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## Social emotional learning for Latino students

Norma Guzmán

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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING FOR LATINO STUDENTS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy

by

Norma Guzmán

September, 2022

Gabriella Miramontes, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Norma Guzmán

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

*The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step*

- Lao Tzu.

I dedicate my dissertation to my mother, father, and sister. I appreciate the love and support I constantly receive. This accomplishment belongs to the four of us. I also want to thank the Pepperdine professors for their support and guidance I have received to meet this significant accomplishment.

## VITA

**RESEARCH INTERESTS**

Higher Education; Organizational Leadership, Educational Leadership

**SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS**

- 17 years' experience in the education field as an instructor and principal at several schools
- Communication, presentation, and management skills
- Fluent in Spanish (Reading and Writing)
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine how teachers teach Social Emotional Learning (SEL) to Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade. Latino students experience academic and emotional challenges due to parental education, language barriers, cultural difference, environmental challenges, and poverty. Integrating SEL into the classroom environment can be beneficial for Latino students to meet academic, social, and emotional development. A review of the literature supports that SEL can be a methodology to integrate into the school or classroom environments which support Latino achievement. As such, the classroom instructor is the critical participator in integrating SEL into the classroom environment. Through 15 semi-structured interviews, instructors who are experts in the fields of transitional kindergarten through second grade were interviewed. The data was gathered, coded, and thematically analyzed to find themes and phrases representing the best practices instructors integrate to meet Latino students' academic success. Based on the analysis of best practices from the participants along with the literature review, a training model was created for instructors to teach them how to integrate SEL into the classroom.

*Keywords:* Latino, SEL, integration, methodologies

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Background/Historical Context

The term social and emotional learning (SEL) has been commonly used for research purposes focus on emotional intelligence in the academic setting (Choi & Kim, 2014). The terms recognize the role social and emotional factors play in the academic learning process. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) was developed systematically in the literature that focused on promoting SEL. Publications such as *Guidelines for Educators* (Elias et al., 1997a) and *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995) used the term SEL. As such, SEL is based on the research of Howard Gardner and Dan Goleman. *Multiple-Intelligence Theory* by Howard Gardner (1983) states that humans are by nature social and emotional. The book *Emotional Intelligence* by Dan Goleman (1995) focused on the interrelationships between thinking, emotions, and actions. Robert Sylwester (1995), a scientist, supported Gardner (1983) and Goleman's (1995) finding that emotion influences different life factors. Schools and instructors believe that SEL is vital in mainstream educational concerns (Elias et al., 1997a). Social and emotional skills are key components to succeed academically, interpersonal relationships, family, and community life.

In 2003, the state of Illinois was the first state to develop and adopt social and emotional standards for kindergarten through high school (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) helped the state of Illinois to develop the standards and focus on the academic needs for the students being served. Dusenbury and Weissberg (2018) found that between 2003 to 2015, interest have increased for individual states to integrate SEL to curriculum and instruction. In 2016, CASEL launched an initiative called Collaborative State Initiative (CSI) for states to have a place that can guide in

developing and structuring SEL standards that would fit the needs of the state. Currently, as of the time of this study, 25 states were working with CSI and assessing different approaches for implementing SEL to their local education system.

SEL gives students the ability to strengthen their social and emotional skills by nurturing their ability to manage, understand, and express social and emotional aspects of life (Kress et al., 2004). Instructors prepare students academically in hopes they was lifelong learners (Lantieri, 2001) and SEL is part of the process of preparing them with life skills (Kress et al., 2004). Elias et al. (1997) found that instructor want to prepare students to be world-class people and not simply world-class students. Goleman (1995) stated that social and emotional intelligence is as important as an individual's IQ to have lifelong success. Intelligence does not guarantee future success so nurturing social and emotional competency can give students life skills to be successful (Kress et al., 2004). Instructors understand that SEL skills are nontraditional skills but if they are going to support academic development it should be considered as a supporting tool for students (Ragozzino et al., 2003).

