotations and examples often demonstrate, Celeste's interview and reflection responses mostly describe her general approach to teaching Japanese rather than her specific engagement with SEL content and pedagogy. Thus, many of Celeste's views of SEL appear wedded to her general teaching philosophy and stem from her accumulated life and teaching experience. For example, during our interviews and reflections, Celeste tried hard to explain how she made decisions about SEL based primarily on her intuition, feelings and personal values.

To clarify some of the indirect and implicit meanings of Celeste's described understanding and implementation of SEL, I have selectively added bracketed words or phrases within many of her quotations. These additions have been included based on follow-up discussions about the accuracy and meaning of her transcripts. Also, I have used ellipses to signal the deletion of repeated or unrelated phrases within a quotation. Further, in an effort to extract and illustrate Celeste's SEL knowledge and practices beyond her verbal responses, I have included additional practice examples within this case. These additional vignettes are supported by Celeste's observational data and my researcher notes from our interviews, observations and reflections. I hope these amendments will further elucidate Celeste's embedded SEL knowledge and pedagogy.

6.2. Participant Profile

As a mature teacher and mum to two adult children, Celeste is a New Zealand-trained primary school teacher and Japanese language specialist. With over 40 years of international teaching experience across primary school, high school and adult education settings, she is the most experienced teacher among the participants. After relocating from interstate, Celeste began

working as a Japanese language teacher at Woodlands Primary School (WPS). She has worked at the school for seven years, teaching all students from Kindergarten to Year 6. WPS has a population of around 540 students, with 58% identifying as having a language background other than English and 4% identifying as Indigenous. Celeste's observations and reflections were based on one Kindergarten class of 19 students, which included one student who was new to the school and classified as speaking English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D), and another with undiagnosed learning needs who was not on an ILP.

6.3. Overview of Findings

6.3.1. RQ 1: How does Celeste conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped her understanding of this learning area?

6.3.1.1. Conceptualisations of SEL

Two main themes summarise Celeste's conceptualisations of SEL: establishing a safe learning environment and SEL as encouraging positive teacher–student relationships. The teacher's influence is at the core of these two themes (see Figure 6.1). In our first interview, I asked Celeste to define what SEL means to her:

> I think it is allowing children to feel safe. So, children who feel safe work well [together] and there's a lot of cooperation and kindness in the classroom, and there's a better learning environment. So, creating that space is number one (Int. 1, p. 4).

When elaborating on her notions of a positive learning environment, Celeste explains "a learning space should be fun and clean and engaging" (Int. 1, p. 9) and states, "sometimes, for whatever reason, kids, some kids, don't feel they [can] achieve in the classroom, but when they come here, they can achieve in something" (Int. 1, p. 11). As such, she stresses the importance of supporting students' "willingness" or "confidence" (Int. 2, p. 3) to share their ideas, adding "a lot of students are not very confident in thinking that their ideas are okay" (Int. 2, p. 3).

Additionally, she notes how a safe environment based on "trust" (VSRD 2, p. 22) can "facilitate learning" (Int. 2, p. 14), suggesting "if you trust someone, then you are going to be engaged [in learning], aren't you?" (VSRD 2, p. 22) and "when you have engagement, you don't have distraction" (Int. 2, p. 14). In our second interview, Celeste highlights her specific role in promoting a positive environment for students. She explains "the safe learning environment is that I establish what *I* want before they enter my classroom" (Int. 2, p. 2). Celeste's notions of

safety and trust are central to her conceptualisation of SEL as a safe learning environment for students.

To establish a safe learning environment, Celeste emphasises building positive teacher–student relationships, which are characterised by value, care and respect. She confirms, “I’m going to make sure that as an educator every child that comes into my classroom, that means every child, knows that I value them” (Int. 1, p. 6), and adds, “I can’t even say goodbye to a child because I have them each year. So, I cannot lose a child” (Int. 2, p. 7). In this way, Celeste explains how positive and enduring relationships are particularly crucial in her specialist language teacher role: “We [specialist teachers] have to deal with the children, the students, every year.… There’s not an end. So, we are all about relationships” (VSRD 2, p. 8).

Accordingly, Celeste describes how she endeavours to “think of each person as they come through my door” (VSRD 1, p. 1) and places importance on demonstrating authentic concern and “a lot of respect” for students (VSRD 2, p. 9). This can include Celeste engaging in physical and verbal exchanges with students in and out of the classroom. For example, during our second interview, Celeste describes how she facilitates regular interactions with students to check in and build relationships:

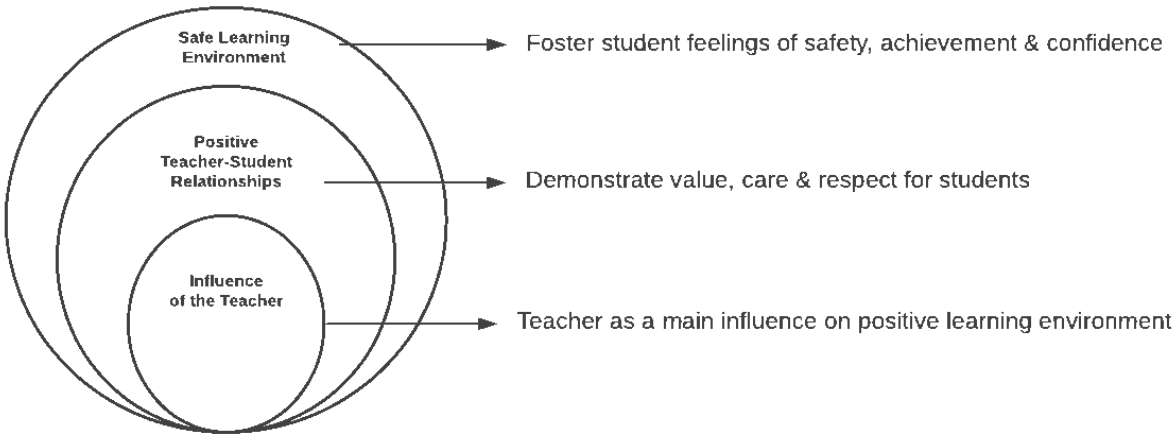
> A lot of things happen for me in the corridors … through the whole week. I’ll just make contact with one kid who is really disruptive, and I will make a point of saying, “Hi, how are you today? Did you have a good weekend?” or [I’ll say] “I love that smile,” or something that’s really personable and makes it very personal. Or I’ll go out of my way to try and find that child, even if they are sitting in detention in the library. I will walk into the library, and I’ll say “Hi”—knowing that he is on detention, this particular child—[I’ll say] “Hi, how are you? Ohh that’s good writing!” (Int. 2, p. 7)

She states, “If I have kids that really know that I care about them, then I can almost teach them anything. Anything!” (Int. 2, p. 11).

As shown in Figure 6.1, Celeste was found to conceptualise SEL as creating a safe learning environment characterised by feelings of trust and student engagement. As reported, she supports a safe learning environment by ensuring positive teacher–student relationships. In particular, she stresses her teacher role and influences in authentically caring for students and intentionally valuing them as individuals.

Figure 6.1

Celeste's Conceptualisations of SEL



6.3.1.2. Influences on SEL understanding

The main identifiable influences on Celeste's understanding of SEL include her lived experiences and personal growth and development (see Figure 6.2). When asked in our first interview about the major influences on her teaching practice and her understanding of SEL, Celeste responded by sharing her experience of becoming a mother and dealing with her son's schooling experience:

> I think my teaching began to expand after I had my own children, and people used to say that to me. And I had a lot more empathy and patience with students who were at the top end or the bottom end [socially and academically] because my own son was misunderstood all through his school life, and it used to break my heart … So, it was from my own experience of, you know, meeting with a teacher and the teacher almost rolling their eyes "oh, here she comes again." [For me as a teacher it was] realising that all that [my] kid needed was someone who believed in him, someone that wasn't on his case and was kind to him; someone that facilitated [his] learning and created an environment where he could feel that difference didn't matter, [instead] it was valued. And I'm not saying I do it [create this environment for students] beautifully every time, but I'm very aware of the students that struggle. (Int. 1, p. 6)

Celeste also recounts that she never wanted to become a teacher because she did not enjoy primary school and felt it "devalued" her as a child (Int. 1, p. 16). However, there was one teacher who positively influenced her teaching approach:

> I think my teaching is modelled on the one teacher in my life that I loved, I adored, [and who] changed my life. She was my high school teacher … and if I hadn't had that teacher, I would have hated school. She just saw me as a human being, and I valued that so much. (Int. 1, p. 15)

In addition to these lived experiences, Celeste describes how her ongoing commitment to personal growth and development has influenced her teaching. Specifically, she identifies her cultivation of a professional mindset or "state of preparedness" as central to her professional teaching routines:

> Something that really influenced my teaching is [what I call] "state of preparedness." So, for me as an educator [it] is being prepared for my classroom [and] for the students. I know exactly what I am going to teach; however, it doesn't mean to say that it actually happens. But that "state of preparedness" for me as an educator is of prime importance in creating a positive learning environment. (Int. 1, p. 5)

When asked to elaborate, Celeste describes the influence of her own self-awareness and self-management skills, including self-questioning and intention setting. As she shares:

> That state of preparedness: so [that is] when—before I go and greet my students—[I consider]—How am I? How present am I? Will I have my best behaviour? Will I be the best version of myself in the classroom? And they are pretty high standards [I set for myself], and I don't often talk about them, but that's how I believe we should be as educators. I really feel that [my state of preparedness is] the greatest motivator for me as an educator; every day when I come to school, [I prepare] to be the best version of who I am. It is not to single out any child, it is to include children … [it is] to catch someone that I can praise [and to] tell them they're all beautiful and then send them on their way. (VSRD 2, p. 17)

For Celeste, "it is simple. It is just preparing my heart and my mind and my smile" (Int. 2, p. 9).

To facilitate this state of preparedness and manage the ongoing stressors associated with teaching, Celeste explains she tries "to be a better educator every year" (Int. 1, p. 7). She does this by committing to regular self-reflection: "Being impatient is not on and being reflective continually is on, and [so is] being kind—kind to myself and kind to the students" (Int. 2, p. 5). In this way, she describes how she engages in regular meditation and self-reflection practices to facilitate her "inner-most attitude" (Int. 2, p. 10), or the key qualities she deems necessary to support positive teaching and learning interactions:

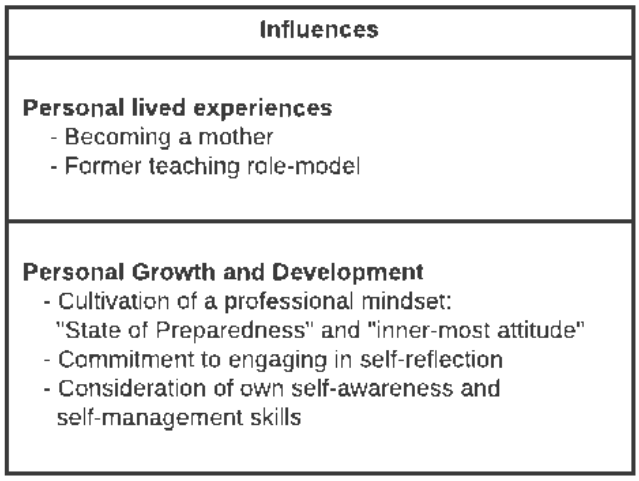
> I meditate every morning, and I think spiritually. I want to be the best person for my husband, my children, my friends, and I have a beautiful life as a result. I've had to work hard at creating that space for me to grow. It [my inner-most attitude] is all about my growth as an educator. I can have the [knowledge of Japanese] content, but I mean I'd never be able to deliver it because [without attention to my inner-most attitude], I'd lose all these kids. So, I consider what is it that makes someone want to be with someone? They've [the students] got to have certain qualities that inspire them … and [those qualities are related to] the teacher's inner-most attitude. And it is the inner-most attitude that I carry with me. (Int. 2, p. 10)

To cultivate her “inner-most attitude,” Celeste again considers her self-awareness and self-management skills by asking: “What are the values I’m going to bring to a classroom? Am I going to yell and scream? Am I going to belittle people? No way, these are all the negatives, and I am quite capable of doing that, but I choose actively not to” (Int. 2, p. 10).

Figure 6.2 summarises the main influences on Celeste’s conceptualisation of SEL. As described, these include her own lived experiences of becoming a mother and her own schooling history. Additionally, Celeste’s ongoing commitment to personal growth and development critically influences her teaching. Specifically, these include her engagement in meditation and self-reflection practices, which she believes support her in developing the “state of preparedness” and “inner-most attitude” required to promote a safe learning environment for students.

Figure 6.2

Influences on Celeste’s Conceptualisation of SEL



6.3.2. RQ 2: How does Celeste make decisions about her teaching of SEL?

6.3.2.1. Preface

When asked to describe her decision-making and planning processes for teaching SEL, Celeste’s answers illuminated her general thinking about her teaching of Japanese content. This contrasts with a more specific description of how she implements SEL-related content and skill instruction. This is not to say Celeste does not consider or address SEL content or practices

within her lessons. Her observational data suggest her inclusion of SEL is primarily intuitive, flexible and relation-based, thus more akin to responsive, in-action decision-making. Accordingly, I have divided the following section into two parts: Part A, Celeste's intentional decision-making about her teaching of Japanese, as supported by her interview data; and Part B, Celeste's responsive, in-action decision-making regarding SEL as supported by her lesson observations and reflections.

6.3.2.2. Part A: Celeste's intentional decision-making about her teaching of Japanese

Celeste plans her teaching according to a specific lesson "formula" for each of her K–6 Japanese lessons. In doing so, she follows an intentional lesson structure that includes establishing "success criteria" (Int. 1, p. 7) and using a range of learning activities to encourage student engagement and learning. When asked to share how she plans and makes decisions about teaching, Celeste responds: "I had to cultivate a different way of teaching to a classroom teacher who's got the whole day [to teach content]. I only have a very short time to make an impact and for them [students] to want to learn" (VSRD 1, p. 8). Consequently, she describes that her "lessons are very short and compact" so "there is a sense of achievement when they [the students] leave.… There is always a purpose" (Int. 1, p. 11).

Celeste sets the purpose of each lesson by establishing "success criteria" for her students: "It's sort of like 'by the end of this [lesson] you will be able to [achieve this]', and if they can't [then] it doesn't matter—we just continue to pick up the pieces" (Int. 1, p. 7). Additionally, she shares, "I'm just aware that if I stay too long on a certain activity, I can lose them. So, then it gets quick—it has to be quick and meaningful, and action based" (VSRD 1, p. 6). In this way, she describes, "I had to create a [lesson] formula that works for me, and that [formula] is: we engage on the mat, we talk, I share, and we have success criteria" (Int. 1, p. 7). When asked how she has developed this teaching "formula," Celeste responds:

> Well, [I have developed this formula] because we only have 40 minutes. So, if you are going to make 40 minutes mean something [to students I must consider] what is going to be their take-away? Now, if you take the three aspects of learning; auditory, visual and kinaesthetic [then] you've got to actually address all three because you've got that much variety in your classroom. (Int. 2, p. 9)

As such, Celeste says she must be "really clever" in using her instructional time (Int. 1, p. 9).

Celeste describes how she plans and implements multiple and diverse learning engagements to engage and cater to her range of learners. In her words, "not every child is going to understand

a language orally but [by] using three distinct ways of teaching [I can] really help every child [to] participate" (Int. 1, p. 5). When prompted to elaborate on these three diverse ways of teaching, Celeste shares:

> Okay, so, auditory; [that is] they listen [to the language], but I always say to them that I am not a naturally good listener of language and so you need to be able to write [which is] kinaesthetic learning. And the other [way of learning] is visual, [so] that's why I have lots of prompts up on here [the classroom walls], for example. And I think [it is important] to use colour [but] not [to] overstimulate the child, but I definitely have prompts so that if I'm saying a word I can actually go and point to it. So, the child can hear it [a word], if they can't hear it, they can see it and then I get them to go and do [write] it. (Int. 1, p. 5)

When asked how she has come to understand the different ways students learn, she responds: "Just observing student engagement [and] being aware that every child learns differently … it's really my own awareness that I try to cultivate" (Int. 1, p. 5). For example, Celeste explains, "what I am realising with my little ones is that we need to play and have fun more than show work in a folder" (Int. 2, p. 1), which has led her to incorporate movement, music, singing and games into her lessons with students (Int. 1, p. 7). During the second interview, Celeste shares how she incorporates these elements into her lessons as a way to have fun while engaging and assessing students' learning:

> I sit on the floor, on my rug, and I play ball games. I play word games. I play hide and seek in the classroom.… I play with them and [we] have fun and laugh and carry on, but [at the same time] I also have my workbook open … So, I am having fun, but I have the [success] criteria that I'm looking for. It's a very quick assessment … while we are all laughing and having fun. (Int. 2, p. 1)

Celeste includes a range of learning activities to teach Japanese content. The activity overview of her first lesson observation illustrates this (see Observational Vignette 6.1).

Observational Vignette 6.1: Activity overview of Celeste's first lesson observation

Opening Greetings: *Students stand and say formal Japanese "greetings" then sit to signal the start of the lesson.*

Name Song: *Celeste leads students in a call and respond song to learn how to introduce themselves and to say their names in Japanese.*

Number/Counting Practice*: Students form a circle. With Celeste as a model, students orally practice their Japanese counting to 10, putting down one finger, in order, as they say the Japanese numbers. Students repeat the activity, counting to 15.*

Circle Game: *Celeste lays out large Japanese number posters on the floor and brings out a bag of stuffed toys. One at a time, Celeste says a number and calls on a student to stand and place a stuffed toy on the corresponding number poster. Nearly all students have a turn to match a toy to a number.*

Number Song (using the guitar): *Celeste leads students in a number song using both hand and body movements.*

Writing Activity (Direct Instruction): *Celeste shows students how to write the numbers 1–5 in Japanese, using the correct order of strokes. She then introduces the formal writing task and models each step of the assigned activity.*

Writing Activity (Partner work): *Students work in pairs, selecting their own partners, and take turns writing the Japanese numbers 1 to 5 on a shared whiteboard. Once they have finished, they work together to draw a "number caterpillar" on their whiteboard.*

Pack-Up & Line Up: *Students show their work to Celeste before erasing their boards and packing them away. As Celeste counts down from 10 to signal the end of the lesson, students line up at the door ready to exit.*

Closing Greetings: *Students say formal Japanese "greetings" to signal the end of the lesson.*

6.3.2.3. Part B: Celeste's responsive, in-action decision-making regarding SEL

When observing Celeste's lessons, her focus on teaching Japanese content and use of an intentional lesson "formula" is clear and practised. Throughout each of her lessons, she also shows responsive, in-action decision-making regarding supporting students' SEL development. For example, on several occasions during both lesson observations, Celeste accommodates and responds to students' academic and social needs while following her lesson formula. These unplanned and spontaneous exchanges highlight Celeste's embedded and responsive approach to attending to students' varied academic, social and emotional needs.

For instance, while students were playing a group game during her first lesson observation, one student became upset when not offered a turn. Celeste's response to this event is presented in Observational Vignette 6.2. Celeste uses the situation as an opportunity to discuss the topic of fairness briefly and to exemplify appropriate ways the children could respond when not given a turn. She also allows the affected student to self-reflect on their behaviour and a choice to re-integrate into the game. She then acknowledges the student's altered decision-making with

verbal and non-verbal positive reinforcement. When asked to reflect on this encounter, Celeste recounts:

> For some reason, I didn't see him [when he put his hand up for a turn], but he does that [gets upset] quite a lot in lessons. He's quite demanding, and he actually throws himself on the floor if things don't go his way. So, I didn't want to pander to him, but I wanted to reward him when I invited him to return to the circle. (VSRD 1, p. 1)

In this reply, Celeste highlights her in-action decision-making in response to the child's emotional reaction by acknowledging how she balanced her knowledge of the student and his behavioural needs with her commitment to maintaining an inclusive classroom environment.

Observation Vignette 6.2: Example of Celeste's in-action response to an upset student

Celeste transitions students from playing a number circle game to playing a song on the guitar. As she turns to get her guitar, a student, X, leaves the circle, kneels down with his head to the ground and begins to cry.

Celeste [to other students]*: What happened?*

Student 1: *He wanted a turn.*

Celeste: *Ahh, okay, okay. But we're going to—[says student's name]—we are going to do another game, but perhaps not this game, but when we play, it's really important to know that sometimes you just don't get a turn. And you might feel sad, you might feel really sad…*

Student 1: *[raises hand]*

Celeste: *Yeah?*

Student 1: *I know! Because everyone has a turn.*

Celeste: *[shakes her head, signalling "no"] But who missed out, today? Who missed out?*

Student 2: *[raises hand to signal she didn't get a turn]*

Celeste [to Student 2]: *But did you cry?*

Student 2: *[shakes head to say "no"]*

Celeste: *No, okay, so there's a good lesson. [Begins to play the guitar to signal the start of a new activity. Students sing the number song together]. Can I have it a bit louder? Do you think you can do it a bit louder?*

Students: *Yeahhh!*

Celeste*:* *And then I might, I might—if X comes back to the mat—he might be my special person that I ask to pick up alllll the toys. So, he has a double turn! But I have to think, do I ask him…*

Before Celeste can finish her sentence, X crawls quickly back to the mat and re-joins the circle.

Celeste: *Ohhh, okay! [Smiles at X. Several of the other children in the circle also smile at him]. Let me see you all singing a bit louder. [Said to X directly: good boy!]*

Students sing two more songs together, with Celeste playing the guitar.

Celeste: *Okay, X, thank you for joining us again. Okay, I'm going to ask—[looks around the circle to choose another helper. Stops and speaks to Student 2]. I didn't choose you either and you were so good sitting there. Would you like to carry the bag for X as he picks up all the toys? And we'll sing as they do it! Ready, go!*

Both students help each other to pick up the toys as the other students sing.

(Celeste, Observation 1, Part 1)

Likewise, during her second lesson observation, Celeste flexibly responded to a student's demonstrated social and emotional behaviours, including physical distancing from other students, disengagement with learning activities and limited communication. At the start of this lesson, a student took himself to another area of the classroom and refused to engage in the class greetings and games. In responding to this student, Celeste used several strategies throughout the lesson to engage him in the planned learning activities, including shifting the position of all students to be closer to where the student had secluded himself (VSRD 2, p. 2), offering several invitations for the student to join in the lesson activities (VSRD 2, p. 3), and deciding to work one-to-one with him to complete the learning objective (VSRD 2, p. 5). About mid-way through the lesson, the student re-joined the other students, participated in a group game and stayed on the mat with Celeste to complete the learning task.

Reflecting on her engagement with this student throughout the lesson, Celeste stated:

> He hasn't been as disruptive as he was yesterday. He's flown under the radar, but I knew that if I didn't do something about him for that one lesson, I wouldn't get [be able to connect with] him for the next lesson. (VSRD 2, p. 3)

When asked to consider her decision-making process when responding to the student's behaviours, Celeste explains:

> [If I had done nothing], I would have lost that child. So, I have to stop then and think, why is this child not engaged? So, okay, [I try] Plan B, Plan C, [I can see] everyone else is okay, everyone doesn't need me, [this student] needs me, [so I] get down on the floor [with him]. (VSRD 2, p. 14)

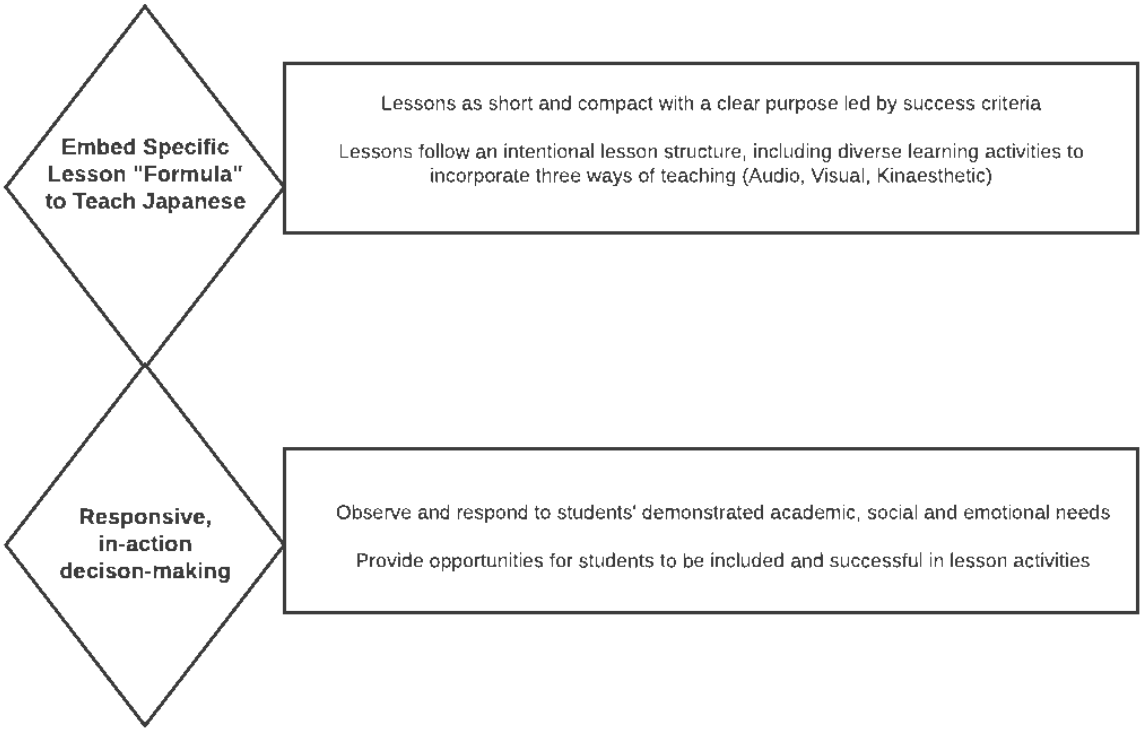
In this way, Celeste demonstrates her ability to observe, consider and respond flexibly and responsively to students' academic, social and emotional behaviours and needs as they arise. The preceding examples from Celeste's lesson observations illustrate her responsive, in-action decision-making when implementing SEL content and practices, including how she supports students to feel safe and included within her classroom.

In summary, Figure 6.3 illustrates Celeste's two-part decision-making regarding teaching Japanese content and her implementation of SEL. As reported, she follows an intentional lesson "formula" when planning her teaching of Japanese lessons, incorporating a strong awareness of time and lesson purpose by using "success criteria" to facilitate students' sense of achievement. Also, she includes various activities to cater to students' diverse learning styles, including auditory, visual and kinaesthetic engagements. Conversely, when considering Celeste's implementation of SEL, her decision-making is observed to be more flexible,

occurring in-action and in response to students' individual or collective needs as they arise. In this way, Celeste carefully observes student behaviours and prioritises students' feelings of inclusion, connection and achievement.

Figure 6.3

Celeste's Decision-Making About her Teaching of Japanese and SEL



6.3.3. RQ 3: What approaches does Celeste use to implement SEL in the classroom context?

Celeste embeds four main approaches to implement SEL in the classroom context: using consistent classroom rules and routines; modelling SEL language and behaviours; encouraging student collaboration; and responding to students' needs (see Figure 6.4).

6.3.3.1. Use consistent classroom rules and routines

In line with her described lesson "formula," Celeste shares how she maintains a consistent and reliable approach to her lessons and a "nice social environment" (Int. 2, p. 2) by establishing clear classroom entry routines and agreed-upon expectations:

> So, I have them lined up outside. I explain that they can go quietly to a desk and sit with their friends.… So, they have freedom in my classroom to sit, but my rule is if they abuse that [freedom] then I have their permission to shift them.… The rules are established before they enter my classroom because it [the classroom] is like a sacred space and it is clean and bright and beautiful. And we are all happy. Off they go [to their chosen seats], and then they put their pencil cases down, and they come and sit on the mat. That's where we begin our greetings, our eye contact and what we are going to do, our games or whatever it is. (Int. 2, p. 2)

She notes this consistency of routines stems from her own aforementioned "state of preparedness" and self-awareness practices, ensuring she is prepared for each lesson and group of students:

> That's why I get my kids lined up outside.… So, before I enter, I know I've got my smile on, I know I've spoken to everyone, I've tried to look at everyone's eyes outside [in the corridor]. I watch them come in, [I] praise them, [I] walk quietly to the thing [whiteboard], [they] sit on the mat, [I] look at them again—[we make] eye contact—and then we start [the lesson]. (Int. 2, p. 9)

Celeste's consistent interactions with students and her responsiveness to every child through verbal interactions, praise and eye contact align with her conceptualisations of SEL as establishing a safe learning environment and positive teacher–student relationships. When asked about any changes to her lesson routines, Celeste replies: "It's always the way!" (Int. 1, p. 2), although sometimes she will intervene and discuss students' behaviour and seating choices to ensure all students feel safe and included in the classroom (Int. 2, p. 2; Observation 1).

6.3.3.2. Model SEL language and behaviours

A second approach Celeste uses to implement SEL in the classroom context is her model of SEL language and student behaviours. This approach includes maintaining a strong awareness of her own verbal and non-verbal language with students, providing positive reinforcement, discussing students' SEL behaviours and sharing personal stories and anecdotes with students. In stressing the importance of modelling SEL language and behaviours, Celeste explains: "Children really pick up on how you look, your face, my words, my actions" (VSRD 2, p. 17). Celeste describes how she prioritises being "present" with her students and acknowledges them with her "time" and her "patience" (Int. 1, p. 12). She confirms: "I never have my back to the students when they walk in for the first minute. I always—I am here, present, right from the very beginning" (VSRD 2, p. 2).

Additionally, she shares how she engages with students through her considered use of verbal and non-verbal language:

> I look each child in the eye every day, every lesson—they have my eye contact and we do greetings. It's a cultural thing [tradition], we do greetings. And I often sit on the floor with them. Also, my other practice is to smile at them … [By showing them] a smile and looking at them and greeting them—there! I've won over a kid that feels that no one cares. I've got them, as simple as that. (Int. 1, p. 7)

Celeste also engages with students by giving each student personal time and access to her:

> I try to go around to every single child in my class and put a double tick on the top of their page to say I've sighted it … They know that I'm coming around to have a look … In 30 or 35 minutes [of a lesson], I never sit down in my class; I will be walking around. (Int. 1, p. 12)

By circling the classroom and showing interest in her students and their work, she can acknowledge their learning efforts, enhance their feelings of safety and inclusion and develop the teacher–student relationship (Int. 1, p. 12).

Positive reinforcement is also a solid characteristic feature of Celeste's interactions with students. She intentionally uses positive reinforcement of desired student behaviours to influence the behaviours of other students:

> Well, I play a game. I start praising people all over the place and then I notice the kid that isn't compliant [following classroom expectations] suddenly go: "Oh gosh, I'm left out, I'd better do something that she notices that's good." Then I flick straight onto that kid [and praise them]: "Ooh, I like the way you are sitting." (Int. 1, p. 13)

She indicates that "I use a lot of positive reinforcement to the point that I sometimes feel perhaps I talk too much" (Int. 1, p. 13). Celeste also shares how providing encouragement and positive support can encourage students to feel safe and take risks:

> If a child gives me a wrong answer, I'll say well you are almost there, you are just missing something. I'll never say "No!" [This is] so that the child then is rewarded for being brave [by offering a response]. (Int. 2, p. 4)

As described in her conceptualisation of SEL, creating a safe learning environment is central to Celeste's teaching and includes demonstrating empathy for students' academic and social needs. For example, when reflecting on her first lesson observation, she explains why she allows students to "pass" during a class discussion or game:

> No one wants to look a fool, and sometimes what I've experienced with learning a language is that your brain knows it, but it doesn't translate out of your mouth.… Why would I want to ridicule a child if they can't do it immediately? … I wasn't

> that quick at learning, and I always tell them.… So then gradually they'll become safer, they'll feel safer and safer and they don't care.… It's a non-judgemental environment after a while. (VSRD 1, p. 18)

Celeste also encourages regular conversations about SEL-related skills and attitudes with students, including taking risks, developing confidence and building resilience: "They're so shy sometimes—they don't want to make mistakes, and we often talk about that" (VSRD 1, p. 18). In this way, Celeste is observant of students' social and emotional needs and considers ways to support these within her teaching routines.

Observation Vignette 6.3: An example of a SEL-related class discussion facilitated by Celeste

Celeste: *Now we're going to play a game, and I'm hoping that [says student's name, Y] is going to join us. This game, I'm going to close my eyes—I think we've already played it, only once—and I'm going to close my eyes and I'm going to ask that you come and you make a circle. Ah, ah, ah wait! But before we start, we are going to think about when we play a game and we get out, what do we do? Do we feel really, really, really sad?*

Several students: *Noooo!*

Celeste: *Do we feel sad? We might feel a little bit sad, perhaps. But what do we do if we get out? Good boy, thank you for joining us (said to Y, who re-joins the circle). What do we do?*

Student 1: *We stand up.*

Celeste: *Why do we—But do we look really sad like (puts on a really big frown, tilts head to the side, looks down into lap)?*

Several students: *Noooo…*

Celeste: *Show me your "Okay, I'm okay that I got out" face (looks up at students, shrugs shoulders, moves head quickly from side to side, smiles).*

Students: *(many of them make the same gesture with their faces)*

Celeste: *Guess what? You can even smile!*

Student 2: *You don't make people feel like a sore loser.*

Celeste: *(Nods) You don't make people feel like a sore loser. Because I decided to play this game today with one of my classes, and there was one student who decided that they were going to cry. And how do you think it made everyone else feel?*

Several students: *Sad.*

Celeste: *Sad! But we're supposed to be having fun! And suddenly this person is crying! So, what can we do to make sure that we have fun playing this game?*

Student 3: *To make other people happy, too?*

Celeste: *(Smiles) Make other people happy too. Well, yes, absolutely. And when we get out, we just get out. And it's no big deal. Okay.*

Celeste introduces the game then students begin to play. As individual students get out, they stand and do not show any signs of sadness or frustration. When the third student gets out, Celeste points to this student and commends his reaction.

Celeste: *There's someone who is smiling, and they even got out! [To another student: "You smiled too, beautifully!"]*

(Celeste, Observation 2, Part 1)

An example of Celeste's SEL-related conversation with her Kindergarten students about "getting out" during a class game is presented in Observation Vignette 6.3. In addition to showing how she addresses SEL-related content and skills within her lessons, this example depicts her decision to follow up on issues of turn-taking and fairness that arose during previous lessons (see Observation Vignette 6.2). Celeste models specific emotions through verbal and non-verbal body language and supports students in considering how these emotions can affect a collaborative game. She then provides positive reinforcement on the students' applied behaviours.

During our second interview, Celeste explains she often shares her learning experiences, personal growth and feelings of vulnerability with students. She demonstrates how she uses her own personal "narratives" (Int. 2, p. 3) to support students' social and emotional understanding and development:

> I'll tell funny stories about myself and the mistakes I've made, and they [the students] laugh and they laugh. And I said, "You know what, it's okay to make mistakes!" … I get them excited [*speaks as though speaking to students*]: "You know, I was at a professional development, and I was really worried they [the presenters] were going to ask me this question because I didn't know it. How many of you feel that?" And they [the students] go—and I said "Yeah! Well, you need to be safe, you need to feel safe in learning this language, and you're all risk-takers" … I say [to the students] this is what it means to be a risk-taker. (Int. 2, p. 3)

Similarly, Celeste shares that she is comfortable modelling relationship repair strategies, including saying sorry to students when teacher–student relationship issues arise. For example, she explains: "maybe they [a particular student] think I've forgotten them and maybe they don't feel included" (VSRD 1, p. 2). In these cases, she describes: "I just go in front of them—I've learnt now—I just go in the classroom and put my arms around them [the affected student] and say, 'Oh, sorry darling! Gosh, ohhh!' So, everyone sees me say sorry!" (Int. 2, p. 15)

6.3.3.3. Encourage student collaboration

Celeste's third approach to implementing SEL sees her encourage student collaboration within her lesson activities. When asked what student collaboration looks like in her classroom, she responds:

> Sometimes that's [using] think-pair-share [opportunities], sometimes that's testing [students competing against each other as a game] and having a winner, and then we'll play winners off against winners … It is always constantly changing. (Int. 2, p. 3)

For example, as observed throughout her Kindergarten lessons, hands-on games are central to Celeste's facilitation of student collaboration, with students often working and rotating in pairs to complete different learning games or puzzles (VSRD 1, p. 4). During our first reflection, Celeste explains:

> I've got more games that I will be introducing, and I have it [the rotations] structured. So, I lay them [the games] around the classroom, and then they [the students] move in pairs around the classroom. (VSRD 1, p. 4)

During Celeste's first lesson observation, she also had students work with a partner to take turns writing the Japanese number characters from one to five on a shared whiteboard. At the end of the lesson, Celeste commended the students on their effort and collaboration: "Oh my goodness, I saw some beautiful work. Oh, gosh! … I love watching you share your work together, and doing your work together, and helping each other" (Observation 1, part 2).

Additionally, Celeste explains how she organises student "buddies" across different year levels as a way for students to develop their collaboration skills and share their learning:

> At least twice a year, I'll teach a unit to the [Year] 5/6s and I'll get them to go down to the kinders and the Year 1s and teach it. I really feel it gives [the older the students] a sense of responsibility and it also is quite lovely. (Int. 1, p. 15)

In this way, Celeste describes how "buddies is just another aspect of learning" and how she watches "with such pride the way that they go, and they teach the kindies" (Int. 2, p. 13). Moreover, as noted during both her lesson observations, she often uses a circle formation during class games and discussions. Doing so allows students to practice collaborative social behaviours, ensures all students are included in the learning and enables Celeste to observe and comment on specific student interactions. As she describes:

> If I'm going to play a game, I love being able to stand outside the circle and then walk around my circle or make commentary or just observe them.… I have about four games that involve a circle, and I can see who helps, who's listening, who can respond quickly … And I don't allow them to have their backs or their shoulders to others, so they have to be considerate to the person next to them (VSRD 2, p. 15).

6.3.3.4. Respond to students' needs

Celeste's final approach to embedding SEL in her classroom is to observe and flexibly respond to students' needs. Supported by her responsive, in-action decision-making processes, this includes considering the school context when making changes to her lesson plans while addressing student behaviours and supporting their individual learning progress through one-

to-one support. For instance, Celeste explains how she might modify her lesson plans and content in response to school events:

> Today with my Year 3s, book week was just [exhausting]—everyone was over it and they'd [the Year 3 students] had done a big P.E. lesson and I thought: "My goodness, how on Earth am I going to teach them the [Japanese] names [of things] in the park?" [I decided to] scrap that lesson completely [and] go back to something that I taught two weeks ago. And I just taught it in depth. And then I gave them a piece of paper and they had to write the moral of the story [I had read to them] and do an illustration. They were very quiet, and I played beautiful music. (VSRD 1, p. 10)

By altering her planned lesson in response to the perceived needs of her class, Celeste demonstrates her awareness of how students' social and emotional needs can affect their learning and engagement.

Celeste also supports individual students' academic needs and abilities during her lessons by differentiating her teaching approach to ensure student inclusion, access and achievement. This can include modifying her academic press and expectations and electing to work individually with children. For example, I noted this during her first lesson observation when she supported an EAL/D student in completing a number writing activity. In this instance, Celeste sat one-to-one with the student on the carpet, talking through the specific learning objectives of the task and modelling each step of the activity. Throughout this encounter, she remained beside the student and provided feedback and positive reinforcement on her progress. When asked to reflect on her engagement with this student during the lesson, Celeste responded:

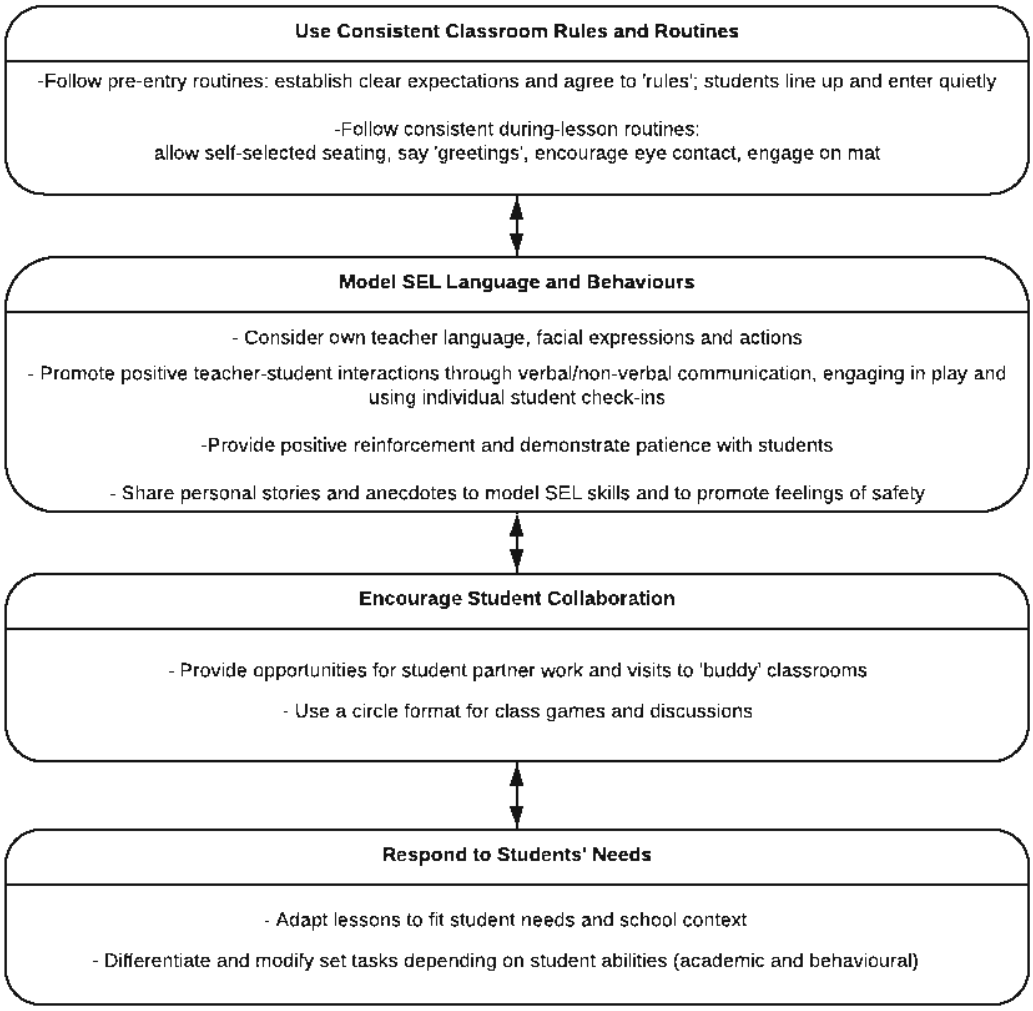
> When I went down and worked with her, she didn't really want me to work with her. But, I thought, she's got to get used to that because that means that there will be a level of trust between us—[and she will understand] my expectations hopefully.… I just wanted to make sure that I had opened up that communication. (VSRD 1, p. 17)

Thus, Celeste considers working one-to-one with students a valuable approach to developing trust, communication and positive relationships with students.

Figure 6.4 provides an overview of the approaches Celeste indicated and was observed to use to support SEL. These include embedding consistent classroom rules and routines; modelling SEL language and behaviours; encouraging student collaboration; and responding to students' academic and behavioural needs. These approaches strongly relate to Celeste's described tri-part conceptualisation of SEL as creating a safe learning environment supported by positive teacher–student relationships and active teacher engagement.

Figure 6.4

Celeste's Approaches to SEL Implementation



6.3.4. RQ 4: What factors promote or impede Celeste's implementation of SEL?

6.3.4.1. Promoting factors

Two main factors positively support Celeste's wider teaching, including her implementation of SEL: her personal commitment to engaging in self-reflection practices and the influence of positive collegial relationships (see Figure 6.5). Celeste shares her self-reflection practices: "I really try to be a better educator every year … And there is so much more that I can learn" (Int. 1, p. 7). To demonstrate, she elaborates how she self-reflects following each teaching lesson: "I evaluate myself and [say to myself] okay was there any child that I spoke harshly to? Was there anyone that I didn't engage with?" (Int. 1, p. 12). When asked how she cultivates this practice of self-reflection to support her teaching, Celeste shares:

> Well, I don't go home until I've sat at my workbook and written out the little extra bits [I've added or changed about each lesson] into my workbook, [I don't go home until I have] reflected on my day.… I might have completely changed the lesson! … And then I tidy my classroom and go around and make it beautiful for the next day. And what is my self-reflection? I offer gratitude for being there. I often verbally say, "thank you room, I am now going." (Int. 2, p. 18)

Additionally, Celeste identifies positive collegial relationships as a promoting factor to her general teaching, including her support of students' SEL:

> I think the first thing that works is a good relationship with the people that you work with because there's trust [in a good relationship], and I think that [trust] flows from upstream to downstream. And I think when you've experienced the opposite, then you struggle. But when you are really accepted and really honoured—or your teaching is understood, or there's an ease—then that flows down like a river. That's what I think. (Int. 1, p. 14).

When asked to identify what supports her to feel "accepted" and "honoured," she suggests:

> I think it [a feeling of trust and support] needs to come from the exec [executive], and if it's not coming from the exec and it doesn't flow down, then you're very isolated.… And it [the collegial environment] can turn to chaos very quickly if managers aren't emotionally intelligent.… When the managers or the "upstream" don't see the value of a specialist teacher and that we're working so hard, that disappoints me. (Int. 2, pp. 16–17)

Therefore, Celeste describes how her team of specialist teachers support her feeling valued:

> It is very much a give and take [relationship], and that's probably what we have in our [specialist teaching] team … We're very united. We look out for each other.… There's a lot of harmony and I think that's why we achieve what we can. We help each other. (VSRD 2, p. 13)

Also, Celeste shares how regular communication with classroom teachers can assist her in addressing academic or behavioural issues that arise with students. In this way, she suggests there is a "flow on effect" between teacher collaboration and the overall result for students (Int. 2, p. 19). For example, she might follow up with a student's teacher regarding a particular event or concern: "I might say to the teacher, 'Well, this is what happened, I'm just letting you know'.… So, it doesn't surprise anyone, it's just we're in it together" (Int. 1, p. 14). Overall, Celeste suggests "there are a lot of contributing factors that come into play" (Int. 2, p. 17) when supporting students' academic, social and emotional needs.

6.3.4.2. Impeding factors

Three factors impede Celeste's teaching, including her implementation of SEL: time limitations, teacher exhaustion and limited background information about students (see Figure

6.5). Celeste notes how her lessons' limited duration and frequency can restrict her from teaching planned academic content and SEL-related skills, including implementing specific content-based activities and allowing time for students to share and self-reflect on their learning (Int. 1, VSRD 1). For example, when reflecting on her first lesson, Celeste shares: "I wanted to do another song, but I knew in the time that [I had left] I wasn't going to get it all done. That's often the case" (VSRD 1, p. 6).