### **Positive Impact of SEL in School Environments**

SEL provides a connection between students' relationships with teachers and classmates (American's Promise Alliance, 2021). SEL is essential in transitional kinder through second grade, where students are in an academic and structured environment for the first time. Students also learn to build outside relationships, cope and manage emotions (Kress et al., 2004). SEL is the process of developing self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, social awareness, and self-management (Zins et al., 2007). Learning social-emotional lessons that promote positive interactions enhances the ability to learn (Duchesneau, 2020). SEL skills teach students how to manage their emotions, problem-solve, and create positive relationships

(Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Students learn to share, cooperate, get along with others, and solve peer conflict through the application of SEL skills (Diperna et al., 2016). Part of learning how to resolve conflicts is to provide students with tools to manage emotions, self-reflect, and relationship skills. Classroom settings can contribute to giving students the tools and foundations of social and emotional skills (Rivas-Drake et al., 2020). The classroom structure helps to develop communication skills that intern promote sharing and cooperating to decrease peer conflict, which is a perfect example of SEL. Incorporating SEL in the class benefits students, particularly Latino students with emotional and academic challenges, compared to their White counterparts (Hart & Nash, 2020).

### ***Teachers are Essential in Integrating SEL***

The teacher's role in integrating SEL in the classroom is essential. Teachers show they care authentically by cultivating relationships with their students, which helps meet academic goals and integrate SEL (Newcomer, 2018). The teachers' role is to model communication, trust, and collaboration. Teachers must help build and nurture relationships between peer to peer and teacher to peer (Noddings, 1994). Teachers can cultivate SEL growth in transitional kindergarten through second-grade, which students can ultimately use those skills for the rest of their academic, work, and life experience. Students in transitional kinder through second grade grasp the pillars of self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, social awareness, and self-management (Zins et al., 2007). Those pillars are part of their daily routines, curriculum, instruction, and classroom culture. They also help with students that have social, emotional, and academic challenges.

**Schools.** Schools can strengthen student social and emotional skills without taking away from them meeting academic standards (Kress et al., 2004). Students in middle school and high

school do not get the integration and focus of SEL in the classroom because it is assumed that those skills have been developed and do not need nurturing in an academic structure. Teachers have independently integrated social emotional skills, but districts and administrators are jumping in the SLE bandwagon and making it part of their curriculum and instruction time. Integrating SEL skills has had positive outcomes and schools want to integrate it to their curriculum and instruction, but schools lack the budget and need government to find the funds to integrate SEL.

**Latino Students.** Academically Latino students are behind and have challenges to meet goals in the classroom (Newcomer, 2018). Cultural and environmental challenges are part of the reason, which SEL skills can help support, balance, and cope with those obstacles. Integrating the pillars of SLE in transitional kinder through second grade can be essential to Latino students academic growth, emotional stability, and social experiences. SLE integration has proven to effectively increase motivation, drive, build on interpersonal relationships, and academic growth (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). It is crucial to integrate SEL at an early age for Latino students to use those skills as they mature, face challenges, make decisions, and gain knowledge

**SEL's Impact on Latino Students.** Social and emotional skills are essential for students of color in addition to academic subjects (Duchesneau, 2020). Latino and black students are considered children of color, for this study the focus is on Latino students. The influence schools and classrooms have on children of color can support social, emotional, and academic achievement. Latino students tend to receive more negative comments (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), low academic expectations (Oates, 2003), tend to be less mature than their White counterparts (McClelland et al., 2000), lack of attentiveness (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013), not task-oriented (Sbarra & Pianta, 2001), and have poor work habits (McClelland et al., 2000). In



Los Angeles, Latino students make up the largest number of students in transitional kinder through third grade. LAUSD has over 117,581 Latino students enrolled for grades TK through second grade (LAUSD, n.d.). The numbers shows 3,214 students enrolled in pre-school, 42,259 in kindergarten, 35,668 in first grade, and 36,440 in second grade. Latino students benefit from receiving SEL lessons because it allows them to create prosocial behavioral routines and active collaboration with their teachers and peers (Rivas-Drake et al., 2020). Culturally responsive environments and showing care is essential pedagogy for Latino students (Newcomer, 2018).

**Culture Differences.** Latino students have different cultural traditions, which have an influence on how they learn in a school environment. Shankland and Rosset (2017) found that Latino have different values and experiences from the American culture. The different cultural tradition can makes it difficult for instructors to nurture and understand Latino students (Ramirez, 2004). School in the United States are structure to incorporate American traditions which can be difficult for Latino students to grasps and feel welcomed into the learning environment (Alba & Nee, 2003). Instructors have to be intentional to integrate cultural connections with their students to build on their SEL competency (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018).

**Make the Change.** The government is paying attention on the benefits of SEL in the classroom (West et al., 2018). In 1983 a report of the nations schools initiated government to make the change to integrate curriculum standards to schools (Gordon, 2003). In 1994 the Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence met in efforts to include social and emotional support to schools (Haggerty et al., 1996). Initiatives are now occurring for government to consider the integration of SEL to current academic standards (Elias et al., 1997b). For this study it is important to briefly discuss the role of government and current polies

to integrate SEL as part of the educational standards. Policy makers support the integration of SEL and are taking initiative to support schools (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). In particular in low income communities that have challenges to meet academic goals and policies like the No Child Left Behind Act have had minimal impact on meeting academic standards in under serve communities (Ferguson, 2016). The positive aspect of the No Child Left Behind Act is it paid attention for the first time to outside influences that affect student learning and the responsibilities government has to oversee those influences (Kress et al., 2004). States have taken initiatives to integrate SEL into the classroom setting and organizations such as the CASEL focuses on preparing preschools through high schools to nurture students academically, emotionally, and socially to prosper in school and life (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). Kress et al. (2004) found that some state standards to meet academic goals already have embedded social and emotional skills. SEL skills overlap with state curriculum standards, which allows for the implementation to be smooth and consistent to the objectives and values each institution need to meet (Novick et al., 2002). Government integrating SEL to a student's academic life had a positive outcome in particular to Latino students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem is that schools have not adopted SEL to curriculum and instructions. Integrating SEL can have a positive impact on Latino students meeting academic goals because they tend to be academically behind compare to their White counterparts. Schools do not promote SEL to Latino students because they need to focus on nurturing their academic skills and meeting academic standards (Kress et al., 2004). Schools and teachers feel the pressure to meet academic goals and sometimes lack the other factors that contribute to a student's academic foundation. Teachers have independently integrated SEL skills in the classroom because they are

aware of the long-term benefits. The influence of teachers integrating SEL skills in the classroom has schools and local government agencies paying attention and considering the benefits of integrating SEL into school curriculum and instruction. Latino students tend to be academically behind because of the language barriers and lack of parent education. It is also due to environmental and cultural challenges. Schools have seen that students can have positive relationships and academic growth if schools focus on social, emotional pillars in the classroom.

Schools tend to focus on students' academic skills to move on to the next grade, and very little focus is given to the pillars of social-emotional learning (Bierman et al., 2010). SEL is not approached in the classroom as a subject or skills students will need to succeed but instead assumed students already have those skills. Some teachers believe that students need to learn at home, and teaching them SEL skills is not their responsibility. Teachers have realized that parents are not focusing on teaching their children social and emotional skills before coming to school. Teachers integrate SEL components into the classroom setting that might not align with the school district or school. In the last years, education has changed, and teachers have taken on more responsibilities that can be overwhelming. Students deal with broken homes, environmental challenges, community challenges, depression, loss, and abuse. These challenges become the teacher's problem because they bring them into the classroom and affect their learning. Depending on the school community, there might be resources to guide individual students, but schools without resources become the teacher's problem.