Correspondingly, she describes the Japanese strand of the AC as "very dense," arguing that "what the Australian Curriculum is asking us to do is far too much" (Int. 1, p. 10). She further clarifies that her one 45-minute Japanese lesson per week with students during alternating school terms only equates to a total of "one week of intensive Japanese" (Int. 1, p. 9). As she confirms:

> That's one week condensed. So, I'm never going to achieve everything [in the curriculum] and I'm always going to have to repeat myself, and I'm always going to have to sound as though I'm never teaching anything to these kids' (Int. 2, p. 11).

During our second interview, Celeste explains having shifted her professional attitude in response to these time and curriculum demands:

> I hope I am not being too negative, but I've had to really accept that I have such a limited time to teach such deep knowledge that I can't do it. So, this is where my own "state of preparedness" has allowed me to move forward as an educator and not be driven by reaching the standards.… We have got this very dense curriculum and there is no way on God's Earth that I can teach that in one year.… And then, so that I don't get driven mad—which used to happen to me in the beginning, I used to just go home with the weight of what I *wasn't* achieving—I think I really have had to change that [my focus] to what it is that I *can* contribute to these children's lives. Teaching Japanese is a side. (Int. 2, p. 11)

Thus, Celeste confirms her emphasis on establishing a safe, inclusive and positive learning environment for her students: "If they enjoy coming to my class, then I've won. And I don't care what they mean by enjoy" (Int. 2, p. 11).

Celeste also identifies teacher exhaustion as an impeding factor to her teaching, including her implementation of SEL. She clarifies, "my lessons are very short and compact … It's very intense teaching—it's exhausting teaching actually" (Int. 1, p. 11). In fact, during our final reflection, Celeste calls attention to this: "Look how tired I am today, I'm just so tired" (VSRD 2, p. 1). She also admits that teachers "have off days as well, so sometimes you might do things better or worse" (VSRD 2, p. 12). For example, Celeste explains how a busy teaching day affected her second lesson observation, specifically her usual entry routine:

> Well, it [the lesson] didn't go to plan and I felt really—I felt terrible in a way.… [I was running behind] because I was on duty, [and] I was putting up this learning intention and then my success criteria [as the students walked in]—I was actually writing it onto the board and my back was [to the students]. I timed it—it was about a minute.… So, I thought it [the lesson] started badly, that wasn't what I intended. (VSRD 2, p. 2)

With an average of five classes a day and 24 classes each week, Celeste acknowledges that "constantly adjusting" her content and learning space for so many different students "is actually quite exhausting" (Int. 2, p. 24) and can influence her teaching preparation and demeanour.

As a final impeding factor, Celeste notes limited communication about specific students' backgrounds and needs can affect her implementation of SEL. This includes a lack of formal communication about students who are new to the school or critical information regarding students' learning diagnoses. To exemplify, following her first lesson observation, Celeste reflects on her interactions with a new EAL/D student: "I had forgotten how tricky it was last week [to communicate with her], and so the minute I saw her my heart sank. [I thought to myself] Oh! Okay. Alright, we have to work with this" (VSRD 1, p. 7). When asked if she had received any background information on this student, such as prior schooling or language history, Celeste responded, "I have no background information.… She just shows up" (VSRD 1, p. 14). Thus, she suggests:

> It would make a tremendous difference if the classroom teacher came to tell me [information about a student]—sometimes I'm just too busy and I don't see them, but [they could] even flick me an email [to say]: "I've got this new student, this is what I am doing with them." (VSRD 1, p. 15)

Similarly, during our reflection on her second lesson observation, Celeste shares how her planned teaching sequence was affected by a student who demonstrated behaviour and learning needs. Again, she highlights her lack of background information about the student:

> I just didn't have the skills [to engage him], and I didn't know enough about his condition … I just was bamboozled by him, whereas last week it was [the EAL/D student]! … Like hello, can't I know that these kids are like this! (VSRD 2, p. 4)

When asked if she had followed up with the classroom teacher of the student with demonstrated behavioural needs, Celeste explains:

> Just very briefly at the staff meeting.… I have to go back to him, but I was on duty, and it was such a hectic day today.… I am going to find out A) is [the student] on the spectrum; B) does he [the teacher] let him wander around the classroom? … See, I was insisting all the time that he comes down onto the mat, but it might be that [the teacher] just lets him go. (VSRD 2, p. 5)

In this way, Celeste argues that communication and information about students' backgrounds, behaviours and learning needs is "the most valuable thing for me to have" (VSRD 1, p. 15).

Figure 6.5 synthesises the main factors Celeste's data indicate influence her general teaching, including her implementation of SEL-related instruction. Promoting factors include her self-reflection practices and positive collegial relationships based on trust. Conversely, time limitations, teacher exhaustion and limited communication about students' needs and backgrounds impede her teaching of Japanese and SEL.

Figure 6.5

Promoting and Impeding factors on Celeste's SEL Implementation

Promoting Factors	Impeding Factors
- Self-Reflection - Daily reflection to consider own language, interactions with students and to identify areas for improvement - Positive and professional teacher attitude, including kindness and gratitude **- Positive Collegial Relationships** - Collegial collaboration and communication - Influence of executive trust and support to enhance working relationships	**- Time Limitations** - Limited duration and frequency of lessons - 'Dense' curriculum leads to unrealistic expectations **- Teacher Exhaustion** - 'Intensive teaching' required to cover all content and skills - Energy spent adjusting lessons for different students **- Limited Background Information about Students** - Lack of information about new students, students' needs - Teachers as busy; difficult to collaborate and communicate

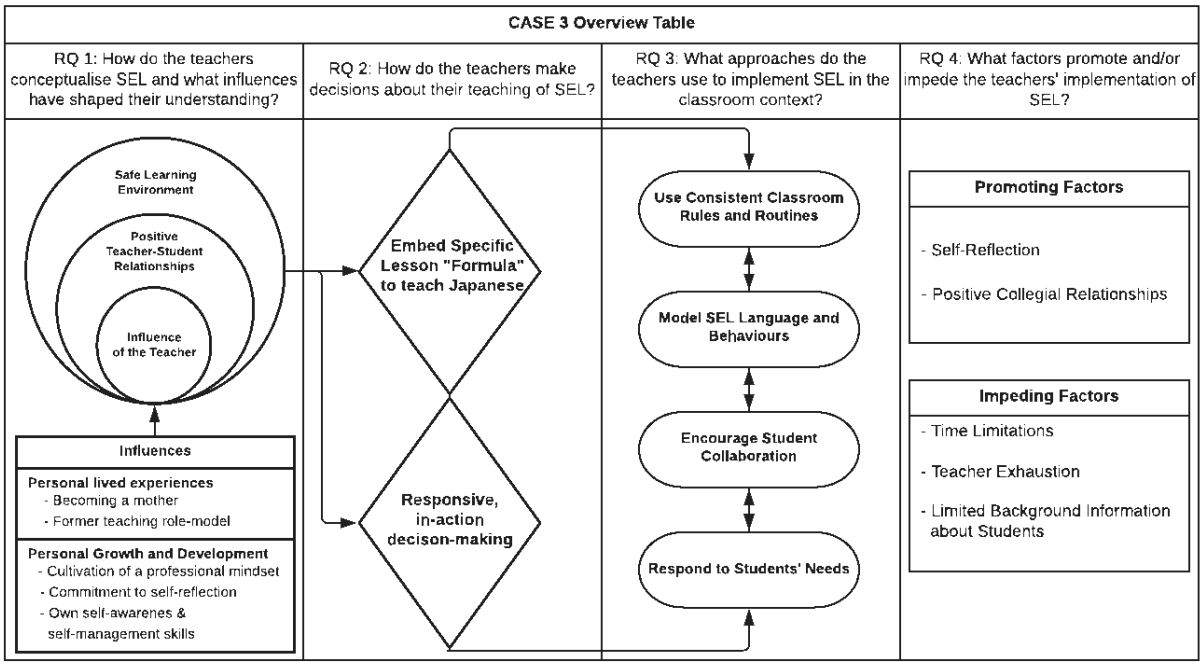
6.4. Summary of Case Findings

The amalgamated case findings of research interactions with Celeste are presented in Figure 6.6. Overall, Celeste's role as a K–6 Japanese specialist teacher conceptualises SEL as creating a safe learning environment based on positive teacher–student relationships and active teacher engagement. As reported, Celeste's understanding of SEL has been influenced by her lived experiences and engagement in personal growth and development practices. When making decisions about her teaching of Japanese, Celeste relies on a self-devised lesson "formula" to ensure her intentional use of time and to embed diverse learning activities. Her decision-making about SEL content and skills occurs in action during her lessons in response to student behaviours and concerns. Celeste embeds SEL in her classroom context by using consistent classroom rules and routines, modelling SEL language and behaviours, encouraging student collaboration and responding to students' needs. As discussed, these approaches stem from her noted conceptualisations of SEL as a safe environment, positive relationships and teacher

influence. Although time limitations, teacher exhaustion and limited student background information can impede Celeste's general teaching, including her SEL implementation, her self-reflection practices and positive, trusting relationships with teachers and executive staff enhance her teaching.

Figure 6.6

Summary of Celeste's Case Findings



6.5. On Reflection

Celeste's engagement in this study provoked several points of reflection about her SEL teaching and the impact of the study's methods. She states, "I have really enjoyed it. It's given me opportunity to reflect on my own teaching" (VSRD 2, p. 16). Specifically, Celeste shares that her participation in the study has "reaffirmed" (VSRD 2, p. 23) her teaching by offering an opportunity to consider "ways to deepen my practices as an educator" (VSRD 2, p. 16). She confirms, "I got inspired again—Why am I teaching? What is it that I can share? What is it as an educator I can learn?" (VSRD 2, p. 16). Additionally, she reflects:

> In the past, I thought maybe I've only got another year left [as a teacher], but actually it's funny, isn't it? When you gather wisdom around you, you want to keep trying. I'm really excited to think, okay, I can do more planning. (VSRD 2, p. 23)

Celeste acknowledges the benefits of being video recorded while teaching: “I don’t think I’ve ever in my career been videoed, so that was really such an inspiring thing for me” (VSRD 2, p. 16). To elaborate, in our final reflection together, she explains how reviewing her lesson footage affirmed her teaching practice by allowing her to identify her teaching strategies:

> I think everyone knows in their head the sequence that they want to have in a lesson, and the more you've taught the more you don't even need to write it [your lesson plan] down—you just know what works. So, then, it’s really interesting to see in a 40-minute sequence when it [the lesson] falls apart and what are the skills that you have that you can [use to] clamber back up to save it? Sometimes that’s not always apparent. Viewing it [my teaching] made me realise all of the things that I use that help me achieve just a little bit of success. (VSRD 2, p. 18)

Celeste also shared how her engagement in the study supported her to plan an additional observation lesson as part of her annual professional review. She confirms:

> It helped me very much having you and having thought a lot about my teaching—then this [planning for another lesson observation] was a cinch. It was very easy…. And I decided to do the social-emotional aspect in my classroom. (VSRD 2, p. 22)

Finally, Celeste describes feeling “very comfortable” during the research interviews and reflections (VSRD 2, p. 18), prompting her to reflect on her own engagement with students:

> I think there was trust and I think that’s the key, for anything, [there was] trust with you. And then that made me reflect that if I feel this comfortable, imagine what I need to do with my students to make them feel comfortable—that they want to share, that they want to be vulnerable in their learning because we’re all like that. (VSRD 2, p. 18)

Overall, Celeste notes how her involvement in the study reinvigorated and affirmed her teaching practice by providing valuable opportunities for self-reflection and professional growth.

Chapter 7: Case Report 4—Alex

7.1. Participant Profile

Alex (they/their/them) has 10 years of teaching experience across a range of year levels (K–12), subjects and environments, including in primary, high school and outdoor education settings. Trained in the state of Victoria (Australia) in outdoor and physical education, their teaching background and professional experience include work in non-mainstream schools and youth support services. Alex strongly appreciates holistic education and has several years of experience teaching inquiry-based programs. They see young people as "incredibly capable" and teaching as a way to "give back a little bit." At the time of this research, Alex had just started teaching Year 6 at Mount Sacred. Mount Sacred has a population of around 365 students, with 34% identifying as having a language background other than English and 4% identifying as Indigenous. During this study, Alex was teaching a class with 23 students. Two of these students had severe medical needs requiring regular medical intervention and a medical support dog; they also followed ILPs outlining their specific academic, personal and social learning goals. Several other students were classified as EAL/D, and another was at the beginning of a gender transition.

7.2. Case Preview

Unique to this case, Alex requested that both lesson observations be recorded outside their classroom and beyond the school boundaries while their class spent time at a local nature reserve. This request is intended to capture Alex's highly flexible approach to their SEL pedagogy, emphasising students' authentic and relatable learning and the use of community and outdoor spaces as a defining characteristic of their teaching. During their roaming lesson observations, Alex was highly engaged and reflexive as a research participant, providing ongoing and insightful commentary about their teaching actions and decisions concerning SEL. In this way, Alex's case demonstrates their highly developed sense of personal efficacy and confidence in approaching SEL and their strong integration of all case research elements. As the case report will outline, Alex's personal conceptualisations of SEL guide their decision-making for students' SEL learning and their selection of student-centred pedagogical

approaches. Resultingly, Alex's personal and professional boundaries are very entwined concerning SEL.

7.3. Overview of Findings

7.3.1. RQ 1: How does Alex conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped their understanding of this learning area?

7.3.1.1. Conceptualisations of SEL

Three main themes encapsulate Alex's conceptualisations of SEL, which I defined as SEL as a teacher's responsibility, SEL as a supportive learning environment, and SEL as students' personal and social skill development (see Figure 7.1). As the encompassing feature of their SEL understanding, Alex regards SEL instruction as a teacher's responsibility and "a core part of why I do what I do and why I think that education is so important" (Int. 1, p. 4). They further elaborate, "it's not a choice, it's actually a responsibility" (Int. 2, p. 6) and indicated "I'm not opting in or out of anything, it's just what I see my role as" (Int. 1, p. 7). Alex regards supporting students' social and emotional growth and learning as an essential responsibility of their role as a teacher and "absolutely vital for [students] to be able to learn in the first place" (Int. 1, p. 4). Also, Alex notes a strong personal interest in SEL and how it promotes their natural inclusion of the subject across their teaching: "I care about it, so that's good, like it's not hard for me to do" (Int. 2, p. 6).

In addition to considering SEL as a teacher's core responsibility, Alex conceptualises SEL to encompass a supportive learning environment. They state, "It's my responsibility to ensure that I am creating a safe, fun and supportive environment" (VSRD 2, p. 11). To elaborate, Alex shares: "I absolutely want every student to be coming into this space feeling happy, safe and connected … and if that's happening, then they have what they need to thrive in a learning setting" (Int. 1, p. 10). In creating a supportive learning environment for students, Alex acknowledges that "everyone brings something" (Int. 1, p. 13). Such thinking underscores the importance of "getting to know each student" to "truly understand[d] who they are and what they bring, [and] how they best can be supported" (Int. 1, p. 7). In this way, Alex describes their "responsibility" and "commitment" to maintaining "professional relationships with young people" (VSRD 2, p. 9) by valuing students' individual needs, ideas and experiences:

> [I] get to know each student because I get that their worlds are just as complex as ours and that they have so many things they're thinking about and so many things

> they're doing and so many things they're experiencing and so much that they bring in here every day. (Int. 1, p. 10)

Alex also defines a supportive learning environment as characterised by "consistent boundaries and expectations" and "guiding values," such as kindness, safety and respect for self, others and the environment (VSRD 2, p. 10). Specifically, Alex prioritises "mutual" respect with students, regardless of assigned "roles" or "titles."

In conjunction with conceptualising SEL as a teacher's responsibility and a supportive learning environment, Alex describes SEL as students' personal and social skill development:

> The impact that I want to have on them [students] is that I have somehow, in some way, helped them to be more confident in who they are, what they believe in [and to know] what's important to them—to know that they matter! (Int. 2, p. 21)

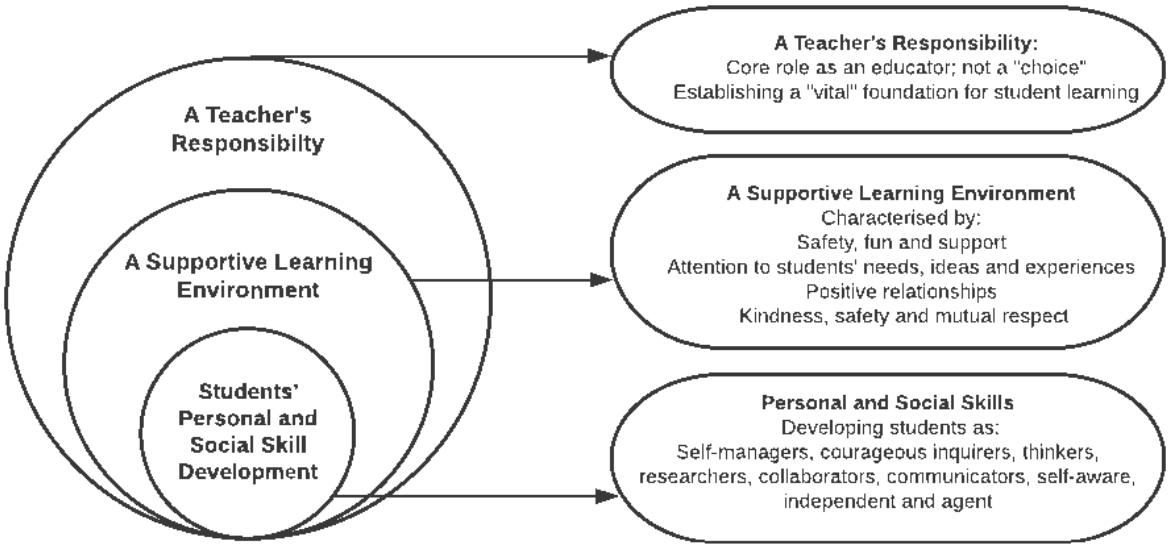
During our first interview, Alex identified critical social and emotional capabilities they consider essential for students to develop, including "learners as self-managers, courageous inquirers, thinkers, researchers, collaborators, [and] communicators" (Int. 1, p. 5). Alex underscores the importance of supporting students' self-awareness by "helping them [students] know who they are, giving them opportunities to really explore who they are, what they're about, [and] what they value" (Int. 1, p. 5).

Accordingly, Alex considers SEL an opportunity to build students' "own identities as learners" (VSRD 2, p. 16) and "challenge kids to be brave enough and courageous enough" to question their learning, themselves and others (Int. 1, p. 3). Alex also highlights the importance of supporting students to self-manage by developing their "independence and agency," noting that "for any child, the job is to set them up to be able to be independent in our world" (Int. 2, p. 15). Thus, Alex views SEL as a critical avenue by which students learn to "effectively access the world around them" (Int. 1, p. 8).

As depicted in Figure 7.1, Alex conceptualises SEL as a teacher's core responsibility and a "vital" foundation for student learning. As outlined, Alex views SEL as creating a supportive learning environment characterised by safety, fun and mutual respect and an avenue to support each student's personal and social skill development, including their self-awareness and self-management skills.

Figure 7.1

Alex's Conceptualisations of SEL



7.3.1.2. Influences on SEL understanding

Two main types of influences shape Alex's understanding of SEL: professional and personal (see Figure 7.2). Regarding professional influences, Alex identifies their varied teaching background and work experience as having shaped their interest in "giving back" to students by supporting their social and emotional welfare:

> I had a very strong desire to work with youth at risk, so through uni, I did a lot of work [as] a recreational worker. And I think for me it [teaching] is about giving back a little bit. (Int. 1, p. 9)

Alex also notes how their training in outdoor and physical education, coupled with their work experience in youth support and "very specific non-mainstream schools" (Int. 1, p. 2), facilitated a "really strong idea of where lots of those kids are coming from" (Int. 1, p. 10).

Additionally, when reflecting on their experience as a high school teacher, Alex explains they consider education a "whole experience" and therefore felt limited by teaching "one particular content [area]" at a time: "I see education as this whole thing, and I see how for rich learning to happen, it needs to sort of go across [subject boundaries]" (Int. 1, p. 2). Consequently, Alex approaches students' social and emotional development from a holistic and integrated perspective.

Further to Alex's varied teaching experience, their understanding of SEL has been influenced by their deep professional knowledge of the AC and other SEL-related programming resources. These include the general capabilities and Murdoch's (2015) learning assets. When asked to describe what specific influences have shaped their current understanding of SEL, Alex responded:

> If you look at the general capabilities, I mean they are pretty clear around being inclusive and being able to regulate and self-manage the appropriate emotions and behaviour and understanding of different histories and cultures and the significance of what that looks like for our society. It is actually just all there. (Int. 2, p. 6)

Alex adds, "the other consistent feed here is the learning assets" (VSRD 2, p. 15). These learning assets relate to students' development of a specific subset of personal and social skills and abilities, including students' communication, relationship and self-management skills. In elaborating on the influence of these learning assets on their conceptualisation of SEL, Alex explains:

> I really admire the works of Kath Murdoch and the Learning Assets … and I think so much of it [SEL] can fit within those.… It's the language that gets built in and it's the concepts.… No matter what we're doing or where we're doing it, it's being able to go out and say to someone: "Alright, so as a collaborator, are you openly listening to the ideas and opinions of others? Are you being kind and respectful in the way that you're sharing your own ideas? Are you negotiating conflict?" And these are all the skills I think no matter who you are and what age you are and where you are in the world, they're all the things that build towards successful people. (Int. 1, p. 5)

More specifically, Alex describes how the learning assets are "visually represented in the classroom," "referred to every single day," and serve to provide a "specific language" to prompt students' thinking about their personal and social development (Int. 2, p. 26).

Alongside their professional experience and development, many personal influences have shaped Alex's understanding of SEL, including their "own values and ideas" (Int. 1, p. 7). Alex explains, "it's hard to know where my own dispositions as a person and my own experiences growing up where that stops and where my education starts" (Int. 1, p. 9). In this way, Alex's conceptualisation of SEL amalgamates both their personal and professional identities. For example, they note their innate appreciation of human difference and individuality and how this supports them in responding to the unique needs of each student:

> I feel really strongly about the fact that no two people are exactly the same. I think people talk a lot about, "Ah, it's impossible to differentiate for your whole class."

> Well, I disagree, a lot. I think there are certainly ways of doing it that make it possible. (Int. 1, p. 7)

Thus, Alex actively draws on their deep-seated empathy and own lived experiences to "truly empathise and to truly connect" with students:

> I remember what it's like to go through those phases of trying to figure out things about the world and about yourself, and I remember the impact that it had on me for grown-ups to listen to me and to share and connect in a way that made me feel like they didn't think I was just a kid. (VSRD 2, p. 9)

Alex also highlights the importance of appreciating and incorporating students' other learning experiences, including those outside school hours:

> I just think about those kids outside of this context, a lot, and I am really conscious that I am a person outside of the 9 to 3 and I am learning all of the time. So are they. (Int. 2, p. 21)

Figure 7.2

Influences on Alex's Conceptualisations of SEL

Influences
Professional Influences - Varied teaching experiences - Knowledge of curriculum and programming resources **Personal Influences** - Personal values, ideas and identity

Figure 7.2 presents prominent professional and personal influences shaping Alex's conceptualisations of SEL. As described, Alex's professional experiences in varied education settings and their knowledge of the AC's general capabilities and Murdoch's learning assets have shaped their understanding of SEL. Additionally, Alex's values and ideas about SEL assist them in appreciating and considering students' social and emotional development from a place of empathy, interest and understanding.

7.3.2. RQ 2: How does Alex make decisions about their teaching of SEL?

Alex makes decisions about their teaching of SEL by prioritising authentic learning opportunities and responding to students' needs, interests and experiences (see Figure 7.3).

Throughout our research encounters, Alex describes their SEL decision-making as "intentional, not accidental," noting their commitment to planning learning that has "enough behind it to be intentional and have impact and agency" (VSRD 1, p. 2). Accordingly, Alex endeavours to provide students with both breadth and continuity of relevant, contextual and authentic learning experiences that extend across the curriculum and go "beyond the boundaries" (Int. 1, p. 11), including for SEL. They explain: "If you look at the kinds of opportunities that students have over a given week in my classroom, you'll see that there is not a lot—there's hopefully nothing—that stands alone" (VSRD 2, p. 14). Further, Alex shares: "I see my job to provide meaningful learning opportunities for my students … if I close them off to just what I bring, then I'm closing them off!" (VSRD 2, p. 15).

Accordingly, Alex describes their intentional use of "experts" (VSRD 2 p. 15) and various "learning spaces" to "blur" traditional learning boundaries (Int. 1, p. 10) and promote authentic "cross-curriculum links" (VSRD 2, p. 15). These ensure meaningful student "opportunities to grow and develop and extend their personal and social capabilities" (VSRD 2, p. 7). For example, Alex draws on inquiry-based learning investigations, "purposeful play" and regular weekly outings—or "Wednesday wanderings"—to different "learning settings or learning spaces" (Int. 1, p. 11). Alex explains:

> I try to make it [learning] like a seamless thing that actually from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to sleep you're learning. And that our learning spaces are everywhere around us. (Int. 1, p. 10)

Alex also notes how outdoor and off-site learning opportunities offer students access to "a different group of peers" and the ability to "seek a different space [for] support" (VSRD 1, p. 7). They suggest these learning opportunities present authentic opportunities for students "to be able to apply [their] skills but in a really fun way" (VSRD 1, p. 25). As they share, "it [learning] is not about this one exact situation that you're in right now—it's about the skills around that to communicate effectively, to collaborate effectively, to self-manage" (VSRD 1, p. 9). However, Alex admits that in planning these types of learning experiences, "you don't know what's going to happen, and you can't manufacture [the learning]" (VSRD 1, p. 25).

Alongside prioritising these authentic learning opportunities for students, Alex makes decisions about their teaching of SEL in response to students' needs, interests and experiences. They state: "You could step into my classroom this time next year and gosh it will look different because it should! … That is me responding to the young people that I'm working with and what they're needing" (VSRD 2, p. 11). Accordingly, Alex describes their planning for SEL

as “very much collaborative” with students to facilitate “student agency and impact” (VSRD 1, p. 4). Alex observes and listens to students’ unique needs, issues and experiences and incorporates these into their teaching to increase students’ “motivation” and make learning “more meaningful for them” (VSRD 1, p. 9).

For instance, Alex aimed to increase two students’ self-confidence to walk home from school by including the students’ route home during the class’s weekly outings:

> I can intentionally but incidentally do so many things for kids. Like, I’ve got two kids in here who, for some reason, they’re really okay with walking to school but they find it really hard to walk home from school. I am not sure quite what that is yet, but [on our outings] we can very incidentally walk towards their [homes] and … walk in that direction and build that … confidence and that reassurance. (Int. 1, p. 12)

Alex shared another example of planning a series of outings for their Year 6 students to visit the local high school to provide students with an “authentic link for transition” and enhance their “connection with peers” (VSRD 2, p. 3).

When planning for SEL, Alex also describes how they flexibly build on students’ evolving interests and experiences by listening to them and making as many relevant links between them and the curriculum as possible. Therefore, Alex sees their “role as knowing the curriculum so well” (VSRD 1, p. 4) to be flexible in their planning for SEL. To demonstrate, Alex explains how “Wednesday wanderings” built upon students’ interest in building “bush huts” at a local nature reserve:

> I never planned to do bush huts out there with them as such, but I’m responding to what they’re wanting to do and I’m listening to them. So, for me, it’s about [relating] the learning assets and it’s about accessing the general capabilities and the different parts of the curriculum which I support them in.… But it’s also honouring that, well, effectively what they want to do is make bush huts! (VSRD 2, p. 4).

Addressing students’ social and emotional needs underlies Alex’s SEL planning and decision-making process. Alex is fond of saying to students:

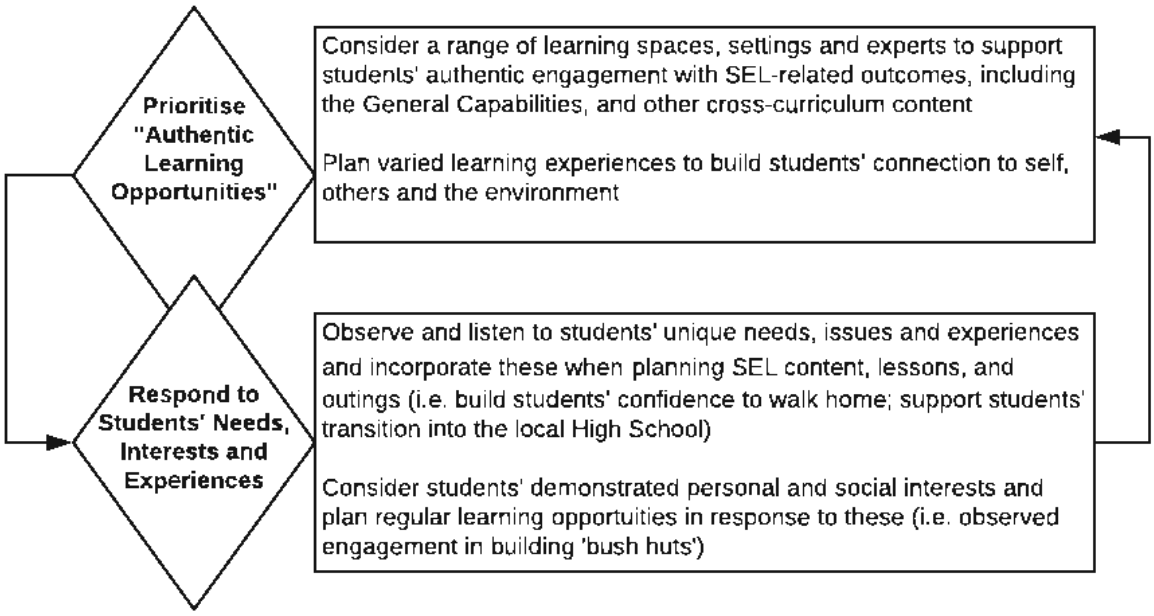
> I want to honour what you want to do, but to do this properly, [I need to] set you up with the opportunities to [do this] and the skills to do this in a way that applies to [your] lives on a daily basis, or for the future, or the right now! (VSRD2 , p. 10)

Figure 7.3 outlines Alex’s decision-making process concerning their teaching of SEL. This process includes prioritising students’ involvement in a range of “authentic learning opportunities” to encourage students’ genuine engagement with SEL-related outcomes. Alex

also flexibly plans and adapts SEL-related learning in line with the AC and in response to students' demonstrated needs, interests and experiences to increase students' learning motivation and engagement.

Figure 7.3

Alex's Decision-Making About SEL



7.3.3. RQ 3: What approaches does Alex use to implement SEL in the classroom context?

Alex was found to use three main approaches to implement SEL with students. These approaches are highly interrelated and stem directly from Alex's described decision-making and planning processes for SEL. I have defined these approaches as modelling, communicating and connecting with students; facilitating authentic learning opportunities; and encouraging student questioning, reflection and goal setting (see Figure 7.4).

7.3.3.1. Model, communicate and connect with students

Alex consistently models, communicates and connects with students in ways that purposefully illustrate and promote students' personal and social skill development. Alex shares: "For me, meaningful and purposeful teaching and learning and purposeful play mean that I'm always going to, for as long as I am face-to-face teaching in a classroom, I will be modelling

constantly" (VSRD 1, p. 6). Alex models, communicates and connects with students by "setting the tone" for learning. This is achieved by promoting "effective communication and kindness and support" (VSRD 1, p. 11) through verbal and non-verbal exchanges, including maintaining appropriate proximity, smiling frequently and using positive, constructive language.

In describing the importance of "setting the tone" for student learning, Alex balances "really firm expectations and boundaries" alongside responses to student behaviour that are "kind," "consistent" and model "control" (Int. 2, p. 9). For example, when sharing about the process of having "hard conversations with young people," Alex underlines the importance of exhibiting self-regulation and "having enough control" when responding to students' needs (Int. 2, p. 9). Their approach also includes consciously choosing not to "match a heightened behaviour with a heightened behaviour," finding appropriate times to "check back in" with students (Int. 2, p. 9), and giving them "the time and the space because that's what they need" (VSRD 1, p. 3). In this way, Alex demonstrates personal efficacy and confidence when interacting with students, defining themself as "consciously skilled" and "incredibly intentional" (VSRD 2, p. 8) in their ability to "respond in the way that models what [a] young person is needing" (Int. 2, p. 9).

As another means of facilitating students' SEL, Alex describes the importance of establishing open and respectful communication channels with students:

> I talk [to students] about sometimes I am going to ask you to do stuff, and if you don't know why, I really want you to come and ask me.… You can challenge something that you are not sure about, [but] do it respectfully because I am going to treat you that way. But it is important to me that you know why. (Int. 2, p. 9)

Alex also notes "the importance of [the] language" (Int. 2, p. 9) they use with students, namely their "conscious effort" (Int. 1, p. 6) to provide constructive feedback and positive reinforcement. According to Alex, "it's about framing things and wording things" (Int. 1, p. 6) in "positive" ways to "connect [students] with what's happening in the moment." In so doing, Alex builds students' "awareness of the impact [they are] having on others" (Int. 1, p. 6). For example: "So, I might say [to a student]: 'You know, when you do that, this is what's happening for other people, this is what I'm seeing'" (Int. 1, p. 6).

Alex explains they support students' social and emotional development by "building [students'] narratives" and "helping them to manage" and "to figure out" who they are, where

they fit in and how their actions affect others (Int. 1, p. 6). Likewise, Alex connects with students by sharing about their own learning and experiences (Int. 2, p. 21):

> I am asking so much of them all the time—to share with me, to reflect, to make connections in their learning—that part of it for me is the willingness to do it for them, too. So, I always feel like I'm learning with them. (VSRD 2, p. 9)

7.3.3.2. Facilitate authentic learning opportunities

In addition to modelling, communicating and connecting with students, Alex uses a range of "authentic learning" opportunities to implement SEL. These opportunities stem from Alex's described prioritisation of authentic, context-based learning to address cross-curricular demands and student needs. In this way, Alex suggests, "our classroom is everywhere" (VSRD 1, p. 4). Accordingly, Alex collaborates with students to participate in various learning activities both on and off school grounds, including regular community outings, purposeful play and inquiry-based learning projects. To exemplify, Alex details their facilitation of regular "Wednesday wanderings" with students (Int. 2, p. 27). These wanderings typically last a couple of hours and involve students' navigation of 'active streets' to locations accessible within 2.5 kilometres of the school's immediate environment, including "local parks, schools, government organisations and galleries" (Int. 1).

When asked about the planning and curriculum intentions behind these community visits, Alex describes their consistent integration of SEL intentions, including developing "community connections," "connecting with the environment" and "building capable, independent young people" (Int. 2, p. 27):

> It's the general capability to show empathy and compassion. It's about being reliable and responsible active citizens to use and to share those spaces with people of the public.… And sometimes they don't and then that's where the learning is. And how great that we can do that as a class with all of our peers. (Int. 2, p. 27)

Alex also notes how these regular community outings provide a "really purposeful time" to connect with students by offering alternative stimuli, environments and opportunities to explore and support students' SEL-related issues (VSRD 1, p. 14). As Alex summarises, the outings allow:

> Time for me to connect with students that might be really needing it, and sometimes that means that I'm talking with the same people a lot, but it is about giving some people who need that bit extra, that time. (VSRD 1, p. 14)

However, Alex explains that in facilitating these outings, "there's a lot that goes into getting to this point" (VSRD 2, p. 2). This includes "making sure that students are equipped with the skills to use our spaces safely" and lots of "student capacity" building around students' safety, self-awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making skills (VSRD 1, p. 13).

In addition to community outings, Alex embeds authentic SEL opportunities for students by encouraging "purposeful play." According to Alex, this type of play is "incidental but not accidental" (VSRD 2, p. 5), promotes student "relationship" and "connection" (VSRD 1, p. 25), encourages emotional management (VSRD 2, p. 6) and increases students' "incentive" and "motivation" to learn by incorporating their "favourite things" and allowing them to do "something that is real" (VSRD 1, p. 25). Examples of purposeful play include students playing collaborative video games, riding their bikes during lunch breaks and engaging in hands-on outdoor investigations, including building bush huts (VSRD 2).

Specifically, Alex explains the rationale behind encouraging students' purposeful play as a way to support students' SEL development:

> I'm putting them into a situation where … I can guarantee there are times where they'll have to negotiate conflict, where something's gonna happen and they're not gonna agree … [I observe] how students respond to that, how that changes and shifts. (VSRD 2, p. 6)

For instance, Alex describes using video games as a form of purposeful play to support students' SEL-related skill and capability development:

> So, today I hooked up my Nintendo Switch to the interactive whiteboard and I had four controllers … Then I said: "Disclaimer. This is meant to be really fun. This is an opportunity to continue working on those skills around negotiating conflict, speaking to each other with kindness and being open to other people's ideas and opinions. But let's have a bit of a fun with it and let's do this in a way that it doesn't have to always be [serious]. Let's play Mario Kart!" And so, for me today, I got to finish the week and have the most positive interactions. (VSRD 1, p. 25)

Such purposeful play is viewed as "open" yet guided by "overall key concepts," "shared learning" and the consistent language of the general capabilities and the learning assets (VSRD 2, p. 6).

Further to community outings and purposeful play, Alex promotes authentic SEL development through inquiry-based learning opportunities. These learning experiences follow several "phases of inquiry," including tuning in, sorting out, finding out, going further, analysing and reflecting (VSRD 2, p. 4). However, Alex notes that inquiry-based learning is "not just a

circular thing where it goes around and it's step by step" (VSRD 2, p. 4). Rather it can be "spontaneous" and arise at any time (VSRD 1, p. 17). However, Alex notes that inquiry-based learning is "led by the kids" (Int. 2, p. 27).

For instance, during our interviews, Alex shared about organising a tree planting ceremony with their class to "honour a student's [independent research] project" (VSRD 1, p. 16). During the ceremony planning process, which took place over several weeks, Alex presented students with a single unplanted tree gifted to the school. Alex then supported students to engage collaboratively in an investigation of what the tree needed to survive, how and where it should be planted and its long-term care.

During our discussion of this inquiry-based learning opportunity, Alex explained how the students elected to form separate groups to investigate these key areas and how students negotiated conflict when confronted with various social and logistical issues (VSRD 1, p. 17). Alex reflects on how this experience supported students' social and emotional development by encouraging them to appreciate various roles and responsibilities related to a group goal:

> It was a really important prompt for me to support the general capabilities and the learning assets because … it's this idea that when you are working towards a shared goal with something, you don't have to be the loudest voice. You don't have to be the person who physically puts the tree in the ground to have had impact in that space or to be a leader within that space. (VSRD 1, p. 17)

Alex continued, "the whole class was so actively involved and present … and they knew that their contributions [mattered]" (VSRD 1, p. 20). Additionally, Alex describes how facilitating inquiry-based learning opportunities, purposeful play and regular community outings often go hand-in-hand for students. They suggest these encounters provide "authentic avenues for students to experience, play and inquire into real-life issues relevant to themselves, others and their community" (Int. 2, p. 27).

7.3.3.3. Encourage student questioning, reflection and goal setting

Alex's third identified approach to implementing SEL encourages student questioning, reflection and goal setting, which they believe facilitates and helps track students' SEL growth and progress. When reflecting on their perceived role in supporting students' SEL, Alex states, "for me, it's helping them make those connections to their learning" (VSRD 2, p. 7). Moreover, "there's so much that goes deep within the curriculum—[it's] drawing them constantly to that and making meaning" (VSRD 1, p. 4). Accordingly, Alex explains: "[I] really carefully

consider the types of questions I might ask to prompt them to respond to an experience and think what they would take in the next time they're in that space" (VSRD 1, p. 9). Alex uses various "tuning in" opportunities to encourage students to "wonder and to be curious" (VSRD 2, p. 9). These include unpacking target skills and learning outcomes through group discussions (see Observation Vignette 7.1), inviting guest speakers from diverse backgrounds, using role-play scenarios based on observed student interactions and sharing carefully selected texts (VSRD 1; VSRD 2).

Alex also engages students in whole-class reflections (Observation 1, part 4). These reflections encourage students to "share their ideas and their learning" (VSRD 1, p. 12) and incorporate "consistent language" related to the learning assets to support students' reflection on their learning and behaviour (VSRD 1, p. 8). Aligned with these reflections, Alex encourages students to set and monitor their "own goals that link together with the learning assets and parts of the curriculum" (VSRD 2, p. 12). Alex explains:

> We share, we reflect, we talk about it [a goal], and we build on how do we know when we've reached our goal? So, I get them to comment and feedback around that. Sometimes it's verbally, sometimes it's through a document, sometimes it's in their writing book … There are lots of ways that we do that. (VSRD 2, p. 12)

According to Alex, these reflection and goal-setting opportunities encourage students to "make [their] learning visible" (VSRD 2, p. 12) and therefore support the documentation and tracking of students' SEL development (VSRD 1, p. 8).

As summarised in Figure 7.4, Alex was identified as using three main approaches to implement SEL: modelling, communicating and connecting with students through effective and positive communication; facilitating authentic learning opportunities such as community outings, purposeful play and inquiry-based investigations; and encouraging student questioning, reflection and goal setting through "tuning in" and group reflection activities. As reported, the three approaches strongly relate to Alex's prioritisation of authentic, curriculum-based SEL learning in response to students' demonstrated needs.

Observation Vignette 7.1: An example of a "tuning in" discussion about collaboration facilitated by Alex

Alex and students are on-site at the nature reserve. Students stand in a circle as Alex guides them through a 'tuning-in' discussion about what it means to be a collaborator before they head off to continue constructing their group bush huts.

Alex: *If you're effectively collaborating with your group today, what does that look like?* [*Several students raise their hands. Alex calls on Student 1.]*

Student 1: *Umm, being kind and listening to ideas.*

Alex: *Be part of it. Okay. The ability to listen to other people's ideas, particularly if they're different to yours, is a really good skill to have as a collaborator. What else does it look like?* [*Calls on Student 2.]*

Student 2: *Teamwork.*

Alex: *Teamwork. Can you elaborate? What is teamwork?*

Student 2: *Like, if you can't pick up a stick then someone else could come and help you, or like if you're building something and you can't like stand it up or put it down, someone could help you?*

Alex: *So, problem-solving together?*

Student 2: *Problem-solving!*

Alex: *Good. [Calls on Student 3.]*

Student 3: *Listening to each other and not just doing what you think would be better.*

Alex: *Great, so actually listening to each other. And there's a difference between standing and being quiet, like right now XXXX is standing and being quiet but that doesn't actually tell me whether you're listening* or not*—and I'm not saying you're not—but it's this idea of truly trying to find a way of listening to others' ideas and what they are sharing with you. [Calls on Student 4.]*

Student 4: *Umm, not making a big scene out of something when it's not really that* important.

Alex: *Yeah, if it's not a problem, don't make it a problem. I like it. Or of it's a really small problem, keep it small. Umm, the other thing is—from what XXXX is saying—the language of the learning assets is around working towards shared goals. Okay? So, even though those goals might not be your first idea, it's that idea that we're working towards shared goals. And I really like this idea of keeping in the back of our minds as a collaborator being empathetic. What do I mean by empathetic? [Calls on Student 5.]*

Student 5: *Uh, like, feeling how other people feel like at that moment in time…*

Alex: *Yeah, being able to…*

Student 5: *…so you can understand how to help them.*

Alex: *Yeah, and how to support them or what your role might be in the situation to be the most productive team member. Kind of what like XXXX was saying. Great.*

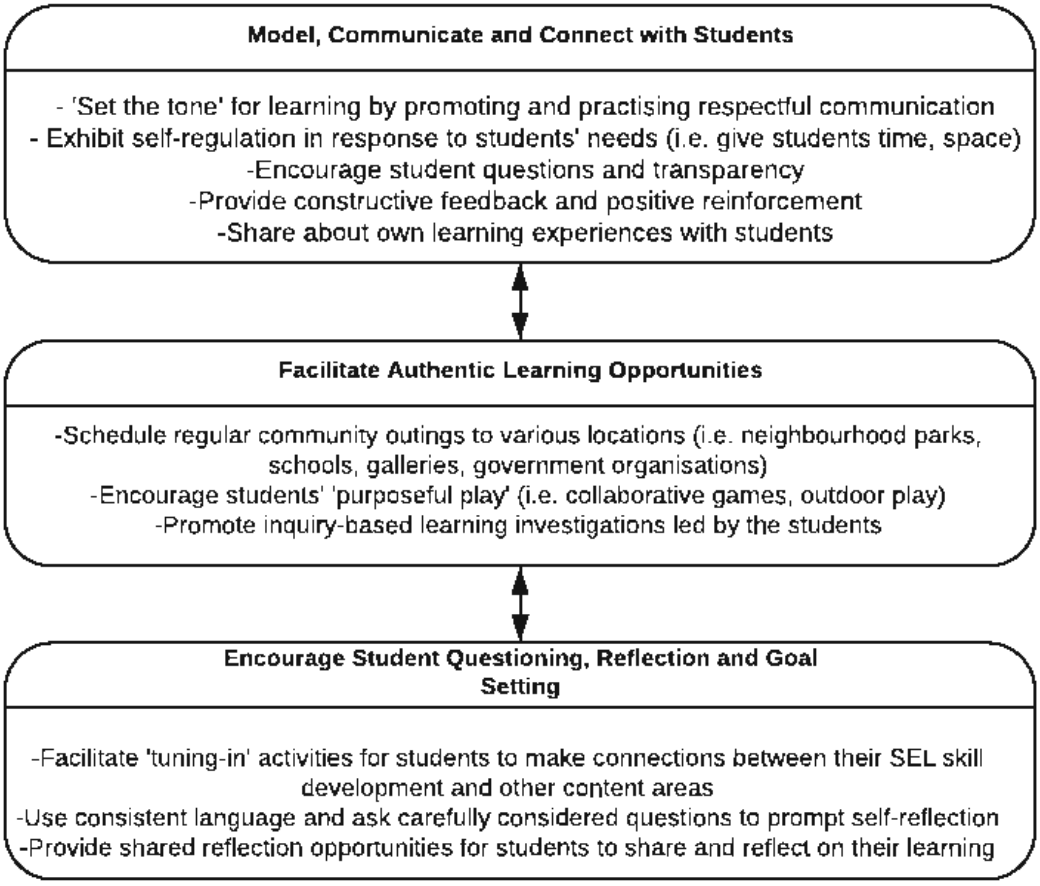
Alex continues to facilitate the discussion with students about what is meant by being compassionate and reliable as a collaborator. Students continue to offer their ideas with Alex responding to and elaborating on them, drawing their suggestions back to the language of the Learning Assets.