The problem can be solved if teachers are given the tools to deal with classroom social, emotional, and academic challenges. That can be done in the classroom, and it will not take from the academic development. On the contrary, SEL can be integrated into curriculum and instruction. The government has generated funds and policies to improve learning in schools,

such as the No Child Left Behind Act. Government needs to give additional funds to schools to integrate programs focused on social and emotional development. States need to structure standards on how to apply SEL into a classroom setting based on student's developmental years to have positive outcomes (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). The challenges students faced in the nineteenth-century are entirely different for students in twenty- century (Mahoney et al., 2018). The teacher and classroom setting have a more significant role than it has ever had. Transitional Kinder through second grade are vital grades to teach students positive behaviors, emotional balance, and deal with negative behaviors inside and outside the classroom.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the study is to examine how teachers promote SEL to Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade. The teacher's methodologies for integrating SEL skills was analyzed. Teachers play a crucial role in how they integrate SEL components into the classroom. The role of the school was considered; for example, is SEL part of the school culture in strategies or practices being promoted inside and outside the classroom. The researcher will look at Latino students and the positive or negative effects of socialization and academic achievement in the classroom. Elementary students in TK-2nd grade are in their developmental years, and integrating SEL tools in the classroom can benefit the rest of their academic years. The study analyzes how SEL is part of the classroom at each grade level and its impact on Latino students. Implementing SEL into the classroom culture can positively impact students meeting academic goals and interpersonal relationships. In particular, Latino students have academic challenges due to language barriers, environmental, family, and lack of parent education.

It is a qualitative study that will help get insight into how SEL can benefit Latino students. It will analyze how teachers integrate SEL into the classroom and the benefits of

integrating SEL skills. The study focuses on instructors that teach predominantly Latino students in the classroom. The researcher will get participants from different educational sectors such as private, public, charter, and religious. The data was collected from teachers in grades TK-2nd grade who have two years of experience inside the classroom. Understanding the type of implementation the teachers do with SEL for Latino students was analyzed. The structure might look different for each teacher and grade level, but the pillars of SEL are part of the classroom environment.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

- RQ1: What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ2: What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ3: How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ4: What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is to understand how teachers integrate SEL into the classroom with primary Latino students. The study aims to examine the benefits of SEL on Latino students in the primary grades. It is essential to understand the focus teachers place on integrating social-emotional components to instruction and classroom management. The challenges teachers face while integrating and the need to integrate SEL is part of the study. An

example of having SEL in the classroom is when students are given examples and tools to build an environment of respect and academic growth. Unlike academic achievement, SEL is not measured, but it can be taught and analyzed through observation.

Schools need to start focusing on the SEL components because it benefited Latino students and other students. These are tools that benefit students for the rest of their lives beyond the classroom setting (Kress et al., 2004). Findings from this study are intended to provide schools, teachers, and administrator's insight into the importance of integrating social-emotional components into students' curriculum and classroom experience. The findings of this study can be used for the professional development of the district of administrators, school counselors, and teachers. Educational psychologists can use the study to learn the influence a classroom setting has on a student's emotional and social growth. The literature will contribute to best practices to meet academic and emotional growth in the classroom. It will also give insight into what Latino students need to be academically successful at school. Lastly, the role schools and teachers have beyond the academic components can now be supported by this study.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

There are several assumptions on how social-emotional learning is already integrated into a student's daily life. The first assumption is that the SEL pillars have been embedded into the education system and does not need to be a subject to be taught at school. It is assumed that integrating SEL into the classroom structure had positive results when teaching Latino students. Teacher's nurturing the emotional components of students is assumed to be a key factor of learning. It is assumed that schools or school districts make the final decision to integrate SEL into a student's educational experiences. There is an assumption that teachers integrate some form of SEL into their classroom structure or curriculum because they find it beneficial for

students. It is assumed that time has been spent teaching the students social-emotional components that will positively impact their interaction with peers, teachers, and family. There is an assumption that SEL skills come from the classroom instructional time and are not brought from their home environment. Their home environments are not considered, but rather the school setting gets all the credit. There is an assumption that Latino parents do not participate at school due to the following reasons:

- they do not speak the language,
- level of parental education,
- lack of social support,
- poverty,
- pressure of a predominantly English-language curriculum,
- lack of time,
- financial responsibilities,
- education is not a priority, and
- cultural differences.

It is assumed that the lack of parent participation is the reason SEL is needed in the school setting for Latino students. The lack of parent participation affects students' social and emotional development, which is the reason schools need to integrate SEL when teaching Latino students.

Through the assumptions of the study it could be discovered that Latino parents teach SEL skills at home in correlation with the school, and therefore that is the reason for the a positive impact on student growth. Parents could have contributed to the growth of SEL by giving their children set expectations at school and rewards at home. It could be discovered that different cultural values and traditions gives Latino student's social and emotional balance before

entering a school environment. Outside influence is not considered for the study such as friends and extended family.

Teachers are professional experts in the field of education that can contribute to the study. Their perspective on SEL is from their experience in the classroom, school environment(s), and educational background. The years in the educational field contribute to the understanding of what students need to have academic growth. Having experience teaching different grade levels gives different prospective on the academic, social, and emotional challenges students are facing and the benefits SEL can bring to student learning. The academic foundations they received in their undergrad, master, certification(s), and credential programs make them knowledgeable in education field. School providing professional development also gives instructors continues understanding of what students need.

Providing instructors with professional development helps to integrating new or improve methodologies in the classroom, which gives instructors knowledge and skills to improve how students learn. Professional development gives instructors the knowledge to understand the need to integrate skills such as SEL into the classroom environment. Educational trainings allows for teachers to share the social, emotional, and academic growth or challenges faced when teaching Latino students. Instructors having experience teaching in different school environments and academic levels contribute to the benefits of integrating strategies that can ultimately improve student learning. The number of years an instructor has teaching in the classroom is essential in order to participate in the study and contribute on how SEL can benefit student's academic, social, and emotional success. Instructor must have the education, professional trainings, years of experience teaching different grade levels, and experience teaching Latino students. It is also vital for teachers to have worked with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Suarez-



Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009). Instructors need to understand the challenges of Latino students because they experience it first hand in the classroom environment. They understand the need to integrate skills that serve students beyond reading and writing (Kress et al., 2004).

There is an assumption that the participants was truthful with the information they provide for the study. The researcher asked for the participants to be candid in hopes to attain the information needed for the study. It is assume that instructors are sharing honest experiences of being in a classroom with Latino students and understanding the challenges. Instructors have tried different practices to help Latino students meet goals. The practices that have been established in the classroom have benefited from the integration of SEL skills (Kress et al., 2004). In particular in transitional kinder through second grade where students experience school for the first time and are presented with social-emotional skills. It is assume that SEL has been integrated in some format to student's academic life.

The participant will share best practices to get Latino students to meet academic goals. They was asked what techniques and strategies they use in hopes it is SEL skills. The researcher focused on best practices in the classroom that have had a positive effect on Latino students. Instructors will not be directly asked about ways they have implemented SEL skills, but rather the researcher will dig into their answer for SEL skills integration. The participants will share how they have integrated different strategies to support student's social and emotional wellbeing. They was asked if social and emotional are factors for Latino students to meet academic goals. It is assumed that teachers have a clear understanding and background of what helps Latino students and have applied different strategies. The integration of different strategies has had a positive effect on how Latino students learn. Instructors do not need to have a clear

understanding of what is SEL because the researcher will not use the term in their questions. The researcher will look for the application of SEL skills in their answer to use for the study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study had several limitations because the researcher is focusing on a particular pool of students and factors. A limitation of this study is that it will not examine Latino students outside of transitional kindergarten through second grade. The pool is limited to Latino students, which does not allow for generalization to be used. The study does compare Latino students in relation to environmental challenges, cultural differences, and academic inequalities. It will not examine if the school district or school has established norms for SEL in the classroom, but rather best practices being used that can be identified as SEL skills. The influence of academic programs such as curriculum content will not be used to collect data on SEL application. The lack of professional development or training on SEL will not be considered in the study. It will also not look at the influence the home environment has on SEL and academic achievement. The study is focused on school and classroom environment. It looks at instructors and the different methodologies they use to meet academic goal for Latino students.

It was challenging to find instructors willing to be interviewed and share their experiences with Latino students. There tends to be hesitation when the focus is on an individual group of students due to the responsibility instructors have of serving all students equally. It can be challenging for instructors to discuss about a culture values and traditions if they are disconnected from the culture. Teaching Latino students does not mean instructors understand Latino traditions and values, which has an influence on how students learn. Instructors tend to be private in academic practices being used because it makes them vulnerable to judgment. Finding instructors that teach predominantly Latino community might be challenging when looking for

different social environment. The study will include teachers who do not necessarily have formal training in SEL since evidence of experience will not be required.