Alex: *You demonstrated the most amazing collaboration as a group on Monday when we planted that tree. And it was that every single person was a part of it, they were contributing, but not everyone was planting the tree. You all found different roles and responsibilities that had equal value in that whole process. So, I want you to take that learning from Monday into how you might apply that together today.*

(Alex, Observation 1, Part 2)

Figure 7.4

Alex's Approaches to SEL Implementation



7.3.4. RQ 4: What factors promote and/or impede Alex's implementation of SEL?

7.3.4.1. Promoting factors

Two prominent factors promote Alex's implementation of SEL: feelings of value, trust and support within the school environment; and Alex's own SEC (see Figure 7.5). During our second interview, Alex shared the benefits of working within a positive school "culture" and feeling valued by their school leadership: "I know that I am valued here and that my work and my contributions are valued" (Int. 2, p. 17). Alex also describes their confidence and trust in the school leadership:

> When I look at the person who is leading our school and leading our community, I am so confident … that every single decision that is made within our executive … —I know that at the centre of that decision is absolutely the child. And for me, I can work anywhere … if that is what it comes back to. (Int. 2, p. 17)

Additionally, Alex underlines the importance of feeling a sense of "connection" to and "acknowledgement" from leadership and other colleagues, especially on days that are "hard" or when they are feeling "really vulnerable" and need to "sense-make" or "re-group and ground" themself (VSRD 2, p. 22). In our final reflection, Alex shares what they need to feel successful in their delivery of SEL and their support of students' needs: "Being able to talk through things … if I didn't have that, I couldn't do this. I couldn't face up every day and give mostly what young people need" (VSRD 2, p. 19). Alex also regards relationships with parents as "such a good investment" to support their implementation of SEL with students, noting the value of frequent and "rich" conversations with families to "check in" and discuss children's academic and social progress (Int. 2, p. 21).

Alex's own SEC—including demonstrated self-awareness, self-management and relationship skills—also supports their implementation of SEL. This includes engaging in self-reflection opportunities and giving themself "permission to not be okay sometimes, and permission to step out of it [a situation]" (VSRD 1, p. 22) as needed. Alex explains that going on a walk or taking time to speak to colleagues "is important … because it allows you to breathe and compose" (VSRD 1, p. 23). Further, Alex emphasises the importance of maintaining a rational, positive and student-centred mindset, especially when confronted with difficult student behaviours or interactions:

> It's remembering that it's not personal, and that no matter how personal it can feel when a little person is there [in a heightened state], it's not about me, it's really not. It doesn't mean it doesn't have an impact or effect, but for someone to be there it's them telling you that they're not okay. They're saying, I need something. (VSRD 1, p. 23)

In this way, Alex highlights how their ongoing professional reflection on practice has supported them to understand better and engage "consciously" with students' social and emotional needs. For example, Alex describes how "being consciously skilled" (Int. 1, p. 4) in this area of their teaching has come from "identifying the work that I am already doing and putting a focus on [it]" (Int. 2, p. 1) and by "being reflective and thinking about where to next" (Int. 1, p. 4). Alex notes the value of attending regular meetings or "catch-ups" with an external "critical friend" or "mentor support person" to elicit professional discussion and reflection about a selected area of their practice and to "bring it back to your consciousness" (Int. 2, p. 2).

7.3.4.2. Impeding factors

Alex identified two factors that impede their implementation of SEL: student barriers to learning; and perceived staff negativity and inaction concerning students' social and emotional needs. To exemplify student barriers to learning, Alex explains the difficulties they have encountered when encouraging students to move their thinking beyond "getting it right" or to "respectfully question" and to "take learning into a bit of an unknown zone" (Int. 1, p. 3), both generally and with SEL. Alex shares:

> The most challenging thing about the group of kids that I'm working with is it's almost like I've stepped into this world where they've never been encouraged to truly think and they are very willing to conform (Int. 1, p. 3).

In addressing this issue, Alex notes the importance of talking to students about taking learning risks to develop their self-confidence and independence. As Alex tells students:

> I have to be like: "It's okay if your response is different to the person sitting next to you because that's the point … I'm asking you to connect meaning for you and therefore that could very well be different from other people and that's okay." (Int. 1, p. 3)

Alex also raised additional challenges of staff negativity and inaction concerning supporting students' social and emotional needs and implementing SEL. For example, they noted some teachers' negative conversations about students and a lack of shared staff responsibility, collaboration or approach when responding to student behaviour. Alex explains, "it seems to be [easier for teachers] to look at the negatives, or to look at what a kid is *not* doing instead of what they are doing" (Int. 2, p. 7). Moreover, "other people [teachers] are just like, 'What are the rules? Why aren't they following them?' And I'm like because *your* job is to support students in their learning" (Int. 2, p. 11). Accordingly, Alex suggests a more positive and collaborative staff approach to engaging with students and supporting their social and emotional needs. They add, "there is a trend I am finding, and it is just like: 'Whose problem is this to deal with?' … I'm just like imagine if everyone in the school worked together! Imagine!" (Int. 2, p. 12).

Figure 7.5 summarises the main factors Alex identified as promoting or impeding their implementation of SEL. As discussed, Alex describes feelings of collegial value, trust and support, and their own SEC, as the main factors enhancing their SEL knowledge and teaching. Conversely, student barriers to learning, negative staff conversations about students, and a lack of a shared approach to student behaviour can impede Alex's SEL implementation.

Figure 7.5

Promoting and Impeding Factors on Alex's SEL Implementation

Promoting Factors	Impeding Factors
- Feelings of value, trust and support - Working within a positive school culture - Connection to and acknowledgement from staff and leadership - Building relationships with parents **- Teacher's own Social Emotional Competence (SEC)** - Self-awareness and self-management skills (i.e. taking time to manage own emotions, have conversations with colleagues) - Maintaining a positive, student-centred mindset; not taking student behaviour personally - Engage in professional reflection on practice to identify and reflect on selected teaching areas, including SEL practices	**- Student barriers to learning** - Challenges with getting students to think independently, both generally and with regard to SEL - Need to encourage students' risk-taking and independence **- Perceived staff negativity and inaction** - Negative teacher conversations about students - Lack of collegial responsibility and collaboration when managing and responding to students' behaviour and social and emotional needs

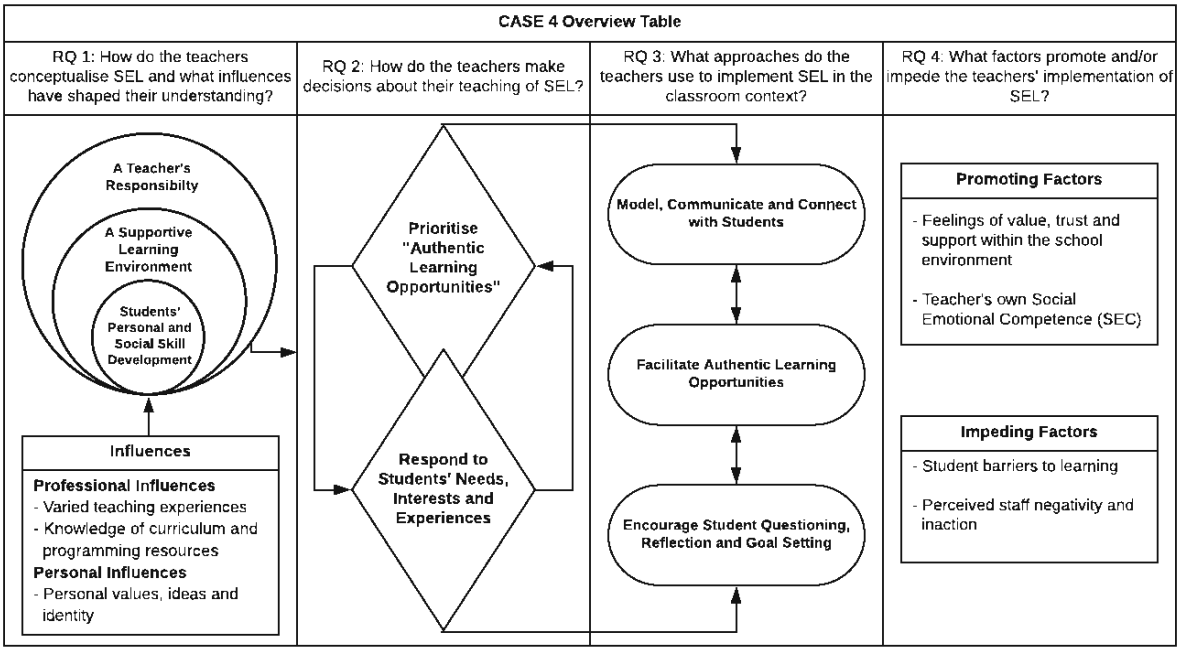
7.4. Summary of Case Findings

The synthesised case findings of research interactions with Alex are presented in Figure 7.6. Overall, Alex conceptualises SEL as a teacher's professional responsibility to provide students with a safe and supportive learning environment and to address students' general capability and learning asset development. Several professional and personal influences have informed Alex's understanding of SEL, including their varied teaching experiences and professional background, their knowledge of the AC and other SEL-related programming resources, and their values and ideas about children and learning.

When planning for SEL, Alex makes decisions about SEL content and instruction in response to the student's needs, interests and experiences. Additionally, Alex prioritises authentic learning opportunities to address cross-curriculum learning outcomes and provide students with rich and contextual SEL experiences. As identified, Alex uses a range of student-centred approaches when implementing SEL. These include modelling, communicating and connecting with students by "setting the tone" for learning and practising positive communication practices; facilitating authentic learning opportunities such as community outings, purposeful play and student-led inquiry investigations; and encouraging student questioning, reflection and goal setting. Alex's approach to and engagement with SEL is positively influenced by feelings of collegial support and value, their own SEC, and ongoing reflection on practice. However, Alex notes that negative staff perceptions of students and a lack of shared responsibility for student behaviour can impede their approach to SEL.

Figure 7.6

Summary of Alex's Case Findings



7.5. On Reflection

As a component of participating in this study, Alex reflected on their experiences of being interviewed and observed. Alex noted several points of consideration about their SEL practices, students' learning engagement, their own SEC and the benefits of the study's methods. They described the research process as "really good reflective practice for anyone" (VSRD 2, p. 18) and a valuable opportunity to "connect" and engage in "a bit of mentorship, [and] also a bit of support in that sense-making and being able to talk through things" (VSRD 2, p. 19).

Specifically, Alex found being video recorded was "affirming" of their professionalism and students' learning engagement, with their lesson footage providing "almost like a different lens" (VSRD 2, p. 1). Alex explains how watching their observation videos enabled them to "see and appreciate more" (VSRD 2, p. 1) about their students and SEL pedagogy, including an opportunity to gain "feedback, too, on where my students are at and how far they've come" (VSRD 1, p. 8). For example, Alex describes:

> I might perceive someone who's sitting there fiddling with their head down as being not engaged or a bit bored, but actually what I could see in the video were things that I wouldn't normally see if I'm talking to this person.… Sometimes it feels like they're [students] somewhere else, and they're having their own

> conversations, but what I could see in the video was that they were talking directly about what everyone else was talking about, and it was them making meaning out of it. (VSRD 2, p. 22)

Resultingly, Alex shares, "I really liked it … actually seeing my students having fun … That was cool to see" (VSRD 1, p. 2). Alex also explains how reviewing the video footage highlighted their ongoing support of and intentional interactions with students:

> One thing that was really clear for me watching it [the video footage] was how aware I am in every little moment about how I support each individual … That was something that I was able to really reflect on … Even if I'm only with one person …, it's really evident that I'm really aware of each person who's out there and where they're at, and [I'm] really present in that moment. (VSRD 2, p. 1)

When asked directly about the process of being recorded, Alex offers that instead of feeling quite "conscious" or "thrown by the recording," they were surprisingly "quite comfortable… [and] present in the moment" (VSRD 1, p. 1). As such, Alex suggests the recording process did not affect "the way I was interacting in that space" (VSRD 1, p. 1). Further, Alex highlights how reviewing the video confirmed their professionalism and own emotional management skills when interacting with students, particularly during periods of heightened stress. Alex reflects:

> It's nice to see that when I know there's emotional turmoil that's happening for me … I'm able to set the tone where it needs to be, and I'm able to support students regardless of the fact that I might freaking out … I'm pretty sure I can do that and maintain that, but actually watching me do that knowing how I might be feeling on the inside is actually—that's been meaningful for me. (VSRD 2, p. 18)

Consequentially, Alex describes how engaging in professional reflection on their SEL pedagogy, as required by this study, prompted a deeper reflection on their own SEC. As Alex outlines in our final reflection:

> One thing it's made me think about—in being so conscious of the social-emotional learning for young people—is being really mindful of that in myself and also with my family. I've been way more aware of when I'm doing things that support me to support others … [and] my own general capabilities as well. (VSRD 2, p. 24)

Overall, Alex shares: "For me, what I've taken away is an opportunity to stop and actually reflect and in a really lovely way" (VSRD 2, p. 18).

Chapter 8: Cross-Case Thematic Summary (Cases 1–4)

8.1. Introduction

This chapter summarises the thematic findings of the cross-case analysis of Cases 1–4. It reflects the first stage of my two-part cross-case analysis. As outlined in the analytic procedure in Chapter 3, to reach these findings, I first extracted individual case themes from Cases 1–4 using a six-step thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clark, 2013). Then, I analysed these themes across the four cases to identify common cross-case themes and differences. The resulting themes are summarised below with respect to each of my research questions.

8.2. Summary of Cross-Case Themes

8.2.1. RQ 1: How do the Case 1–4 participant teachers conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped their understanding of this learning area?

8.2.1.1. Conceptualising SEL: SEL as positive environment, content and a teacher's responsibility

All four teacher cases conceptualise SEL as creating a positive environment for students to learn, express themselves, and practise essential personal and social skills. The theme 'SEL as positive environment' arose from these conceptualisations and, therefore, encompasses the teachers' understanding of SEL as an avenue to build a positive classroom culture and sense of community (Beau & Alex); to support students' feeling of safety, achievement and confidence (Karen, Celeste & Alex); and to deal with students' needs (Karen & Alex). The data show how each of the four teachers sees the foundational role of relationship-building, both with and between students, in a positive SEL teaching environment. Therefore, "relationship-building" is a necessary social skill in the teachers' conceptualisations of SEL and the theme "SEL as a positive environment."

Further to "SEL as positive environment," three teachers (Beau, Karen & Alex) also relate specific SEL content and skills to their understanding of SEL. Therefore, the theme "SEL as content" was developed to encompass the teachers' conceptual understanding of SEL as a

curriculum content area—with teachable skills and outcomes—that addresses students' behavioural needs (Karen) and establishes a solid foundation for academic success (Beau). Teachable SEL skills these teachers note include:

- supporting students to identify and understand their emotions (Beau & Karen).
- engaging in collaboration and mindful communication (Beau & Alex).
- practising self-reflection and self-awareness (Beau, Karen & Alex).
- developing empathy and respect for others (Beau & Karen).
- developing problem-solving skills (Karen).
- practising independence and developing agency as researchers (Alex).

One teacher (Celeste) does not directly indicate any specific SEL-related skills or content as part of her conceptualisation of SEL. However, as presented in her case study, without overt thinking, Celeste readily embeds SEL skills and content throughout her lessons. She provides frequent and varied opportunities for students to engage in personal and social skill learning and practice (i.e., collaborative games, group discussions and partner work). While not explicit in her case study comments regarding her conceptualisations of SEL, Celeste demonstrated a depth of implicit knowledge of students' personal and social skill development. So implicit and embedded was SEL within her standard teaching pedagogy, Celeste does not identify SEL as separate content. As noted in her case study, her experiences support the conceptualisation of "SEL as content."

In contrast to the other three classroom teachers, Celeste represents a unique case as someone who teaches across several year levels and classes daily. Accordingly, her data analysis introduces the underlying premise for the third related theme, "SEL as a teacher's responsibility." This theme reflects data that indicates teachers' perceived influence when creating a positive learning environment to support students' social and emotional development. Celeste's case study reflects SEL as integral to her being and responsibilities as a teacher; she cannot conceive of teaching and her responsibilities to the children's learning without it. Similarly, Alex's data exemplifies this theme when describing their conceptualisation of SEL teaching as "not a choice" but a "responsibility." Beau's case data further supports this theme by identifying teacher relationships with students as "vital" to students' SEL and development.

8.2.1.2. Shaping teachers' understanding of SEL: The role of personal and professional influences

Three teachers (Beau, Celeste & Alex) provide independent examples of personal influences that have shaped their understanding and uptake of SEL. These personal influences include their lived experiences and backgrounds, personal identities, and an ongoing commitment to personal development and reflection. During our initial interviews, these teachers shared intimate personal accounts about their understanding of and commitment to supporting students' personal and social development. For example, Beau notes his upbringing in a small town where discussions of mental health were limited and his adult lived experience of navigating a problematic professional promotion. Also, Alex shares information about their experience navigating personal identity issues as a teenager and many years working with at-risk youth as influences on their understanding of and commitment to SEL. Likewise, Celeste recounts her experience as a mother to a son with academic challenges and the notable influence of a teaching role model on her adopted approach to teaching and learning. Across these three cases (Beau, Celeste & Alex), the teachers' ongoing attention to teacher responsibility, intentional relationship-building and creating a safe space for students to learn appears linked to several personal influences, including their values (Alex), lived experiences (Beau, Celeste & Alex) and a commitment to self-directed learning and self-reflection (Beau, Celeste & Alex). While Karen briefly mentions her family history as a precursor to pursuing teaching as a second career path, she does not directly relate this information to her understanding or teaching of SEL.

In addition to these personal influences, data from three of the four cases (Beau, Karen & Alex) indicate the prevalence of several professional influences on the teachers' understandings of SEL. Collectively, these examples support the notion that teachers' professional contexts and interactions also shape their conceptualisations of SEL. For example, Karen highlights several professional influences, including her school's approach to SEL implementation and SEL-related staff training and engagement opportunities (i.e., SEL committee work). Likewise, Beau and Alex confirm the influence of their professional settings and their knowledge of SEL-related resources on their teaching of SEL. For these three teachers, their understanding of "SEL as content" is shaped by their knowledge of the AC (Beau & Alex) and the SEL programs used in their schools (Beau, Karen & Alex), in addition to varied teaching experiences (Alex) and SEL staff training opportunities (Beau & Karen).

In summary, three main themes emerge from the cross-case analysis of Cases 1–4 that reflect the teachers' common conceptualisations of SEL: "SEL as a positive environment," "SEL as content," and "SEL as a teacher's responsibility." Through such findings, SEL reveals its complexity as a multi-faceted teaching area. As conceptualised by these teachers, SEL appears to include yet extend beyond curriculum-based content descriptors and sequenced lessons, traversing into a highly relational realm of learning grounded in relationships and teacher engagement.

Two additional themes emerged in identifying the influences that shaped the teachers' understandings of SEL in this way: "personal influences" and "professional influences." Three teachers' personal identities and lived experiences were found to be a source of knowledge and empathy for their students' SEL. As such, the teachers' understanding of self is posited to act as foundational to their SEL instruction and ultimately a promoting factor for their ongoing SEL implementation. Additionally, professional influences appear to play an important role in shaping teachers' conceptualisations of SEL by providing tangible, relatable and informative content and structures for them to apply to their SEL planning and instruction. Overall, while the teachers' understandings of SEL are unique and individual, there are significant commonalities in their conceptualisations of SEL and the influences that have shaped their broad understanding of and engagement with the learning area.

8.2.2. RQ 2: How do the Case 1–4 participant teachers make decisions about their teaching of SEL?

8.2.2.1. Decision-making for SEL: Student-centred, content-informed and teacher-driven

All four teachers used their knowledge of students—including students' needs, interests, experiences and contexts—to plan and deliver their SEL instruction. Thus, the theme of "student-centred" decision-making encapsulates the teachers' student-focused and highly responsive approach to SEL planning using their knowledge of students. Specifically, all four teachers emphasise their frequent observation of students to identify areas of need to inform their SEL instruction. In addition, Alex highlights the strong influence that students' interests play in their SEL planning process and their emphasis on providing "authentic learning opportunities" for students to apply their SEL learning. In this way, the four teachers describe their SEL content and lessons as having the potential to change daily or even within the same lesson based on their evolving decision-making in response to students' demonstrated needs

and engagement. Therefore, this theme depicts a highly responsive and in-action approach to the teachers' SEL planning and decision-making—an approach grounded in careful student observation, an understanding of child development and strong relationships with students.

In addition to "student-centred" decision-making, a common element across three of the four teachers (Beau, Karen & Alex) was their use of SEL programs, initiatives and resources to guide their SEL planning and teaching. The theme of "content-informed" decision-making for SEL indicates these commonalities. It captures the teachers' use of SEL-related programs, content and resources to plan for and sequence their SEL instruction. This theme also appeared to be significantly shaped by the teachers' described professional influences on their SEL understanding (i.e., their professional training and school contexts). For example, Beau planned explicit and sequenced SEL lessons using content and resources from the AC, his school's adoption of FSP and other anti-bullying websites. He also integrated his SEL-related content and skill selection with his school's inquiry teaching framework. Karen's decision-making for SEL is intertwined with her school's adopted PBL approach to student wellbeing, embedded values system and established model for student behaviour (the Glasser Model). Also, Alex describes their commitment to addressing the general capabilities content from the AC—including supporting students' understanding of self, others and the environment—as the basis of their SEL instruction. These three teachers' regular engagement with SEL programs and resources confirms their "content-driven" approach to SEL decision-making.

When planning for SEL, Alex draws from their outdoor education background and strong personal interest in facilitating "authentic learning opportunities" to ensure real-world SEL application for students. Thus, in addition to their knowledge of students and SEL content, Alex's SEL planning and instruction appear strongly influenced by their personal values, passions and preferred pedagogy. Likewise, while Celeste does not use any specific SEL-related programs or resources to guide her SEL teaching, she does note using a preferred lesson "formula" to teach Japanese. She describes using this specific formula to plan all her lessons across all year levels. The formula includes clear lesson success criteria, a "greetings" routine and a purposeful range of learning engagements, including singing, games and collaborative activities. Accordingly, the analysis of Alex's and Celeste's data introduces the underlying premise for an additional evolving theme depicting a "teacher-driven" approach to the teachers' SEL planning and decision-making. This developing theme reflects cross-case data indicating

the teachers plan and deliver SEL in ways that resonate with their personal beliefs, values and teaching styles.

Overall, this cross-case analysis indicates the teachers' "student-centred" and "content-informed" approaches to decision-making for SEL. These identified themes suggest the teachers' planning for SEL evolves predominantly from their knowledge of students alongside their engagement with various SEL programs and resources. Additionally, for two teachers (Celeste & Alex), there are indications that their interests, roles and values shape their SEL planning and decision-making. This emerging theme suggests that teachers' planning for SEL can also be "teacher-driven" while remaining grounded in their knowledge of students and SEL content.

8.2.3. RQ 3: What approaches do the Case 1–4 participant teachers use to implement SEL in the classroom context?

8.2.3.1. Implementing SEL: Active, consistent, relational and responsive approaches to SEL

Four themes are identified as encapsulating the Case 1–4 participant teachers' approaches to SEL implementation. These include teachers:

- taking an active and explicit approach to SEL instruction
- establishing a positive and consistent learning environment
- connecting and relating with students
- using a student-centred approach to respond to students' SEL needs.

On analysis, these four themes relate closely to the teachers' conceptualisations of SEL and their decision-making processes.

To begin, the theme "active and explicit SEL teaching" encompasses the teachers' modelling and explicit teaching of SEL content and skills. This theme relates strongly to the teachers' "SEL as content" conceptualisations. During their observations, the teachers facilitated SEL lessons bound by clear learning intentions and success criteria (Beau & Celeste) and targeted SEL content (Beau, Karen & Alex). During the interviews, the teachers describe their SEL instruction as incorporating a range of explicit and intentional SEL-related skill-building opportunities, such as:

- mind and body activities, including meditation, active listening and physical exercise (Beau & Celeste)
- buddy class visits (Karen, Alex & Celeste)
- collaborative role-plays (Beau, Karen & Alex)
- whole-class SEL discussions, including circle time conversations and scheduled class meetings (Beau, Karen & Alex)
- regular opportunities for student goal-setting and self-reflection (Beau, Karen & Celeste).

The four teachers were also observed and identified as active and intentional facilitators of SEL. They "model" key SEL skills and behaviours for students by actively demonstrating respectful verbal and non-verbal communication marked by positive language, facial expressions and actions. Additionally, as role models for students' SEL, the four teachers describe ways of sharing personal stories and anecdotes with students (Alex, Celeste & Karen); using teacher-led questioning (Beau & Alex); and providing constructive feedback and positive reinforcement to acknowledge students' SEL progress and achievements (Beau, Karen, Celeste & Alex).

Likewise, in line with their shared conceptualisations of "SEL as a positive environment," all four teachers express their commitment to ensuring a positive and consistent classroom culture to encourage students' social and emotional development and SEL engagement. Therefore, teaching behaviours constitute the second theme, "establishing a positive and consistent learning environment." This theme embodies individual and collective case data to indicate the teachers' consistent and intentional use of classroom expectations, consistent SEL-related routines and regular opportunities for student input and collaboration to facilitate students' SEL.

Across the cases, the teachers recount their use of clear expectations for student behaviour based on established class agreements to build a positive classroom environment. These agreements include "classroom rules" or "essential class agreements" (Beau, Karen & Celeste), school values (Karen) and learner attributes (Alex). The four teachers also note using consistent classroom routines to facilitate smooth transitions to learning for their students. Transitions incorporate Celeste's pre-entry expectation that her students line up outside and greet one another and Beau's morning run routine. Alex uses whole-class check-in and intentional setting of routines, while Karen assigns "bell tasks" for students. The teachers' use of regular

opportunities for student input, collaboration and recognition of students' SEL accomplishments are nested within this theme. Examples include the facilitation of student discussion and sharing opportunities using established SEL pedagogies such as circle time (Karen), whole-class meetings (Karen, Beau & Alex) and collaborative games (Celeste).

When teaching SEL, the four teachers were dedicated to forging connections and relating with students. The theme "connect with students" reflects this approach. This theme describes the teachers' commitment to connecting, communicating and relationship-building with students. Connecting with students was a consistent approach when teaching; however, when implementing SEL, it was reflected in the content and teaching. For example, the four teachers recount the value of developing relationships with students and suggest these relationships create an essential foundation for all student learning, including SEL. As a language specialist, Celeste notes her regular commitment to checking in with students outside of the classroom and working one-to-one with them as a way of getting to know each student despite her limited time with them each week. Also, Alex shares their commitment to understanding their Year 6 students' lives to ensure classroom communication and SEL lessons are authentic and relatable to students' ongoing needs.

Each of the four teachers also embedded what I described as a responsive "student-centred approach" to teaching SEL. This theme comprises data depicting the teachers' connections with students and reflects their intentional responsiveness to students' needs. It also includes examples of the teachers' facilitation of authentic SEL-related learning opportunities. For instance, the four teachers describe how they carefully observe and engage with students to identify specific SEL need areas. Three teachers (Beau, Karen & Alex) also share how they select and relate SEL content to students by incorporating students' interests and abilities. Alex's case data powerfully depicts their heavily student-centred approach to SEL—an approach grounded in involving students in "purposeful" play, authentic learning opportunities and student-led inquiries. Across the cases, the teachers also describe "embedding" learning and behavioural scaffolds to assist students' SEL development (Karen) and differentiating content and strategies to cater for a range of student abilities and learning styles (Beau, Celeste & Alex).

In review, cross-case analysis of these four cases reveals themes consistent across the cases and highly entwined. Case data indicate the teachers use a range of approaches to implement SEL—complementary and symbiotic approaches rather than occurring in isolation.

Additionally, the themes align with the teachers' individual and collective conceptualisations of SEL. They also appear shaped by the influences that have informed their thinking about the area. Cross-case examples exemplify how the teachers draw on their conceptualisations of SEL as content, environment and a teacher's responsibility to implement approaches to SEL that are active, consistent, relational and responsive. As these themes encompass, by using a range of approaches for SEL, the teachers facilitate active and explicit SEL instruction that responds to students' needs, develops a positive learning environment and encourages connections with students.

8.2.4. RQ 4: What factors promote and/or impede the Case 1–4 participant teachers' implementation of SEL?

8.2.4.1. Promoting teachers' SEL implementation: Teachers' SEC, positive school culture and school-wide commitment to SEL

Three themes encapsulate the dominant factors identified to promote the teachers' SEL implementation:

- the teachers' own SEC, including their personal commitment to and understanding of social and emotional skill-building (i.e., self-awareness, self-management and relationship-building)
- the influence of a positive school culture, including staff engagement, leadership support and positive working relationships
- a school-wide commitment and approach to SEL, including school-wide SEL program implementation and staff training.

Cross-case data show the teachers' individual SEC supports their SEL engagement and implementation. The theme "teachers' own SEC' reflects the teachers' personal application of SEL-related skills, behaviours and attitudes to their teaching of SEL. Thus, it depicts an embodied teaching experience of SEL, suggesting the teachers practise the SEL skills and content they teach. For example, Beau notes how reflections on his lived experiences—both as a child and as an adult—have bolstered his regard for SEL as a "vital" learning area. Reflections have encouraged him to plan more explicitly for students' personal and social needs.

Similarly, Karen, Celeste and Alex outline their personal commitment to participating in research opportunities and inquiry projects to identify improved teaching strategies (Karen &

Alex) and cultivate a positive professional mindset for teaching (Celeste & Alex). All four teachers note their commitment to engaging in self-reflection practices, including journaling, professional reading, mindfulness activities, exercise and peer conversations. These practices were noted to increase their self-awareness (Beau, Celeste & Alex), refine their teaching practices (Beau, Karen & Alex) and strengthen relationships with students (Beau, Karen, Celeste & Alex). This theme suggests the teachers' own SEC acts as a catalyst for their teaching of SEL by providing a foundation of lived experiences and empathetic understandings upon which to develop their SEL instruction.

As a second promoting factor, all four teachers outline the benefits of a positive school culture in their SEL implementation. Accordingly, the theme "positive school culture" includes cross-case data reflecting the school-based decisions and relationships supporting teachers' SEL planning and teaching. Within this theme, cross-case examples indicate the positive influence of the following on the teachers' understanding and engagement with SEL:

- regular opportunities for staff input, collaboration and communication (Beau & Karen)
- positive relationships with colleagues, including team teaching and the chance to de-brief (Beau, Karen, Celeste & Alex)
- relationship-building with parents and the school community (Beau, Karen & Alex).

Three teachers (Karen, Celeste & Alex) highlight the positive impact of leadership support, trust and acknowledgement on building positive working relationships to support and embed an SEL-focused school culture for teachers. This second theme implies that teachers' SEL commitment and practices benefit from the support of their colleagues, leadership and school community.

As the third and final promoting factor, two of the four teachers (Beau & Karen) note that their schools' SEL approaches have positively influenced their SEL knowledge and practices. Thus, the theme "school-wide commitment and approach to SEL" is supported by cross-case data, which depict the positive influence of consistent, shared and embedded SEL practices within these teachers' school contexts. For example, Karen describes her school as taking a proactive and preventative approach to SEL by embedding specific SEL programs and supporting teachers to adopt these within their teaching. Likewise, Beau shares that by including SEL within its annual action plan and increasing staff collaboration opportunities, his school

encourages an intentional approach to SEL. Both teachers outline the benefits of receiving staff training and working on school-based SEL committees to create shared staff resources for SEL. Finally, Beau and Karen note that their schools' "shared approach" to SEL increases parent partnerships and community engagement with SEL by initiating conversations around students' social and emotional skills and behaviours. Overall, this theme indicates that a school-wide approach to SEL can provide teachers with shared structures, resources and relationships to enhance their SEL implementation.

8.2.4.2. Impeding teachers' SEL implementation: The constraints of time and teacher exhaustion, wavering school/staff support for SEL and various teaching challenges

In contrast to the promoting factors outlined, all teachers provided independent examples of restrictions to their teaching of SEL. From these examples, three themes arose that reflect these limitations: the constraints of time and teacher exhaustion, wavering school and staff support for SEL, and various teaching challenges unique to each teacher participant.

Three of the four teachers (Beau, Karen & Celeste) described themselves as busy, tired and "time poor" (Beau & Celeste), and their classroom teaching time as limited (Karen & Celeste). Therefore, the theme 'time and teacher exhaustion' encompasses the negative impact of professional time pressures and feelings of exhaustion on the teachers' engagement with SEL. It also reflects cross-case data indicating the effect of "dense" curriculum requirements and unrealistic teaching expectations (Celeste), limited opportunities for staff communication and collaboration (Celeste), and pressure to move ahead with planned lessons regardless of student progress (Karen & Celeste). In further support of this theme, Karen's and Beau's case data highlight the additional time and training demands required for SEL implementation at their schools. Karen notes that some SEL programs can take a long time for staff to learn and establish in schools. At the same time, Beau suggests introducing new SEL programs and training can result in negative sentiments and teachers showing limited 'buy-in' due to viewing SEL as an additional time-consuming task.

A second theme, "wavering school and staff support for SEL," arose from cross-case data indicating the adverse effects of limited staff engagement or school consistency regarding SEL implementation. In contrast to the noted benefits of a school-wide approach and commitment to SEL, two teachers (Beau & Alex) report their implementation of SEL was impeded by:

- a school's shifting SEL priorities and initiatives (Beau)
- the prioritisation of academic content over SEL implementation (Beau)
- a lack of authentic staff "buy-in" or collegial responsibility for SEL (Beau & Alex)
- limited community and student knowledge about SEL (Beau & Alex).

Thus, while school-wide SEL programs and initiatives can positively support teachers' uptake and implementation of SEL, this influence must be consistent, reliable and collectively supported by school staff.

Finally, across the four teachers, individual case data present several unique challenges to the teachers' SEL implementation. These are collated within the theme "various teaching challenges," which encompasses the complexities teachers identify as impeding their SEL instruction. While some overlap exists, several challenges are specific to the individual teachers and their school contexts, such as:

- the cultural and religious backgrounds of students (Beau)
- finding suitable SEL resources for students (Karen)
- a perceived lack of students' SEL transfer (Karen)
- limited background information about new students and students' learning needs (Celeste)
- student learning barriers including limited knowledge of SEL (Alex).

Notably, while discussed concerning the teachers' SEL instruction, these challenges to teachers' SEL implementation can also be considered general teaching challenges.

Reviewing these themes overall, the implementation of SEL by these four teachers is enhanced by their lived experiences and personal and social competence, peer collaboration and feelings of collegial support, and a school-wide commitment to SEL. These themes highlight SEL instruction's strong personal and social nature for teachers and students alike. The themes suggest teachers' personal identities and social supports play a pivotal role in their SEL perceptions, planning and pedagogy. Conversely, time constraints and feelings of exhaustion seem to prohibit teachers' SEL implementation. The inconsistent school compounds this and staff support for SEL and various other challenges connected to school settings and student cohorts. Collectively, these themes highlight that even for those teachers strongly committed to and proficient with SEL, it is a time- and energy-intensive teaching area that can present unique challenges for teachers.

8.3. Conclusion

This chapter has synthesised and summarised the major cross-case thematic findings from Cases 1–4. All themes are supported by cross-case data and reflect identified similarities and differences in how the participant teachers conceptualise, plan and implement SEL. Additionally, the named cross-case themes capture the personal and professional influences on the teachers' SEL knowledge and outline several promoting and impeding factors on their SEL practices. Next, I will present abridged individual case reports for Cases 5–7 (Chapter 9) and a thematic summary (Chapter 10), followed by a final cross-case analysis report (Chapter 11). This final summary report will integrate the cross-case themes from all seven cases and provide the basis for my cross-case discussion of findings.

Chapter 9: Case Reports 5–7

9.1. Case 5: Lucy—Participant Profile

Lucy (she/her/hers) is a mature teacher with 10 years of teaching experience across Years 2, 3 and 5. She transitioned into primary teaching late in her professional career after raising her children and completing two previous degrees in science and art conservation. Lucy began teaching Year 3 at Lakeside Primary School at the start of the school year. The school hosts an open-plan learning environment that sees student cohorts taught by several teachers within a large flexible learning space. Each teacher has an assigned class but also instructs various groups of students across the cohort (i.e., levelled literacy and mathematics groups). The school has a population of around 480 students, of which 46% identify as having a language background other than English, and 1% identify as Indigenous. During this study, Lucy taught her assigned class of 24 Year 3 students, several of whom had EAL/D backgrounds and other diagnosed learning needs, including ASD. At least three students were on ILPs.

9.2. Overview of Findings

9.2.1. RQ 1: How does Lucy conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped her understanding of this learning area?

9.2.1.1. Conceptualisations of SEL

Lucy conceptualises SEL as a critical "part of being a teacher" (Int. 1, p. 7) and as a way for students to develop relationships and build key social-emotional skills (see Figure 9.1). When asked to define what SEL means to her, Lucy responds:

> It's relationships and emotions and dealing with the way they [students] view the world … Relationships, for me, is probably the biggest one because that covers a lot of areas. Relationships covers how you deal with other people and how you deal with yourself. (Int. 1, p. 7)

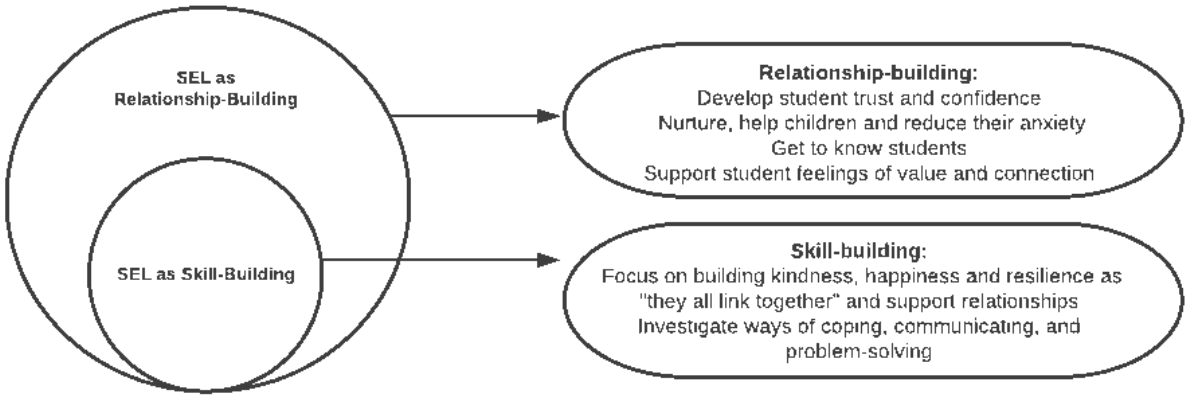
Lucy considers SEL a valuable way to help nurture and support children to develop trust and important foundations for stronger relationships. She proposes that while SEL content can be challenging for some students due to its open-ended and personal nature (VSRD 2, p. 16), it enables students to develop key "skills for life" and ways "to cope in the real world" (Int. 1,

p. 9). Lucy lists these critical skills as demonstrating resilience by seeing the "positive aspects in every situation" (Int. 2, p. 5), finding ways to relax (Int. 1, p. 8) and "be happy" (Int. 2, p. 5), sharing and communicating effectively with others (Int. 1, p. 10), and being able to laugh at oneself when making mistakes (Int. 2, p. 6).

Additionally, Lucy underlines the importance of teaching students to be kind, caring and respectful, both to themselves and others (Int.1, p. 10; Int. 2, p. 4), explaining her emphasis for SEL lessons is "the process not the product" (VSRD 1, p. 12). She shares, "I know the curriculum is important—I know it is very important—but to me it is more important that they [students] actually come out of school as rounded, resilient, kind [and] caring" (Int. 2, p. 26). Overall, Lucy considers these relational attributes and skills as "the basics" (Int. 2, p. 4) of SEL and "all link[ed] in together" (Int. 2, p 10) as part of her "underlying main premise for SEL" (Int. 1, p. 9).

Figure 9.1

Lucy's Conceptualisations of SEL



9.2.1.2. Influences on SEL understanding

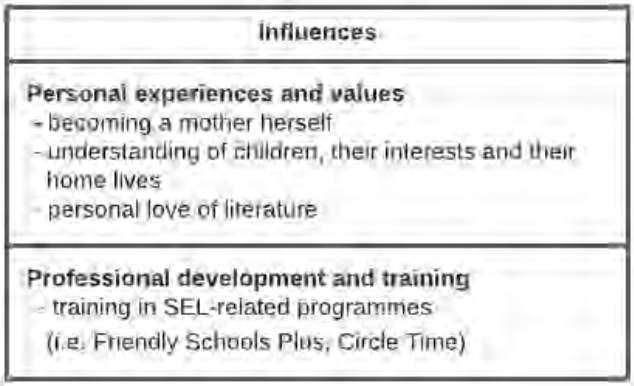
Lucy's understanding of SEL is influenced by her personal experiences, values, professional development and training (see Figure 9.2). In our discussions, Lucy explains how her maturity and experience as a mother allow her to understand and emphasise with children's needs, backgrounds and experiences (Int. 1, p. 2; Int. 2, p. 16). She also notes her personal interests, namely her love of children's literature, often influence her selection of SEL content (Int. 1, p. 8). Additionally, Lucy explains how her training in different SEL-related programs,

including FSP and circle time, has informed her understanding of and approach to teaching SEL.

For example, Lucy describes circle time as “a really powerful way” to teach SEL (Int. 1, p. 10), stating: “In a circle I can see everybody and we can see each other … so they [students] all feel included. I think that’s a really important basis to start a lesson” (Int. 2, p. 15). Lucy shares that more formal and sequenced SEL programs, such as FSP and Bounce Back, can feel “really hard to follow” (Int. 1, p. 8) due to their prescribed lesson sequence and materials (Int. 2, p. 12). She prefers implementing “role-playing or a game or sharing” (Int. 2, p. 12) with students and using “more spontaneous” SEL content to assist students to “take on board life around them” (Int. 1, p. 8). Lucy’s understanding of SEL has been influenced by her personal experiences and interests and her training in SEL-related programs.

Figure 9.2

Influences on Lucy’s Conceptualisations of SEL



9.2.2. RQ 2: How does Lucy make decisions about her teaching of SEL?

Personal interests and beliefs guide Lucy’s decision-making for teaching SEL alongside her desire to respond to students’ needs, interests and experiences (see Figure 9.3). She considers “caring,” “respect” and “being friends” as “the basics” of SEL (VSRD 1, p. 4) and explains she tries to “integrate it [SEL] all the time” across content areas by incorporating her love of children’s literature (Int. 2, p. 11) and teaching using circle time pedagogy (Int. 1, p, 10; Int. 2, p. 15). Rather than adhering to published SEL programs or using prefabricated SEL materials like worksheets, Lucy plans weekly SEL lessons predominantly in response to her observations of students (Int. 2, pp. 11–12, 26).

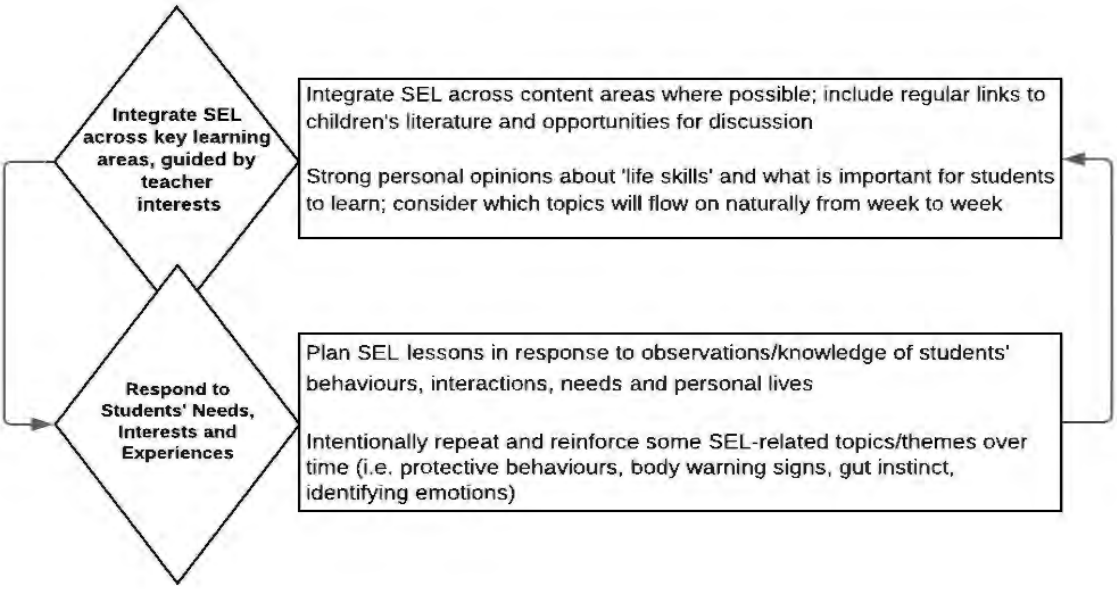
For example, her lessons address students' "friendship issues," "kids not respecting others by talking" and year-level "pushing and shoving incidents" (VSRD 1, p. 4; Int. 2, p. 11). She states, "I am just tweaking [my SEL teaching] all the time to try and make the lessons better and their learning better" (Int. 2, p. 26). Lucy's knowledge of her students, including their home lives, interests and personalities, supports her in selecting relevant content and activities for SEL lessons. For instance, during her first lesson observation, Lucy addressed the concept of "self-worth" by having students make individual "affirmation stones" to depict their unique qualities. When asked about her selection of this topic, she says it was in response to her students' personal lives:

> In this school, we have a lot of kids from broken families—there's dads in prison, there's all sorts of backgrounds [*sic*] … So, a lot of these kids need to feel safe and secure and loved, and I do believe you need to have your own self-worth and value. (VSRD 1, p. 4)

Moreover, she shares: "I find it is easy to teach them if you know where their interests are" (Int. 2, p. 2). Accordingly, Lucy selects learning materials to suit students' interests (VSRD 1, p. 13). She regularly engages them in relationship-building conversations "that way they really see you as taking an interest in them" (Int. 2, p. 16). As such, Lucy's overall decision-making for SEL is highly responsive, stemming from her personal interests, beliefs and comprehensive knowledge of her students.

Figure 9.3

Lucy's Decision-Making About SEL



9.2.3. RQ 3: What approaches does Lucy use to implement SEL in the classroom context?

Lucy implements several approaches to SEL, including fostering positive relationships; modelling and teaching SEL language and behaviours; and using consistent SEL routines and learning engagements (see Figure 9.4). Lucy prides herself in how she connects with her students and her deliberate effort towards fostering positive teacher–student relationships: "If I know a student is particularly troubled or worried about something at home … I will make it intentional to check in on them" (Int. 2, p. 21; VSRD 2, p. 16). She says, "people and relationships has [*sic*] always been my thing" (Int. 2, p. 26) and explains she "is very open" and "genuine" with students to facilitate positive and trusting relationships (Int. 1, p. 4; Int. 2, p. 21). Lucy shares, "I really try to give every child in my class the understanding that I care for them … I want to know all of them well" (VSRD 1, p. 16). Lucy's positive relationships with students were evident throughout both lesson observations. She positioned herself on the floor among her students, spoke warmly to them and shared engaging stories about herself (VSRD 2, p. 17).

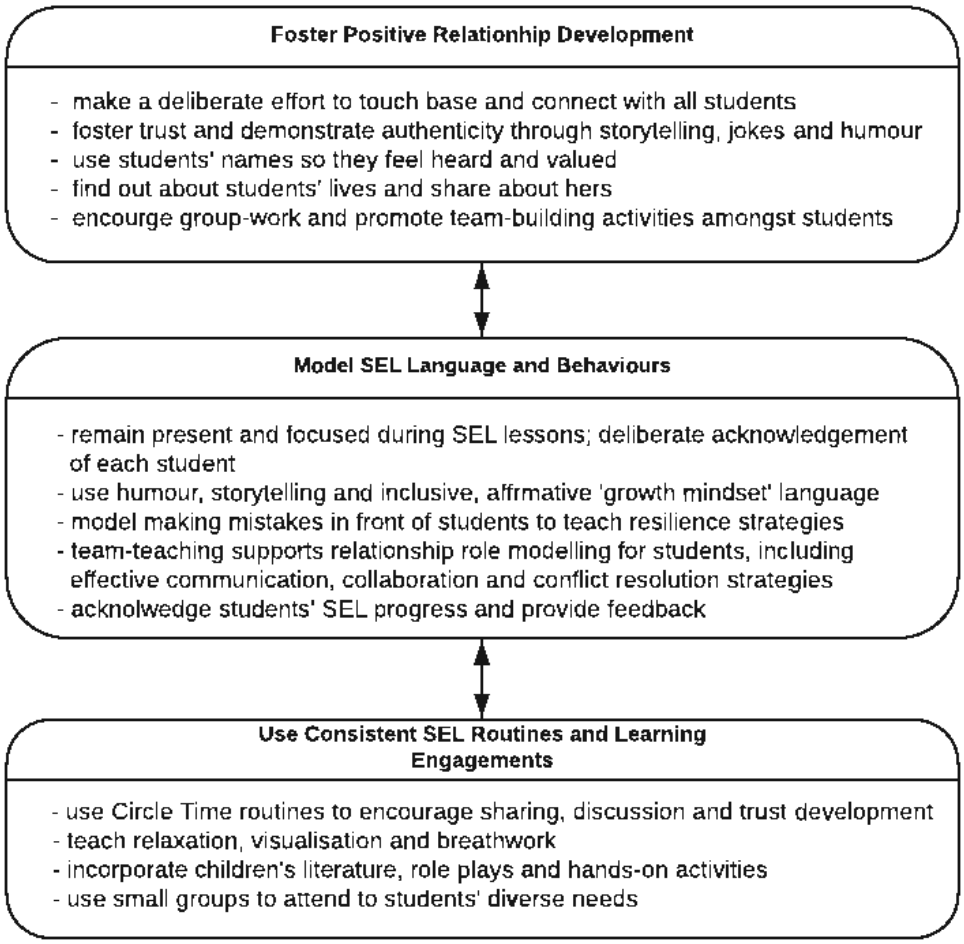
Lucy also actively models key SEL language and behaviours. For example, she makes it a point to greet all students in an "authentic" and "deliberate" manner (VSRD 2, P. 6) and "make them feel welcome to the day" (Int. 1, p. 11; VSRD 2, p. 16). Lucy intentionally "celebrate(s) mistakes" (Int. 2, p. 6) and uses "growth mindset" language to encourage students' resilience-building strategies, including positive self-talk. She shares, "it's the language I use in the class—'you might not have that now, but you have it, you will get it, you're working hard at it'" (VSRD 2, p. 10). Lucy also shares personal stories with her students to "jog them into thinking" about SEL topics: "I just find stories help them relate" (VSRD 2, p. 17). Reflecting on her second lesson observation, Lucy affirms she stays present and "in the moment" when teaching SEL: "I am right in the moment of the lesson. It's not like I give them a task and I walk away … I'm right there in it" (VSRD 2, p. 16). Additionally, Lucy remarks how her unique, team teaching environment positively supports adult modelling of key SEL-related skills for students:

> I love team teaching … They [students] see us engaging and if we don't agree they can see us resolving conflicts in a mature manner and having a discussion and having a joke and it's a really good way to role model how adults interact. (Int. 1, p. 4)

As a final and complementary approach, Lucy uses consistent routines and learning engagements to support students' SEL engagement and progress. These routines include using circle time pedagogy (VSRD 1, p. 4) and "small groups" for literacy and mathematics (Int. 2, p. 24). In the small groups, Lucy provides individualised support and feedback for students on various social and academic topics, noting they "all need different things" (Int. 2, p. 24). She also engages her students in regular relaxation, breathing and visualisation exercises (Int. 1, p. 8), and enjoys using children's literature, hands-on crafts and structured role-plays to support students' engagement with SEL content (VSRD 1, p. 18; VSRD 2, p. 10). Overall, Lucy takes an active, student-centred approach to implement SEL, as evidenced by her relationship-building, modelling of SEL language and behaviours and use of consistent SEL routines and activities.

Figure 9.4

Lucy's Approaches to SEL Implementation



9.2.4. RQ 4: What factors promote and/or impede Lucy's implementation of SEL?

9.2.4.1. Promoting factors

Three main factors promote Lucy's implementation of SEL: her SEC, team teaching and a positive school environment (see Figure 9.5). During our second interview, Lucy describes herself as having always been "reflective," sharing how this quality supports her to try different approaches to enhance her teaching (Int. 2, p. 25). She demonstrates self-awareness and resilience by suggesting being kind to yourself and allowing time to grow and improve your practice is important. She notes that a lesson might not go to plan, but "that's life and you're going to get there" (Int. 2, p. 26).

Lucy also shares how team teaching positively supports her SEL teaching and her own SEC by facilitating authentic collaboration, communication and support (Int. 1, p. 13; Int. 2, pp. 19–21). She shares, "it is amazing because if I am feeling flat then I know that [my colleagues] are there as well.… I mean we will all help each other" (Int. 2, p. 20). As an additional promoting factor for her teaching of SEL, Lucy commends her school's support for SEL (Int. 1, p. 14). Specifically, she applauds the school's use and recognition of a shared set of school "values":

> So, they [the executive staff] have printed off the values which are beautifully designed on little business card sizes so [students] are often regularly getting awards for kindness and respect and excellence throughout the day (Int. 1, p. 14).

She describes how this wider school system encourages her to comment on students' SEL-related behaviours and achievements in line with the school's overarching approach, thus enhancing her SEL implementation.

9.2.4.2. Impeding factors

Two main factors are identified as impeding Lucy's implementation of SEL: a shared, open-plan learning space and several complex barriers to students' learning (see Figure 9.5). When teaching within an open-plan environment, Lucy sometimes finds it challenging to locate a suitable space to hold weekly SEL lessons for her class. She explains she must book other classrooms in advance to ensure a space that will protect students' privacy and encourage them to share openly (VSRD 1, p. 15). She also remarks that students' noise levels within an open-plan setting require ongoing management, with some activities proving difficult to facilitate due to equipment requirements and the resulting levels of distraction for other students in the shared space (Int. 2, p. 20; VSRD1, pp. 3, 15).

Additionally, Lucy highlights several complex student needs and barriers to learning that can impede her implementation of SEL. These include student learning diagnoses such as ASD, anxiety and limited English language. According to Lucy, diverse student needs, including a lack of language and limited responsiveness, can make it difficult for her to communicate or develop relationships with some students, requiring her to adapt her preferred resources and approach to SEL (VSRD 2, pp. 1–3).

Figure 9.5

Promoting and Impeding Factors on Lucy's SEL Implementation

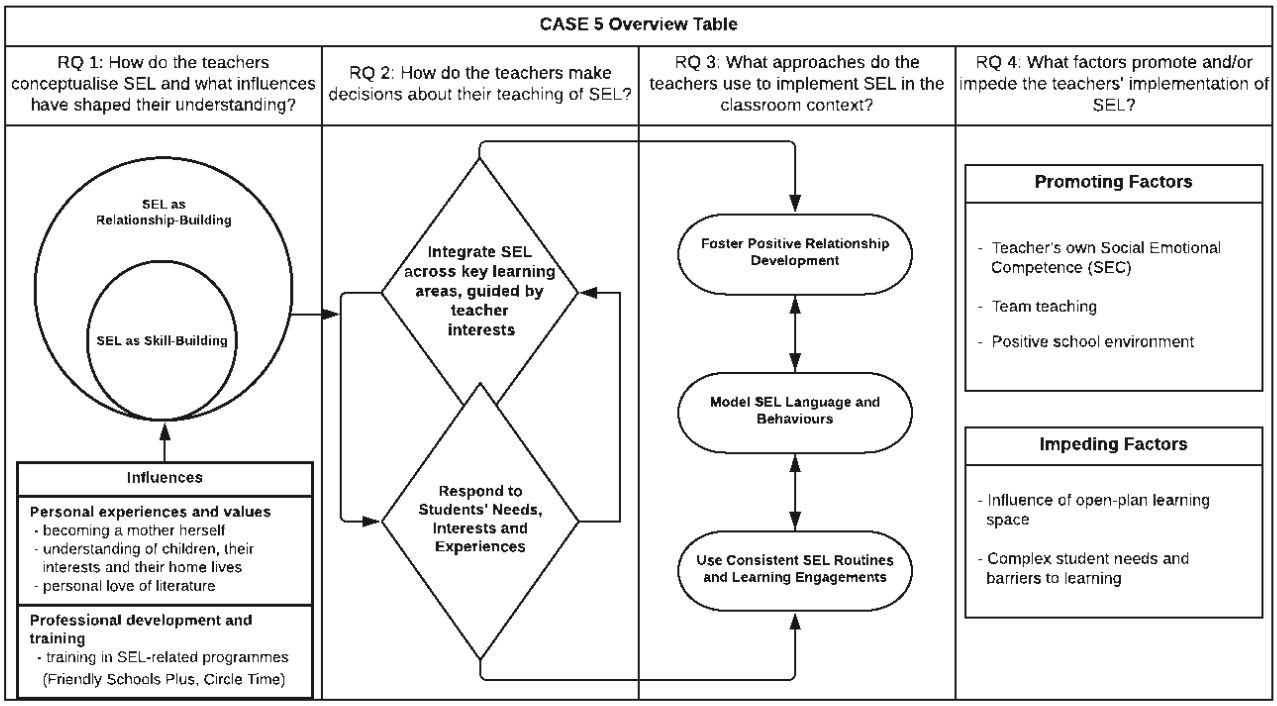
Promoting Factors	Impeding Factors
- **Teacher's own Social Emotional Competence (SEC)** - constant reflection on teaching practice - important to be kind to yourself; allow time to grow and improve on practice - **Team-teaching** - provides a shared approach to students' SEL issues - encourages relationship development with more students - supports teacher SEC and professional development - **Positive school environment** - whole-school set of school values - school social events offer opportunities to engage with parents	- **Influence of an open-plan learning space** - some SEL activities require a more private setting to support student privacy and to encourage a greater ease of sharing; finding room for a single class can be difficult to organise - noise levels within an open-plan teaching environment require constant management - **Complex student needs and barriers to learning** - some students disengaged with SEL due to specific learning needs and behaviours (autisum diagnosis, EAL/D, anxiety/risk-avoidance); need to adapt resources and programmes to include all students - lack of language or limited responsiveness can make it difficult to form relationships with students - regular student absences can result in poor social connections or lack of student engagement and lessson continuity

9.3. Summary of Case Findings

The synthesised case findings of research interactions with Lucy are presented in Figure 9.6. Overall, Lucy is characterised as a highly relational teacher whose SEL practice is heavily guided and influenced by her personal values and lived experiences, and her strong interest in and knowledge of students' personal and academic needs. Lucy considers SEL a way to support students' personal and social skills, and uses consistent relationship-building techniques, teaching routines and adult modelling to encourage students' SEL growth. While her teaching of SEL can be challenging to manage within an open-plan setting and teaching students with diverse needs, she benefits from a strong sense of self, a collaborative teaching team and a positive school environment.

Figure 9.6

Summary of Lucy's Case Findings



9.4. Case 6: Seb—Participant Profile

Seb (he/him/his) has taught for six years across three school settings. His prior experience includes teaching Kindergarten, Years 3, 4 and a 3/4 composite class. After several years of retail work, Seb pursued a Bachelor of Primary Education as a mature-age student. He explains he likes "helping people to improve" and particularly enjoys "the nurturing, more warm side [*sic*]" of working with children (Int. 1, p. 3). During this study, Seb taught a class of 19 Kindergarten students at WPS. Of its approximately 540 students, 58% identify as having a language other than English, and 4% identify as Indigenous. In Seb's class, one student was classified as EAL/D, and another had documented learning needs but was not on an ILP.

9.5. Overview of Findings

9.5.1. RQ 1: How does Seb conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped his understanding of this learning area?

9.5.1.1. Conceptualisations of SEL

Three main themes encapsulate Seb's conceptualisation of SEL: identifying the classroom teacher as central to students' SEL development; SEL as positive teacher–student relationships; and SEL as the promotion of students' "prosocial behaviours" (see Figure 9.7). Seb prioritises SEL and regards children's emotional development as critically important and central to any "good teaching" (Int. 1, pp. 5, 12). When asked to define SEL, he describes it as naturally embedded within a teacher's language, interactions and expectations:

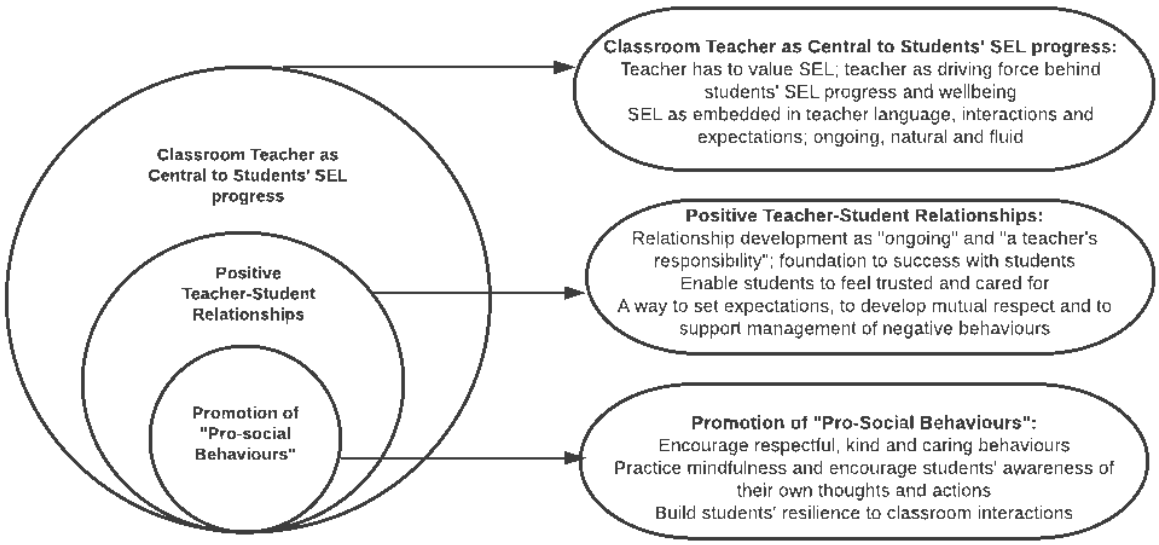
> It's in every interaction that you're having with them [students] and supporting them to have with each other. [That] is the social-emotional learning. It obviously goes way beyond explicit lessons—it's in every expectation of how they treat each other and how I treat them. (Int. 1, p. 10)

Accordingly, Seb considers classroom teachers central to students' SEL progress, suggesting teachers must value SEL themselves to support student's personal and social wellbeing. Positive teacher–student relationships comprise another key component of Seb's conceptualisation of SEL. For him, teacher–student relationship development is "an ongoing thing all the time" (Int. 2, p. 21) and helps encourage "success with students" by promoting feelings of inclusion, confidence, trust and care (Int. 1, pp. 13, 16). As the final element of his conceptualisation of SEL, Seb identifies his commitment to building students' "prosocial behaviour and empathy" (Int. 1, p. 5). This includes "a focus on increasing wellbeing and increasing resilience" (Int. 1, p. 8) and encouraging students "to be well-rounded, to have high self-esteem and high self-efficacy for the things they want to do [and to] find value in themselves" (Int. 1, p. 5; Int. 2, pp. 3–4).

Additionally, Seb considers SEL as building students' awareness of their "influence" on others and assisting them in realising "that there is a world beyond them" (Int. 2, p. 5). To facilitate these behaviours and dispositions, he promotes students' active listening behaviours, mindfulness techniques, and reflection and metacognition processes (Int. 1, p. 8). Overall, he considers SEL a "general collective focus" of his teaching and one characterised by a shared commitment to respect and kindness (Int. 1, p. 11).

Figure 9.7

Seb's Conceptualisations of SEL

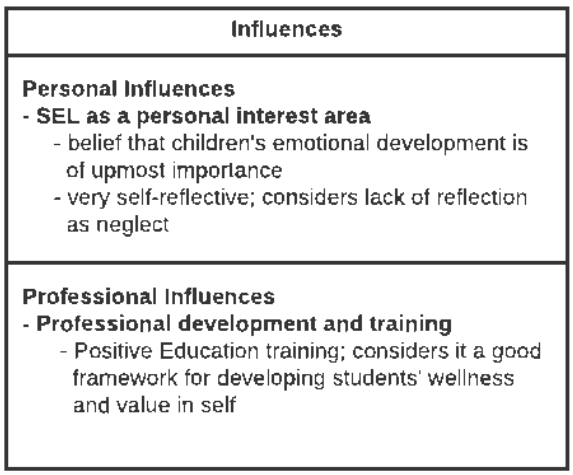


9.5.1.2. Influences on SEL understanding

Seb's understanding of SEL has been shaped by his interest in the area, alongside professional development and training influences (see Figure 9.8). He considers SEL a priority teaching area that naturally aligns with his educational strengths and values (Int. 1, p. 15). In our discussions, Seb describes himself as "someone who care[s] pretty deeply about the wellbeing of other people" (Int. 1, p. 6), leading him to seek out professional resources to enhance his understanding of the area (Int. 1, p. 8). Additionally, Seb shares how professional training, specifically in positive education, influenced his understanding and implementation of SEL. This training included interstate school visits and conversations with colleagues regarding the positive education curriculum and its related resources. Seb explains that the training prompted him to "focus on increasing wellbeing and increasing resilience" for students and "developing foundations for students to be able to reflect" (Int. 1, p. 8). Seb's personal values and professional influences have shaped his understanding of and commitment to SEL.

Figure 9.8

Influences on Seb's Conceptualisations of SEL



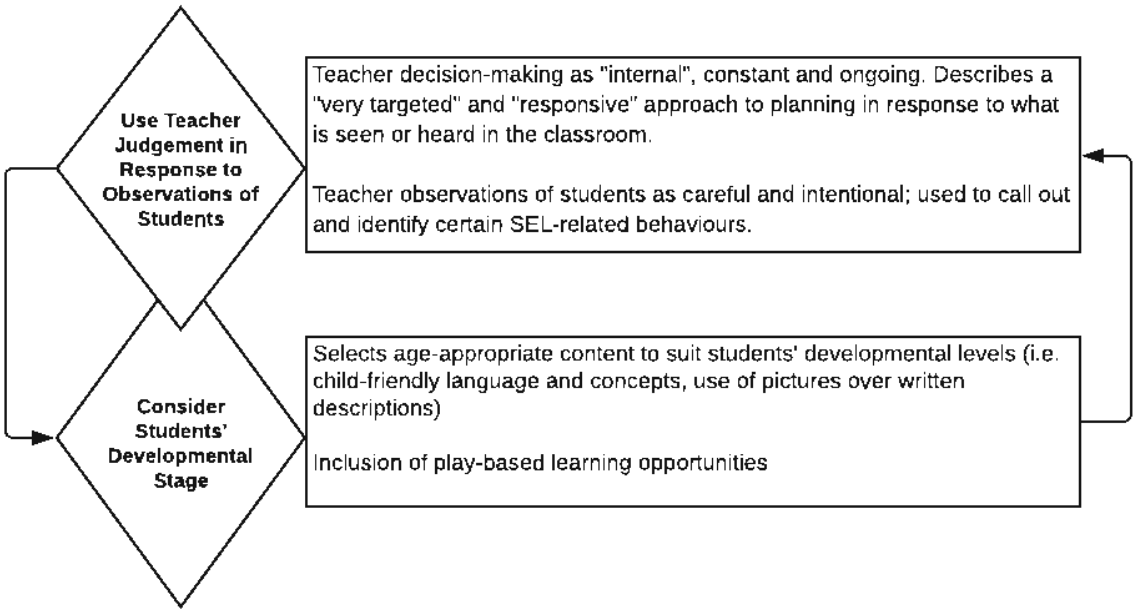
9.5.2. RQ 2: How does Seb make decisions about his teaching of SEL?

When making decisions about his teaching of SEL, Seb uses his teacher judgement combined with his knowledge of students' developmental abilities (see Figure 9.9). In this way, Seb describes his approach to SEL as "responsive" and "very targeted" to students' needs (Int. 2, p. 8). He explains: "We are not planning out a year's worth of stuff and then just strictly adhering to it. We're targeting the needs of the students, which is good teaching in any discipline" (Int. 2, p. 8). While Seb admits his teaching of SEL "is not mapped out anywhere," he does have a "general picture of what's going on" and is confident "students are getting what I want them to get out of it and what I think they need to get" (Int. 1, pp. 9, 10).

Seb explains he observes students (Int. 2, p. 3; Int. 2, p. 6) and relies on his positive relationships with them to assist him in selecting and implementing relevant SEL content and activities (Int. 1, p. 13). He also adapts his language and SEL resources to cater to students' mixed abilities and developmental levels, noting that Kindergarteners often require adapted SEL-related language, activities and resources to "really conceptualise and grasp an idea" (Int. 1, pp. 10–11; Int. 2, p. 6. For example, he uses play-based learning (Int. 1, p. 13), hands-on pictorial resources (Int. 1, p. 11) and children's literature (Int 2, p. 5) to explore age-appropriate SEL concepts with his students. Overall, Seb regards his decision-making for SEL as responsive to students' ongoing needs and, therefore, less reliant on "hard data" and "much more qualitative" in nature (Int. 2, p. 3).

Figure 9.9

Seb's Decision-Making About SEL



9.5.3. RQ 3: What approaches does Seb use to implement SEL in the classroom context?

Seb implements several interrelated approaches to SEL. These include modelling and teaching SEL language and behaviours, fostering positive teacher–student relationships, and responding to students' needs (see Figure 9.10). In line with his perspective, classroom teachers are "the most important" aspect of supporting students' social and emotional development at school (Int. 1, pp. 16, 19). Seb consistently models and teaches his students key SEL skills and behaviours (Int. 2, p. 10). This includes being "persistently kind and warm" (Int. 2, p. 15); using and "teaching more language around emotions" (Int. 1, p. 11) to support students' emotional expression; and "setting expectations" for student behaviour by using a shared "essential agreement" (Int. 2, p. 10).

Seb also implements "highly structured" learning routines to support his students' "levels of self-help" and to develop their confidence, independence and pride (Int. 2, pp. 3, 6). When interacting with students, Seb intentionally identifies, labels and affirms positive student behaviours he observes (Int. 2, pp. 14–15, 19) and narrates actions students can take in SEL-related situations. He shares, "it's being ready to pick things up and being willing to take the time to point them out" to students (Int. 2, p. 19). Importantly, Seb also highlights what he

chooses not to model for students, including not "cutting them down or shaming them" (Int. 2, p. 12) and avoiding "heavy-handed" or "cruel" responses to student behaviour (Int. 2, p. 13). Therefore, Seb considers his approach to embedding SEL skills and behaviours as much about positive modelling as it is about "a lack of negative modelling" (Int. 2, p. 13).

Additionally, Seb prioritises positive, caring relationships with students (Int. 2, p. 24) as the basis for his SEL implementation. He explains he develops these relationships by engaging in students' imaginary play (Int. 1, pp. 13–14) and "talking to them, having lots of jokes with them, [and] showing them a lot of warmth" (Int. 2, p. 15). Seb shares how playing with students who struggle with peer relationships is an effective way to help them build and transfer "some skills around play and negotiations" (Int. 1, p. 13). He describes himself as "persistent" in the strategies he uses to facilitate trust and openness with students and says relationships are strengthened when they are treated "with a bit of tact" (Int. 2, pp. 13, 15). Seb also enacts specific relationship "repair" strategies with students as needed, including having follow-up conversations, checking in more often and providing increased positive feedback and praise (Int. 2, pp. 2, 20). He suggests that relationships based on "mutual respect" (Int. 2, p. 14) assist in setting positive expectations for the classroom and promote students' sense of value and social responsibility.

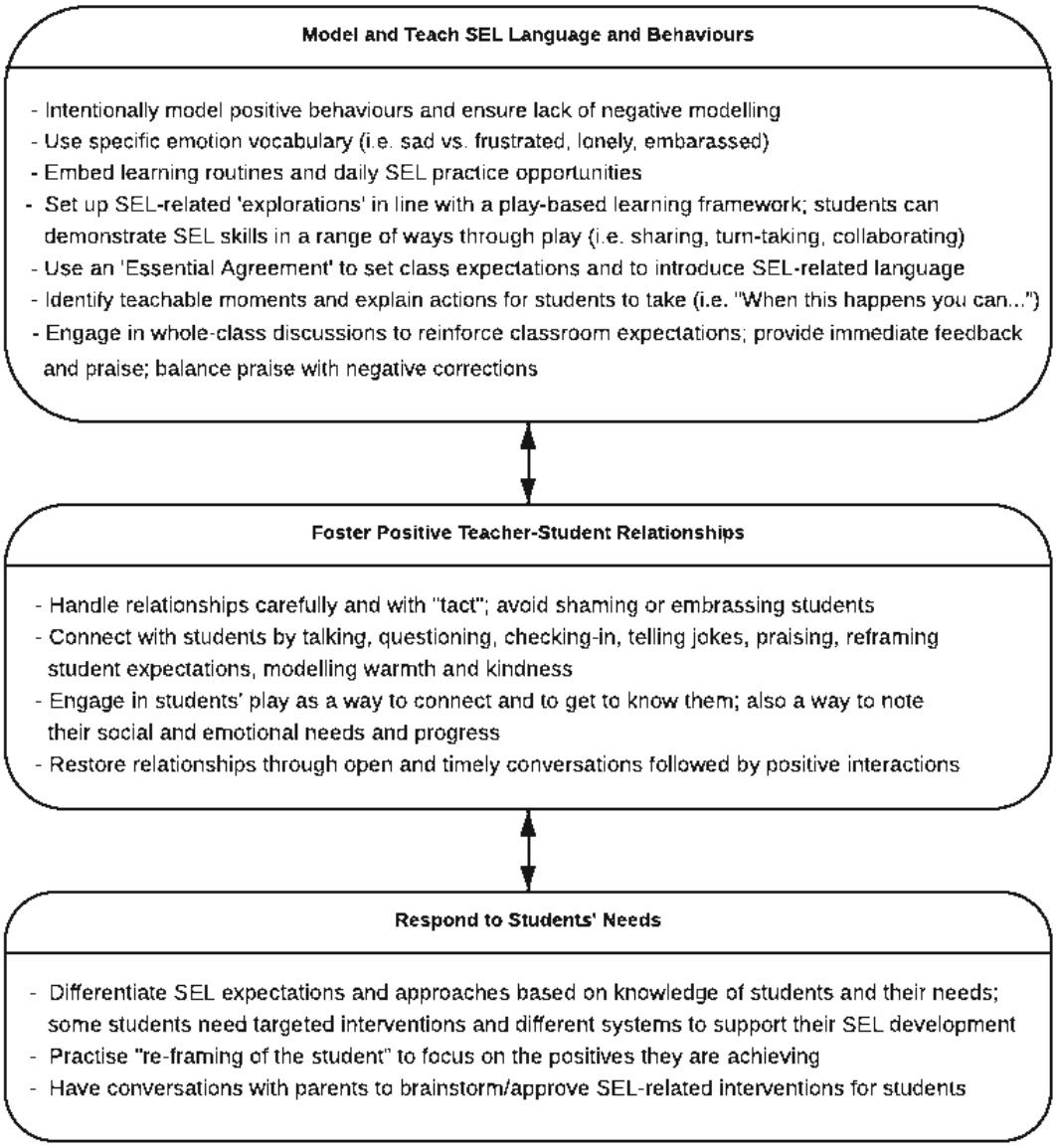
Seb's final approach to implementing SEL involves meeting students' individual and developmental needs. This approach includes considering students' age, abilities and interests (Int. 1, p. 10); differentiating or "reframing" his SEL expectations for specific students (Int. 2, pp. 1–2); and liaising with parents/carers to coordinate shared approaches to SEL across home and school environments (Int. 2, pp. 9–10). Seb says his Kindergarten students benefit from adaptations to SEL content and delivery to meet their developmental needs, including embedding lots of dialogue, using age-appropriate language and resources, repeating examples and incorporating play-based learning. He also notes these adaptations can vary from student to student (Int. 1, pp. 11, 14–15):

> There's always a few kids in the class that need lots of additional conversations, lots of one-on-one conversations, lots of restorative conversations … to try and understand the bigger picture of what's going on (Int. 1, p. 11).

Overall, Seb's approaches to SEL are highly student-centred, emphasising teacher modelling, positive relationship development and appropriate differentiation of SEL skills and content.

Figure 9.10

Seb's Approaches to SEL Implementation



9.5.4. RQ 4: What factors promote and/or impede Seb's implementation of SEL?

9.5.4.1. Promoting factors

Two main factors promote Seb's SEL implementation: his own SEC and a school-wide commitment to SEL (see Figure 9.11). Seb characterises himself as "pretty reflective" and "highly empathetic" and suggests these qualities support his SEL teaching (Int. 1, pp. 6, 15). He notes: "I try to be pretty reflective and that's how you learn is by reflecting on things and

then trying to do it differently next time and that's what we're trying to teach kids to do is to reflect" (Int. 1, p. 15). Seb also says his school's commitment to SEL gives him "a lot of confidence in making it [SEL] a priority" (Int. 1, p. 15). He shares:

> It's a clear priority and it's valued … I think knowing that something is not really valued makes it pretty hard to commit to it. But with something like this, this is really the only thing I really know I will always try to do the best I can in. (Int. 1. p. 15)

For example, Seb recounts a bullying scenario in which "the whole staff really tried to stamp it out and were really successful" (Int. 1. p. 18). Accordingly, he reflects students' SEL is enhanced when a school has "a culture around it" and staff who are "committed to social-emotional wellbeing" (Int. 1, pp. 15, 19).

9.5.4.2. Impeding factors

Three factors are identified as impeding Seb's SEL teaching: a lack of time, teacher exhaustion, and broad and varied school priorities (see Figure 9.11). Despite his commitment to SEL, Seb admits it can be difficult for teachers to plan for and implement SEL due to time constraints. He laments, "I'm frustrated that I'm not finding the time to plan more deeply and more explicitly [for SEL] and to have a really good scope and sequence around it" (Int. 1, p. 8). He also finds it challenging to find time to manage students' academic and social needs, noting he cannot always connect with students to the degree he would like (Int. 2, p. 21).

Accordingly, he describes teaching as "very tiring" and "overwhelming," explaining that teachers are constantly observing, responding to and shifting their approach to students: "It's like you are always trying to do more" (Int. 2, pp. 21–22). Seb suggests this feeling is exacerbated by his school's wide and varied school priorities and programs, resulting in what he terms "a bandwidth problem" (Int. 1, p. 9). He explains:

> I think a problem that our school has is that there are so many capable teachers who are trying to push valuable things and there's a lack of focus on any one thing. So, it's really hard to get a focus on it [SEL]. (Int. 1, p. 6)

Seb says staying abreast of these numerous school priorities and programs directly affects his capacity to implement SEL: "I've found lately I hardly look at our planners because I am just feeling overwhelmed with all the different things that we are trying to do" (Int. 2, p. 7).

Figure 9.11

Promoting and Impeding Factors on Seb's SEL Implementation

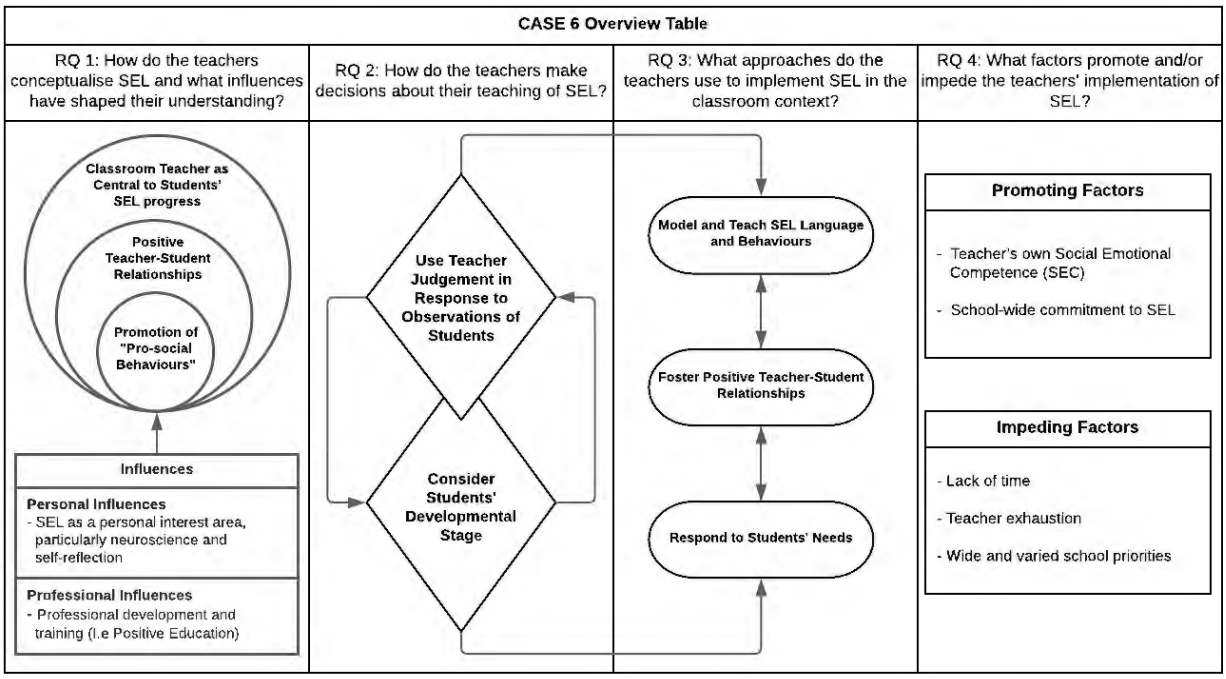
Promoting Factors	Impeding Factors
- **Teacher's own Social Emotional Competence (SEC)** - SEL as a personal priority and commitment - Importance of self-reflection on professional practice and teacher-student interactions - **School-wide commitment to SEL** - School leadership considers SEL a priority; clear direction for learning, high expectations and a focus on student outcomes - Whole-staff participation and commitment to supporting students' SEL progress; joint actions from staff and leadership; many whole-school programs that support SEL - Importance of family/carer involvement; regular meetings support a "shared language" between parents and school	- **Lack of time** - difficult to find time to plan deeply or for teachers to work together/share; difficult to balance time spent managing students' academic and social needs; lack of time to connect with all students to the degree he'd like - **Teacher exhaustion** - teaching described as "very tiring"; constantly making decisions, observing, responding and shifting approach - **Wide and varied school priorities** - many different SEL-related programmes and interest areas across staff/school; hard to plan with all these components in mind and lack of any whole-school SEL framework; impact of too many different approaches can be overwhelming

9.6. Summary of Case Findings

Seb's case findings are presented in Figure 9.12.

Figure 9.12

Summary of Seb's Case Findings



In summary, he regards teacher influence as pivotal to SEL and is committed to teaching SEL to support students' prosocial skills and relationship development. Seb uses his professional training and observations of students to plan for SEL, ensuring his resources and activities are age-appropriate and responsive to students' needs. To facilitate SEL, Seb models and teaches SEL language and behaviours, promotes positive teacher–student relationships and responds to his students' academic, personal and social needs. Although he suggests SEL can be hard to implement due to time constraints, feelings of exhaustion and numerous school priorities, Seb's own SEC and his school's commitment to SEL support his SEL teaching.

9.7. Case 7: Summer—Participant Profile

Summer (she/her/hers) completed her Bachelor of Primary Education directly after leaving secondary college. Eager to begin her teaching career, she worked as a relief teacher across several schools before graduation. This experience supported her in securing an ongoing, full-time position at WPS, where she has taught for six and a half years. Summer has experience working with students in Years 2–6. During this study, she taught a class of 27 Year 6 students. Of the approximately 540 students at WPS, 58% identify as having a language other than English, and 4% identify as Indigenous. Four students in Summer's class were classified as EAL/D, while several others had documented learning needs, including language delay, ADHD and anxiety.

9.8. Overview of Findings

9.8.1. RQ 1: How does Summer conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped her understanding of this learning area?

9.8.1.1. Conceptualisations of SEL

Summer's conceptualisation of SEL encompasses three main themes: SEL as a teacher's primary responsibility; SEL as a positive learning environment and relationships; and SEL as the development of students' "real-world" (Int. 1, p. 14) knowledge and skills (see Figure 9.13). Summer regards supporting students' SEL needs as "beyond what the curriculum outcomes are" (Int. 1, pp. 2–3) and "the most important thing" a teacher will do (Int. 2, p. 27). She also considers SEL an essential prerequisite to students' academic learning (Int. 1), primarily bolstered by positive teacher–student relationships: "If you cannot form a relationship with a child, they just won't progress" (Int. 1, p. 6; Int. 2, pp. 9, 27). She explains how positive

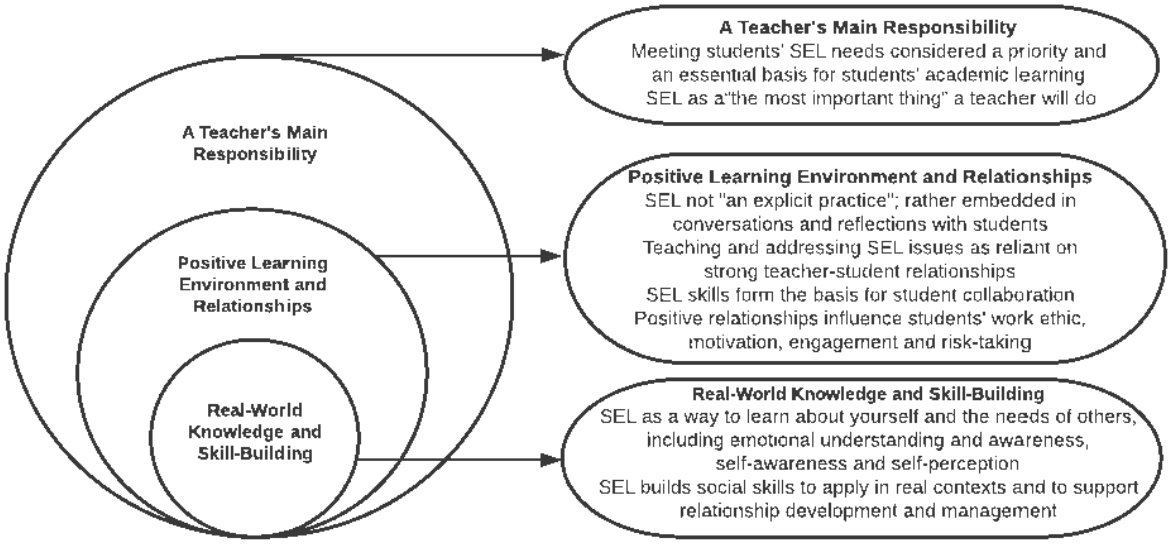
relationships with students can make them “more willing to come to school,” “more receptive to engaging in stuff that is tricky,” and more willing to “take risks in their learning” (Int. 2, p. 6). As such, Summer emphasises the need to know her students’ strengths and interest areas (Int. 2, p. 4), their “body language” and “visual cues” (Int. 1, p. 8; Int. 2, p. 10) and “when they are feeling up or down or just a little bit flat” (Int. 2, p. 4).

For Summer, SEL is “learning about yourself as well as the needs of others and how we can interact and make everyone feel safe and welcome” (Int. 1, pp. 2, 14). She does not consider SEL “an explicit practice” but rather as embedded within her interactions, conversations and reflections with students (Int. 1, p. 14). Supporting students’ self-management and self-regulation skill development is particularly important to Summer as they form the basis for effective collaboration across a variety of settings (Int. 2, p. 2).

Thus, Summer focuses her SEL teaching on the development of a positive classroom “culture” (Int. 1, p. 14) and students’ personal and social skill-building, including positive communication, relationship development and emotional awareness (Int. 1, p. 3; Int. 2, p. 2).

Figure 9.13

Summer’s Conceptualisations of SEL



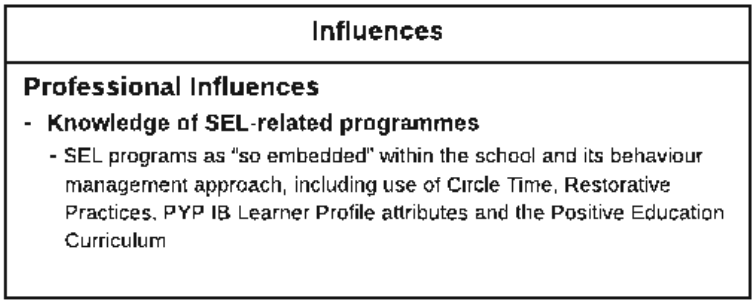
Overall, Summer’s conceptualisation of SEL is fuelled by her responsibility to engage students in prosocial learning through positive teacher–student relationships, collaborative class culture and real-world skill-building.

9.8.1.2. Influences on SEL understanding

Summer's understanding of SEL has been shaped predominantly by her professional knowledge of SEL-related programs (see Figure 9.14). While she has not "done any formal training other than shared practice" (Int. 1, p. 12), she explains how the several SEL programs used within WPS have made it easy for her to embed SEL-related language and topics within her teaching (Int. 1, pp. 3, 10). For example, Summer regularly uses the IB Primary Years Program to teach key attributes, language and skills (Int. 1, p. 3) and makes links to the positive education curriculum to support students' understanding of their personal strengths (Int. 2, p. 5). She also uses restorative practices (Thorsborne, 2017) and circle time to resolve student conflict and facilitate open communication and student reflection (Int. 1, pp. 3, 9). Summer explains she extracts "bits and pieces" from different SEL-related programs (Int. 1, p. 10; Int. 2, p. 15) to devise her own "well-rounded program" (Int. 1, p. 3). Overall, Summer's knowledge of several SEL-related programs has shaped her understanding and implementation of SEL.

Figure 9.14

Influences on Summer's Conceptualisations of SEL



9.8.2. RQ 2: How does Summer make decisions about her teaching of SEL?

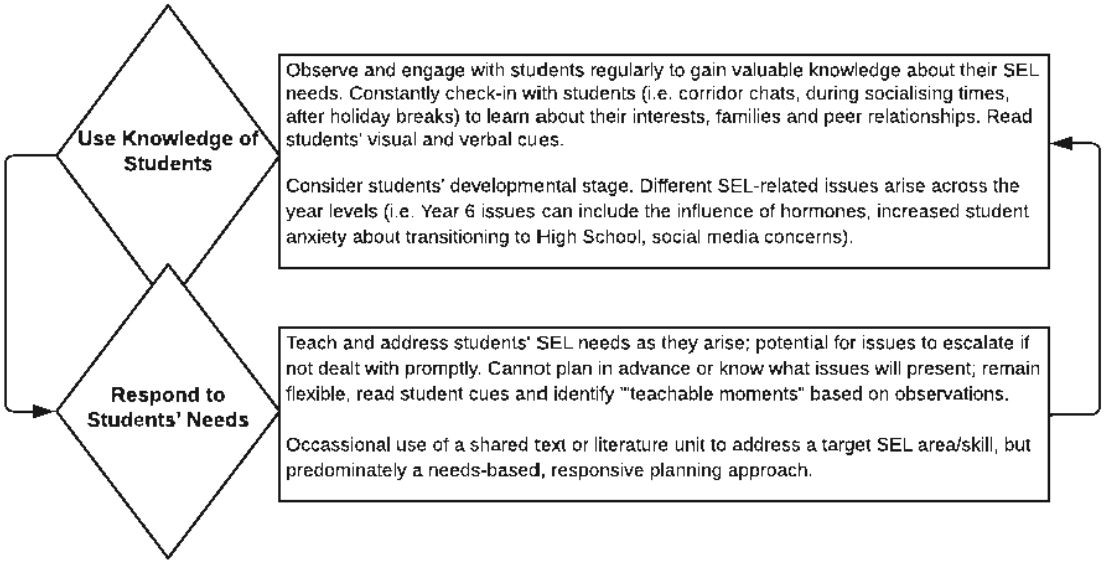
Summer uses her knowledge of students and their individual needs to guide her decision-making for SEL (see Figure 9.15). She describes her planning for SEL as done "on a needs basis" and in response to observed student behaviours, including their "body language" and "cues" (Int. 1, p. 9; Int. 2, pp. 5, 9, 10, 25). She shares: "Being a teacher you are always watching 15 things at once" (Int. 2, p. 10). She occasionally uses a class novel to prompt important conversations (Int. 2, p. 5) or if she notices "something lacking" among her students (Int. 2, p. 9). Summer stresses her flexible and responsive decision-making for SEL: "You're not necessarily teaching a certain thing every week but more as things arise" (Int. 1, pp. 3, 13; Int. 2, p. 9).

As such, Summer confirms most SEL content "comes up more as a conversation or in reflections, but not as an explicit practice" (Int. 1, p. 13). She notes that for this approach to be effective, "it certainly comes down to knowing each kid" and "tap[ping] into a child on a personal level" (Int. 1, p. 6). In addition, Summer encourages responding to "teachable moments" (Int. 2, p. 11) or unplanned yet relevant events concerning students' personal or social lives. She states, "kids can't learn if there are issues pressing on them or if there are things happening at home that are playing on their mind all day long" (Int. 1, p. 10; Int. 2, p. 7). Indeed, she shares in her classroom, "there's not really a time when it's inappropriate to have an issue. So, if there's something going on we can deal with it at that moment" (Int. 1, p. 13).