### **Definition of Terms**

- *Classroom climate*: Instructor focus on positive interaction rather than negative interactions between students, so the classroom has a positive climate (Cook et al., 2017). Students and teachers actions set the climate in the classroom for the day. Not every day will have the same climate due to student challenges, activities, or emotions. Students are held accountable for their actions to keep the climate fair and equal to all.
- *Classroom management*: Teachers establish the condition of how the classroom was structure, with the desirable social goals and interventions to maintain a positive environment (Wentzel, 2003). Instructors are the lead in maintaining and holding students accountable to have an environment that is conducive to learning.
- *Competency*: The ability to problem solve, critically think, make decisions, interpersonal communication, effectively communicate, and self-manage (Kress et al et., 2004). Competency and social-emotional skills both go hand in hand when integrated into a classroom setting or into academic standards.
- *Culture*: The customs, values, and traditions an individual or group brings from their heritage that makes them unique (Newcomer, 2018). Those unique cultural factors contribute to cultural diversity in a school setting.
- *Cultural awareness*: Understanding that individuals or group of individuals has different cultural experiences that make them unique to them (Monzó & Rueda, 2001). Not all individuals of the same culture have the same experiences. Instructors

need to be aware of cultural diversity and include diverse content in curriculum and instruction (Gay, 2000).

- *Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP)*: Instructors that are aware of cultural differences, but maintain cultural competence and consciousness to achieve academic success with students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
- *Instructors/teacher*: The study will use the term teacher or instructor, but the meaning continues to be the same. Instructors or teachers teach student in different ways to get them to meet academic goals inside and outside the classroom. Teachers use different methodologies and strategies to meet academic and social competence. Teachers can use cultural difference as a vehicle to meet academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
- *Latino*: The term Latino encompasses diverse groups such as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central Americans (Etzioni, 2002). The term Latino does not include South Americans for this particular study. Families that identify, as Hispanic was considered for this study as Latino.
- *Modeling*: The term modeling in the study references to the instructor displaying positive relationship with co-workers and students. Students are influenced by their relationships with peers or adults in a social setting and scholastic activities (Bandura et al., 1999). Instructors have to model healthy relationships for students to understand and assimilate with their peers.
- *Positive learning environment*: The environment is determined by the instructor, who manages the desirable classroom behaviors (Cook et al., 2017). The instructor sets the

tone for a positive and respectful learning environment. Instructors do this through setting rules, acknowledging positive actions, and rewarding positive actions.

- *Relationship skills*: The ability of building healthy relationships with individuals by communicating, listening, and negotiating (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Students are given tools and rules in the classroom on how to treat others through actions and words. If students break the rules they have consequences to their actions in hope it will not reoccur.
- *Responsible decision making*: Making decisions that considers every factor and consequence (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Instructors use real time examples to guide students on making the best decision that considers every factor.
- *Self-awareness*: The behavior is due to an individual emotions and personal thought. (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Students are aware that their physical and emotional actions have consequences. Instructors encourage students to self-reflect and analyze their surrounding before taking an initiative.
- *Self-management*: The ability to balance emotions, behavior, and thought (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Students are taught different strategies to not be reactive with emotions and behavior inside and outside the classroom. The instructor has strategies if students have emotional and behavior problems to guide students into a better place.
- *Social-emotional connection*: Nurturing student's social skills, emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance to meet their academic achievements (Durlak et al., 2011). It is essential for students to socially and emotionally connect to

- their peers and instructor to motivate them to learn. Instructors teach students best practices to meet healthy social and emotional connections.
- *Social emotional learning (SEL)*: The five pillars of SEL are self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness (Zins et al., 2007). SEL pillars can be integrated into a classroom setting through instructional techniques, curriculum, student accountability, and peer interaction. SEL skills can be influential in student's developmental years, academic life, family, and future job.
  - *Students success in the classroom*: Students that have interpersonal skills, problem solve, and the ability to ask for academic support and social support (Caprara et al., 2000). Student success is not defined by GPA, academic grade, or academic honors but rather emotional and social intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Teachers view student success as the ability to follow rules, ask for help, reflect on actions, build relationship, and take accountability.

### **Chapter Summary**

This qualitative study research design focuses on understanding what SEL pillars are being used in the classroom. It looks at the strategies and best practices instructors use to integrate SEL skills in the classroom. The study focused on Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade. The researcher wanted to focus on the early academic years because students are learning social and emotional balance for the first time in a structured environment. The data was collected from public, charter, private, and religious schools. Schools selected for the study will need to serve predominantly Latino students. The researcher is not looking for schools that have challenges meeting academic goals with Latino students, but rather what

support system are put in place. Instructors have to have a minimum of three years of professional experience to participate in the study. They need to have a bachelor's degree and educational understanding of best practices. The researcher purpose is to understand the influence SEL has on Latino students' academic achievement and interpersonal relationships. The researcher wants to examine teachers' techniques and strategies to integrate SEL into school activities, accountability, curriculum, and instruction.

The researcher is of Latino heritage and has an educational background in both the public and private school sectors. Their 18 years of experiences has been in teaching and administrative leadership. Most of their professional career has been serving predominantly Latino communities, which is where the passion came to integrate SEL to curriculum and instruction. Having the cultural understanding both personally and professionally leads the researcher to find different techniques and strategies that benefit Latino students in an academic environment. The researcher wants schools to integrate SEL to their academic setting. Integrating SEL gives Latino student the skills and tools to deal with emotional and social challenges that can restrict academic achievement.

The first chapter provided a brief introduction to the background and history of the study. It focused on the problem that was studied, the significance of the study, and the framework used in the study. The purpose statements and research questions were clearly stated to understand the research being conducted. The researcher states the significance of the study in the educational system. The study had assumptions due to the researcher cultural background, education, and professional experience. The limitations of the study were the number of participants contributing to this study, the participants being of Latino descent, and the grade

levels analyzed. Key terms were defined to understand the study and the findings. Chapter 1 concluded with the content being presented.

Chapter 2 was the literature review that supported the study. The researcher used scholarly articles for the literature review. The scholarly articles were attained through the Pepperdine University digital library. The content collected will support the data for the study. Chapter 2 will conclude with a synopsis of the data collected.

Chapter 3 is the methodology used to answer the research questions by providing data to support the study. The nature of the study, phenomenological structure process, the appropriateness of phenomenology methodology, and the research design were clearly stated. The strengths and weaknesses of the research were analyzed. The researcher described the analysis unit for the study. The sample size, population, purposive sampling, and participant selection were described for the study. The criteria for inclusion, exclusion, and maximum variation were listed. The protection of human subjects was reviewed by the Pepperdine University Review Board before interview occurred. The steps taken were described in the human subject consideration section of Chapter 3. The data collection section describes the researchers steps for communicating with participants. Interview questions are introduced and relationship between research and interview questions is described. The reliability and validity of the study was reviewed by professionals in the field for the study to be validated. Prima facie validity, peer review validity, expert review validity were described in detail in Chapter 3. This chapter included interview technique, protocols, and guidelines to follow for the study. The statement of limitation, personal bias, and epoche was acknowledged, which allowed the researcher to put aside their own preconceptions. The final sections of the chapter were data



analysis, reading, describing, classifying, interpreting, and achieving interrater reliability and validity. The chapter concluded with key components of the data describe.