Summer's planning for SEL also considers common developmental concerns for her Year 6 students. These include issues relating to social media, mental health, puberty, transition to high school and students' home lives (Int. 1, p. 12; Int. 2, pp. 4–5, 20). She says, "there's a lot going on outside of school which we often have to deal with … It does become really difficult to think okay, well this is school time and that's home time" (Int. 1, pp. 12–13). In these cases, Summer's language and approach to SEL shift to be more precise and targeted. For instance, Summer shares that "last year there was a lot of girls and suicide threats and things like that where it really became a topic of mental health rather than just 'How are you feeling emotionally?'" (Int. 2, p. 5). Accordingly, Summer's flexible decision-making for SEL aims to address students' needs as they arise and is grounded in open and targeted communication to ensure students feel comfortable and safe (Int. 1, p. 13; Int, 2, p. 7).

Figure 9.15

Summer's Decision-Making About SEL



9.8.3. RQ 3: What approaches does Summer use to implement SEL in the classroom context?

Summer uses three main approaches to implement SEL with her students: ensuring teacher engagement, connection and modelling; responding to students' needs; and using SEL-related routines (see Figure 9.16). Stemming from Summer's decision-making processes, her approaches to SEL are heavily student-centred and reliant on positive teacher–student relationships. Summer describes herself as a "very important person" in her students' lives (Int. 2, p. 7) and a "role model" her students can look up to and trust (Int. 2, p. 19).

Accordingly, she observes and connects with her students, both in and out of the classroom (Int. 1, p. 7; Int. 2, p. 25) (i.e., on the playground, in the corridor, during group rotations), through regular "daily check-ins" and "catch up" conversations (Int. 2, p. 4). These check-ins allow Summer to "notice a lot and pick up a lot" (Int. 2, p. 25) about her students to support their academic, social and personal needs (Int. 1, p. 7; Int. 2, p. 19). They also provide a valuable opportunity to model communication skills and give students "immediate feedback" on their academic and social learning (VSRD 1, p. 3). Additionally, Summer explains the power of sharing "stories" or "personal anecdotes of life experience" to connect with students:

> When students see or hear excerpts of things you find challenging as an adult or things that you've had to persevere with … or stories of when you were at that age … they really latch onto that' (Int. 2, p. 19).

Summer also engages her students in "rich discussions," supports them to "generate ideas" (VSRD 2, p. 12), and encourages collaboration, perseverance and reflection by using "teacher-guided questioning" (Int. 2, p. 2) and modelling positively framed "growth mindset" language (Int. 2, p. 24; VSRD 2, p. 4). For example, when faced with challenges, she encourages students to ask themselves:

> "What can I do to get there?" rather than "I'm bad at this" … and it's "Okay, so you're not there yet, but what do you need to do just to get one point higher?" (Int. 2, p. 24; VSRD 2, p. 4).

Additionally, as evident during her lesson observations, Summer embeds the language of the IB learner profile attributes and the positive education character strengths (Observations 1 & 2) to support students' reflection on their academic and social learning (VSRD 2, p. 3).

As a second approach to implementing SEL, and in line with her responsive decision-making, Summer flexibly attends to students' academic and social needs as they arise. In doing so, she

relies on her deep knowledge of and connections with students (Int. 1, p. 7; VSRD 2, p. 18), acute observations (Int. 2, p.10) and a high level of teaching flexibility (Int. 1, pp. 9–10). Summer also advocates taking immediate action on a concern "when it is relevant" and before it can develop into a larger issue (Int. 1, p. 13; Int. 2, pp. 7, 14, 21).

Summer shares how she often uses "whole group restorative circle" conversations to address students' SEL-related incidents as they arise and to review important SEL concepts, including relationship and emotion management (Int. 2, p. 20; VSRD 2, p. 14). She explains that these conversations are usually unplanned and "sometimes may mean dropping everything in your classroom in terms of curriculum … or just completely restructuring the day" (Int. 1, pp. 9–10). In this way, Summer describes how responding flexibly to students' personal and social concerns "is about seeing the importance of [the issue] at that moment rather than I've got time for you on Friday and it's Monday" (Int. 2, p. 7). She continues, "you don't plan for these things, and you do often have to think of them on the spot … but it very quickly becomes just second nature" (VSRD 2, p. 19).

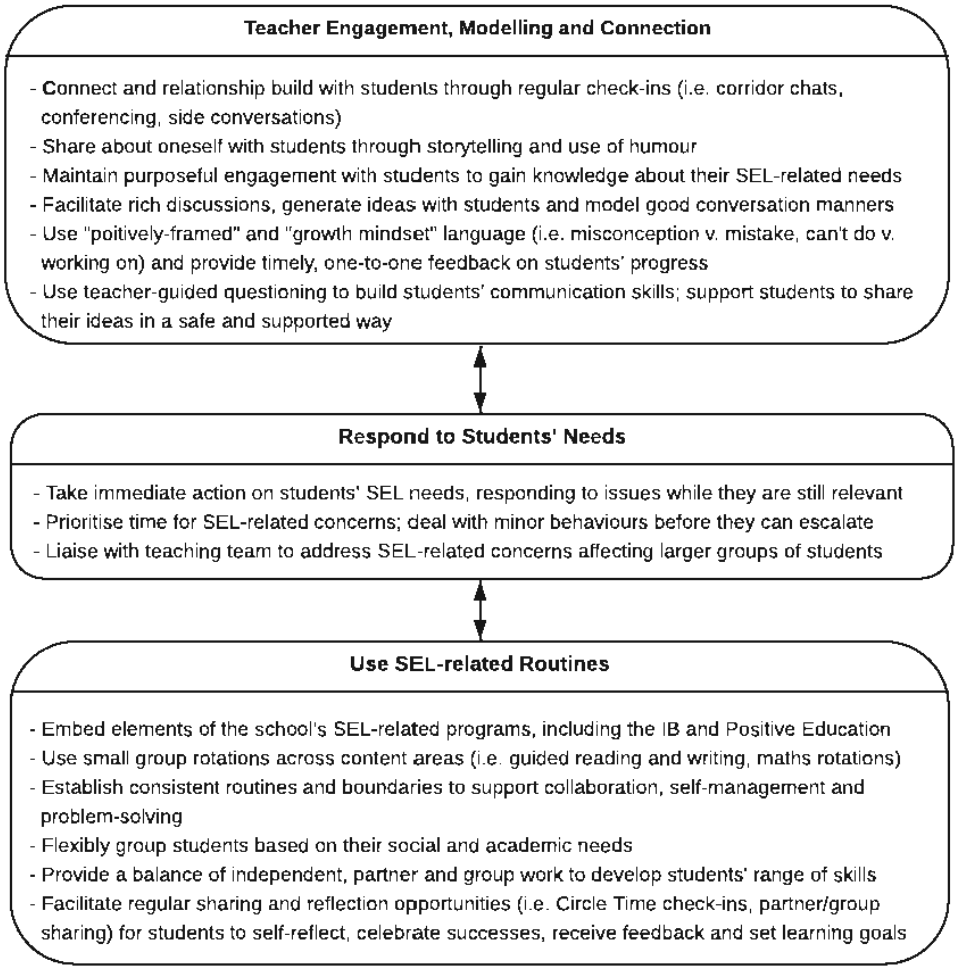
Summer's final approach to implementing SEL includes using SEL-related routines "to foster a positive learning community" (VSRD 1, p. 12). For example, she regularly uses a small group rotation format across subject areas, with groups of 4–6 students rotating from one learning task to another. Summer shares: "One [group] is teacher-led, and the rest need to be student-driven," with students participating in various independent tasks or collaborative activities across the week (Int. 2, p. 3). Her student groupings are flexible and consider students' academic abilities and social needs (VSRD 2, pp. 12, 14). According to Summer, using small learning groups supports students' collaboration and problem-solving skills (Int. 2, p. 2; VSRD 1, pp. 2, 9).

As observed during lesson observations, Summer routinely embeds opportunities for student reflection and sharing (i.e., circle time, partner sharing opportunities) to develop students' self-awareness, social awareness, independence and self-regulation skills (Int. 1, p. 8; VSRD 1, p. 6). She suggests reflections encourage students "to stop and think about what they've done and think about themselves or think about others … I certainly think it helps them to understand themselves more than anything" (VSRD 1, p. 7). Accordingly, Summer explains her formative assessments are often posed as a reflective question or statement ("Something I was proud of today was…", Int. 2, p. 12) so students "are really articulating … and noticing what they are

doing well or a challenge they've overcome" (Int. 2, pp.12–13). Overall, her approaches to SEL are teacher-driven, student-centred and grounded in routine and reflection.

Figure 9.16

Summer's Approaches to SEL Implementation



9.8.4. RQ 4: What factors promote and/or impede Summer's implementation of SEL?

9.8.4.1. Promoting factors

Several factors are identified as promoting Summer's SEL implementation: her own SEC; team teaching, staff collaboration and feelings of support; and parent engagement and communication (see Figure 9.17). Summer describes herself as "passionate about" students' social and emotional development (Int. 1, p. 2), stating: "One of my greatest strengths is recognising what each and every child is capable of and what they can share so that they can feel confident in their learning" (Int. 1, p. 13). She also describes herself as an avid learner who

will constantly "look things up online … and research further to make sure that I know what I'm doing" (Int. 1, pp. 10–12). Additionally, Summer suggests her self-management and emotional regulation techniques are essential to teaching and relationship-building with students:

> It is about being persistent even when you don't want to be, even when the child has upset you or hurt you or thrown something at you or said something awful to you. It is about coming back the next day and pretending as if it hasn't happened so that they know they can still trust you or that you still trust them. (Int. 2, p. 16)

Summer also notes her teaching team and colleagues' significant role in supporting her SEL implementation. She says working closely with her Year 6 team encourages a responsive and collaborative approach to meeting students' SEL needs. She describes staff collaboration as "valued" at her school (Int. 2, p. 8), explaining:

> We often have the ability to talk about what's happening in our classroom, what's happening with friendships, what's happening with certain students.… We definitely know what is happening in each classroom and which kids need support. (Int. 2, p. 9)

In this way, Summer suggests shared "core values" among colleagues "make a big difference to how you can teach and how you can collaborate" to promote a unified SEL approach (Int. 1, p. 2; Int. 2, p. 26).

Finally, Summer identifies parent engagement and communication as promoting her SEL implementation. She says supporting students' academic, social and emotional development is "not only about knowing the child, it's about knowing the parents" (Int. 1, p. 12). Therefore, she consciously tries to facilitate "honest" ongoing communication with parents about her students' lives and elicit parental support and communication as needed (Int. 2, pp. 4, 6, 15; VSRD 2, pp. 13, 16). She suggests regular communication with families is essential as "parents see different sides of kids that we don't see" (VSRD 2, p. 16). Overall, Summer says once a relationship with a student's parent(s) is established, they are "usually pretty quick to let you know if something is going on at home" (Int. 2, p. 4). Such information assists her in planning her SEL teaching appropriately.

9.8.4.2. Impeding factors

Throughout our conversations, Summer identified one impediment to her SEL implementation that relates to her school's uptake of "lots of programs" for SEL (see Figure 9.17). She indicates the multiple programs can be confusing at times:

> I have been here for six years, so the programs that were on six years ago, are they still in effect? … There are things [programs] that have been here all along and then there's new things coming in, but I guess at what point do we say [are they helpful]? (Int. 1, p. 11)

Summer also suggests staff training for these SEL-related programs is needed to promote "a common understanding" and "more similarities" among teachers to improve student outcomes (Int. 1, p. 11).

Figure 9.17

Promoting and Impeding Factors on Summer's SEL Implementation

Promoting Factors
- **Teacher's own Social Emotional Competence (SEC)** - Personal commitment to and interest in SEL teaching - Recongition and value of students' strengths and contributions - Reflection on practice and own personal strengths; need to show selfless behaviour to maintain and repair trust with students - **Team teaching, staff collaboration and feelings of support** - Teachers who share strategies, practices and "core values" help to support a responsive and collaborative approach to students' SEL - Value of a shared office, planning time and a team-teaching approach - Team emotional support as critical; reach out to colleagues as a way to support your own social and emotional wellbeing - Principal knows which teams can work together well and fosters those relationships - **Parent engagement and communication** - Ongoing engagement with parents to communicate about students' behaviours, progress and engagement; gain important knowledge about students' interests, needs, backgrounds and families

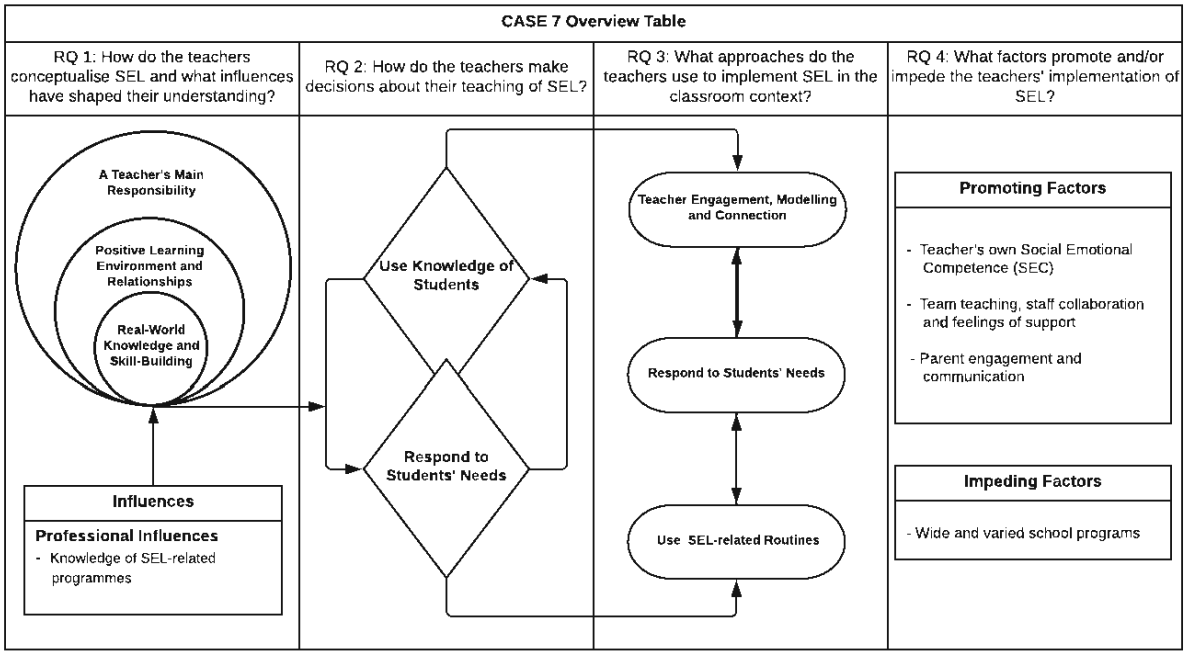
Impeding Factors
- **Wide and varied school programs** - Use of many different SEL-related programs across the school can be confusing; confusion as to which are still used and prioritised; need for continued staff training

9.9. Summary of Case Findings

Summer's case findings are presented in Figure 9.18. Overall, she considers SEL integral to her teaching, creating a positive classroom environment and encouraging students' real-world skill-building. When planning for SEL, Summer uses her knowledge of students and their needs to select appropriate SEL content and teaching strategies. Therefore, her approaches to SEL are highly student-driven and supported by embedded SEL routines and ongoing teacher modelling, engagement and connection.

Figure 9.18

Summary of Summer's Case Findings



While Summer uses several of her school's SEL-related programs to inform her teaching, she suggests greater consistency and staff training around these would further improve student outcomes. Summer considers SEL a personal interest area enhanced by her own SEC, staff collaboration and a strong school culture around SEL.

Chapter 10: Cross-Case Thematic Summary (Cases 5–7)

10.1. Introduction

This section summarises the results of my cross-case analysis of Cases 5–7 (Lucy, Seb & Summer). Figure 3.8 reflects the second step of my two-stage cross-case analysis. In line with the analytic procedure outlined in Chapter 3, I reached these findings by identifying individual case themes from Cases 5–7 using a six-step thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I then compared these to the cross-case themes generated from Cases 1–4 (see Chapter 8). In the following summary, using case data from Cases 5–7, I synthesise those emerging themes that complement findings in the data from Cases 1–4. Where collated cross-case data from Cases 5–7 indicate a divergence from collated findings of Cases 1–4, these are presented. To culminate, I present a graphic overview of the amalgamated cross-case themes from Cases 1–7 (see Figure 10.1). This diagram informs my cross-case summary report and integration of findings presented in Chapter 11.

10.2. Summary of Cross-Case Themes

10.2.1. RQ 1: How do the Case 5–7 participant teachers conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped their understanding of this learning area?

10.2.1.1. Conceptualising SEL: SEL as a positive environment, content and a teacher's responsibility

All three teachers (Lucy, Seb & Summer) provide independent examples that support their understanding of "SEL as a positive environment," "SEL as content" and "SEL as a teacher's responsibility." Exemplifying alignment with the theme "SEL as positive environment", the teachers describe their individual understandings of SEL as an avenue to:

- "nurture" children to develop their trust and confidence and to reduce their anxiety (Lucy)
- develop mutual respect and increase students' feelings of value (Seb)
- create a collaborative classroom environment (Summer).

Seb, Lucy and Summer underscore the central role relationship-building with students plays in their conceptualisations of "SEL as a positive environment." They suggest teacher–student relationships result in stronger connections with students (Lucy), provide support for managing "high-end negative behaviours" (Seb), and influence students' work ethic and motivation (Summer). These findings reinforce the findings and themes identified in Cases 1–4. Thus, it is argued that the experienced SEL teachers in this study conceptualise SEL as a conduit for creating a positive classroom environment characterised by respectful and collaborative interactions facilitated by active relationship-building with and between students.

A review of Cases 5–7 also shows that the teachers align specific SEL content and skills to their understanding of SEL. For example, they describe their understanding of SEL as an opportunity for students to develop key attributes and "skills for life" (Lucy), to promote "prosocial" behaviours (Seb), and to support students "real-world knowledge" and skill-building (Summer). Specifically, the personal and social skills and behaviours the teachers note include:

- demonstrating respect, kindness and care for others (Lucy & Seb)
- developing and managing relationships (Lucy & Summer)
- practising mindfulness and developing greater self-awareness and emotional understanding (Seb, Lucy & Summer)
- increasing student resilience to circumstances and interactions (Seb & Lucy)
- investigating ways of coping, communicating and problem-solving (Lucy).

In juxtaposing these SEL-related skills and behaviours to those presented in Cases 1–4 (see Section 8.2.1.1), there is notable overlap across all seven cases. This suggests that the seven participant teachers conceptualise SEL as a content area consisting of key personal and social skills taught to enhance students' social and emotional development. They consider these skills and behaviours essential to creating a positive learning environment.

From Cases 5–7, Summer considers SEL "the most important thing" a teacher will do. Summer's data reflects her belief that meeting students' SEL-related needs is a prerequisite to their academic progress. Lucy also describes SEL as "part of being a teacher" and admits she has "strong opinions" about and regular "influence over" the SEL content she teaches. Seb sees the classroom teacher as a "driving force behind students' SEL progress." His data suggests he

conceptualises SEL as naturally embedded within a teacher's practice through language, expectations and student interactions.

These findings echo Cases 1–4, and the theme "SEL as a teacher's responsibility" encompasses cross-case data suggesting teachers regard themselves as a significant influence on the students' SEL journey. Accordingly, across all Cases 1–7, the teachers note their personal responsibility towards supporting students' SEL and their commitment to SEL as central to their understanding and teaching of SEL.

10.2.1.2. Shaping teachers' understanding of SEL: The role of personal and professional influences

Individual case data from two teachers (Lucy & Seb) show how their lived experiences and personal values have influenced their opinions of SEL. For example, Seb regards SEL as a personal strength and interest area and considers his empathetic and reflective nature a driving force behind his interest in and teaching of SEL. Likewise, Lucy relates her interest in and knowledge of SEL to her lived experience as a mother and her understanding of children and their interests. Summer's data diverged from the other two cases, as it did not reflect the influence of personal lived experience on her conceptualisation of SEL.

However, all three teachers (Lucy, Seb & Summer) identify the role of professional experiences that have influenced and shaped their understandings of SEL. These professional influences include development and training opportunities for SEL-related programs (i.e., circle time, FSP, positive education) and knowledge of the SEL-related programs used within their teaching contexts. Cross-case data from Cases 5–7 confirm that personal influences for two teachers and professional influences for all three have shaped their respective conceptualisations of SEL. Therefore, cross-case findings from Cases 1–7 indicate that personal experiences, professional development and training opportunities influence individual teachers' conceptualisation and implementation of SEL.

From a comparative cross-case review of data from Cases 1–7, there is considerable parity in how each of the seven teachers conceptualises SEL. Case data from the seven cases strongly indicate that teachers regard SEL as a personal responsibility to students, an opportunity to facilitate a safe and supportive learning environment, and a way to ensure their students learn essential content and skills. Likewise, similar influences have shaped the teachers'

understanding of SEL. These personal and professional influences include the teachers' lived experiences, personal values, professional training and contexts.

10.2.2. RQ 2: How do the Case 5–7 participant teachers make decisions about their teaching of SEL?

10.2.2.1. Decision-making for SEL: Student-centred, content-informed and teacher-driven

Three themes encompass Case 5–7 teachers' decision-making processes for SEL. The most common element across Cases 5-7 was the teachers' focus on students in their classes. Individual case data shows that each teacher enacts a fluid and responsive approach when planning for SEL. The three all reported making decisions about SEL instruction based on intentional, ongoing and careful observations of and interactions with students. Thus, their decision-making for SEL is based on their teacher's judgement (Lucy, Seb & Summer), is responsive to students' needs (Seb, Lucy & Summer) and considers students' developmental stages (Seb & Summer). For instance, Seb describes his planning for SEL as internal, ongoing and "very targeted" to what he sees and hears in the classroom. Summer also identifies her decision-making for SEL as "needs-based" in response to student behaviours.

Additionally, situated at either end of the primary year levels, both Seb (Kindergarten) and Summer (Year 6) note the influence of students' developmental stages on their SEL planning; for example, play-based learning features in Seb's decision-making for SEL in Kindergarten. At the same time, Summer uses circle time to address several recurring SEL-related topics with her Year 6 students (i.e., puberty, social media, transition to high school). Lucy's case data also indicates that she plans weekly SEL lessons in response to her observations and knowledge of students and their needs. Lucy explains how these weekly SEL lessons cyclically contribute to her ongoing planning for SEL as they generate valuable insights into her students' personal lives and self-perceptions. She then uses these insights to guide her future SEL lessons. Accordingly, the teacher's knowledge of students is identified as an input and output of Lucy's student-centred SEL planning approach. These findings indicate that the teachers' planning and teaching of SEL is 'student need centred' and resonates with those classified under the theme "student-centred" from Cases 1–4.

In Cases 5–7, the teachers used SEL-related programs, content and resources as aids to plan for and sequence their SEL teaching. For example, Summer's case data reflect some integration of her school's SEL program content—including target skills, behaviours and language—

within her SEL lessons. Lucy planned her SEL lessons in line with her knowledge of SEL-related pedagogies (i.e., circle time) and her school's shared values system. Additionally, all three teachers are identified as discussing some relevant links between SEL topics (i.e., empathy, self-awareness, perspective-building, relationship development) and AC content areas, including literacy, mathematics, health and the social sciences.

In Cases 5–7, the data indicates that each teacher's knowledge of SEL programs and AC links informs their planning of SEL and integration of skill and content instruction for students. The teachers' knowledge of SEL and the AC is often integrated flexibly, on a "needs" basis and in response to student observations and present circumstances. Such findings are similar to the "content-informed" approach identified in Cases 1–4 when planning and making teaching decisions about SEL.

While content-informed, Lucy's case data reflects a more "teacher-driven" approach to her planning and decision-making for SEL. For example, while keeping students' needs and interests at the centre of her SEL planning, Lucy consistently indicates her "love" of children's literature and its influence on her selection of SEL materials and activities. Her data confirm she regularly aligns her SEL instruction with her favourite books to anchor SEL skills and content to a story students will remember. Additionally, Lucy selects SEL lesson materials and resources based on her interests such as making crafts, playing games and using role-plays. In this way, her case data support the notion that while all seven teachers' SEL planning and instruction is centred around students' social and emotional needs and informed by SEL programs and resources, it can also be influenced by teachers' personal passions and preferred pedagogies.

In summary, the Case 5–7 teachers indicate a predominately "student need-centred" approach to their decision-making for SEL. This approach is based on their observations and knowledge of students, including students' developmental stages. While these teachers plan for SEL with some SEL-related curriculum and program content in mind, their collective case data confirm students' evolving needs and interests are more central to their decision-making for SEL. Additionally, Lucy's data reflect a more substantial influence of her personal interests in her SEL lessons, indicating what has been labelled a "teacher-driven" approach to SEL planning.

10.2.3. RQ 3: What approaches do the Case 5–7 participant teachers use to implement SEL in the classroom context?

10.2.3.1. Implementing SEL: Active, consistent, relational and responsive approaches to SEL

Cases 5–7 indicate all three teachers' use of dynamic and explicit approaches to implementing SEL in the classroom. For example, the teachers:

- explicitly taught SEL language and behaviours, including emotional vocabulary (Seb), resilience strategies (Lucy) and reflective practices (Summer)
- modelled SEL language, skills and behaviours through team teaching (Lucy & Summer)
- intentionally interacted with students (Lucy, Seb & Summer)
- provided specific and immediate SEL-related feedback and recognition of students' SEL growth and achievements (Lucy, Seb & Summer).

From the case study data, each teacher provided regular, varied and explicit opportunities for students to practise SEL skills by:

- working in collaborative groups (Seb & Summer)
- participating in self-, partner and group reflections (Seb, Lucy & Summer)
- engaging in circle time discussions (Lucy & Summer).

These findings support the "active and explicit SEL teaching" identified in Cases 1–4. Lucy's and Summer's case examples enrich this theme. Both confirm that when discussing and modelling SEL skills for students, they actively share personal stories and anecdotes with students (Lucy & Summer) and purposely use teacher-led questioning (Lucy & Summer).

Cases 5–7 data show how each teacher uses consistent SEL routines and learning engagements for students to build their SEL competencies. These SEL routines and engagements include:

- whole-class SEL discussions (Lucy & Summer)
- role-plays (Lucy)
- regular sharing and reflection opportunities (Lucy & Summer)
- self-regulation tasks (Seb)
- guided reading and writing groups (Seb & Summer).

Seb and Summer also note their use of classroom essential agreements and lesson learning intentions to identify clear and consistent classroom expectations for students' behaviour and learning outcomes. As part of facilitating a positive learning environment to support SEL, Lucy and Summer also regard student collaboration and peer relationship-building as central to developing students' social skills. As such, both teachers intentionally provide a balance of independent, partner and group activities and allow for flexible grouping and seating arrangements to support students' team-building and social skill development with their peers. Cases 5–7 reflect the teachers' emphasis on the value of a "positive learning environment" to enrich SEL development and implementation.

Aligned to establishing a positive learning environment, Lucy, Summer and Seb identify ways they build relationships and connect with students to accelerate SEL. In this way, the theme "connect with students" encompasses their "relational approach" to SEL. For example, collective case data indicate that all three teachers:

- intentionally check in with students to develop trust and mutual understanding and to get to know more about students' interests and family lives
- engage in students' play, tell stories and use humour to "humanise" themselves, to connect with students and to model SEL language and skills
- use relationship repair strategies (i.e., one-to-one follow-up discussions, stimulating conversations) to restore any strained teacher–student relationships.

These strategies used to "connect with students" strongly support the notion that the teachers regard their relationships with students as pivotal to their facilitation of SEL. It is from these relational encounters that the teachers learn about students, identify their personal and social needs, and monitor their SEL progress.

This supports the theme "student-centred approach" to SEL. The three teachers undoubtedly embed this approach to facilitate relevant SEL learning opportunities. For example, Lucy explains she must know her students well to know how and what feedback to give them. In particular, she notes she is especially conscious of those students with high anxiety and special needs when framing and delivering SEL feedback. Seb also indicates his increased attention to students who may be struggling with personal and social skill development. As such, he modifies SEL activities, expectations and feedback for these students (i.e., use of a sticker chart, targeted play-based learning interventions, and modified learning intentions). Summer's

case data also confirm her "student-centred approach" to SEL by indicating her immediate action in response to students' SEL needs. For example, she addresses "minor" SEL-related issues before they escalate and gives "timely and relevant student feedback" in response to students' observed personal and social behaviours.

Overall, data from Cases 5–7 confirm that the teachers facilitate SEL using approaches to SEL that are broadly categorised as "active," "consistent," "relational" and "responsive to student needs." As outlined, they include the teachers actively and explicitly teaching and modelling SEL skills; creating a positive classroom environment; connecting with students; and responding to students' needs. As with Cases 1–4, the cross-case findings from Cases 5–7 suggest teachers' use of these approaches to SEL is highly interconnected and complementary. These findings confirm that all seven teachers enlist similar strategies to plan and teach SEL content and skills.

10.2.4. RQ 4: What factors promote and/or impede the Case 5–7 participant teachers' implementation of SEL?

10.2.4.1. Promoting teachers' SEL implementation: Teachers' SEC, positive school culture and school-wide commitment to SEL

Three themes encompass the factors that promote Case 5–7 teachers' SEL teaching. First, cross-case data indicate the teachers benefit from understanding their own SEC or "sense of self" to support their SEL implementation. For example, collated data demonstrate that all three teachers regularly reflect on themselves as teachers and learners and use these reflections to refine their SEL practices. For instance, Summer's data show she takes time after lessons to self-reflect on complicated interactions with students to ensure she responds to students in ways that are appropriate and to maintain trust in her relationships with them. She suggests teachers must often practice selfless behaviour and be the bigger person in difficult situations to model appropriate language and behaviours for students. Seb's data also support this finding, noting the influence of his reflections on his SEL practice and teacher–student interactions. His data indicate that after a trying teacher–student encounter, he will conduct open and timely follow-up conversations to restore his relationships with students. All three teachers describe SEL in ways that reflect SEL as a personal strength and priority teaching area. These findings align with the thematic findings from Cases 1–4 that suggest the teachers' strong sense of self—

including their self-awareness and self-efficacy concerning teaching SEL—motivate them to prioritise SEL for students and refine their SEL teaching practices.

As reflected in individual and collective case examples, Case 5–7 teachers' SEL implementation indicates these teachers benefit from positive staff relationships and a supportive school environment. These positive collegial relationships occur both at the team and leadership levels and are characterised by:

- feelings of emotional support (Seb & Summer)
- authentic collaboration and planning (Lucy & Summer)
- shared approach to students' SEL issues (Lucy, Seb & Summer).

Lucy's and Summer's case data also reflect the benefits of team teaching in their SEL practice. Their data indicate that working closely within a teaching team encourages their feelings of value, trust and collaboration. For example, Summer shares that her teaching team will often check in with her and adjust their teaching and schedules to support her personally and professionally as needed. Likewise, Lucy suggests team teaching for SEL invites unique opportunities for professional collaboration, joint planning and relationship-building while simultaneously encouraging teachers' own social, emotional and professional development. Accordingly, in reviewing the cross-case thematic findings from Cases 1–7, it is posited that positive staff relationships, especially those within a close-knit teaching team, support teachers in developing SEL-related skills they are expected to model and teach.

A review of Cases 5–7 also reveals the positive influence a school-wide commitment and approach to SEL has on the teachers' SEL implementation. SEL is established as a whole-school priority in their schools with clear directions for teaching, learning and student outcomes (Lucy, Seb & Summer). As such, these teachers identify school-wide practices that support their SEL instruction and enhance their professional engagement, including:

- school-wide use of SEL-related programs (Lucy, Seb & Summer)
- joint actions from staff and leadership in support of students' SEL, including opportunities for communication and collaboration (Lucy, Seb & Summer)
- opportunities for family, carer and community engagement and communication (Lucy, Seb & Summer).

These findings align with those generated from Cases 1–4 and suggest that teachers' SEL-supportive school contexts—including the SEL programs, communication and collaboration opportunities offered—positively influence the teachers' SEL uptake and implementation.

10.2.4.2. Challenges to teachers' SEL implementation: The constraints of time and teacher exhaustion, wavering school/staff support for SEL and various teaching challenges

Distinct from the promoting factors, independent examples from Cases 5–7 confirm several challenges to the teachers' uptake and teaching of SEL. First, Seb's case data identify teachers as "busy" and teaching as "draining." He notes it can be challenging to find the time to plan deeply for SEL or to collaborate with other teachers as they are often "caught up with their own stuff." Additionally, he describes responding to individual students' academic, social and emotional needs as tiresome, explaining that it requires constant observation, decision-making and shifts in approach. He shares that he often lacks time to talk to and connect with all students to the desired degree. Seb's case data aligns with Case 1–4 findings, in which three out of the four teachers (Beau, Karen & Celeste) noted time constraints and feelings of exhaustion as challenges to their SEL teaching. However, Lucy's and Summer's data do not mention these issues identified by Seb or the preceding cases. This finding may be due to the support provided by "team teaching" when planning for SEL and its implementation. Nevertheless, this finding is unique and significantly different from the other four case studies.

Seb's and Summer's data indicate the restrictive effects of changing or varied school priorities on their uptake and teaching of SEL. For example, while both Seb and Summer consider their school's use of multiple SEL programs pivotal to their understanding of SEL, they also suggest too many SEL initiatives within one school context can be confusing (Summer), overwhelming (Seb) and result in a "lack of focus on any one thing" (Seb). In this way, Seb says it can be hard to plan with several different SEL programs in mind. Accordingly, these teachers suggest their school would benefit from a more refined SEL focus (Summer) and a shared set of aligned SEL values and vocabulary that is clear, concise and relatable to all students and staff (Seb). Therefore, both teachers' data indicate a fine line between the pros and cons of using multiple SEL programs and initiatives within a school setting. Seb's and Summer's cross-case data extend the related Case 1-4 findings to indicate that while a school's use of several different SEL programs is informative, it can overwhelm and confuse teachers when planning and implementing SEL.

Finally, cross-case data from Cases 5–7 indicate several additional challenges to the teachers' SEL implementation. As with the cross-case findings from Cases 1–4, these challenges are unique to the individual teachers and their school contexts. For the Case 5–7 teachers, these challenges include:

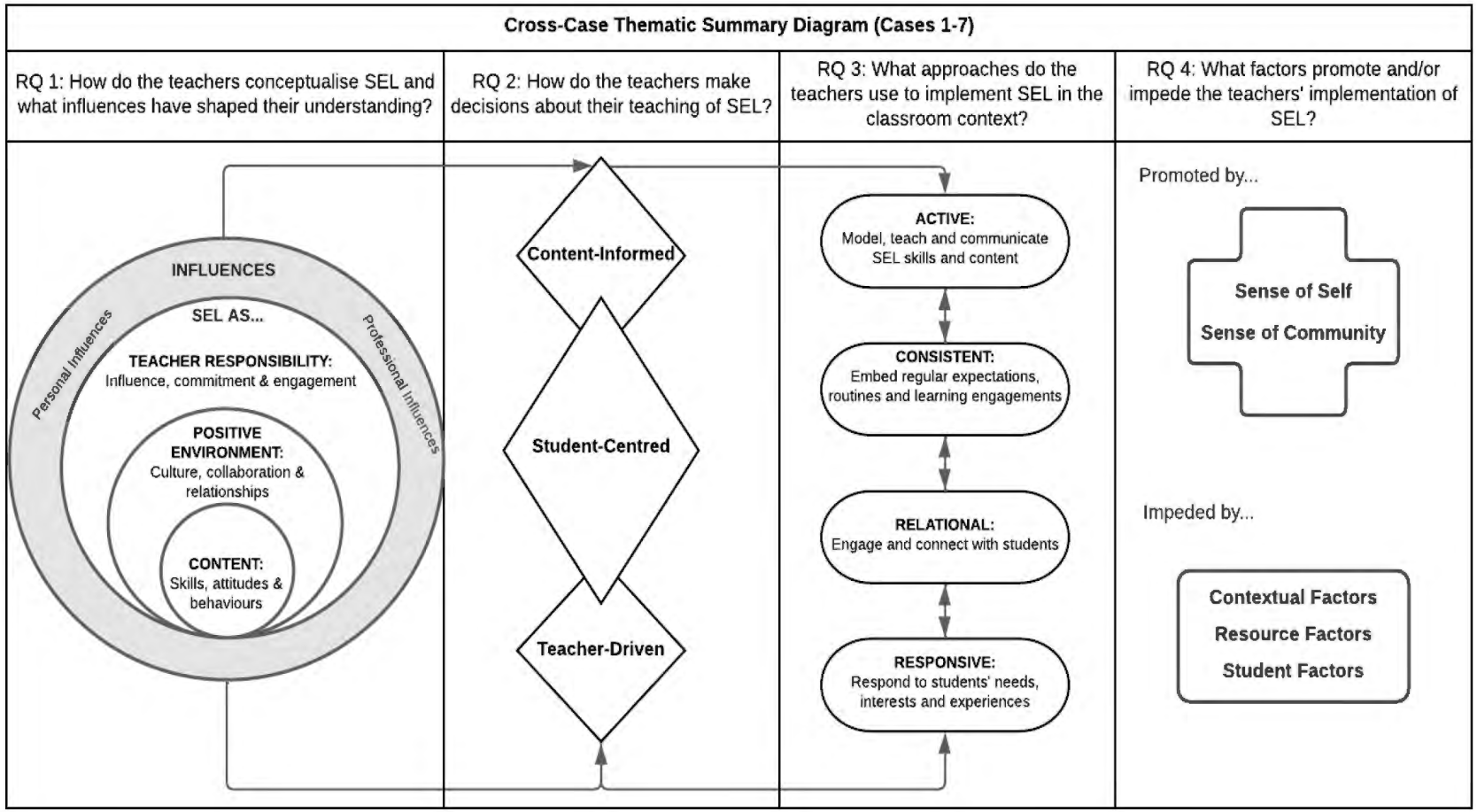
- the influence of open-plan learning spaces on SEL instruction includes ensuring adequate seating options, managing noise levels and coordinating shared spaces with other teachers (Lucy)
- planning SEL instruction for students with complex needs, including those with EAL/D, anxiety and ASD (Lucy & Seb)
- finding developmentally appropriate and accessible SEL resources (Seb)
- aligning SEL content with other curriculum content areas (Summer)
- tracking and assessing students' SEL progress (Lucy & Seb).

While unique to each teacher, these challenges collectively suggest several student, school and resource factors that can challenge teachers' implementation of SEL. They indicate essential considerations about teachers' access to SEL resources, professional training and teaching contexts. Overall, the challenges identified across all seven cases signal several critical areas for teacher support and improvement concerning teachers' engagement with and implementation of SEL in schools.

In summary, a cross-case review of Cases 5–7 indicates that the teachers' SEL instruction is enriched through their ongoing commitment to and awareness of their own social and emotional development. Their engagement with SEL is also enhanced by positive relationships, feelings of emotional support and collaboration, and a whole-school approach to SEL. Conversely, various time pressures, feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion, multiple SEL priorities in schools, and wide-ranging teaching challenges are identified as impeding the teachers' implementation of SEL. These findings support those generated from Cases 1–4 and suggest teachers benefit from a strong "sense of self" and "sense of community" when implementing SEL. The findings also indicate several potential additional support areas needed to strengthen teachers' commitment to and teaching of SEL.

Figure 10.1

Cross-Case Thematic Summary (Cases 1–7)



10.3. Conclusion

This chapter has reported the major cross-case thematic findings from Cases 5–7, which have been juxtaposed and positioned appropriately with previous cross-case themes generated from Cases 1–4. The resulting cross-case themes for Cases 1–7 are amalgamated and graphically summarised in Figure 10.1. These final themes reflect the findings from all seven cases and are supported by numerous cross-case examples.

Overall, the themes indicate significant commonalities in how all seven participant teachers conceptualise, plan for, and teach SEL. These commonalities include the teachers' focus on SEL-related content, the classroom environment, their students and themselves throughout their SEL planning and implementation processes. They also highlight the teachers' shared understanding of the purpose of SEL, their perceived role and influence as teachers, and the centrality of students to their SEL instruction. These findings also reflect key personal and professional influences on the teachers' understanding of SEL and present several factors identified to enhance or challenge the teachers' SEL implementation. The next chapter will group these findings into two broad themes, spanning my research questions. The final chapter will discuss these and related implications for SEL theory, research and teachers' professional development.

Chapter 11: Cross-Case Summary Report and Integration of Findings

11.1. Introduction

This chapter reports the overarching research findings of this multiple case study. The findings represent collective insights integrated from the triangulated data sources generated from this multiple case study. Supporting examples are provided to illustrate the findings. The chapter begins with a review of the study's aims and research questions, followed by an examination of findings relating to each research question. The final section of the chapter identifies emerging methodological insights related to the research process and use of the VSRD method. While these insights correspond to and corroborate my choice of methodological approach, I have included them in this chapter as they present unique insights and suggest valuable discussion points for future SEL research—considerations I address in Chapter 12.

11.2. Overview of the Study Aim and Research Questions

This study investigated how a selection of Australian primary school teachers understand and action SEL in their classrooms. Following a qualitative multiple case study design, this research engaged seven teachers in semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and VSRDs to discuss and reflect on their professional SEL knowledge and practices. Four research questions (RQ) guided this exploratory investigation:

> ***RQ1:*** *How do the teachers conceptualise SEL, and what influences have shaped their understanding?*
> ***RQ2:*** *How do the teachers make decisions about their teaching of SEL?*
> ***RQ3:*** *What approaches do the teachers use to implement SEL in their classrooms?*
> ***RQ4:*** *What factors promote and/or impede the teachers' implementation of SEL?*

Together these questions elicited significant research findings concerning how the participant teachers understand, plan for and action SEL within their classrooms.

11.3. Summary of Findings

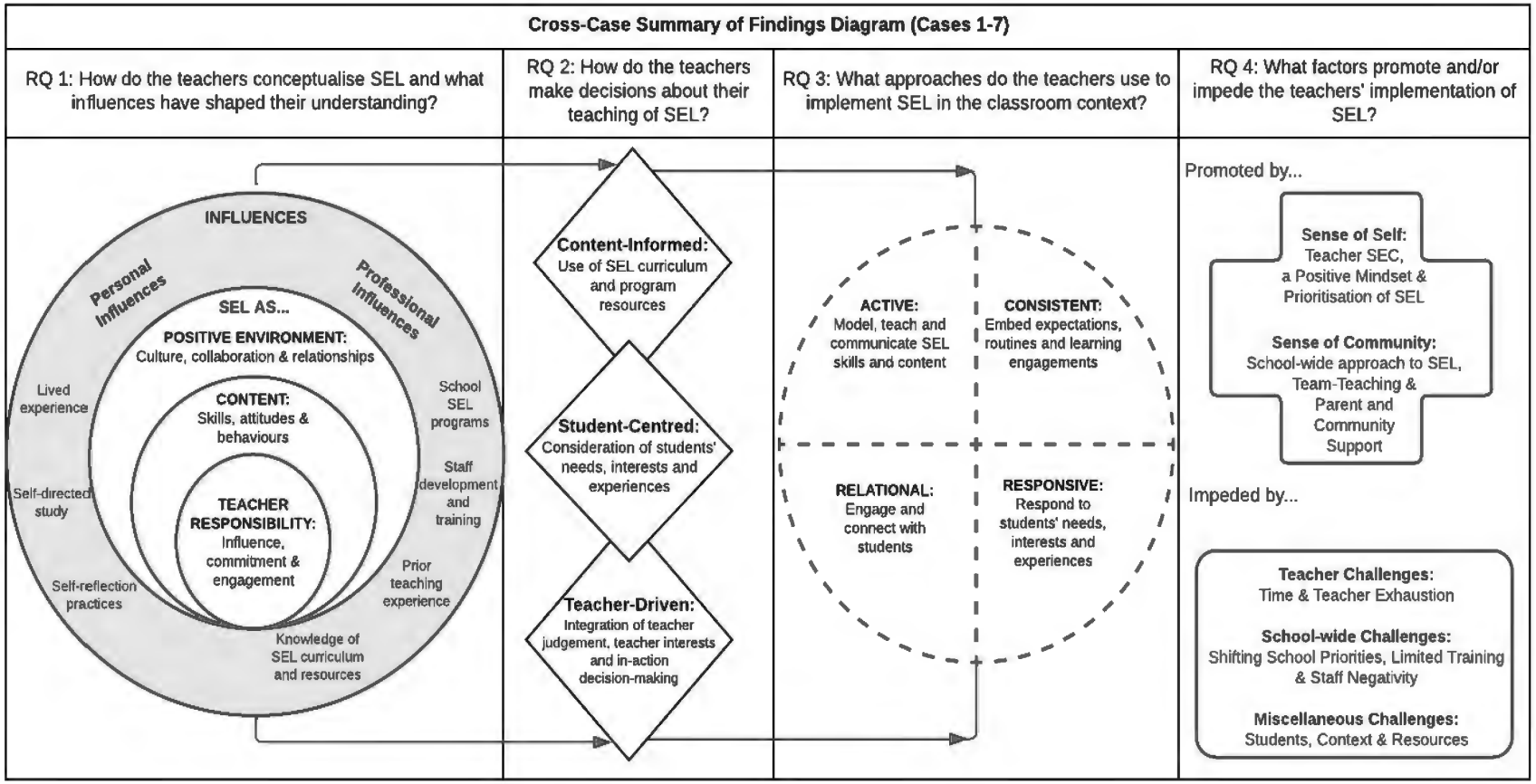
A visual summary of the study's key research findings is presented in Figure 11.1. All seven teachers demonstrated rich, multi-layered understandings of SEL (RQ1). Notably, they conceptualised SEL in three main ways: as the creation of a positive learning environment, as teachable content and skills, and as part of their professional responsibility. The study results also signalled the teachers' use of three dynamic decision-making processes for teaching SEL (RQ2). The findings indicate the teachers planned for and made decisions about their SEL instruction using their professional knowledge of SEL content (content-informed), in direct response to their students' needs and interests (student-centred), and in line with their personal interests and preferred pedagogies (teacher-driven).

Additionally, the teachers' decision-making processes relate strongly to their unique conceptualisations of SEL. The study revealed the participant teachers used several interrelated and complementary approaches to implement SEL with students (RQ3). Their collated approaches to SEL were categorised as active, consistent, relational and responsive, complementing their conceptualisations of and decision-making processes for SEL. Finally, the study identified several personal and professional factors that positively and negatively influenced how the teachers conceptualised (RQ1) and implemented SEL (RQ4). The positive factors identified included teachers' personal values, their own social and emotional skills, supportive collegial relationships and SEL-positive school environments. Contrastingly, the study identified the teachers' lack of time, feelings of exhaustion and shifting school priorities as the main challenges to their SEL uptake and implementation.

Overall, the study's research findings position the participant teachers as knowledgeable, capable and intentional SEL facilitators who employed a range of knowledge and skills to conceptualise, plan for and implement relevant SEL instruction for their students. These findings also signal several areas for future consideration to support teachers' SEL understanding, uptake and implementation. A more detailed overview of the findings concerning each research question is presented below.

Figure 11.1

Cross-Case Summary of Findings Diagram (Cases 1–7)



11.3.1. Teachers' conceptualisations of SEL and corresponding influences (RQ1)

11.3.1.1. SEL as environment, content and a teacher's responsibility

Based on the cross-case analysis of the participant teachers' first and second interview data, this study found the teachers to conceptualise SEL in three interrelated ways: as a positive learning environment, as teachable skills and content, and as their professional responsibility to students. Across all seven cases, teachers conceptualised SEL as establishing a positive learning environment for students. Throughout their first and second interviews, the teachers explained that they considered SEL synonymous with a positive classroom "environment," "culture" or "community." They described a positive classroom environment as extending "beyond curriculum outcomes" (Summer) to address the ongoing and "real-world" social and emotional needs of students (Lucy). Accordingly, the teachers defined SEL as a learning area nurtured by consistent and authentic classroom opportunities for engagement, collaboration and relationship development with teachers and students alike. They also described a positive learning environment as essential to students "feeling happy, safe and connected" (Alex) and encouraging "cooperation and kindness in the classroom" (Celeste). As such, the teachers positioned the classroom environment as an input to and outcome of students' SEL.

In support of creating a positive classroom environment for students, six of the seven teachers also defined SEL as the explicit and intentional teaching of specific social and emotional skills, attitudes and behaviours. Analysis of these six teachers' interview data showed they defined SEL as a key learning area to support students' "social and emotional intelligence" (Beau), "personal and social skill development" (Alex), "prosocial behaviours" (Seb) and "real-world knowledge and skill-building" (Summer, Lucy & Karen). Some social and emotional skills and behaviours the teachers identified included encouraging students to develop greater self-awareness of their strengths and emotions; practising mindful communication; setting and reflecting on goals; and collaborating and problem-solving with others. These six teachers collectively indicated their understanding of SEL as a learning area grounded in teachable content and skills geared to develop students' social and emotional capacities and support a positive classroom environment.

Four of the seven teachers also conceptualised SEL as their main professional responsibility to students. While all teachers broadly discussed their professional commitment to and enthusiasm for facilitating SEL (which was expected, given their agreement to participate in

this study), four teachers distinctly described SEL as a significant component of their professional role. For example, Summer described SEL as "the most important thing that you'll do" for students; Seb defined the classroom teacher as "the most important" influence on students' prosocial behaviour development; and Alex shared that they regard supporting students' SEL development as a "responsibility," not a "choice." Thus, for these teachers, SEL was understood as their professional commitment to ensuring students' holistic development.

Overall, the seven participant teachers demonstrated rich and multi-layered conceptualisations of SEL. These findings suggest that the teachers' understandings of SEL extend beyond the traditional social or emotional skill-based elements of CASEL's original SEL framework to include broader interpretations of SEL. As such, these findings signal the teachers' holistic conceptualisation of SEL as a learning area that includes SEL-related skills and content yet also incorporates elements of classroom community-building, positive relationship development and teachers' feelings of professional responsibility. As one of the few studies investigating how Australian primary teachers personally conceptualise SEL (Blewitt et al., 2021; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016), these findings provide valuable insights into how these teachers think about SEL and how their understandings translate into their SEL planning and teaching.

11.3.1.2. Personal and professional influences on the teachers' understandings of SEL

From the combined analysis of the teachers' first and second interview data, the teachers' conceptualisations of SEL appear to have been shaped by several personal and professional influences. For five of the seven teachers, key personal influences on their understandings of SEL included their own lived experiences (Beau, Celeste, Alex & Lucy); their personal strengths, interests and values (Beau, Alex, Lucy & Seb); and their engagement in self-directed learning (Beau, Celeste & Seb). For example, three teachers shared how becoming a parent had influenced their understanding and support of teaching SEL (Celeste, Lucy & Alex). Others described how their distinct personal interests in neuroscience (Seb), outdoor education (Alex) and children's literature (Lucy) shaped both their understanding and implementation of SEL by influencing their selection of SEL content and pedagogies. Three teachers also described their personal commitment to self-directed learning and self-reflection practices to support their SEL knowledge, including personal study (Beau & Seb), journaling (Celeste) and regular meditation practices (Celeste). These findings suggest that the teachers' lived

application of SEL skills supports their SEL conceptualisations. They also position the identity and interests of the classroom teacher as central to their understanding and support of SEL.

For six of the seven teachers, several professional influences also contributed to their distinct conceptualisations of SEL. Key professional influences included staff training in SEL and the use of school-based SEL programs (Beau, Karen, Seb & Summer); prior teaching experiences (Alex); and the teachers' knowledge of various SEL curricula and program resources (Beau, Karen, Alex, Lucy & Summer). For example, Karen described how receiving ongoing professional training in several SEL programs, and having access to shared resources and teaching sequences, informed her understanding of SEL. Likewise, the other five teachers described the influence of their school's SEL-related programs and staff development opportunities to support their professional SEL knowledge. Therefore, across these six cases, professional influences shaped the teachers' understandings of SEL. They provided solid, content-rich foundations and structures from which each teacher designed their SEL instruction.

These findings suggest that several internal and external experiences and knowledge sources influence the participant teachers' understandings of SEL. Accordingly, the teachers' SEL conceptualisations comprise personal and professional elements, which are highly intertwined. These findings present several focus areas for discussion and future SEL research concerning the influence of teachers' personal and professional experiences on their SEL knowledge acquisition and development.

11.3.2. Teachers' decision-making processes for SEL (RQ2)

A cross-case analysis of the teachers' first and second interview data identified the teachers' use of three distinct yet complementary decision-making processes for teaching SEL, categorised as content-informed, student-centred and teacher-driven. Across all cases, the teachers used at least two of these processes when making decisions about their SEL implementation. An additional finding is that the teachers' demonstrated approaches to decision-making for SEL also appeared to align with their individual conceptualisations of SEL. Those teachers who emphasised their understanding of SEL as content and creating a positive learning environment were also identified as using a predominantly content-informed and student-centred approach when planning their SEL teaching (Beau & Karen). Other teachers who conceptualised SEL as a positive classroom environment and their professional responsibility to students were evidenced as using a mainly student-centred and teacher-driven

approach when making decisions about SEL (Celeste, Lucy, Seb & Summer). Only one teacher combined all three planning processes (Alex). This finding suggests that how the teachers personally understand SEL is linked to their preferred planning and decision-making processes for the learning area. The teachers' identified decision-making processes for SEL are further described below.

11.3.2.1. Content-informed: Use of SEL curricula and program resources

In four of the seven cases (Beau, Karen, Alex & Lucy), teachers were identified as using SEL-specific content, resources and pedagogies to inform their planning and decision-making for SEL. Three teachers (Beau, Karen & Alex) selected and sequenced their SEL content and lessons according to the SEL-related program resources embedded within their individual school settings. For example, Karen described her planning of SEL lessons as aligned with her school's shared value system and school-wide SEL units and embedded programs. These four teachers also relied on their previous SEL training and knowledge of additional SEL-related resources (i.e., the AC, online SEL-related websites, and online videos) when planning and sequencing their SEL lessons. Using a content-informed approach, these teachers identified target SEL skills and content around which they planned and sequenced their SEL lessons. This approach signals the teachers' methodical and intentional decision-making for SEL based on known content.

11.3.2.2. Student-centred: Consideration of students' needs, interests and experiences

Across all seven cases, the participant teachers prioritised their students' needs, interests and experiences when selecting, planning and sequencing their SEL content and lessons. Using a student-centred approach to decision-making, the teachers highlighted the importance of students' needs in planning and teaching SEL. For example, the teachers described their student-centred approach when planning for SEL as "meeting students where they're at" (Karen) and "knowing students and how they learn" (Alex). Their decision-making for SEL appeared primarily driven by their ongoing observations and interpretations of students' needs, interests and experiences. For instance, Summer noted that she makes decisions about students' social and emotional issues "on a needs basis" by remaining "attentive" and "picking up on" students' "small" cues. In this way, all seven teachers indicated their aim for SEL was to address students' social and emotional needs authentically and timely. More specifically, four teachers emphasised their use of age-appropriate SEL resources and pedagogies to suit

students' developmental needs (Seb, Summer, Celeste & Karen), and three others indicated their intentional inclusion of students' personal interests and background experiences to ensure authentic and relatable SEL instruction (Beau, Lucy & Alex). As such, the teachers' student-centred approach to decision-making for SEL stemmed from their deep knowledge of students. This approach signals the teachers' highly personalised, responsive and dynamic decision-making for SEL.

11.3.2.3. Teacher-driven: Integration of teacher judgement, interests and in-action decision-making

In five of the seven cases, participant teachers used a teacher-driven approach when planning and decision-making for SEL (Celeste, Alex, Lucy, Seb & Summer). Their selection of SEL-related content and teaching pedagogies appeared strongly influenced by their interests, teacher judgement and in-action decision-making. For example, Seb detailed that he selects and sequences SEL content based on his teacher's judgement: "Students are getting what I want them to get out of it and what I think they need." Additionally, three of the teachers' personal interests appeared to strongly influence their decision-making for SEL (Celeste, Lucy & Alex). Celeste shared her regular use of a personally developed "lesson formula" when teaching her students; Alex outlined their prioritisation of "authentic learning experiences" and varied "learning settings" to teach SEL; and Lucy recounted that her decision-making for SEL is highly guided by her "love" of children's literature and personal opinions concerning the "life skills" she thinks students should learn. Identifying the teachers' use of a teacher-driven approach to decision-making for SEL highlights their uniquely subjective influence when planning and sequencing SEL.

Likewise, the teachers' use of three different yet complementary decision-making processes for SEL indicates the combined influence of teachers' content knowledge, student knowledge and personal engagement on their planning and instruction of SEL. These findings elicit several points concerning the role and types of knowledge and experience teachers use to plan for SEL.

11.3.3. Teachers' approaches to SEL implementation (RQ3)

The findings show the teachers used four dynamic and interrelated approaches to implement SEL. These findings were derived from the cross-case analysis of the teachers' combined lesson observation and VSRD data. The teachers' four main implementation approaches to SEL are categorised as "active," "consistent," "relational" and "responsive." While enacted

differently across the cases, all approaches were evidenced in each teacher's lesson observations or VSRD data. Notably, the teachers' implementation approaches to SEL also appear to relate to their identified decision-making processes for SEL and their individual conceptualisations of SEL (as per the findings for RQ2). This suggests the teachers both plan for and facilitate SEL in line with their unique understandings of SEL content, their knowledge of students and their own SEL-related skills and attitudes. These links are illustrated in the review of the findings below.

11.3.3.1. Active: Model, teach and communicate SEL skills, language and behaviours

All seven teachers employed an active approach to SEL in their classrooms. Each participant teacher purposefully facilitated SEL through their active and intentional modelling of SEL language and behaviours or explicit teaching of SEL-related content and skills. The teachers' active approaches to SEL align with their described use of content-informed, student-centred and teacher-driven decision-making for SEL.

In five of the seven cases, teachers emphasised their commitment to modelling appropriate SEL skills, language and behaviours—both verbally and non-verbally—for students (Celeste, Alex, Lucy, Seb & Summer). These teachers personally exemplified SEL for students by communicating openly through personal storytelling; remaining present and focused during lessons; modelling warmth and kindness; exhibiting their emotional self-regulation; and demonstrating positive communication and relationship strategies. To actively implement SEL, six teachers also used explicit SEL teaching practices (Beau, Karen, Alex, Lucy, Seb & Summer). These included delivering sequential, content-based lessons with clear SEL intentions; leading whole-class SEL-focused discussions; using role-plays and scenarios to target SEL skills and behaviours; and asking guiding questions to further students' thinking about SEL. By actively modelling and explicitly teaching SEL to students, all participant teachers 'set the tone' (Alex) for intentional SEL in their classrooms.

11.3.3.2. Consistent: Embed regular expectations, routines and learning engagements

All teachers also embedded a consistent approach to their implementation of SEL. As such, they set clear SEL behaviour expectations and used reliable learning routines to support their students' continued SEL practice and development. The teachers' use of consistent approaches to SEL complemented their active implementation approaches and appeared to stem from their content-informed and student-centred decision-making processes for SEL.

To consistently implement SEL in their classrooms, all teachers embedded "student-centred" classroom behaviour expectations with students by establishing a shared "essential agreement" or set of positively framed classroom "rules." The teachers regularly supported these through verbal behaviour reminders and visual cues (i.e., posters in the classroom) and sometimes by implementing student behaviour charts or reward systems. Additionally, all teachers used consistent daily entry or transition-to-learning routines, small group and guided learning rotations, and regularly scheduled class outings or discussion opportunities to support their teaching of SEL. The teachers also provided regular opportunities for students to practise mind-body activities, share and self-reflect on personal achievements, and set SEL-related goals. Across cases, the teachers' consistent approaches to SEL laid the groundwork to address SEL language and behaviours with students in an ongoing, embedded and authentic way.

11.3.3.3. Relational: Engage and connect with students

All seven teachers implemented relational approaches to SEL. In doing so, they underlined their commitment to developing strong and positive relationships with students as integral to their SEL planning and instruction. In this way, the teachers' use of relational approaches strongly supports their student-centred and teacher-driven decision-making processes for SEL. Their relational approaches also reflect their understanding of SEL as synonymous with creating a positive learning environment for students.

Examples of the relational approach the teachers used to establish and maintain positive relationships to support students' SEL include: individually recognising students' personal, social and academic achievements; balancing praise with constructive criticism; encouraging and engaging in students' play; connecting with each student through regular "check-ins"; using storytelling, jokes and humour; handling student relationships carefully; and enacting relationship repair strategies as needed. Using these relational approaches to SEL, these teachers supported students' feelings of trust and authenticity and gained valuable insights into their lives and identities. They also helped to establish a safe, trusting base from which the teachers could develop positive relationships and explore a range of SEL topics with students.

11.3.3.4. Responsive: Respond to students' needs, interests and experiences

Finally, in all seven cases, teachers used responsive approaches to facilitate SEL. In doing so, the teachers ensured their SEL instruction suited their students' needs, interests and experiences by inviting student questions, encouraging student input, and using their

knowledge of students to select appropriate SEL content and pedagogies. Based on this input and using their teacher's judgement, the teachers modified their SEL lessons and content accordingly. Therefore, the teachers' responsive approaches to SEL reflect their student-centred and teacher-driven decision-making processes.

The teachers' responsive approaches to SEL included providing students specific and timely feedback concerning their personal, social and academic progress; identifying and responding to "teachable moments"; and differentiating lesson content or materials to support students' diverse social, emotional and developmental needs. For example, Beau explained how he provides students with "multiple entry points" into learning to ensure their success and increase student "buy-in" across a range of learning areas, including SEL. All teachers also noted using flexible grouping, student collaboration and team-building activities to cater to their students' diverse personal, social and academic needs. By enacting responsive approaches to SEL, the teachers positioned students' interests and needs as central to their SEL instruction and target outcomes.

Overall, the teachers' use of four distinct yet complementary approaches to SEL implementation characterises the teachers as dynamic, intentional and responsive facilitators of SEL. It also reflects teachers who value positive teacher–student relationships central to students' SEL development. Moreover, these findings suggest noteworthy connections between the teachers' personal understandings of SEL, their professional decision-making processes and their resulting teaching practices.

11.3.4. Promoting and impeding factors on teachers' SEL implementation (RQ4)

Several factors that promote and impede the teachers' implementation of SEL were identified in the analysis. These findings were primarily generated from the cross-case analysis of the teachers' second interview data. The noted factors concern personal and professional aspects of the teachers' identities and school environments. When cross-referencing these factors with the findings generated in relation to RQ1, substantial commonalities emerge. This overlap indicates that similar personal and professional factors have positively and negatively influenced the teachers' understanding and implementation of SEL.

11.3.4.1. Promoting factors: Teachers' sense of self and a shared sense of community

The main factors promoting the teachers' SEL implementation included each teacher's sense of self and a shared sense of community around SEL. All seven teachers identified their own SEC as integral to their uptake and implementation of SEL. In this way, the teachers described how their personal engagement with key social and emotional skills supported their SEL teaching. For example, each teacher identified self-reflection on their professional practice as supporting their implementation of SEL with students. Two teachers (Celeste & Alex) also identified their deliberate cultivation of a positive professional mindset towards their students as contributing to their SEL engagement and practice. Additionally, four teachers described their SEL implementation as driven by their personal commitment to and prioritising SEL as a "vital" learning area (Beau, Alex, Seb & Summer). In identifying these personal promoting factors, the teachers demonstrated how a strong sense of self—defined by their own personal skills, beliefs and priorities—supports their implementation of SEL.

Further, all seven teachers identified a shared sense of community around SEL as enhancing their SEL implementation. Each teacher described how a school-wide commitment and approach to SEL enhanced SEL engagement by encouraging an SEL-positive school culture and staff ethos. Specifically, the teachers noted the favourable influence of working in schools with shared school values, embedded SEL programs, and regular professional development opportunities and encouraged staff collaboration (including team teaching). Moreover, three teachers described how parent support and wider community engagement with SEL (Beau, Seb & Summer) assisted them in addressing students' SEL needs. Others commended the positive influence of supportive leadership in driving their SEL implementation (Karen, Seb & Summer). These promoting factors point to the teachers' sense of self and their wider school community as relevant positive influences on their professional SEL implementation.

11.3.4.2. Impeding factors: Teacher, school-wide and miscellaneous challenges

Contrastingly, several impeding factors affected the teachers' SEL implementation. These broadly relate to teacher, school-wide and various miscellaneous challenges within the teachers' school contexts. While quite varied across the seven cases, each teacher noted at least one area of challenge to their SEL implementation. For example, four of the seven teachers (Beau, Karen, Celeste & Seb) identified their lack of time and personal feelings of exhaustion as notable challenges to their SEL engagement and teaching. These teachers also described how "busy" school schedules and various professional demands made it hard to promote

regular collaboration and deep thinking around SEL. Some of the time and energy demands these teachers acknowledged included attending professional meetings, following up on student behaviour issues and meeting with parents.

Additionally, four teachers identified school-related challenges to their SEL implementation, including shifting school priorities for SEL (Beau, Seb & Summer), limited professional training (Summer) and perceived staff negativity and inaction concerning SEL (Alex). For these teachers, the school context played an integral role in their SEL instruction, with leadership support, professional learning, program clarity and staff morale described as imperative to their uptake and teaching of SEL. In contrast to a shared, whole-school sense of community surrounding SEL, these teachers identified their SEL implementation as challenged by their schools' use of too many SEL-related programs, insufficient professional development opportunities or negative staff perceptions of SEL.

Finally, all teachers described several miscellaneous challenges to their SEL implementation. For instance, they noted finding suitable and age-appropriate teaching resources (Karen), using open-plan learning spaces (Lucy), dealing with student absences (Lucy), and attending to students' diverse behaviour and learning needs (Beau, Celeste, Karen, Alex, Lucy & Seb) as constant challenges to their teaching of SEL. Additionally, Beau identified a lack of parent and community knowledge about SEL as restrictive to his SEL progress with students. Celeste indicated she would like more background information about students to support their personal and social needs. While these are common challenges for many teachers in contemporary school settings, they suggest several relevant impediments concerning teachers' SEL instruction.

Overall, this study has highlighted several promoting and impeding factors on the teachers' SEL implementation. While the teachers' personal sense of self, solidarity and support within their school environments enhanced their SEL uptake and engagement, a lack of time, exhaustion, a school's wavering commitment to SEL and various teaching challenges negatively affected the teachers' facilitation of SEL. These findings provide a solid basis for discussing future avenues to support teachers' SEL engagement and implementation.

11.4. Methodological Insights Related to the Research Process

As outlined in Section 3.2.2, I actively embraced an empathetic approach during research encounters and sought to develop feelings of mutual trust and demonstrate appreciation for the participants' time and input. After completing the research, for my knowledge and reflection, I asked the teachers to share their thoughts on their engagement in the research process, including the enacted research methods and my position as an insider teacher-researcher. This section provides an overview of participant reflections regarding this study's empathetic approach and methods.

11.4.1. The research process: Learning and reflecting together

In reflecting on their engagement in the research, the participants commented that they found the research approach "heart-warming" (Summer) and "non-threatening [and] really interesting and really beneficial" (Lucy). Additionally, teachers shared they had experienced a sense of "trust" (Celeste) and "affirmation" (Seb & Summer) throughout the process. To achieve this, I enacted an empathetic and AI researcher stance. I regularly acknowledged the participants' time and effort as teachers, demonstrated active listening, used affirming language and encouraged teachers to extend their responses if they felt comfortable. The following data excerpts exemplify how I engaged with the participants in these ways:

> Well, that is a perfect example to kind of illustrate how you have meshed all these different [teaching aspects together]: creative storytelling, reflective practice, circle time, student interests, relationships, accountability. It is actually quite incredible. The depth of that example, you might not realise it, but I do! (Karen, Int. 2)

> That's amazing. Well, clearly, you've tapped into that. I love meeting with teachers because I am reminded of all the work that you do on a daily [and] hourly basis. (Lucy, Int. 2)

> Do you feel comfortable telling me a little about that? You don't have to. (Celeste, Int. 2)

> Are there any other additional [or] specific attributes that you feel are of utmost importance? … Is there anything you want to add in terms of your SEL focus that maybe you just didn't before? It is not a trick question or a quiz; there isn't anything you have to do; it is just if you want to. (Seb, Int. 2)

In line with my position as an empathetic insider-researcher, throughout the interviews, I provided regular "validation" of participants' experiences as well as "expressions of empathy" (Ross, 2017, p. 328). Ross (2017) explains how a researcher's insider position can support emotional understanding and relationship-building with participants, resulting in a "rich

interview experience" and an "enriched research relationship" (pp. 328, 329). When asked to reflect on the process of being interviewed and whether they felt comfortable with the research procedures, one participant responded:

> Oh, very comfortable, very comfortable. There was not a problem at all. I think there was trust, and I think that's the key for anything; trust with you, trust with you [*sic*], and then that made me reflect that if I feel this comfortable, imagine what I need to do with my students to make them feel comfortable … And you re-assured me when I said, "Oooh, that wasn't so good, Amber!" (Celeste, VSRD 2, p.18).

Another participant described the interview process as being "very positive, and it's never a criticism" (Summer, VSRD 2, p. 21), thus highlighting the teacher interviews as a supported opportunity for them to share openly about their knowledge and professional practices.

Likewise, the teachers confirmed that by observing themselves teach and actively "debriefing" (Lucy) and reflecting on their lessons, they noticed features about themselves and their practice of which they were previously unaware. When asked to describe their thoughts on the lesson observation process, several teachers commented on the ease of the recording procedure and how they became more comfortable with the process over time. For example, Lucy shared:

> It was easier this time than last time. I found I was really anxious last time before it started. This time I wasn't because I thought, whatever happens, happens! … It was very non-threatening, having just a small camera. I mean, I didn't even notice it, and the same last time. Once I started teaching, I just didn't even look at you or focus—I just focused on my teaching. (VSRD 2, p. 22)

Additionally, Celeste confirmed: "Viewing it [my lesson] made me realise all of the things I use that help me achieve just a little bit of success" (VSRD 2, p. 18).

As implemented in this study, each pre-recorded lesson observation served as the positive resource base (Nind et al., 2015) or reflective stimulus for each VSRD session. Because of the combined research methods, the teachers reflected on their body language, lesson content and delivery, student engagement, and increased interest in SEL teaching. Research in this area suggests the synthesis of lesson observations, video-stimulated recall and reflective professional dialogue encourages teachers as researchers (Reitano & Sim, 2010). VSRDs as used supported teachers in unveiling their thinking and feelings (Powell, 2005; Reitano & Sim, 2010) and developing teachers' reflective thinking capacity, especially concerning their professional practice (Moyles et al., 2002) and in-action decision-making (Hepplewhite, 2014).

This research also found that the teachers enjoyed participating in VSRDs concerning their SEL knowledge and practice. When asked about the VSRD process, they essentially described it as "affirming" (Seb), labelling the use of the VSRD method as a "powerful" (Beau) way to reflect on their SEL teaching and engagement with students. For example, one teacher noted: "What I've taken away is an opportunity to stop and actually reflect and in a really lovely way" (Alex, VSRD 2, p. 18). More specifically, another teacher shared that by revisiting and articulating elements of her practice to me as a "sounding board," she was able to reflect more critically on her practice:

> I've enjoyed debriefing over it because I usually think back over the lesson in my mind and reflect on how it went and what I could have improved, but actually verbalising it is different. And I think verbalising it makes me question more what I've done and if I've done things maybe in the best way or how I could have improved or what surprisingly worked that I hadn't thought would work. (Lucy, VSRD 2, p. 21)

Similarly, another teacher said video footage facilitated beneficial feedback and discussions about "why things happened" (Beau, VSRD 2, p. 17).

The teachers noted their increased self-awareness, self-management and responsible decision-making resulting from these VSRD engagements. Summer recounted, "I've just become more aware more than anything." Additionally, some teachers (Seb, Beau, Lucy & Celeste) offered several suggestions for how it could be used among their staff to support teacher development and increase SEL engagement and instruction. While unintentional, these findings suggest that the use of VSRDs can assist teachers in developing elements of their own SEC to support their professional SEL practice.

Overall, taking a research stance committed to ensuring teachers' feelings of support, empathy, and appreciation assisted them in sharing and "to reflect more deeply and to notice things" (Seb, VSRD2, p. 15) about their SEL teaching. As such, using case study narratives of teaching and reflection developed from an endogenous or insider-research perspective (Trowler, 2011). When supported by triangulated teacher-centred qualitative methods, as found in this study, individual case findings reflected a deep level of personal understanding and interpretation (Fleming, 2018). Related research and practice implications in relation to these findings will be further discussed in Chapter 12.

11.5. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the key findings in response to the study's four guiding research questions. It provided a cross-case summary report of findings, integrating research insights from all seven cases. The main findings are supported by individual case examples and collated within the cross-case summary of the findings diagram (see Figure 11.1). In presenting these findings, significant commonalities were addressed, and important discussion points were highlighted. Together these findings lay a foundation for the discussion and conclusion chapter, Chapter 12.

The chapter also presented several unintended findings regarding the value of using an empathetic approach throughout the study and the VSRD as a personal and professional learning tool. These findings inform the discussion of methods and related implications in the next chapter.

Chapter 12: Discussion and Conclusion

12.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the study's main research findings. Two dominant themes encapsulate these findings. Within each theme, I present key research outcomes, contextualise these in reference to previous SEL research and theory and interpret the meaning of the results. I follow by discussing the broader implications of the research findings, which lay a foundation for future SEL practice, development and research directions. An overview of these implications and corresponding considerations for future SEL research and practice is presented in Table 12.1. At the conclusion of the chapter, I identify research limitations and present SEL research and teaching suggestions to enhance future SEL practice and research in Australia. In doing so, I outline the study's theoretical, methodological and applied outcomes and contributions.

12.2. Overview of Cross-Case Themes

From a review of the study's research findings, two themes encompass the significant ways teachers think about SEL as a concept and approach their teaching of SEL. These themes lay the foundation for discussing the research findings and related implications. I draw on the collective case findings from the study's four research questions to explore each theme.

The first theme—*I am; therefore, I teach*—considers the significant influence of teachers' personal SEC knowledge, skills, beliefs and experiences on their SEL knowledge and practices. It positions teachers' subjective knowledge and identity as fundamental to their planning and implementation of SEL in classrooms and future SEL efforts. In discussing this theme, I draw on established SEL research and conceptual frameworks concerning the role and influence of teachers' own SEC and their beliefs about teaching SEL. The cross-case findings in support of this theme are presented in Figure 12.1.

The second theme—*SELebrating relationships*—extends outwards to address the significant influence of positive school-based relationships on teachers' SEL engagement and implementation. This theme establishes teachers' relationships with students and colleagues—including school leadership—as pivotal to their professional SEL knowledge and practices. It

also discusses teachers' use of responsive and relational approaches to implement SEL. In exploring this theme, I connect to literature concerning relational pedagogy, student-based approaches to SEL, and the supportive influence of positive teacher–student relationships and staff collaboration on teachers' SEL uptake and instruction. Figure 12.2 shows the cross-case findings in support of this theme.

12.3. Theme 1: I Am; Therefore, I Teach

12.3.1. Overview

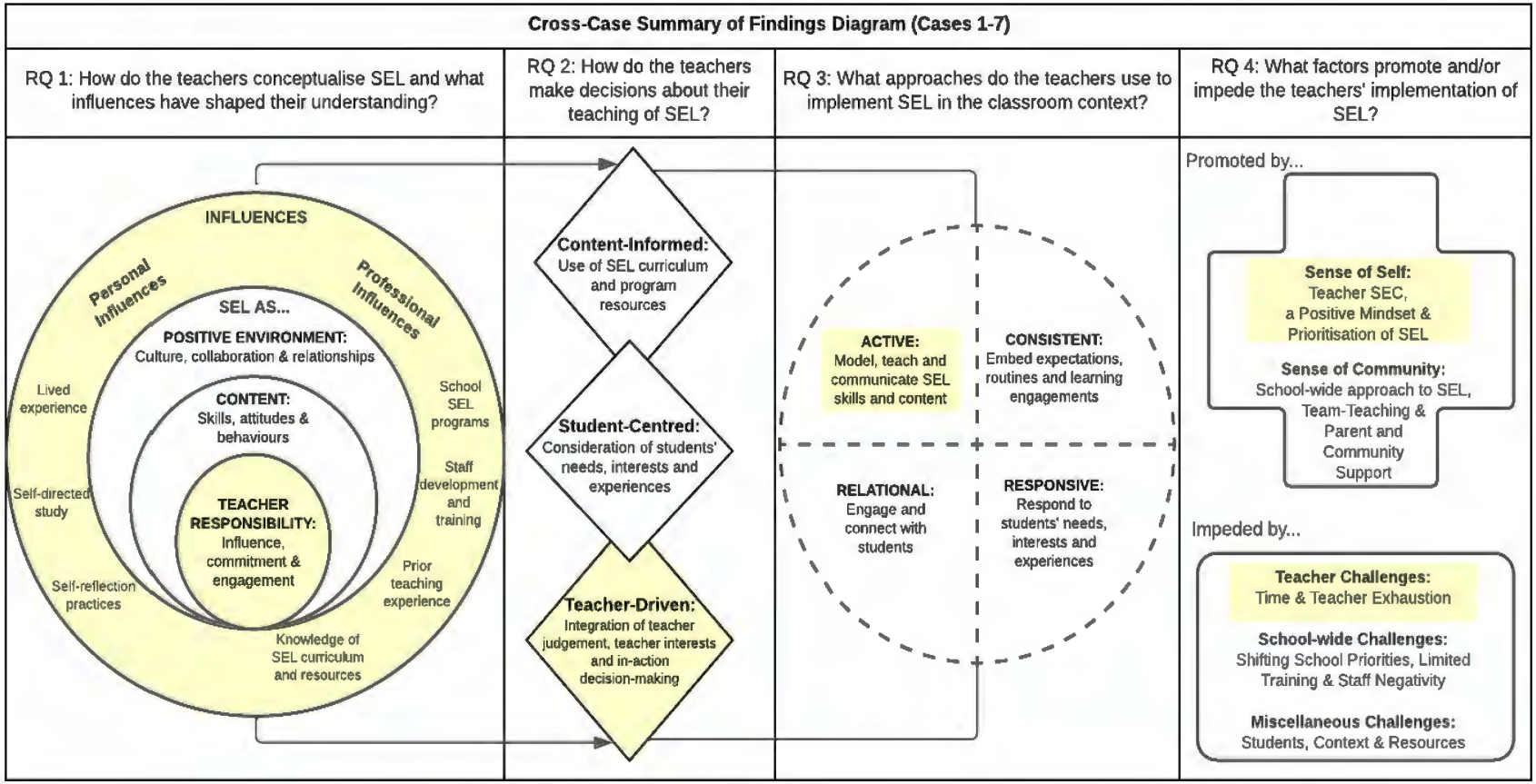
This theme positions teachers as rich, individual sources of content and influence concerning their teaching of SEL. The research results demonstrate that the participant teachers considered themselves critical components in their understanding, planning and facilitation of SEL. In support of this theme, most teachers noted the influence of their own SEC development, beliefs and lived experiences on how they understood and implemented SEL with students. Their subjective experiences, knowledge and skills thus formed the foundation from which their SEL conceptualisations and practices grew. Accordingly, as shown in Figure 12.1, the cross-case findings supporting this key theme indicate that teachers' thinking about, planning for and implementing SEL are highly subjective processes tied to their own experiences, judgement, skills and SEC development. Therefore, this first theme highlights the subjective role and influence of teachers' SEC and personal identity within their SEL instruction.

12.3.2. Unpacking teachers' SEC for SEL

The research findings demonstrated that teachers engaged their personal SEC when conceptualising, planning and implementing SEL. Their collective case reports revealed they were notably self-aware and able to identify, activate and manage their emotions when teaching SEL. They recognised and regarded the needs and emotions of their students and responded accordingly, making responsible decisions about their teaching practices and SEL instruction. Throughout their interviews and video-stimulated reflections, teachers reflected on themselves as people and professionals who acknowledged their unique strengths and specified future personal and professional development areas. Like Jones et al. (2013), teachers' active engagement with self-reflection practices enhanced their SEL instruction.

Figure 12.1

Cross-Case Findings in Support of Theme 1



Throughout their observations, the teachers actively modelled prosocial attitudes and behaviours when teaching students SEL content and skills. They used verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to facilitate positive learning environments and engaged in positive relationship strategies to develop and sustain supportive connections with students and colleagues. Their SEL instruction was intentionally shaped by their interests, skills, experiences, judgement, and knowledge of their students and SEL programs and content. Thus, the participant teachers' SEL instruction looked and felt different across each case as each teacher thought about and implemented SEL in ways they felt connected to, knowledgeable about, and with which they were personally comfortable.

While the spectrum of teachers' SEL conceptualisations and instruction was wide and varied across the cases, one element was consistent: each teacher's profound role and influence in selecting, planning and delivering SEL. Such research findings consequently highlight a robust subjective component of teaching SEL. Like Zinsser et al. (2015), the findings confirm that teachers place a high value on their SEL teaching and appear intensely aware of their own SEC and related skills' influence on their students' progress. These outcomes align with research identifying how teachers' personal SEL knowledge and skills can shape their SEL instruction in classrooms (Blewitt et al., 2021; Hen & Goroshit, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Lozano-Peña et al., 2021; Martínez, 2016; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2015).

For example, in their research concerning teachers' perceptions of emotionally supportive classroom practices, Zinsser et al. (2015) found that "highly supportive" teachers of SEL adopted a "practice what you preach" approach to SEL instruction. They used "the exact regulation strategies they wanted students to use" (Zinsser et al., 2015, p. 910). Similarly, Hen and Goroshit (2016) confirmed a link between teachers' emotional self-efficacy beliefs and their expression of empathy towards students, asserting "teachers who believe in their efficacy to identify and regulate emotions will be able to be empathic toward their students" (p. 7). In line with these authors, the current research shows teachers who are aware of their own social and emotional skills—displaying emotional self-regulation and empathy while teaching—and are apt at modelling these skills as an embodied component of their SEL instruction.

This theme's cross-case research findings strongly support and provide illustrative examples consistent with what Jennings and Greenberg (2009) refer to as a PCM for SEL. Across all cases, the teachers demonstrated effective emotional self-regulation, awareness of and responsiveness to students' needs, and positive communication strategies. During their lessons,

they made responsible decisions to support their students' social, emotional and academic outcomes and reflected on these in our follow-up conversations. In line with the PCM, the teachers' positive social and emotional dispositions and skills supported their teacher–student relationships, classroom management strategies and effective SEL implementation. The case findings underscore the integral influence of teachers' social and emotional skills on their SEL knowledge, planning and instruction (Schonert-Reichl, 2017, 2019).

According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), teachers' SEC and wellbeing are at the heart of the PCM model for SEL. They argue that teachers with higher levels of SEC and wellbeing encourage a more positive classroom culture and "are outstanding role models of desired social and emotional behaviour" (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 493). Aligned with the PCM, the current research demonstrates that teachers relied on their SEL skills and practices to engage and enhance relationships with students and colleagues, resulting in SEL-positive environments and practices that were active and responsive to students' SEL needs. Through rich, reflective and practice-based examples, the case findings thus demonstrate how teachers activate and use their personal, social and emotional skills and knowledge to inform and support their decision-making and instruction for SEL.

The research findings also illustrate how SEL teachers' "awareness of self as a teacher" is integral to their SEC development and SEL teaching (Rodriguez et al., 2020). The teachers demonstrated ongoing self-reflection—both self-directed and prompted by the study's methods—relating to their SEL teaching. Several teachers used specific strategies or set aside scheduled times to self-reflect on their teaching (i.e., daily journaling, meditation practices, meetings with mentors, and exercise routines). Others used a more intuitive and responsive approach to self-reflection. Regardless, each teacher demonstrated high self-awareness concerning their teaching practice and ongoing engagement with students' SEL learning. This research uncovered how different teachers apply and embody the same SEL skills they sought to model and embed for students. Such findings advance the argument that "teachers' competency in understanding themselves—from perceptions of whom they believe their students are, to whether they feel they are capable of being effective as a teacher—influences every aspect of how they teach" (Rodriguez et al., 2020, p. 944). The findings again position SEL as a subjective teaching area uniquely framed and guided by a teacher's own social and emotional skills, self-knowledge and reflective capacity.

12.3.3. Considering teachers' personal influences and beliefs on their SEL instruction

In addition to teachers' own SEC, the research findings identified several influences that shaped teachers' interpretations and implementation of SEL. These influences were personal and professional and included teachers' diverse lived experiences, personal interest in and beliefs about SEL, engagement in self-directed learning, prior teaching experiences and professional learning opportunities. Most participant teachers' interest in and knowledge of SEL was partially influenced by their engagement in professional learning for SEL, including self-directed study, participation in school-based SEL committees, attendance at professional development courses and online research. Such findings support Jones and Bouffard's (2012) organising framework for SEL, which positions teachers' backgrounds, SEC and pedagogical skills as key influences on students' social and emotional skill and behaviour development. These findings also align with recent Australian SEL research into early childhood and primary educators' SEL knowledge acquisition. For example, Blewitt et al. (2021) found that many educators derive their SEL knowledge from various professional influences, including structured learning experiences, educator-led learning, previous teaching experiences and purposeful interactions with other education professionals or agencies. Similarly, earlier work by Djambazova-Popordanoska (2016) notes that some Australian primary teachers' conceptualisations of SEL are informed by their professional exposure to specific programs used within their teaching contexts and CASEL's original SEL framework.

While this study confirms similar professional and contextual influences on teachers' understandings of SEL, the findings also add to the extant Australian SEL literature by identifying several distinctly personal influences. Across the cases, six out of the seven teachers shared that they intentionally prioritised teaching SEL because they inherently valued it as a learning area. They acknowledged the effect of their personal experiences and social and emotional skills on their knowledge and uptake of SEL. These teachers described how personal perceptions of and experiences with mental health, their role as parents or their own engagement with SEL-related learning and practices had influenced their understanding and teaching of SEL. Therefore, the findings of this study expand on the current SEL literature, suggesting a more personal derivation of teachers' SEL knowledge. While teachers' conceptualisations of SEL are undeniably informed by their professional experiences, training and contexts, they are also inherently linked to their lived personal experiences and values.

In this way, the study's findings also identify the role of teachers' beliefs in teaching SEL (Collie et al., 2015; Molina et al., 2022; Zinsser et al., 2014). As the research exemplified, most participant teachers identified SEL as "vital" to all learning and their primary responsibility when teaching students, highlighting their strong personal commitment to and beliefs about teaching SEL. Like Collie et al. (2015), the teachers' case examples illustrated they are committed to SEL and its curriculum aims and consistently strive to do the best for their students by providing relevant SEL support and instruction. Likewise, these results align with research by Zinsser et al. (2014), who found "highly supportive teachers [of SEL] see SEL as highly valuable and integral to their daily activities and interactions with students" (p. 487). Similarly, cross-case analysis reveals how these highly supportive SEL teachers incorporate SEL into their daily interactions and routines with students. This is achieved through teacher and student modelling and SEL teaching that reflects a reverential understanding and support of the children's SEL emotional experiences and learning at home and in the classroom. A shared belief about the importance of SEL, grounded in each individual's personal SEL experiences and teaching, depicts SEL teaching and thinking that moves beyond a reliance on a "checklist or lesson plan of [SEL] skills" (Zinsser et al., 2014, p. 487).

Most teachers in this research signalled their support and use of their schools' SEL programs and approaches when they aligned with their personal views about SEL. Such findings support those of Molina et al. (2022), which indicate that Australian primary and secondary teachers who identified specific SEL programs as "an extremely good fit" with their personal values were highly likely to regard SEL as an "extremely important" part of their teaching.

Given the research findings, the participant teachers are thus described as highly supportive of SEL, with their personal beliefs firmly guiding their decision-making and approaches to SEL. The outcomes also confirm that teachers will refer to SEL programs in their classrooms, provided such programs align with these personal beliefs. As such, teachers' overall SEL thinking and implementation can be described as content-informed yet distinctly personal, underscoring the influential role of individual teachers and their beliefs in implementing SEL.

12.3.4. Theme 1 Summary

The research findings synthesised in Theme 1 highlight the strong influence of teachers' own SEC and related skills in their knowledge and teaching of SEL. They also confirm that teachers will support their school's approach to teaching SEL provided they feel it aligns with their personal beliefs, values and skills. As identified in the study findings, a teacher's

conceptualisation of SEL and SEC, underscored by beliefs grounded in personal experience, will provide the catalyst and foundation for framing their approach to teaching SEL. Consequently, this first theme depicts SEL as a subjective, personal and belief-driven teaching and learning area. Therefore, SEL teachers provide unique and critical lenses through which students develop and explore SEL content. The findings offer a unique insight into SEL teachers' history, prior experience and beliefs, and their influence on SEL teacher thinking and practice. They highlight the importance of understanding individual conceptualisations of SEL and the influence personal beliefs may have on SEL instruction. The findings provide the preliminary groundwork for future SEL research into the role and influence of Australian teachers' SEL skills, personal identities and beliefs on their SEL instruction.

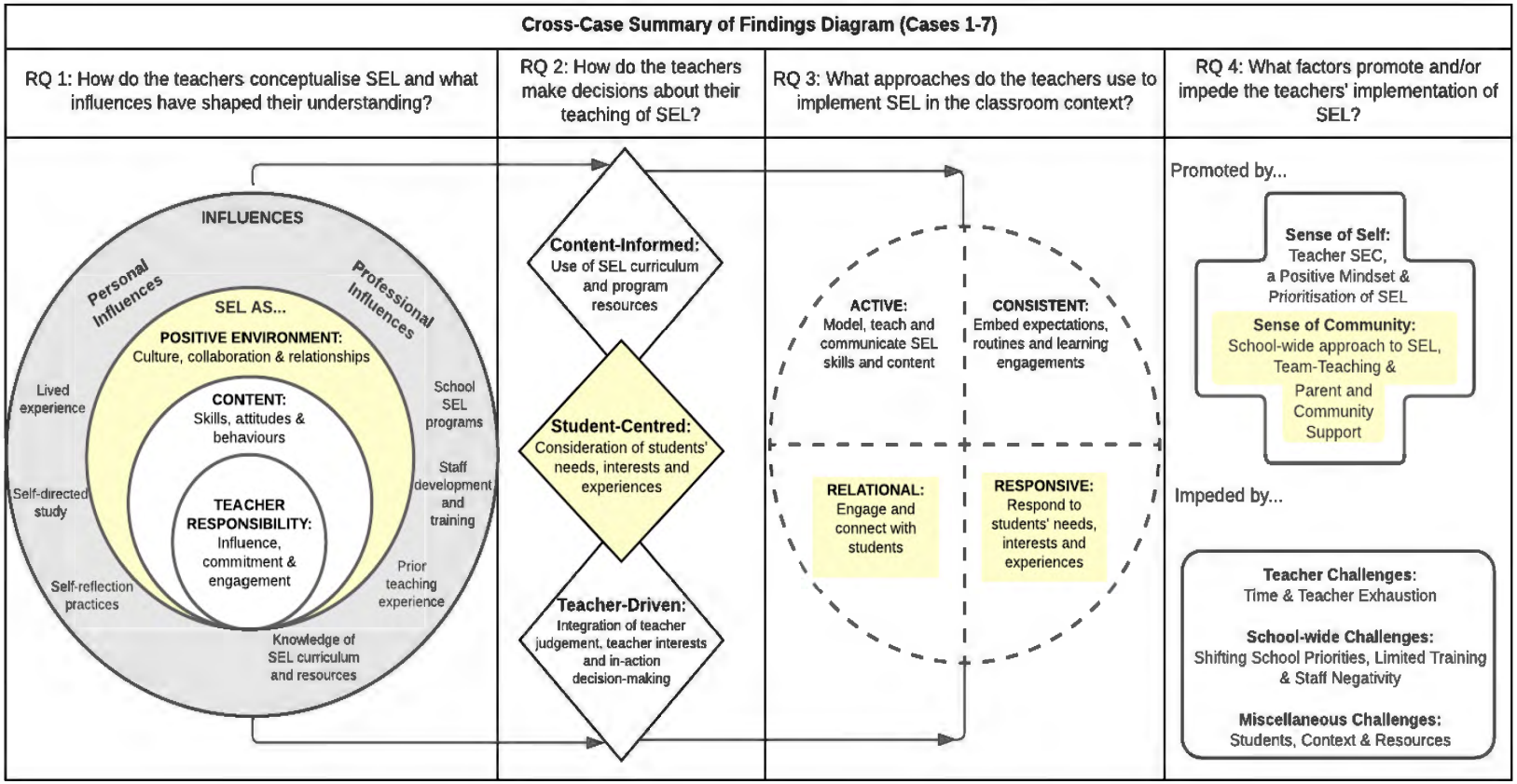
12.4. Theme 2: SELebrating Relationships

12.4.1. Overview

The next theme extends beyond teachers' personal SEC and beliefs about SEL to consider the role of student and collegial relationships in teachers' SEL understanding, planning and implementation. As presented in Figure 12.2, the most relevant findings informing this theme recognise school-based relationships—namely teacher–student relationships and teacher–colleague relationships—as pivotal to teachers' SEL perceptions and practices. The study results identified that teachers' knowledge of and relationships with students strongly affect their SEL content selection, decision-making and implementation. Additionally, teachers explained how supportive relationships with their teaching colleagues and school leadership informed and supported their teaching of SEL. In this way, teachers' conceptualisations and approaches to SEL can be described as highly relational, reciprocal and student-driven. Their school-based relationships form key pillars and scaffolds upon which they plan and implement SEL.

Figure 12.2

Cross-Case Findings in Support of Theme 2



12.4.2. Relating and connecting for SEL: From students to students, for students

If teachers' SEC and personal beliefs are the foundation of their SEL knowledge and implementation in classrooms, then their knowledge of, care for, and relationships with students are the cornerstones on which they build and shape their SEL instruction. The study's findings highlight the centrality of students and the teacher–student relationship in teachers' SEL knowledge, planning and delivery. All participant teachers demonstrated a strong commitment to understanding, supporting and relating to their students as the basis of their SEL implementation. This commitment was evidenced both within and outside the classroom. Grounded in their personal conceptualisations of SEL, every teacher underscored their desire to establish a positive learning environment centred around opportunities for student collaboration, healthy relationship development and a caring learning culture.

Such findings reinforce the discoveries of Ferry et al. (2011), Yoder (2014), Cefai and Cavioni (2014), and Freeman and Strong (2017). Ferry et al. (2011) found that teachers actively sought information about students' backgrounds, lives and communities to support their social-emotional pedagogy and positive relationships with students. These authors also cited teachers' attention to establishing an 'emotional pulse' with students, ensuring they felt safe and heard before engaging in specific content learning. Yoder (2014) also identified positive learning environments for SEL characterised by solid student engagement, positive teacher–student relationships, emotional and academic support, personalised relationships and trust in teachers. Participant teachers acting on their SEL knowledge and beliefs and implementing them in classrooms created classroom environments that supported positive SEL learning and catered to the individualised needs of their students. Cefai and Cavioni (2014) describe such classrooms as "caring classroom communities" that provide a "dual pathway to social and emotional education" (p.18). As such, caring, student-based SEL instruction focuses "on improving rather than proving competence" (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014, p. 18). As identified in the current study, in such classroom contexts, students and teachers openly share and are highly supportive of each other. Consequently, students are more likely to feel connected to their group, become engaged in classroom activities, and improve their learning and behaviour.

As exemplified by the findings, teachers sought to establish mutual respect and trusting relationships with their students by connecting with them individually, intentionally and continuously. Such findings confirm previous research noting that teachers' engagement with students and their modelling of relationships and skills support students' sense of wellbeing

and feelings of connection in school (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020; Cefai & Cavioni, 2014; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). To facilitate positive teacher–student relationships, teachers demonstrated approaches aligned with evidence-based instructional practices for SEL (Yoder, 2014). These practices included teachers' use of student-centred discipline, modelled SEL language, displays of warmth and support, cooperative learning engagements, classroom discussions and self-reflection opportunities (Yoder, 2014). Like Blewitt et al. (2021), teachers effectively embedded SEL opportunities within students' everyday learning environments and routines using these approaches to model and teach SEL skills. Doing so encouraged transparent and trusting connections with and among students, confirming that "relationships are the soil in which children's SEL skills grow" (Jones & Bouffard, 2012, p. 9).

These findings build on Theme 1, as they strongly align with and inform Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) PCM. They confirm that teachers with sound SEC and wellbeing prioritise and enhance healthy teacher–student relationships (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The findings also support widespread research indicating that SEL instruction is more effective when delivered by teachers with whom students have trusting relationships (Cahill & Dadvand, 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Poulou, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). As identified in their interviews, observations and reflections, the participant teachers intentionally observed, listened to and engaged with their students—during class, in the corridors and on the playground. Doing so allowed them to develop mutual trust and essential insights into their students' lives and experiences. This research illustrates that by actively connecting with students, teachers gain valuable information about their students' lives and SEL behaviours, which they can draw on to increase and improve the applicability of their SEL instruction. Consequently, they selected, planned and delivered SEL content in engaging and relatable ways to their students' knowledge, interests and needs.

Accordingly, participant teachers' SEL instruction can be described as highly purposeful, responsive and student-driven. Like Jacobs and Renandya (2019), the participant teachers' student-centred SEL approaches included modified role-plays, peer collaboration opportunities, whole-class discussions and situated learning opportunities. Several teachers also cited prioritising addressing "teachable moments," putting academic learning aside as needed to respond immediately to students' pressing social or emotional concerns. Using such approaches, teachers intentionally and actively engage their students in their own SEL learning, providing valuable opportunities for students to learn and practice essential SEL skills in

context and with support. Thus, teachers positioned learners at the forefront of their SEL instruction, ensuring SEL content and methods were timely, relevant and relatable.

In contrast to highly structured and sequenced approaches to SEL, student-centred learning (Jacobs & Renandya, 2019) and relational pedagogy (Hickey et al., 2022; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2008) were thereby at the heart of teachers' SEL conceptualisations and implementation. As evidenced across their cases, and like Jacobs and Renandya (2019), participant teachers embedded student-centred learning approaches that valued students as key contributors to their own learning and promoted student autonomy. They encouraged student–student interactions and positioned themselves alongside students as "co-learners" in the classroom. Teachers also demonstrated sound relational pedagogy by prioritising their day-to-day interactions with students, establishing relationship foundations, and providing consistent avenues to positively communicate and engage with students (Ferry et al., 2011; Hickey et al., 2022; Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2008; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). As Hickey et al. (2022) suggest, by enacting relational pedagogy practices, teachers "tender proactive engagements between [themselves] and students, which are aimed at nurturing rich and meaningful interpersonal exchanges to shape experiences of learning" (p. 296). Thus, as evidenced across the participant cases, teacher–student relationships evolved as "the primary 'site' of learning from which the contextualised realities of the experience of schooling become apparent, negotiated and grounded" (Hickey et al., 2021, p. 6).

As identified in this study, SEL teaching is therefore described as an idiosyncratic and dynamic rather than linear process. The findings indicate a process that moves away from established interpretations of teacher and teaching knowledge as "a quantifiable entity(s) that can be passed from teacher to student in a unidirectional flow" (Rodriguez, 2013). Instead, teachers' individual processes reflected an awareness of how different systems within the school and the classroom interact to promote and sustain valuable learning (Rodriquez, 2013). Rodriguez (2013) categorises this teaching approach as reflecting a dynamic systems framework in which "teachers steeped within their context choose to accept feedback from the learner (also referred to as student-centred information) and process it. In turn, their teaching develops" (p. 78). Therefore, the research outcomes imply an imminent divergence from top-down and heavily systematic and programmatic approaches to SEL planning and instruction. The findings echo the resounding call for more flexible and holistic SEL approaches steeped in authentic awareness, relationship development and connection-building between teachers and students

(Dobia et al., 2020; Hickey et al., 2022; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Oberle et al., 2016; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017; Rodriguez, 2013).

12.4.3. Collegial relationships as SEL supports for teachers

In addition to positive teacher–student relationships, the findings of this study highlight the encouraging influence of supportive teacher–colleague relationships on teachers' SEL implementation. Across the cases, teachers described their school climates as broadly positive and helpful, characterised by respectful and collaborative staff interactions. They explained how their relationships with colleagues, including their school leadership, buoyed their own SEC development and informed their knowledge and implementation of SEL. Many of the teachers' collegial relationships were specifically enhanced by staff collaboration opportunities. Such arrangements included collaborative planning sessions, shared office environments, established SEL committees, and opportunities for teachers to share their teaching knowledge and practices at staff meetings. Several teachers also noted they both used and valued a joint planning, team teaching approach to their SEL planning and implementation. Examples of this approach included teachers holding whole year-level SEL discussions; co-constructing and acting out teacher role-plays; making visits to 'buddy classes'; and implementing long-term, project-based learning across several classes.

The current research suggests teachers value the professional and social engagement garnered from working closely within team settings in these ways. These findings confirm previous research stressing the importance of systemic or whole-school approaches to SEL. Using such approaches to SEL in schools gives teachers the necessary resources, practices and structures to facilitate learning, connection and collaboration opportunities for SEL at a shared, school-wide level (Dobia et al., 2020; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Meyers et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2016). Like Dobia et al. (2019), this study suggests that promoting staff collaboration and ownership concerning SEL can support meaningful links between SEL classroom practices and school-wide SEL policies.

Collegial relationships also provided participant teachers important social and emotional support and enhanced their engagement with SEL. For example, most teachers noted the openness with which they could approach their teaching colleagues and school leadership to receive support and guidance concerning their students'—or their own—social and emotional issues. As cited in several of the teachers' case reports, implementing SEL and responding to students' spontaneous SEL needs could sometimes raise difficult topics for teachers and

students alike (i.e., bullying, anxiety, learning disorders, hormonal changes and difficult home circumstances). In these situations, teachers explained that they sought collegial support to debrief and receive guidance about their students' SEL needs. They also spoke to colleagues for encouragement on challenging teaching days. Some teachers also conferred with their students' previous teachers to gain professional insights into distinct student behaviours or to discuss relevant support strategies. In these described ways, teachers benefited from the care and knowledge of their colleagues to scaffold their SEL implementation and support their own personal SEC and wellbeing in their school setting. The research findings confirm that teachers' SEL knowledge and engagement are enhanced when working within SEL-positive school settings that encourage a shared sense of care for both students' and teachers' SEC development alike (Collie & Perry, 2019; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Meyers et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2016).

In contrast to the benefits of maintaining positive professional relationships in support of SEL, teachers cited some consistent barriers to engaging and connecting with their colleagues. Overwhelmingly, teachers indicated their lack of time or feelings of exhaustion as a hindrance to their collaborative engagement and planning for SEL. Several teachers lamented wanting to plan or do more with their students and colleagues concerning SEL, but sometimes they could not find the time or emotional energy to do so. Sadly, these findings resonate with a large body of SEL and teacher SEC research in which teachers identify time, stress, feelings of isolation and emotional exhaustion as barriers to their overall wellbeing, job satisfaction and engagement with SEL (Collie et al., 2015; Collie & Perry, 2019; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). The research findings suggest that the relationships and collaborative structures that enhance teachers' SEC and SEL teaching are the first to falter when teachers feel stressed or overwhelmed, thus perpetuating feelings of isolation and burnout. Thus, like Collie and Perry (2019), the current research identifies teachers' SEC development and SEL implementation as strongly intertwined with their feelings of wellbeing, connection and collegial support.

12.4.4. Theme 2 summary

As discussed in Theme 2, SEL was found to flourish in classrooms and school communities where teacher–student and teacher–colleague relationships are established, nurtured and valued. The research outcomes identified positive teacher–student relationships as pivotal to teachers' SEL teaching. They also suggest teachers prefer a holistic, student-centred and

relational approach to SEL over more standardised or programmatic SEL instruction. While teachers used SEL curricula and programs to inform their teaching of SEL, they preferred to implement SEL content and approaches in line with their knowledge and observations of students. Additionally, the study findings confirm that teachers rely on their colleagues' support and knowledge to inform their SEL knowledge and practices and support their own SEC development. Unfortunately, time constraints and exhaustion can inhibit teachers' feelings of connection and collaboration. As such, the current research underscores the importance of ensuring purposeful and positive relationship-building for teachers—both within classrooms and school-wide—to support SEL (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017).

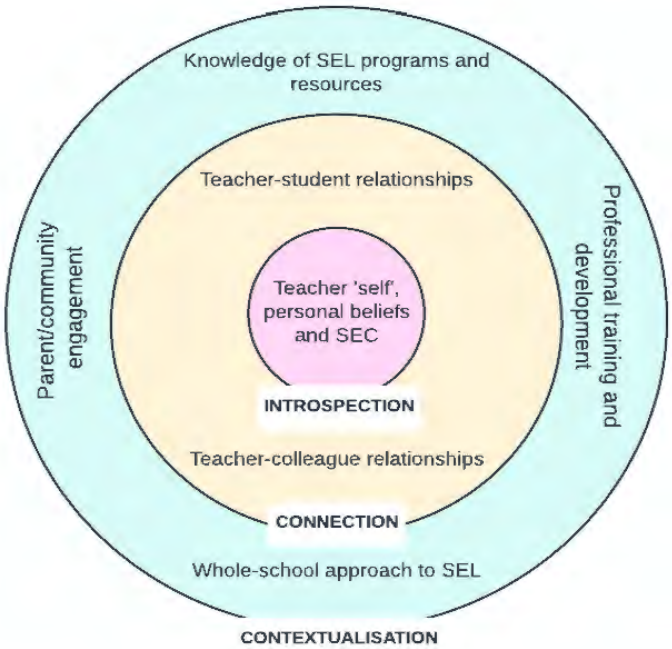
12.5. Research Implications and Future Considerations for SEL Research and Practice

12.5.1. Overview

As the preceding cross-case themes have signalled, several implications concerning future SEL directions have emerged from the main research findings. As Figure 12.3 illustrates, these implications relate to encouraging teachers' introspection, connection and contextualisation to inform and enhance future SEL research and practice efforts in Australia.

Figure 12.3

Implications Emanating From the Research



First, the research findings imply that to teach SEL with purpose and influence, teachers require strong SEC fuelled by a continuously evolving awareness of self. However, not self, in an egocentric, individualistic or self-promoting sense, but in a way that values an authentic understanding and deep consideration of oneself to conceptualise, model and support a range of social and emotional skills for students. Martínez (2016) suggests "new initiatives [in understanding and teaching SEL] depend on what teachers think and do about it [SEL] since they are the ones who generally apply and implement [it]" (p. 7). Likewise, Blewitt et al. (2021) contend that while educators often apply "tacit" or "personal and subjective" knowledge when implementing SEL, this knowledge is not easily transferred to others (p. 12). Therefore, like the teachers in this study, other teachers of SEL need to be educated and encouraged to make such knowledge more "explicit" and tangible in their teaching (Blewitt et al., 2021). In this way, and as the current research achieved, teachers should be encouraged to seek to understand more deeply who they are and what they bring—or do not bring—to their SEL implementation with students. Thus, the first implication of the research is to support and enhance future investigations of teachers' "introspection" and self-knowledge for SEL.

Additionally, the research confirms that positive school-based relationships are central to supporting and influencing teachers' approaches to SEL. The outcomes illustrate that participant teachers highly regard student-centred and relational approaches to teaching SEL and benefit from collaborating and communicating with their peers on a personal and professional level. As a result, regular and purposeful opportunities for all teachers to connect and relationship-build with their students and colleagues should be considered essential to enhancing teachers' implementation of and commitment to SEL. Therefore, identifying ways to embed and provide opportunities to ensure teachers' sense of 'connection' with SEL is the second key implication of this study.

The findings also suggest that several personal and professional factors can shape teachers' SEL approaches. While participant teachers used their knowledge of SEL content and programs to guide their SEL teaching, they also prioritised their students' needs and skills and adapted SEL programs and resources as needed. These teachers' use of professional expertise and personal judgement in their approach to SEL echoes the findings of Bailey et al. (2019). Bailey et al. (2019) argue that purely programmatic or structured approaches to SEL can "fail to leverage the expertise of teachers who ultimately know their classroom best, and whose relationships, observations, and decisions are critical to providing effective and timely social-

emotional support for students" (p. 54). As such, this research highlights the important role teachers play in contextualising SEL for students. Accordingly, the research findings indicate and support a shift from programmatic and standardised approaches to SEL to more relational and student-centred approaches. Ensuring greater relevance and contextualisation of SEL teaching in Australia reflects the third main implication of this research. The following sections unpack each implication in more detail while providing potential practical pathways to advance research and pedagogy. In presenting these, I am aware the current study's findings underpin these implications, and future studies in this area will likely continue to inform teacher education, in-service professional learning and classroom practice.

12.5.2. Encouraging introspection: Exploring the teacher 'self' for SEL

The present study confirms that a teacher's identity, framed by their personal interests, beliefs, values and lived experiences, influences their conceptualisations of SEL and resulting teaching practices (Rodriguez et al., 2020). As outlined in cross-case Theme 1, the findings of this study indicate that teachers plan for and implement SEL according to what they know, live, reflect upon and value. They rely on an "embodied, personal meaning" (Palmer, 1997) of SEL to connect with SEL content and facilitate SEL instruction in ways they described as relevant and authentic to themselves and their students. According to Olsen (2012), the notion of teacher identity theory is predicated on the belief that "teaching is not merely a cognitive or technical procedure but a complex, personal, social, often elusive, set of embedded processes and practices that concern the whole person" (p. 1123). As such, Olsen (2012) refers to teachers as "three-dimensional individuals" whose own lived experiences become "personal/professional influences and effects" on their teaching (p. 1124).

This study's participants' gaze remained largely within their classrooms and schools. Although they acknowledged the influence of external SEL resources, programs and training on their understanding of SEL, they mainly connected their SEL knowledge and pedagogy to their own social and emotional values and lived experiences. Across the cases, the teachers gave little attention to SEL's wider social and political agenda. If we are to consider SEL an important avenue to "transform" and promote social equity, justice and inclusion (Cuocci & Arndt, 2020; Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2019; Markowitz et al., 2018), teachers' broader perspective of SEL is needed. Such a perspective would invite teachers to consider students' diverse histories and perspectives more deeply within their personal SEL knowledge and teaching. Doing so would promote the broader relevance and transferability of their SEL

instruction (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Dyson et al., 2021; Heyeres et al., 2019; Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020).

While the transformative SEL literature in Australia is thin, a shift in this direction is imminent. Australia's education sector must be held accountable for what it is doing—or not doing—to guarantee relevant social, emotional, academic and cultural outcomes for its most marginalised populations. The same can be argued for addressing the specific requirements of students with diverse behaviour, learning and mental health needs. Therefore, it is suggested to increase both the accountability and relevance of future SEL efforts in Australia. We should begin ensuring that teachers, school leaders and SEL policy makers are supported to consider more purposefully the different cultural, social and behavioural intricacies of teaching SEL to Australia's diverse student populations (Dobia & Roffey, 2017; Hickey et al., 2022; Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020; Robinson et al., 2020). First, this will require a greater cultural representation of and consultation with various minority and marginalised communities to understand their specific SEL needs (Robinson et al., 2020). Additionally, it will necessitate the intentional unravelling of teachers' personal values, subconscious biases and predispositions through formal processes of introspection and self-reflection.

To enhance teachers' introspection—or sense of "self" for SEL—extends profoundly into teachers' SEC, exploring the inner realms of their personal identities, beliefs, values and content-rich histories. The inner examination of a teacher's "self" builds on the original philosophical ideas of Plato and Socrates (Ergas, 2017) and numerous succeeding education researchers, all of whom have championed teachers' pursuit of self-awareness for improved teaching and learning outcomes (Ergas, 2017; Ergas & Ritter, 2020; Gimbert et al., 2021; Palmer, 1997; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2015). An inner examination of personal SEC for SEL requires willingness and time for teachers to dig deep into their lived experiences—personally and emotionally—to harness and hone their understandings of self and feelings of empathy and accept the potential impact these may have on their SEL teaching. With such understanding and acceptance comes ways to enhance their ability to connect with, embody and action SEL for students.

As a long-standing advocate of teacher self-knowledge, identity and self-reflection for teaching, Palmer (1997) states, "teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness" (p. 15). Palmer's (1997) seminal work in this area describes good teaching as

drawn from the 'identity and integrity of the teacher'. Palmer (1997) suggests effective teachers weave "self, subject and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self" (p. 16). In this way, as found in this study, Palmer encourages teachers' deep and purposeful exploration of themselves to enhance their connection to content and overall teaching impact:

> When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject—not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth. We need to open a new frontier in our exploration of good teaching: the inner landscape of a teacher's life. (Palmer, 1997, p. 15)

Like Palmer, and as identified by the teachers in this study, a profound understanding and awareness of ourselves will enable us to connect better with our students and to relate more authentically to our subject areas, including the teaching of SEL (Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Correspondingly, Rodriguez et al. (2020) state that, like students, teachers are "active participants in their own learning" and do not exist "as empty vessels" void of context and experience (Rodriguez, 2012, p. 5). Citing the limited research into teachers' SEC development, Rodriguez et al. (2020) argue that research into teaching SEL has focused mainly on the SEL-related skills and content teachers are expected to teach. Doing so has overlooked the personally amassed knowledge and skills teachers already embody and bring to their teaching as unique individuals. The current study findings confirm these sentiments, signalling teachers' self-awareness and individual skillsets as noteworthy assets to their understanding and teaching of SEL. Unfortunately, according to Gimbert et al. (2021), "despite evidence from existing studies revealing self-awareness as a valued competency and its development considered critically important to an educator's success" (p. 11), scant research exists concerning how to hone teachers' knowledge and skills in this area. These authors propose that finding purposeful and sustained ways to increase in-service teachers' self-awareness will enhance their social and emotional skill development, resulting in higher levels of teacher SEC, greater teacher wellbeing and improved SEL outcomes for students (Gimbert et al., 2021; Martínez, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2020). The methods and approach used in this study provided such an opportunity for participating teachers. They engaged teachers' self-awareness concerning their SEL knowledge and teaching, supported teachers in reviewing and reflecting on their planning and implementation approaches, and created a safe space for insightful

professional conversations to occur. Adapting teachers' training and practitioner research in these ways could be a means to enhance teachers' SEC development for SEL, as is further discussed in Section 12.5.2.3.

Therefore, the implications of the research findings support the suggestion that to advance and deepen teachers' knowledge and practices in any subject area, including SEL, we must move beyond enduring "pedagogy wars" (Palmer, 1997, p. 21) and "curricular-pedagogical" approaches to teaching that devalue "the status of self in education" (Ergas, 2017, p. 220). Jones and Bouffard (2012) argue that while programmatic and standardised approaches to teaching SEL can support SEL policy and program initiatives, they also present several challenges and should not be implemented without greater consideration of teachers' personal SEC and skill development for SEL (Jones et al., 2013; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Consequently, it is suggested that SEL researchers and teacher educators need to acknowledge and support teachers' intentional inner examination of themselves as rich and unique sources of SEL knowledge and influence on their SEL teaching (Blewitt et al., 2021; Gimbert et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2015). Encouraging teachers to have a deeper understanding of and engagement with their own SECs can promote higher-quality SEL instruction, better success in the classroom and an increased perception of value towards SEL education (Collie & Perry, 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2015; Zolkoski et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, the influence of teachers' personal identities, values and histories remains largely eclipsed by a continued focus on meeting student outcomes, navigating curriculum demands, implementing standardised SEL programs and responding to ever-shifting school priorities (Rodriguez, 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This is found to be the case for both pre-service and in-service teachers (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Ergas, 2017; Ergas & Ritter, 2020; Katz et al., 2020; Markowitz et al., 2018; Murano et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The present study suggests an important new direction for SEL research, initial teacher education (ITE) and in-service teacher development in Australia and elsewhere—a direction that focuses on a teacher's social, emotional and personal capacity-building as central to their support and implementation of SEL. As such, it is essential to consider potential shifts to teachers' initial education training and professional development for SEL.

12.5.2.1. Enhancing teachers' initial training and professional development

This research has shown that teachers bring a wealth of subjective knowledge and personal experience to their SEL perceptions and practices. Encouraging teachers to develop a deeper understanding of and engagement with their own identities, values and SEC is a critical way to promote higher-quality SEL instruction—a view echoed in the literature although not yet widely adopted in practice (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones et al., 2013; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Zinsser et al., 2015; Zolkoski et al., 2021). The research findings also highlight that, when given the opportunity to share and reflect on such innate knowledge, teachers can articulate how their personal beliefs and experiences have shaped their understanding and implementation of SEL. Therefore, the research outcomes suggest that more personalised approaches to SEL teachers' ITE and ongoing professional development may support them to hone and apply their SEL knowledge and practices, resulting in improved SEL outcomes for teachers and students alike.

12.5.2.2. Rethinking and reviewing ITE courses

Many SEL researchers agree that teachers would benefit from ITE programs with an increased and intentional focus on developing teachers' own SEC and personal understandings of SEL (Ergas, 2017; Freeman & Strong, 2017; Jennings & Frank, 2015; Jones et al., 2013; Katz et al., 2020; Main, 2018; Murano et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017, 2019; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Soutter & Timmerman, 2022). Suggested redesigns to ITE programs to support SEL could include offering prolonged opportunities for teachers to participate in frequent and sustained critical self-reflection, meditation and introspection practices within and across courses (Flushman et al., 2021; Schonert-Reichl, 2017, 2019; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Modelling SEL teaching practices for pre-service teachers is also encouraged. In a study of Australian pre-service middle years teachers, Main (2018) found that by modelling and including SEL-related teaching practices consistently within ITE tutorials, teachers were more able to "recognise and consider teaching practices that addressed the social and emotional developmental needs of young adolescent learners" (p. 11). Likewise, Indigenous talking circles (Brown & Di Lallo, 2020) could also be embedded within ITE courses as a culturally significant instructional approach to develop pre-service teachers' relationship skills, explore their norms and values, enhance their self-awareness, promote increased cultural awareness and evaluate teachers' SEC development. Encouraging such teaching and learning opportunities would enhance teachers' SEC development and support pre-service teachers to

uncover, process and share their self-knowledge, personal identities and cultural histories concerning their teaching of SEL safely and collaboratively (Ergas, 2017; Ergas & Ritter, 2020; Hansen, 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017, 2019; Soutter & Timmerman, 2022).

Importantly, such approaches need to impact tertiary educators, their SEC development as teachers, and their teachers in training. Therefore, it is recommended that such teaching be facilitated by highly trained SEL teacher educators or counsellors with proven experience in holding personal and critical conversations of this type (Ergas, 2017; Ergas & Ritter, 2020). Such professional development of teacher educators may represent a crucial first step in shifting teacher preparation models to focus on teachers' identity development for SEL. Moreover, rethinking ITE aims and related courses in this way could dually address the efforts and purposes of related education areas such as culturally responsive teaching, values education and social justice education (Busch, 2014; Dobia et al., 2020; Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Freeman & Strong, 2017; Hoffman, 2009; Markowitz et al., 2018; Soutter & Timmerman, 2022).

Following these suggestions, a nationwide audit of Australia's existing ITE programs is needed to identify how Australia's higher education bodies address teachers' personal and professional development for SEL. In addition, a review or large-scale survey to assess how prepared and engaged Australian and international pre-service teachers feel about implementing SEL as new educators could be an essential next step to inform future ITE efforts for SEL. Merging large-scale research endeavours with existing SEL research would provide a valuable base from which Australia's universities and other education bodies could reshape their approaches to teachers' preparation for SEL education. Such research could also offer opportunities for cross-institution collaboration in redesigning SEL-related ITE courses, policies and other teacher development opportunities for SEL education.

12.5.2.3. Improving teachers' in-service professional development opportunities

This study's findings also indicate changes to the focus and ways to conduct in-service professional development. In-service teachers' SEL-related training and development opportunities are short and explicitly tied to the schools' chosen SEL programs (Freeman & Strong, 2017). Rather than facilitating teachers' deep personal reflection, inner examination and SEC development to support their teaching of SEL, such programs focus on reviewing specific SEL content, skills, lesson sequences and implementation techniques. As Freeman and

Strong (2017) explain, these existing "models [for in-service SEL training] have been extensively critiqued in broader discussions of professional development because they fail to deliver the intended outcomes of changes in teacher practice" (p. 416). From existing literature, in-service opportunities for teachers to critically uncover and engage with their content-rich personal and professional identities in support of SEL appear far and few between (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Ergas, 2017; Ergas & Ritter, 2020; Katz et al., 2020; Markowitz et al., 2018; Murano et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Given the identified importance of SEC on this study's participant teachers' personal identity, thinking, planning and implementation of SEL, future SEL research and in-service policies and practices in Australia need to change. Improvements would focus on understanding and critiquing one's own experiences of SEL and the impact these have on thinking and practice in life and the classroom. Such in-service professional development opportunities are essential for teachers to broaden their SEL knowledge, understanding of engagement and classroom-based outcomes. As exemplified in the study findings, teachers who better understand themselves and are equipped with the reflexive thinking and planning skills needed to develop and implement SEL more effectively and empathetically would be fundamental to this change in focus.

Nevertheless, many existing SEL development opportunities for practising teachers focus primarily on *what SEL is* versus *how to become an embodied teacher of SEL*. Therefore, a more introspective and authentic approach to teaching SEL requires a shift towards active "teacher-centred" SEL in-service professional development. This research exemplifies that such development opportunities aim to explore and extend teachers' SEL perceptions, practices and personal engagement through discussion, observation and reflection cycles. According to Martínez (2016), "engaging teachers in iterative cycles of reflection and action can foster teachers' development of their pedagogical thinking by helping them examine their implicit ideas, values and beliefs through a critical lens" (p. 8). Such opportunities could be facilitated at the school-based level or conducted in future research partnerships with higher education and training institutes.

Additionally, to support and enhance teachers' job satisfaction and overall wellbeing, teacher-centred professional development models must aim to be time-sensitive, empathetic to teachers' emotional needs and involve collaborative professional development strategies using an appreciative, strengths-based approach (Jones et al., 2013). For instance, this study's VSRD

method and empathetic researcher approach successfully engaged teachers in open and reflective conversations about their SEL knowledge and pedagogy. As noted in case reflections, participants regarded the combined use of lesson observations alongside VSRDs as beneficial to their individual SEL growth and professional practice. The VSRD sessions also elicited deep insights about teachers' in-situ thinking and decision-making for SEL, thus capturing a unique—and largely untapped—perspective on Australian teachers' SEL knowledge and teaching. As a result of engaging with the VSRD method, teachers self-reported increased self-awareness and social awareness concerning their teaching of SEL. The regular use of VSRDs as a flexible and cost-effective professional development tool could be more widely considered in Australian schools and education directorates to promote purposeful conversations about SEL.

In considering more effective professional development models to increase teachers' introspection for SEL, this research supports using current, evidence-based SEL-related frameworks to explore teachers' self-awareness as learners. One suggested model for consideration is the FATF (Rodriguez et al., 2020). This comprehensive and contemporary model aims to increase teachers' awareness and competence for SEL by emphasising teachers' development of five key areas: teachers' greater awareness of themselves, their learners, their processes, their interactions and their contexts. Considering FATF within SEL professional development opportunities could provide a valuable framework for teachers to critically examine, explore and enhance their current SEL perceptions and approaches.

A final suggestion to enhance teachers' personal introspection about SEL would involve teachers' engagement in autoethnography-inspired research projects. Such projects would aim to support teachers' intentional inner examination of themselves as educators, including how their values, beliefs, skills and lived experiences shape their teaching (Gallardo & Gindidis, 2020). Encouraging teachers' participation in sustained research investigations involving deep introspection and critical self-reflection would likely provide teachers with authentic opportunities to increase their self-awareness to inform and enhance their SEL knowledge and teaching. Teachers could complete such research projects to maintain their professional certification requirements or to build their professional accreditation portfolios, ideally supporting their pathways to promotion.

A significant implication of the study findings is that enhancing teachers' introspection and subsequent pedagogy development will support and extend teachers' engagement with and

implementation of SEL. Encouraging pre-service and in-service teachers to engage regularly in deep, critical reflection will ensure they are trained to use SEL-related positive teaching practices and promote teacher-centred professional development and research for SEL in schools—ways that develop teachers' SEC and their teaching of SEL positively. Such an approach to teachers' SEL development would present a major shift in how current ITE courses and professional development programs are delivered and conceptualised. Placing increased emphasis on the core relational work of teaching and the influence of teachers' affective and emotional selves could be met with resistance, both by those in and out of the profession. Current teacher education programs and practices often give such elements minimal recognition, largely due to time, ethical considerations and degree scoping constraints. Navigating the socio-political conversations required to ignite such a shift in approach will demand additional research into the benefits and drawbacks of teacher introspection and self-reflection for SEL, alongside increased trust and respect for the personal role of teachers in the important work they do.

12.5.3. Strengthening connections: Inviting opportunities for connection and collaboration in support of teachers' SEL development

As discussed within cross-case Theme 2, this research has confirmed that school-based relationships play a central role in teaching SEL. This study illustrated that teachers highly regard student-centred and relational approaches to teaching SEL and benefit personally and professionally from working closely with their peers. Opportunities for teachers to connect and build relationships with their students and colleagues are needed to enhance teachers' understanding and implementation of SEL. Therefore, it is worthwhile for school leaders to consider future ways to strengthen teachers' school-based connections by building in time and intentional opportunities for teachers to collaborate with staff and students to support their SEL development and teaching. With teaching overwhelmingly considered a high-demand and high-stress profession, promoting a positive, relation-based SEL culture in schools can assist teachers in feeling socially, emotionally and professionally seen and supported, resulting in enhanced feelings of wellbeing and job satisfaction (Collie & Perry, 2019; Collie et al., 2015; Holland, 2021).

Connection and collaboration in schools occur in myriad ways and settings, both formal and informal. While corridor conversations, school celebrations, lunchtime clubs, staff acknowledgement boards and social groups represent informal avenues of relationship-

building, support and collegiality in schools, more formal avenues are also needed to enhance schools' relational and collaborative structures for SEL purposely. However, as the current research findings indicate, encouraging and strengthening school-based relationships requires ample time and consistent planned opportunities for collaboration. Therefore, future directions for SEL must ensure schools' SEL policies and professional development frameworks include sufficient time and opportunities for teachers to positively connect with others to enhance their own social and emotional development and contribute to whole-school SEL outcomes. The following suggestions indicate an increased focus on establishing SEL-positive school-based relationships for teachers steeped in support and collaboration.

12.5.3.1. Encouraging school-based relationship-building and support structures

An intentional focus on supporting teachers' feelings of care, connection and collaboration in schools is needed to promote teachers' SEL teaching and development. Along with encouraging teachers' introspection, re-imagined teacher development models for SEL should consider how teachers can professionally develop positive, collaborative and "nurturing" environments and relationships with their students and colleagues for sustained SEL progress (Gimbert et al., 2021; Street, 2017). Street (2017) describes "nurturing environments" as those in which "children feel emotionally safe, develop intimacy with significant others and feel part of a close social community" (p. 49). Establishing such environments is especially important for our youngest students, as primary school provides a setting for students to observe and practise a range of social and emotional skills (Jones & Kahn, 2017), which are evidenced to affect their brain development (Gerdes et al., 2013; Klimecki, 2015). Noting the bidirectional effects of positive teacher–student relationships and nurturing environments (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Street, 2017) on teachers and students alike, reconsidered professional development models for SEL should position teachers and students as shared central stakeholders in SEL implementation. Such models would move away from essentially "competence-based" models of SEL—or those mainly focused on teaching set SEL content and standards—to recognise instead the value of strengthening teachers' everyday interactions with students and colleagues to promote whole-school, relationship-driven SEL approaches and outcomes. As Pang and Wang (2016) argue, "collaborating with colleagues is a manifestation of a strong professional community, which will have a great impact in developing a sense of collective responsibility for the students' learning" (p. 194).

In support, it is suggested that teachers be offered opportunities to learn and practice emotion regulation and positive communication strategies for their students and colleagues (Pang & Wang, 2016). Teachers would also benefit from increased training in relational pedagogy and student-centred teaching strategies to identify aptly, respond to and build on students' SEL needs (Hickey et al., 2022; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). An increased focus on child development—namely, how students' social and emotional needs evolve over the school years—would also support teachers' understanding of SEL and resulting interactions with students (Bailey et al., 2019). More specifically, encouraging teachers' deeper understanding of how children's brain development is affected by teacher–student emotional exchanges and intentional SEL teaching may inform their planning and approaches to SEL (Klimecki, 2015). Additionally, specific attention to enhancing teachers' relationship-building strategies with students with identified learning or behaviour needs or who come from diverse cultural and language backgrounds would be beneficial, as these students are often considered the most at risk for displaying decreased SEL outcomes (Ferreira et al., 2020; Heyeres et al., 2019; Jagers et al., 2021; Robinson et al., 2020). Developing teachers' relationships with and understanding students in these ways would likely result in a more critical and reflective approach to their SEL instruction.

In line with developing teachers' relationship-building capacity and relational techniques for implementing SEL, schools should also consider embedding opportunities for teachers to share and debrief about specific SEL-related concerns. For instance, this could involve teachers engaging in regular professional conversations with familiar, trained professionals, including school counsellors, assigned SEL representatives or professional coaches trained in SEL development strategies (Holland, 2021; Kaspar & Massey, 2023; Stickle et al., 2019). While teachers in this study acknowledged the SEL support of their immediate teaching teams and leadership, opportunities to talk to other trained professionals connected to their school settings could further support teachers' overall sense of care, wellness and SEL development. These conversations could also involve teachers establishing and working towards specific SEL-related goals—personal, professional or both—providing a professional pathway to track teachers' SEL engagement and growth over time. Further school-based intervention models for teachers' SEL development could be established or reworked as a result of these conversations.

This research identified that teachers value working closely within teams and alongside other colleagues to plan and implement SEL. It is therefore suggested that co-teaching models and collaborative planning opportunities be embedded as permanent pro-SEL fixtures within schools to support teachers in designing and implementing effective SEL instruction (Reeves & Le Mare, 2017). Such opportunities should allow regular time for teachers to participate in joint planning and teaching sessions, conduct classroom visits, share best teaching practices, and engage in professional conversations about their SEL teaching and development. Additionally, increased awareness of how the physical layout of schools can support teachers' collaboration for SEL is encouraged. Examples include providing flexible teaching spaces and shared office environments to invite increased opportunities for teacher collegiality and collaboration for SEL. Creating caring and collaborative teaching environments in these ways can support teachers' uptake of SEL and mitigate feelings of stress and burnout (Collie & Perry, 2019; Collie et al., 2012; Reeves & Le Mare, 2017).

12.5.3.2. Promoting SEL-focused learning communities and research opportunities

The research findings demonstrated that teachers appreciate working within teaching environments that support SEL. Across cases, teachers cited the positive influence of collaborating, sharing SEL practices and having an open dialogue with their colleagues and leadership about students' SEL needs. Engaging teachers in collaborative, SEL-focused learning communities and research opportunities is another suggestion emanating from the implications of this study. The voices and experiences of teachers regarding SEL education need to be heard. Therefore, it is suggested that school leaders and education researchers include teachers within formal learning communities, collaborative conversations and participatory research opportunities to explore their SEL perceptions, practices and pitfalls. Such learning and research endeavours should occur within individual schools and across a broader education landscape to improve teachers' professional connections and bridge existing research-to-practice SEL gaps.

For example, to promote teachers' professional SEL connections, development and collaboration, it is suggested that SEL-focused professional learning communities (PLCs) and coaching models be established as fundamental structures in schools (Holland, 2021; Kaspar & Massey, 2023; Pang & Wang, 2016; Stickle et al., 2019; Vescio et al., 2008; Watson, 2014; Wood, 2007; Yoder & Gurke, 2017). According to Pang and Wang (2016), PLCs offer "a significant staff development approach that contributes to the whole-school improvement and

overall effectiveness" (p. 194). Engaging teachers in PLCs focused on their SEL knowledge and development would present valuable opportunities for teachers to connect, collaborate, share and critically reflect on pertinent issues concerning their understanding and implementation of SEL. Additionally, embedding formal SEL coaching and mentoring structures in schools would support teachers' personal and professional SEL growth. In working closely with a trained SEL coach, teachers can build essential professional strategies and dispositions to enhance their teaching of SEL. Such professional coaching partnerships are based on trust and transparency and represent a valuable way to strengthen teachers' school-based connections to support their teaching and development.

Future directions for strengthening teachers' connections for SEL development also point to enhancing education researcher-practitioner partnerships. As exemplified by this research, supporting "insider teacher-researchers" to engage with teachers in schools can offer a valuable opportunity to elicit current teacher perspectives about SEL and strengthen ongoing research and practice initiatives. Increased qualitative research opportunities involving teachers will support coherence and collaboration for SEL across education sectors and assist school leaders, education researchers and policymakers to identify crucial next steps for future SEL directions in Australia. Improving such partnerships and inviting teachers purposefully and authentically into the SEL research conversation will rely on dynamic, collaborative and transformative qualitative research designs and methods (Dyson et al., 2021). Currently, the SEL research landscape remains primarily influenced by quantitative research designs (Dyson et al., 2021). One suggestion is to encourage teachers' involvement in participatory action research projects concerning SEL. By completing formal participatory action research cycles of reflection and action concerning their SEL instruction and teacher-identified SEL issues, teachers are likely to develop more significant insights and confidence regarding their SEL knowledge and practices (Heyeres et al., 2019; Kemmis, 2011; Martínez, 2016; Williams & Jagers, 2022). They can also build professional connections, collaborate with colleagues and develop essential research skills to enable them to investigate future areas of professional interest or concern. Such projects may also support more comprehensive SEL outcomes for teachers, students and schools and add important insights to the existing SEL literature and research.

Encouraging caring relationships and embedding collaborative SEL-focused learning and support structures for teachers will increase teachers' school-based connections and enable them to leverage their colleagues' SEL strengths to further develop their SEL knowledge and

practices. Likewise, by engaging teachers more centrally within future SEL-related research opportunities, teachers will likely feel more engaged with and connected to evolving SEL knowledge, policies and practices.

12.5.4. Contextualising SEL: Ditching a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to SEL in Australia

In addition to enhancing teachers' introspection practices and relationship-building opportunities to support the teaching of SEL, this research supports the need for a shift in Australia's general thinking about its existing SEL practices. The research findings illustrate that while teachers' SEL understandings and practices are informed by existing SEL programs, policies and curriculum resources, teachers notably prefer to embed student-centred, relational approaches within their SEL implementation. Although most participant teachers cited using elements of SEL-related programs extant within their schools and elsewhere to teach SEL, they regularly adapted these to deliver SEL instruction in ways they deemed more relevant to their students' needs and contexts, as well as their own interests as educators. This is not to say that participant teachers considered the SEL programs as deficient or lacking; rather, they notably prioritised their relationships with students and students' observed in-situ needs over adherence to any specific SEL program.

In this way, teachers demonstrated a solid commitment to contextualising SEL for students. These findings align with substantial research suggesting a necessary and impending shift away from standards-based, programmatic, "one-size-fits-all" approaches to SEL instruction. Instead, they support focusing on using more holistic, context-relevant and strategy-based approaches to address SEL in schools (Bailey et al., 2019; Blewitt et al., 2021; Dobia et al., 2020; Dobia & Roffey, 2017; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Street, 2017). Moreover, the findings echo research showing that although educators may generally value SEL interventions for students, they do not necessarily regard "prescriptive" or program-based SEL implementation as entirely feasible or useful (Bailey et al., 2019; Blewitt et al., 2021; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). In these studies, the disregarded use of prescribed or program-based SEL instruction was mainly due to teachers' time constraints, lack of support or resources, and perceived inapplicability of these programs to their students' needs and experiences (Bailey et al., 2019; Blewitt et al., 2021; Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016; Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Thus, the current study's findings both confirm and add new information to this discussion.

The current research indicates that teachers prefer a more relational and context-driven approach to SEL. They embed SEL within their daily interactions with students rather than following specific SEL programs or initiatives (Bailey et al., 2019; Blewitt et al., 2021; Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Reeves, 2017). The study's teacher case reports demonstrate how and why the teachers do this. Bailey et al. (2019) argue "there is a pressing need for an approach to SEL that is more flexible and feasible to implement, and adaptable to individual and place-based needs" (p. 54). While many researchers generally support teachers' integration of SEL into students' learning in this way, they caution that teachers must also be aware of and intentional about the SEL strategies they use (Bailey et al., 2019; Blewitt et al., 2021; Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Reeves, 2017). Accordingly, Jones and Bouffard (2012) propose that school-wide professional development opportunities should assist teachers in developing SEL strategies to "become habits of mind and ways of 'doing business' rather than an additional curricular burden" (p. 12). This shift will require supporting teachers to broaden their knowledge of contextually relevant SEL strategies.

Additionally, while the findings of this study herald the call for a move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to SEL, it is realistically unlikely for this change to occur with any haste in the immediate future. As demonstrated by the participants, many schools and districts remain deeply wedded to specific SEL programs. SEL initiatives have been packaged and sold to schools and communities as a sure-fire way to systematically address SEL as part of their curriculums. However, as the teacher participants note, these programs are often dipped in and out, with teachers prioritising their personal knowledge, preferred pedagogies and relationships with students above standardised SEL content. A shift from a one-size-fits-all approach to SEL to a more relational method would require a critical reframing of SEL at the system level and the buy-in of teacher educators and executives. In support of a more flexible approach to SEL, school policies and programs could engage the key tenets of implementation science (Rapport et al., 2022) or appreciative inquiry (Banton et al., 2022).

12.5.4.1. Merging "relational approaches" and "strategy-based approaches" for teaching SEL

To merge "relational approaches" and "strategy-based approaches" in SEL teaching will require support for teachers in building their professional knowledge of evidence-based SEL strategies for use with a variety of students across different contexts (Dobia et al., 2020; Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). As found in this study,

teachers will require preparation and practice in identifying formal and informal ways of addressing SEL through everyday interactions and relationships with students and balancing these with their own interests (Bailey et al., 2019; Ferreira et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2013, 2019; Martínez, 2016). Accordingly, Blewitt et al. (2021) suggest that "building upon educators' practical (tacit) knowledge through the provision of explicit, documented techniques tailored to the breadth of strengths and needs within the room could allow educators to integrate formal learning with personal experience" (p. 12). Researchers suggest this shift in approach should also encourage teachers' understanding of child development (Bailey et al., 2019) and brain development (Klimecki, 2015) concerning SEL and collectively re-focus on using general SEL teaching strategies rather than following sequenced curricula. Thus, the study's findings suggest future SEL policies, programs and teacher development opportunities should embrace and develop teachers' relational teaching approaches to SEL *alongside* their uptake of evidence-based SEL teaching strategies (Ferreira et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Moving away from a "one-size-fits-all" vision of SEL will require Australian schools to embrace a more dynamic, inclusive and relation-based approach to SEL and a "shift in focus from curriculum to pedagogy" (Dobia et al., 2020, p. 165). Dobia et al. (2020) confirm that although consistent and sequenced approaches to SEL are essential, "highly prescribed programmes may not reflect student experiences and, therefore, may not generalise well to everyday settings in the classroom and beyond" (p. 165). Additionally, they argue that such SEL programs may not capitalise on "the contextualised knowledge and expertise of teachers and their capacity to be creative and responsive to their student's needs" (Dobia et al., 2020, p. 165). Moreover, many existing SEL programs do not fit the school contexts in which they are adopted, especially those located within remote or Indigenous communities (Dobia & Roffey, 2017; Hoffman, 2009; Robinson et al., 2020; Street, 2017). Accordingly, Dobia et al. (2020) suggest supporting teachers to develop and use evidence-based strategies that are "developmentally sequenced, flexible and responsive to student's needs" (p. 165). Re-imagining SEL education in this way will also rely on supporting Australia's teachers to acquire more culturally aware and contextually relevant SEL instructional strategies pertinent to the Australian context to meet the varied social and emotional needs of all students (Dobia & Roffey, 2017; Heyeres et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2022).

A framework that supports this suggestion is the Anchor Competencies Framework and Guide created by the Centre for Teaching and Reaching the Whole Child (Markowitz et al., 2018;

Markowitz & Bouffard, 2020). This framework aims to equip teachers with a social, emotional and cultural perspective on SEL and culturally responsive teaching for use across all subject areas and according to several key competencies. The framework's concentric structure includes five embedded layers that frame and support teachers' integration of SEL and culturally responsive teaching. These layers include targeted goals, attention to varied contexts and seven "anchor competencies" in which teachers' approaches to SEL and culturally responsive teaching should be grounded. Several "teacher moves" (strategies) are identified from each of the seven competencies, representing specific ways teachers can address each competency. Thus, the Anchor Competencies framework prioritises teachers' use of evidence-based strategies to support student's social, emotional and cultural competence development in a holistic, connected and critical way. As a content-free framework, it also represents a crucial move away from defining *what* SEL is, focusing instead on *how* SEL can be modelled and actioned effectively by school teachers. The framework could provide a helpful way to inform and scaffold teachers' future SEL training and development to support the increased contextualisation of SEL teaching practices and outcomes in Australia.

12.5.5. Summary

From the discussed implications of the research, an overview of suggested considerations for future SEL research and practice in Australia is presented in Table 12.1. These future considerations include supporting teachers' introspection, cultivating teachers' positive school-based connections, and increasing the contextualisation of SEL in Australia for improved teacher engagement, student outcomes and SEL relevance.

Table 12.1

Summary of the Research Implications and Corresponding Future Considerations

Research Implications			
	Increasing Teacher Introspection	*Cultivating Positive School-Based Connections*	*Promoting Greater Contextualisation of SEL in Australia*
Corresponding Considerations	Rethink and review Australia's ITE courses for teachers' enhanced SEL preparation Enhance teachers' in-service professional development opportunities for SEL	Encourage school-based relationship-building and support structures for SEL Promote SEL-focused learning communities and research opportunities for teachers	Merge "relational approaches" and "strategy-based approaches" to teach SEL

12.6. Research Contributions and Limitations

In this section, I discuss the present study's contributions to research, theory and teaching. Considering its limitations, I reflect on ways to enhance future studies of teachers' SEL perceptions, knowledge and practices and propose several potential directions for future SEL research that align with the study's identified contributions and challenges.

12.6.1. Contributions to SEL research, theory and teaching

This study has made a distinct contribution to SEL literature and research and has provided rich, in-depth case accounts of participant teachers' SEL perspectives and practices. To date and to the best of my knowledge, it is the first known multiple case study of Australian SEL teachers' in-situ decision-making processes and teaching practices. Responding to recommendations from Djambazova-Popordanoska's (2016) multiple case study of Australian teachers' SEL perceptions, the research findings extend existing SEL literature by providing illustrative teacher-centred case examples demonstrating how and why teachers implement SEL in the way they do. These examples reveal participant teachers as highly engaged with and committed to their teaching of SEL. As individuals, they are equipped with a range of relational and student-driven instructional approaches. Such contributions are insightful. They highlight the teachers' SEC and SEL knowledge and understanding and their thoughtful influence on their conscious decision-making, flexible teaching approaches and responsive approaches to relationship-building with students.

This research also is the first study within Australia to use VSRDs as a qualitative method—positioned alongside an empathetic, insider-researcher approach—to investigate teachers' professional SEL perceptions and classroom practices. It enacted an exploratory and appreciative rather than evaluative inquiry approach. As such, the research design enabled teachers to discuss, review and reflect on their implementation of SEL to successfully identify how, when and why they adapt SEL content to suit their students' needs and interests. Thus, the research has addressed a gap in the existing international SEL research landscape. It has extended previous research by triangulating participants' interviews, recorded lesson observations and VSRDs to generate rich and detailed professional accounts of teachers' specific SEL knowledge and practices. The resulting accounts provide a unique perspective into teachers' thinking and decision-making when planning and implementing SEL—

perspectives that remain under-represented in the Australian SEL research or pedagogical literature (Djambazova-Popordanoska, 2016).

This research has also illustrated the distinct individual influences of a teacher's personal identity on their knowledge and teaching of SEL. The qualitative design of this study permitted participant teachers to organically describe their SEL thinking and reflections on their SEL teaching. The methods helped the participants uncover how SEL aligns with their values and how their beliefs about SEL inform their SEL content selection and instruction. The research supports and expands the SEL literature through rich, practice-based examples of how teachers' personal SEL beliefs, backgrounds and experiences influence their professional SEL uptake, decision-making and instruction. The findings also align with extant SEL models and emerging global SEL research, which it enhances by illustrating how teachers' personal SEC and identities affect their thinking about and teaching of SEL. The resulting research examples highlight the unique personal and professional complexity of SEL as a highly subjective teaching area, underscoring the role of individual teachers' lives and experiences in teaching SEL. The implications of these findings point to new directions for ITE of SEL and professional development for in-service teachers. The findings also indicate the need for further research on a more extensive sample of teachers to validate the findings.

The current research also contributes to SEL theory by suggesting increased prioritisation and alignment of teachers' personal identity and SEC development within existing models of SEL. The study outcomes depict SEL as an inherently personal teaching area for teachers. Teachers' case examples help illustrate the existing PCM for SEL and provide additional information regarding how teachers use their SEC to guide SEL with students. Further, the research findings underscore the crucial role teachers' relationships with students and colleagues play in teaching SEL. Therefore, this study contributes to SEL theory by illustrating the dynamic, systems-based interplay between teachers' identities, school-based relationships, and knowledge and pedagogy for SEL. It is recommended that this dynamic interplay be more widely considered in evolving models of teachers' preparation for and instruction of SEL. Therefore, the research contributions have broad implications for future SEL research initiatives and policymaking in Australia and internationally.

Finally, this study contributes to conversations concerning the future of SEL teaching and professional development. The research confirms teachers' prioritised use of student-centred, relational approaches to SEL and underscores the role teachers' knowledge of and relationships

with students play in their teaching of SEL. Therefore, the research adds to ongoing discussions concerning the effectiveness—or lack thereof—of implementing standardised or programmatic SEL instruction. Instead, it suggests future SEL-related programs may benefit from an increased promotion of relationship-driven, strategy-based teaching approaches for SEL. It also signals a necessary paradigmatic shift in our current thinking concerning preparing pre-service and in-service teachers to do so successfully. The recommendation is to instigate a shift towards enhanced professional development models for SEL based on understanding personal beliefs and identity, the impact of these on students, the advancement of student-centred approaches to teaching SEL, and relationship-building skills. Such an approach will likely increase the broader relevance and effectiveness of future strategies for SEL teaching.

12.6.2. Limitations of the study

Alongside these contributions, this study has identified limitations for future SEL research endeavours, which involve improvements to several methodological choices following my critical reflection on the research process.

The first limitation concerns the relative homogeneity of research participants' backgrounds and professional contexts. This multiple case study involved seven teachers from five primary schools within one urban Australian education directorate. The participants were all volunteers selected for participation due to their noted positive engagement with SEL. They were recruited from schools where SEL was an active education priority. All teachers were experienced educators with over five years of teaching experience and, despite efforts, were all Caucasian. The strength of this sample was the inclusion of experienced educators identified as notably invested in SEL, which enabled the examination of exemplary SEL practice. However, future SEL research in this area should prioritise conversations with SEL teachers from more varied personal and professional backgrounds. These would include those from a range of cultural backgrounds (i.e., Indigenous, migrant, EAL/D), those working in diverse school settings (i.e., rural, Indigenous, inclusive-special needs), and those with different levels of professional skill or experience (i.e., newly graduated, late-career change). Such research would enhance the current findings by illustrating the influence of culture, context and experience on teachers' SEL knowledge, perceptions and practices.

A second limitation of the research relates to the study's scope and selection of methods. Some researchers may argue that small-scale qualitative research designs provide only a single snapshot of a research issue. I contend that the cross-case findings presented within this

qualitative study provide rich illustrations of teachers' SEL practices and in-depth commentary on their SEL knowledge—illustrations that enhance and support previous research investigations in this area. I also acknowledge that SEL research using mixed-methods and longitudinal research approaches are needed. For example, future SEL research in Australia could quantitatively track and qualitatively illustrate how teachers' SEL perceptions and practices change over time and respond to specific professional development or research-based interventions. Such research designs could uniquely combine teachers' pre- and post-survey data or self-evaluations with VSRDs or focus groups. Equally, they could employ a participatory action research approach to consider the effectiveness of specific interventions on teachers' SEL knowledge and perspectives over a specified period.

Another acknowledged limitation is the study's scope, which is based on exploring teachers' SEL perspectives, understandings and teaching practices. As noted, SEL is a highly relational teaching endeavour involving teachers, students and broader school communities. The teacher-centred case studies in this study effectively illustrated the teachers' personal SEL conceptualisations and approaches to teaching. However, future research is needed, involving varied perspectives (i.e., from students, colleagues, parents/carers and school leadership) and exploring the schools' SEL structures and policies. It could also interrogate teachers' perceptions and practices against school and departments' SEL. Such research would enrich the current study's findings and further develop our systemic understanding of SEL practice and its impact.

My final reflection is on the opportunities afforded and challenges raised by using an empathetic, insider-researcher approach. In embodying an empathetic researcher perspective, my aim in conducting this study was not to critique or evaluate teachers' SEL knowledge or practices. Contrastingly, my focus was to uncover and explore what teachers *do*—rather than what they *do not do*—concerning SEL in the classroom. Accordingly, I did not design the study to identify significant gaps in teachers' understandings or implementation of SEL, nor did I endeavour to evaluate or cross-reference teachers' SEL knowledge and practices against any specific SEL standards or curriculum. Instead, I prioritised an appreciative over deficit perspective concerning teachers' SEL knowledge and skills. Using an insider-researcher approach, I conversed with and observed teachers from a shared, empathetic perspective, displaying appreciation and respect for their SEL knowledge and practices. This approach was fuelled by genuine trust and care for teachers as individuals and professionals. Therefore, the

potential for other researchers to have reached alternative interpretations of the data gathered and for blind spots to have emerged should not be discounted.

I firmly stand by my approach to this research in an education era in which teachers are under constant societal scrutiny and professional pressure. I argue that it demonstrates value, empathy and respect for teachers and has generated significant theoretical and pragmatic findings concerning their unique SEL knowledge, perspectives and practices. Accordingly, the outcomes of my research approach suggest that if we, as education researchers, are willing to listen to and reflect alongside teachers—to position ourselves as genuinely interested and empathetic observers of their expertise and professionalism—we may just be privileged enough to uncover more than initially meets our eye.

12.7. Conclusion

This multiple case study explored seven primary teachers' SEL knowledge, decision-making and teaching practices across five schools within one Australian education directorate. In doing so, it investigated how and why teachers think about and implement SEL in the ways they do. Noting the well-documented role of classroom teachers in delivering SEL to students, the study framed teachers as essential stakeholders and influences in students' SEL education and outcomes. It responded to a gap in Australia's current SEL literature concerning classroom teachers' engagement with SEL by amplifying the professional voices and experiences of practising teachers about their SEL knowledge and instruction. As such, it explored how teachers conceptualise SEL, how they plan and make decisions for their teaching of SEL, what approaches they use to implement SEL and the influences that have led them to understand and deliver SEL in these ways.

Each case study in this research details one classroom teacher's specific SEL knowledge, influences and practices. The research generated detailed illustrations of teachers' professional SEL thinking and practices by employing a unique combination of qualitative research methods, including participant interviews, lesson observations and VSRDs. Together, the cross-case findings confirm individual teachers' significant role in interpreting, selecting and implementing SEL content and pedagogy for their students. Resulting from the systematic process of thematic analysis—applied both within each case and across all seven cases—the research highlights that underlying teachers' conceptualisations of SEL are a unique patchwork of knowledge generated from various personal and professional influences. Teachers'

understandings of SEL appear strongly influenced by their lived experiences and personal beliefs about SEL, their engagement with professional training, and their own SEC development. The research outcomes also confirm that teachers' understandings of SEL are intricately connected by the essential threads of positive relationships and engagement with their students and colleagues. Further, the research shows that teachers select, adapt and implement SEL content and strategies based on what they personally know and value, in line with their school programs, with the support of their colleagues, and in ways intentionally centred around and responsive to their students.

Therefore, this research adds to the existing SEL literature by demonstrating the considerable influence teachers' combined personal knowledge, professional experiences and school-based connections have on their teaching of SEL. It depicts SEL as a highly dynamic, subjective and responsive learning area, steered heavily by teachers in response to their students. The findings are valuable from a research and pragmatic perspective. The study's unique research design provided rich insights into personal, contextual and in-situ practice examples and professional insights into how and why teachers think about and engage with SEL education in the way they do. Such a personal perspective on teachers' SEL instruction is currently under-represented in the Australian SEL context.

Thus, the resulting implications of the research point to a more significant consideration of individual teacher thinking and their school-based relationships in constructing SEL policies and implementing SEL education for students. Aligned suggestions for future SEL research and practice include promoting an increased emphasis on developing teachers' own SEC for their teaching of SEL; supporting teachers' use of student-centred and relational pedagogy over standardised SEL programs; encouraging positive relationship development and collaborative structures in schools; and ensuring greater contextualisation of SEL education for all students. In line with these suggestions, it is proposed that teachers' initial SEL training courses and ongoing professional development models be reviewed. Collaborative teaching, planning and coaching structures should also be encouraged in schools to support the highly social and reciprocal aspects of teaching SEL. Finally, proposed considerations for future SEL research point to teachers' increased use of collaborative, reflective and participatory research opportunities. Such opportunities would invite teachers from various backgrounds to explore their SEL perceptions and experiences. Doing so will ensure that the future of SEL education is rich and meaningful for students, teachers and the broader education community.

With recent global events taking a profound and largely irreversible toll on students' and teachers' social and emotional health and wellbeing worldwide, it can be argued that the future trajectory of SEL education is more important than ever. In our contemporary 'post-COVID' world, ensuring teachers feel equipped and empowered by the requisite knowledge and skills needed to support students through myriad future social and emotional challenges is the combined and essential responsibility of education leaders, researchers and policymakers. As this research confirms, participant teachers widely value SEL and already possess much of the knowledge and skills required to engage with and implement SEL effectively for students. The next step is to recognise, appreciate and activate—more intentionally and more deeply—teachers' existing knowledge and skills for SEL in ways that encourage their personal SEC development, support their SEL teaching and enhance students' social and emotional wellbeing. Positioning teachers as central to SEL in this way will support more relational, responsive and authentic SEL education and student outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix A

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DISTINCTIVE BY DESIGN

Principal Information Letter – Summary of Study

An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

6th February 2019

Dear Mr/s

My name is Amber Piper, and I am writing as a qualified and practising educator to solicit your help in recruiting teachers for my Doctor in Education Research Study concerning Australian primary teachers' current thinking about and delivery of social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction.

As a trained primary teacher with over ten years classroom teaching experience, I highly value a teacher's role in supporting students' development of critical life-long skills to ensure their social and emotional wellbeing. My study has been designed to provide an in-depth look at how teachers currently facilitate SEL instruction alongside their teaching of the Australian Curriculum, as well as their professional thinking and decision-making in this area. This study will encourage teachers to discuss, share and reflect upon their current SEL teaching practices. The findings of this study will inform important ongoing discussions relating to SEL programming, policy and teacher development.

By participating in this study, teachers will contribute their unique professional voices to the current dialogue concerning SEL teaching within the Australian context. The findings from this study will support you as a school leader, as well as SEL program writers and education policy makers, to better understand and respond to the experiences and needs of teachers in relation to SEL and the Australian Curriculum. Additionally, the processes of discussion, observation and reflection will provide a valuable professional development opportunity for participating teachers to review and refine their practice in this area. With the recent development of the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, it is critical for teachers to engage in professional discussions and reflections concerning how best to support students' social and emotional wellbeing.

I have contacted you directly because you lead a school committed to students' social and emotional development as evidenced by your current strategic plan and/or school programs. Below you will find an outline of my project and participant requirements for this study. If you are interested in my project and would like to agree for a teacher or teachers at your school to participate, I would very much appreciate you putting them in touch with me. Or if you need further information and would like to talk with me in person about participating, please contact me on [redacted] or by email at [redacted].

I sincerely appreciate you taking the time to consider your school and teachers being involved in my research project. Thank you in advance for your support and communication.

Kind regards,

Amber Piper

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Summary of Study

Purpose

The purpose of my research study: *An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)* is to investigate how primary teachers facilitate social and emotional learning (SEL) alongside their regular classroom teaching. I am particularly interested in how Australian primary teachers think and make decisions about their SEL instruction, and how these understandings are translated into their day-to-day classroom teaching practices. This study will invite teachers to share about, review and self-reflect on their current knowledge and practices related to students' social and emotional wellbeing and development. Data for this study will be collected through one-on-one interviews, whole-class lesson observations and one-on-one critical reflection sessions.

Teacher Profile

I am interested in recruiting full-time K-6 classroom teachers who are committed to supporting students' social and emotional development and wellbeing within their teaching of the Australian Curriculum. These teachers will welcome the opportunity to share and critically reflect on their current knowledge and teaching practices in relation to students' social and emotional wellbeing. No formal training is required. Ideal participants will:

- demonstrate interest and initiative in developing the social and emotional abilities of their students
- exhibit sound knowledge of the Australian Curriculum
- be comfortable sharing about their professional practice
- show a strong commitment to professional and personal development
- be comfortable being audio and video recorded

Research Procedure

The table below outlines the data collection procedures and an approximate timeline for this study:

Data Type	Length	Term (2019)	Location
Interviews (one-on-one, audio recorded)	2 x 1 hour	1 (March – April)	Teacher preference
Lesson Observations (whole-class, audio-video recorded)	2 x 45 min.	2 (May– August)	Teacher's regular teaching environment (i.e. classroom)
Reflective Dialogue Sessions (w/ use of video prompt) (one-on-one, audio recorded; ideally, each session is to be completed within 72 hours following each lesson observation)	2 x 1 hour	2 (May – August)	Teacher preference

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Timeline

It is my aim to complete data collection over the first two school terms; however, unforseen schedule changes and disruptions may require data collection to extend into Term 3. Any changes to the above schedule will be communicated and negotiated with the teacher participants in advance. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and there are no serious foreseen risks associated with this study. Participants will not receive any remuneration for their participation and will have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage and for any reason without consequence. This research has been granted both University of Canberra Human Research Committee and ACT Education Directorate ethics approval. When I report on this study, all teacher, student and school names will be changed thus allowing all participants and connected institutions to remain anonymous.

Benefits

This study will generate rich, in-depth knowledge concerning the ways in which several Australian primary teachers currently think about, plan for and support the social and emotional wellbeing of their students, specifically in relation to their regular classroom teaching practice. The findings of this study will add valuable insights to the emerging SEL field within Australia about the knowledge, strategies and processes teachers use to support students' social and emotional wellbeing and development. Study findings will contribute professional perspectives to the Australian SEL literature base and inform emerging conversations among teachers, school leaders and policy makers in this area. The teachers involved in this study will engage in professional dialogue and reflective practice thus enhancing their understanding and pedagogical development in this area.

The information collected throughout this study will also contribute to the researcher's final thesis as a requirement of her Professional Doctorate in Education. The findings from this research may also be published within academic journals and/or presented on at professional conferences. A final copy of the published thesis and any other resulting publication(s) will be provided to you and the study participants upon request.

Contact Information

If you know of any teacher(s) who you think would be interested in participating in this study, please encourage them to contact me on [redacted] or via email at [redacted]. Or, if you would like more information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of my study.

Yours sincerely,

Amber Piper

MEd | Lecturer and Unit Convener
Professional Doctorate Program
Faculty of Education | University of Canberra
Building 6, Level D

Appendix B

Interview 1 Protocol:
Exploring Teachers' Knowledge and Thoughts about SEL

General Questions:

How many years have you been a teacher?

How long have you been a teacher at your current school?

What year level(s) do you currently teach? How long have you taught this level?

What is your favourite part about teaching this year level?

Understanding of SEL:

In your own words, how would you define social and emotional learning (SEL)?

How have you come to understand SEL in this way?

Can you describe any professional training you've received to support your knowledge of SEL?

What is your understanding of SEL as it relates to the Australian Curriculum?

How does SEL align with your school's teaching program(s)?

How does SEL align with your school's behaviour policies?

Thoughts about SEL:

What are your thoughts about teaching SEL as a primary classroom teacher?

What do you consider the most important social skills for students to learn?

What do you consider the most important emotional skills for students to learn?

Prompts:

Can you tell what you mean by...	I'd love to hear more about...
You mentioned....	I notice you refer to....
Why...	In what ways?
You made an interesting point about...	Could you explain a bit more...

Interview 2 Protocol:
Exploring Teachers' Delivery of SEL

Follow up questions to clarify content shared within Interview 1 (TBD)

-

-

-

Planning for SEL:

How do you make decisions about the SEL content you teach?

What information do you use to inform your SEL instruction?

Are there any resources you consult when planning for SEL?

Teaching SEL:

How do you facilitate SEL in your classroom?

What are some examples of the instructional strategies you might use? Why are these selected?

In what ways does your delivery of SEL align with your teaching of AC content areas?

During our last interview you mentioned some key social and emotional skills you consider important to students' social/emotional development...

- How do you incorporate the teaching of these social skills within your classroom teaching?

- How do you incorporate the teaching of these emotional skills within your classroom teaching?

How do you monitor students' SEL progress?

Reflecting on SEL:

What would you describe as your professional strengths in relation to teaching SEL?

What would you describe as your professional weaknesses in relation to teaching SEL?

What would you describe as the main benefits of including SEL instruction within your teaching?

What would you describe as the main difficulties of including SEL instruction within your teaching?

Appendix C

VIDEO-STIMULATED REFLECTIVE DIALOGUE (VSRD): SEL Focused Conversation Questions & Prompts

The purpose of a VSRD is to use recorded video footage to intentionally stimulate personal and/or professional reflection. In this way, you have been asked to review your recorded lesson observation in full and to consider the questions and prompts below. In addition, please identify at least 1-3 short segments (+/- 30 seconds – 2 minutes long) from the recording which you feel are of note and would support your responses to any of the following questions/prompts.

- *Please talk to me about the planning of this lesson. What factors and/or resources were considered? In what ways did the lesson go/not go to plan?*

- *Where were you confident in the way the lesson took place? Did you feel unsure at any point? What are your strengths within this lesson?*

- *What elements of this lesson do you feel support students' social and emotional learning and development? Please describe any actions or decisions you made during the planning or delivery of this lesson to support student(s) social and/or emotional needs.*

- *Is there anything influencing this lesson, either for you or for the student(s), that couldn't easily be observed or known by an outsider (i.e. learning diagnosis, behaviour triggers/goals, family background, previous encounters in the day, learned routines, schedule changes, etc.)?*

- *What do you notice about yourself/your teaching during this segment? What do you notice about your students/a particular student?*

- *Will/Did anything from this lesson influence your planning and/or teaching of a subsequent lesson(s)?*

Appendix D

11/22/2018 [redacted]

20180155 - Approved subject to ratification by HREC

donotreply@infonetica.net

Mon 11/5/2018 3:36 PM

[redacted]

<[redacted]>;

Cc:Human Ethics Committee <HumanEthicsCommittee@canberra.edu.au>;

Dear Amber

The Human Research Ethics Low Risk Panel has considered your low risk application to conduct research with human subjects for the project "20180155 - An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)".

The Committee made the following evaluation: **Approved subject to ratification by the Human Research Ethics Committee.**

You will be notified as soon as the Human Research Ethics Committee has ratified the decision. However, you can now commence your research.

The following general conditions apply to your approval. These requirements are determined by University policy and the ***National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*** (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007).

Monitoring

You must assist the Committee to monitor the conduct of approved research by completing project review forms, and in the case of extended research, at least annually during the approval period.

Reporting Adverse Events

You must report any unexpected adverse events or complications that occur anytime during the conduct of the research study or during the follow up period after the research. Please refer these matters promptly to the HREC. Failure to do so may result in the withdrawal of the Ethics approval.

Discontinuation of Research

You must inform the Committee, giving reasons, if the research is not conducted or is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

Extension of Approval

If your project will not be complete by the expiry date stated above, you must apply for extension of approval. This must be done before current approval expires.

Retention and Storage of Data

University policy states that all research data must be stored securely, on University premises, for a minimum of five years. You must ensure that all records are transferred to the University when the project is complete.

Contact Details and Notification of Changes

11/22/2018 [redacted]

All email contact should use the UC email address. You should advise the Committee of any change of address during or soon after the approval period including, if appropriate, email address(es).

Please do not hesitate to contact us via email humanethicscommittee@canberra.edu.au if you require any further information.

All the best,

Hendryk Flaegel

Research Ethics & Integrity

Research Services

University of Canberra

Appendix E

Approval of research proposal

Thank you for your application to conduct the proposed research titled *An investigation of Australian primary teachers' delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)*. I am pleased to inform you that the Education Directorate has approved your research.

Please note the following conditions regarding your proposed research project:

- research in the school(s) must be concluded by end Term 3, 2019
- any publication or provision of your research must not enable the identification of any student, school or system. Data for the ACT must not be identifiable
- any changes in the methodology, scope and timeframe of the project require approval from the Directorate
- names of schools that participated in the research project must be provided to the Directorate at the completion of research/data collection in schools
- an embargoed copy of your report must be provided to the Directorate prior to release for briefing purposes. An electronic copy of the embargoed report should be forwarded to the Directorate at DETResearch@act.gov.au
- a final post-release copy of your report should be mailed to:

  Research Section
  Planning and Analytics Branch
  ACT Education Directorate
  GPO Box 158
  CANBERRA ACT 2601

- research reports received as per the preceding conditions will be placed in an online library accessible internally to all Directorate staff in order to inform policy and program development and evaluation through research in public schools.

The Directorate approves research in all public schools. You may now directly approach the principals of schools. In doing so, you will need to provide a copy of this Letter of Approval

and current *Working with Vulnerable People* registration (or jurisdictional equivalent) if applicable, for permission to carry out your research. It will be at the discretion of the principal as to whether your research can proceed at their site.

Any information that you obtain as part of research or data collection must be treated in accordance with the requirements of the *Privacy Act 1988*.

If you require any information about this letter and/or the research application process, please contact DETResearch@act.gov.au

Best wishes for your research.

Yours sincerely

Robert Gotts
Director
Planning and Analytics
14 December 2018

Appendix F

Approval to extend the timeframe of your research in ACT public schools

Thank you for your request to extend the timeframe of your approved research project titled *An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).*

I am pleased to inform you that the Education Directorate has approved your request to extend the timeframe of your research until end December 2019.

This approval is given subject to the conditions outlined in the Directorate's original approval letter dated 14 December 2018.

You may now directly approach the principals of the nominated schools, with a copy of your approval letters, for their permission to carry out the research. It will be at the discretion of the principal as to whether your research can proceed at their site.

If you require any information about this letter, please contact DETResearch@act.gov.au

Best wishes for your research.

Yours sincerely

Simon Tiller
Senior Director
Analytics and Evaluation
21 June 2019

Appendix G

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Information Letter/Plain Language Statement

An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Dear Principal, Teacher, Parent/carer, Student,

As required by the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* Chapter 2.2. General Requirements for Consent; the following information has been provided to assist you in making an informed, voluntary decision to participate in the research project.

1. **The purpose and methods of research**

   Participants are invited to be part of a study investigating Australian primary teachers' understanding and delivery of social and emotional learning (SEL). This research project will explore how K-6 classroom teachers think and make decisions about their SEL instruction and how these understandings are translated into their day-to-day teaching of the Australian Curriculum.

2. **Voluntary or involuntary participation and any alternatives to participation**

   Participation in the research is completely voluntary and participants may, without any penalty, refuse to answer a question or decline to take part or withdraw at any time without providing an explanation.

3. **Any payments or other incentives for participation**

   You will not receive any remuneration for your participation in this study.

4. **Duration of research and demands on participants, e.g. if research will be repeated over a number of periods, such as months or years**

   This study is scheduled to take place over the first three terms of the 2019 school year. The project will involve each participant to partake in two 1-hour face-to-face interviews, two 45-minute classroom lesson observations and two 1-hour critical reflection sessions to better understand teachers' thinking about and delivery of social emotional learning instruction.

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5. **Risks, (harm, discomfort and inconvenience) implications, and potential benefits to participants**

There are no serious foreseen risks associated with this study. Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage and for any reason without consequence. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, there is a slight risk participants could disclose personal or sensitive information. To address this, participants will be reminded of their right to stop or withdraw participation at any stage and for any reason without consequence.

The findings of this study will add valuable insights to the emerging SEL field within Australia about how primary teachers support students' SEL skill development. By asking participating teachers to discuss, review and reflect on their current SEL knowledge and practice, this study will also provide a professional learning experience from which participants can further review and reflect upon their skills and development in this area.

6. **Provision of services to participants adversely affected by research and who will pay for those services**

This research is covered by General and Products Liability Protection insurance provided by Uni-mutual on behalf of the University of Canberra.

7. **Right to withdraw from further participation at any stage and any implications thereof, and the possibility to withdraw data**

Throughout this study, participants will reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Participants will also be given several opportunities to provide feedback on their contributions to the study by reviewing their personal interview transcripts and the summary of research findings reports provided to them by the researcher. Once their contributions have been reviewed and validated, the data cannot be withdrawn from the data set. This is due to the small number of participating teachers and the effect a total retraction could have on the success of the study.

8. **What are participants expected or required to do**

As part of this study, participants will be asked to participate in:

- 2 x 1-hour one-on-one interviews (audio recorded)
- 2 x 45-minute whole-class lesson observations (audio-video recorded)
- 2 x 1-hour one-on-one critical reflection sessions (audio recorded)

All research activities will be scheduled in alignment with participants' professional and personal schedules. The interviews and reflection sessions will take place on-site within a classroom/meeting room at the participating teachers' school or at an alternative suitable location suggested by each participant. Both the interviews and reflection sessions will be audio recorded to allow for accurate data transcription. Participants will receive a copy of the interview protocol and reflection questions in advance of these sessions. The questions asked

will encourage teachers to consider, share and reflect upon their current understanding and instruction of SEL as it relates to their teaching of the Australian Curriculum.

The whole-class lesson observations will be audio-video recorded and will occur within the participating teachers' regular teaching space. The stationary recording device will be non-invasive and the teacher will be asked to wear a roaming microphone. These recordings will not be transcribed. Although students will be present, the focus of these lesson observations is the teacher's instruction of SEL and his/her professional engagement with his/her class and students. The camera and microphone will be positioned on the participating teacher accordingly. The researcher will use an observation protocol to record her observations throughout each observation lesson. This protocol will be provided to participants in advance of the lesson observations. A parent information letter and opt-out consent form will be provided to inform the parents and students about the purpose and procedure of this study before engaging in the lesson observations.

9. Any audio-visual recording of research activities and confidentiality of these recordings

The individual participant interviews and critical reflection sessions will be audio recorded. A professional transcription service will be used to transcribe the audio recordings. The SEL lesson observations will be audio-video recorded. These recordings will not be transcribed and will only be viewed by the researcher and the participants during each participant's critical reflection sessions. Otherwise, the audio-video recording will only be used to confirm the researcher's on-site observations. No audio-video footage or personal information about students or the class will be shared outside of the discussions with the research participants.

All recorded information collected throughout this study will be transferred to and stored securely on a password protected computer throughout the project and then stored at the University of Canberra for the required five year period, after which it will be destroyed according to university protocols. Data will also be stored, managed and analysed within a web-based data management application, Dedoose. The data saved on this server will be de-identified and only made available to the researcher.

10. Confidentiality and privacy protection, e.g. will research results identify individual participants: schools, students and teachers

All reports and publications of the research will contain no information that can identify any individual and all information will be kept in the strictest confidence in accordance with the University of Canberra Human Research and Ethics Guidelines.

11. Dissemination or publication of research results

Findings from this research study will contribute to and be published as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis as a requirement for the Professional Doctorate in Education (Research) degree at the University of Canberra. Only the researcher will have access to the

individual information provided by participants. Privacy and confidentiality will be secured at all times. The research outcomes may also be presented at conferences and written up for journal publication. In all these publications, the privacy and confidentiality of individuals will be protected.

12. Provision of research results, findings or reports to participants

A summary of the research report can be forwarded upon request to participants when published. If participants would like to receive a copy of the report, they should provide the researcher with a suitable mailing (or email) address.

13. Amounts and sources of funding for research

This study does not have extensive funding requirements and has not received funding from any external organisation. The researcher is entitled to apply for funding up to $2200 to cover any costs associated with equipment, translation services and data processing.

14. Financial, commercial or other interests of researchers, sponsors or institutions and declarations thereof

No.

15. Any expected benefits to the wider community

Participation in this study will allow teachers the opportunity to professionally share about review and self-reflect on their current SEL knowledge and teaching practices. By doing so, they will contribute a unique professional voice to the ongoing dialogue concerning SEL teaching within the Australian context. The findings from this study will support school leaders, SEL program writers and education policy makers to better understand teachers' experiences and needs in relation to SEL instruction.

16. Contact details of the researcher(s)

Name: Amber Piper

Organisation: University of Canberra, Faculty of Education

Phone number: [redacted]

Email: [redacted]

17. Complaints lodgement (dispute resolution) and handling process

The project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Canberra. Approved application reference number: 20180153.

Queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to the researcher and/or supervisor. Their contact details are at the top of this form. You may also contact the University

of Canberra's Research Ethics & Integrity Unit. You can either contact Mr Hendryk Flegel via phone 02 6201 5220, Ms Maryanne Simpson via phone 02 6206 3916 or email humanethicscommittee@canberra.edu.au.

If you would like some guidance on the questions you could ask about your participation please refer to the Participants' Guide located at http://www.canberra.edu.au/ucresearch/attachments/pdf/a-m/Agreeing-to-participate-in-research.pdf

18. Any other relevant information including research-specific information

No

Thank you for your interest in this research project. Please feel free to contact the researchers if you would like to discuss further.

This information sheet is for you to keep.

Yours sincerely

Name: Amber Piper

Title: Lecturer and research student

Organisation: University of Canberra, Faculty of Education

Appendix H

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

Participant Information Letter – Summary of Study

An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Dear Mr/s ,

My name is Amber Piper, and I am a trained primary school teacher currently pursuing my Professional Doctorate at the University of Canberra. This letter has been written to provide you with information about my Doctor in Education Research Study concerning how Australian primary teachers currently think about and deliver social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction alongside their teaching of the Australian Curriculum (AC). Your school principal/director has recommended you as a suitable candidate for this study.

As an educator with over ten years classroom teaching experience, I highly value a teacher's role in supporting students' development of critical life-long skills to ensure their social and emotional well-being. I also understand the difficulties related to primary teaching, including teaching a crowded curriculum within strict time constraints and catering to students' diverse needs. My passion for SEL education has grown from my experiences working with a range of students who needed support in developing social and emotional competence to encourage their achievement both personally and academically.

My study has been designed to explore how teachers currently facilitate SEL instruction, as well as their professional thinking and decision-making in this area. This study will encourage teachers to discuss, share ideas and reflect upon their current SEL teaching practices. The findings of this study will inform important ongoing discussions relating to SEL programming, policy and teacher development.

By participating in this study, you will contribute a unique professional voice to the current dialogue concerning SEL teaching within the Australian context. These contributions will support school leaders, SEL program writers and education policy makers to better understand and respond to teachers' experiences and needs in relation to SEL instruction and the Australian Curriculum. Additionally, the processes of discussion, observation and reflection will provide you with a valuable professional development opportunity to review and refine your SEL knowledge and teaching practices.

Your school principal/director thinks you would be a suitable candidate for this study based on your professionalism and interest in SEL. Below is an outline of my project and the requirements of teachers I would like to interview. If you are interested in my project and would like to discuss your potential participation, please contact me on [redacted] or by email [redacted].

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Below you will find a brief summary of my project, which includes a draft timeline, to enable you to make an informed decision about your potential participation in this study.

Thank you in advance for your interest and support.

Kind regards,

Amber Piper

Lecturer, University of Canberra Faculty of Education

Summary of Study

Purpose

The purpose of my research study: *An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)* is to investigate how primary teachers deliver social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction. I am particularly interested in how Australian primary teachers think and make decisions about their SEL instruction, and how these understandings are translated into their day-to-day classroom teaching practices. I would like to invite teachers to share about, review and self-reflect on their current SEL knowledge and practices. Data for this study will be collected through one-on-one interviews, whole-class lesson observations and one-on-one critical reflection sessions.

Teacher Profile

I am interested in recruiting full-time K-6 classroom teachers who are committed to supporting students' social and emotional development within their teaching of the Australian Curriculum. These teachers will welcome the opportunity to share and critically reflect on their current SEL knowledge and teaching practices. No formal training in SEL is required. Ideal participants will:

- exhibit sound knowledge of the Australian Curriculum
- demonstrate interest and initiative in developing the social and emotional abilities of their students
- be comfortable sharing about their professional practice
- show a strong commitment to professional and personal development
- be comfortable being audio and video recorded

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Research Procedure and Timeline: The table below outlines the data collection procedures and an approximate timeline for this study:

Data Type	Length	Term (2019)	Location
Interviews (one-on-one, audio recorded)	2 x 1 hour	1 (Feb. – April)	Teacher preference
Lesson Observations (whole-class, audio-video recorded)	3 x 45 min.	2 (April – August)	Teacher's classroom
Reflection Sessions (one-on-one, audio recorded, each session to be completed within 72 hours following each lesson observation)	2 x 1 hour	2 (April – August)	Teacher preference

It is my aim to complete data collection over three school terms. Any changes to the schedule will be communicated and negotiated with the teacher participants. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and there are no serious foreseen risks associated with this study. Participants will not receive any compensation for their participation and will have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage and for any reason without consequence. This research has been granted University of Canberra Human Research Committee ethics approval. When I report on this study, all teacher, student and school names will be changed allowing participants to remain anonymous.

Benefits:

The findings of this study will add valuable insights to the emerging SEL field within Australia about the strategies and processes teachers use to support students' SEL skill development and will contribute critical perspectives to conversations concerning teacher training and development, curriculum reform and policy development in this area.

Additionally, the processes of discussion, observation and reflection will provide a valuable professional development opportunity for participating teachers to review and refine their practice in this area.

The information collected throughout this study will contribute to the researcher's final thesis as a requirement of her Professional Doctorate in Education. The findings from this research may also be published within academic journals and/or presented on at professional conferences. A final copy of the published thesis and any other resulting publication(s) will be provided to you and participants upon request.

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Contact Information:

If you think you would be interested in participating in this study, please contact me on [redacted] or via email at [redacted] Or, if you would like more information about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of my study.

Yours sincerely,

Amber Piper

University of Canberra

Initial Teacher Education Lecturer, Faculty of Education

Appendix I

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

DISTINCTIVE BY DESIGN

Participant Information Form

Project Title

An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Researcher

Name Amber Piper

Faculty Faculty of Education, University of Canberra, Building 6, Level D

Phone [redacted]

Email [redacted]

Supervisor

Name Peter Bodycott

Phone [redacted]

Email Peter.Bodycott@canberra.edu.au

Project Aim

You are invited to be part of a study investigating Australian primary teachers' understanding and delivery of social and emotional learning (SEL). This research project will explore how K-6 classroom teachers think and make decisions about their SEL instruction and how these understandings are translated into their day-to-day teaching of the Australian Curriculum.

Benefits of the Project

The findings of this study will add valuable insights to the emerging SEL field within Australia about the strategies and processes teachers use to support students' SEL skill development and will contribute critical perspectives to conversations concerning teacher training and development, curriculum reform and policy development in this area. The information collected throughout this study will contribute to the researcher's final thesis as a requirement of her Professional Doctorate in Education. The findings from this research may also be published within academic journals and/or presented on at professional conferences. A final copy of the published thesis and any other resulting publication(s) will be provided to you upon request.

General Outline of the Project

The project will involve face-to-face interviews, classroom lesson observations and critical reflection sessions to better understand your thinking about and delivery of social emotional learning instruction. These data collection procedures will be scheduled to occur throughout two school terms during the 2019 school year.

canberra.edu.au

1

Participant Involvement

As part of this study, you will be asked to participate in:

- 2 x 1-hour one-on-one interviews
- 2 x 45-minute whole-class lesson observations
- 2 x 1-hour one-on-one critical reflection sessions

The interviews and critical reflection sessions will be audio recorded and will be scheduled at times and locations to accommodate your professional and personal schedule. A professional transcription service will be used to transcribe the audio recordings. The whole-class lesson observations will be audio-video recorded. These recordings will not be transcribed.

Due to the set-up of equipment, the lesson observations will occur within your regular teaching environment. A parent information letter will be provided to you so that you can inform the parents of your students about the purpose and procedure of the study before engaging in the lesson observations. Where possible, critical reflection sessions will be scheduled within 72 hours of each lesson observation to allow for maximum recall capacity.

Participation in this study will allow you the opportunity to professionally share about, review and self-reflect on your current SEL knowledge and teaching practices. By doing so, you will contribute a unique professional voice to the ongoing dialogue concerning SEL teaching within the Australian context. The findings from this study will support school leaders, SEL program writers and education policy makers to better understand teachers' experiences and needs in relation to SEL instruction.

Participation in the research is completely voluntary and participants may, without any penalty, decline to take part or withdraw at any time without providing an explanation or refuse to answer a question. You will not receive any remuneration for your participation in this study.

Potential Risks

There are no serious foreseen risks associated with this study. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage and for any reason without consequence. Throughout the study, you will be provided with opportunities to review and provide feedback on your individual interview transcripts and summary reports of the research findings. Once you have reviewed your interview transcripts and the data summary reports provided to you by the researcher, the data cannot be withdrawn from the data set. This is due to the small number of teachers participating in this study. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, there is a slight risk you could disclose personal or sensitive information. To address this, you will be reminded of your right to stop or withdraw your participation in this study, at any stage and for any reason without consequence.

Confidentiality

Only the researcher/s will have access to the individual information provided by participants. Privacy and confidentiality will be assured at all times. The research outcomes may be presented at conferences and written up for publication. However, in all these publications, the privacy and confidentiality of individuals will be protected.

Anonymity

All reports and publications of the research will contain no information that can identify any individual and all information will be kept in the strictest confidence.

Data Storage

The information collected will be stored securely on a password protected computer throughout the project and then stored at the University of Canberra for the required five year period after which it will be destroyed according to university protocols. Data will also be stored, managed and analysed within a web-based data management application, Dedoose. The data saved on this server will be de-identified and only made available to the researcher.

Ethics Committee Clearance

The project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Canberra. Approved application reference number: 20180155

Queries and Concerns

Queries or concerns regarding the research can be directed to the researcher and/or supervisor. Their contact details are at the top of this form. You can also contact the University of Canberra's Research Ethics & Integrity Unit. You can either contact Mr Hendryk Flaegel via phone 02 6201 5220, Ms Maryanne Simpson via phone 02 6206 3916 or email humanethicscommittee@canberra.edu.au.

If you would like some guidance on the questions you could ask about your participation please refer to the Participants' Guide located at http://www.canberra.edu.au/ucresearch/attachments/pdf/a-m/Agreeing-to-participate-in-research.pdf

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DISTINCTIVE BY DESIGN

Consent Form

Project Title

An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Consent Statement

I have read and understood the information about the research. I am not aware of any condition that would prevent my participation, and I agree to participate in this project. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my participation in the research. All questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

Please indicate whether you agree to participate in each of the following parts of the research (please indicate which parts you agree to by putting a cross in the relevant box):

☐ Participate in two interviews with the researcher

☐ Participate in two lesson observations

☐ Participate in two critical reflection sessions

Name.....

Signature.....

Date .....

A summary of the research report can be forwarded to you when published. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please include your mailing (or email) address below.

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Appendix J

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J S INC Vale BY DESIGN.

February 2019

Consent Form

An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

I_____, agree to participate in the research project titled *An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Delivery of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)*, conducted by Amber Piper who has discussed the research project with me.

I have received, read and kept a copy of the information letter/plain language statement. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this research and I have received satisfactory answers. I understand the general purposes, risks and methods of this research.

I consent to participate in the research project and the following has been explained to me:

- **the research may not be of direct benefit to me**
- **my participation is completely voluntary**
- **my right to withdraw from the study at any time without any implications to me**
- **the risks including any possible inconvenience, discomfort or harm as a consequence of my participation in the research project**
- **the steps that have been taken to minimise any possible risks**
- **public liability insurance arrangements**
- **what I am expected and required to do**
- **whom I should contact for any complaints with the research or the conduct of the research**
- **I am able to request a copy of the research findings and reports**
- **security and confidentiality of my personal information.**
-

In addition, I consent to:

- **audio-visual recording of any part of or all research activities (if applicable)**
- **publication of results from this study on the condition that my identify will not be revealed.**

Participant name: _____ (please print)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness name: _____ (please print)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher name: _____ (please print)

Signature: _____ Date: _____

University of Canberra
T +61 2 6201 5111

canberra.edu.au

Appendix K

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[illegible] July 2019

Parent/Carer Information Letter and Consent Form

An Investigation of Australian Primary Teachers' Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Teaching Practices

Dear Parent/Carer,

My name is Amber Piper and I am currently carrying out a Professional Doctor of Education Research Study at the University of Canberra (UC) relating to teachers' social and emotional learning (SEL) teaching practices. As a trained primary teacher with over ten years classroom teaching experience, I highly value a teacher's role in supporting students' development of critical life-long skills to ensure their social and emotional well-being.

I am very pleased that the ACT Education Directorate and _____ Primary School have agreed to allow me to carry out my research in Mr/s _____ Year ____ class.

For the purpose of my study, I am interested in observing how Mr/s _____ supports their students' social and emotional needs during their classroom teaching, as well as the specific teaching strategies they use. My study design involves audio-video recording two of their teaching lessons so ____ and I can review their teaching methods together. **The recordings will not be transcribed and will only be viewed by Mr/s _____ and me for the purpose of professional reflection.** As your child is in Mr/s _____'s class, I am writing to request your consent for him/her to be present in the regular classroom environment during the recorded lesson observations.

When I report on this study, I will change the names of the school, all teachers and all students. I will also ensure children know they can withdraw from the recording at any point without consequence. Obtained audio-video footage will be stored in a safe and secure location as per the UC human ethics and research guidelines.

The findings of this study will provide new knowledge about how primary teachers make decisions about students' social and emotional needs. It will also contribute valuable insights into the selection of practices teachers use to support their students in this critical area.

I will be very grateful if you can give me written permission to allow your child to be present during the two audio-video recorded lesson observations. **To do so, please sign and return the attached consent reply form to Mr/s _____ by Monday, 29th July.** If you should have any concerns about the purpose or procedures of this study, please speak to Mr/s _____ or you can email me directly at amber.piper@canberra.edu.au.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Amber Piper

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Consent Form

Name of child: _____

Please tick as appropriate and sign. Please return to Mr's _____ by **Monday, 19th July**.

☐ **Yes**, I am happy for my child to participate in classroom activities while the teacher and class are being observed and audio-video recorded. I understand that I or my child can withdraw consent at any time.

☐ **No**, I am not willing to allow my child to participate in classroom activities while the teacher and class are being observed and audio-video recorded. I would like alternative arrangements to be made for my child during the recorded lesson observations.

Signed: _____

Name (printed): _____