Chapter 4 is the data analysis of the content collected. The data was collected through interviews of current instructors teaching transitional kinder through second grade. The data collected was coded and described in this chapter. Chapter 5 will summarize the finding of the study. It will examine the findings of the data collected and discuss the implication process. The researcher had recommendations for the qualitative study and concluded their year worth of research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The learning process is different for every human due to social interaction, age, preferences, and other factors (Dierking, 1991). Each individual has a distinct learning style and preferences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Planned and unplanned experiences contribute to the learning of an individual (Krumboltz, 2009). According to Paul Belanger (2011), learning is complex in how it occurs. Learning outcomes are knowledge, skills, preferences, interest, actions, emotions, and beliefs (Krumboltz, 2009). Also, learning is influenced by interpersonal interaction, attitudes, beliefs, setting, and knowledge (Dierking, 1991). Learning does not only occur in formal classroom settings but can also occur in informal settings, such as museums, zoos, malls, and homes. According to Krumboltz (2009), learning occurs in a split-second of entering an environment, glance, impression, and reaction. Therefore, learning is not just the outcome of cognition learning but also is a holistic process (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The environment shapes an individual and, in turn, influences the learning process (Belanger, 2011).

Learning is the process of creating, building, and reinforcing knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Learning in a classroom setting must be meaningful for the learner to engage, understand the concept, and apply the skill (Harris et al., 2008). Learners need time to reflect on the concept and apply it (Barnett, 2005). Teachers are facilitators for the learning process and are held accountable for setting expectations and having academic growth (Brown, 2003). Reinforcing the information or content is essential for the learning process (Belanger, 2011). Students need to be allowed to examine and explore different views, beliefs, assumptions, values, and experiences (Harris et al., 2008). Learning involves the complete person, and it is important to consider individuals' perception, feeling, thinking, and behavior (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Cognitive learning theory looks at the way individuals think. Cognitive learning theory recognizes there are two sources of information external and internal forms of learning (Tennyson, 1992). External information enters through the sensory mechanism, and internal information results from new knowledge and system components (Tennyson, 1992). External components are text, auditory, and visuals. The focus of educational institutes is to teach cognitive skills and transmit knowledge (Frederiksen, 1984). The cognitive approach helps design learning plans that help build tacit and explicit knowledge (Belanger, 2011). Knowledge is attained through context and transmitted but cannot be transferred or acquired.

SEL has proven beneficial to supports students' emotional and academic development. Students in the primary grades benefit from integrating SELS as they learn to read, write, have emotional stability, and build relationships (Danzig & Harris, 1996). Schools nationwide and around the world are adopting SEL and have seen the benefit of incorporating SEL pillars (Devaney & Berg, 2016). Sates are developing guidelines for implementing SEL programs to support students as they meet goals at school and integrating SEL into existing programs that have been established (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). There is a growing demand from educators, parents, and scientists to implement SEL policies for students to have a well-rounded education. The integration of SEL is to achieve positive goals while meeting social competency (Jagers et al., 2019). It is vital to have an environment with set procedures and expectations for students to thrive and meet goals inside the classroom, playground, lunchroom, and other learning places (Elias, 2019).

Latino students can benefit from SEL integration in the classroom because of their challenges inside and outside the classroom (Elias & Bruene, 2005). Those challenges are environment and culture, which affect their interpersonal relationships and academic goals

(Jones et al., 2017). Latino students do not receive the same educational opportunities as their white counterparts due to what the schools are not able to provide, which is the lack of teacher preparedness, support programs, and cultural awareness. According to Elias (2019), many schools already have established or had some aspects of SEL occurring in the classroom. Data shows that students can learn from strategies applied at school, home, and in the future (Elias & Bruene, 2005).

Schools inside and outside the United States have started to implement social and emotional programs into its school structure (Humphrey, 2013). Dusenbury et al. (2011) found that the Department of Education in the United States have started or are in the process of developing SEL standards for certain SEL skills to be met at grade level. SEL programs are getting the support and receiving the financial support from policy makers, federal, and state (Mahoney et al., 2018). American educators and policy makers want to provide a competitive education to a diverse number of students being served in the U.S.

### **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Studies show that if SEL is promoted in a school or classroom setting, it can be beneficial to an individual's academic success and life outcome (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). This can be nurtured in a school environment where the students spend plenty of their days and time. Social-emotional learning skills (SELS) are beneficial as they continue their educational journey, personal relationships, and professional experience. Jones and Doolittle (2017) found that SELS could be integrated into the classroom with critical thinking, controlling emotions, and behavior balance. Having that growth mindset in a school setting is essential, which SEL brings into a school or classroom environment (Bowers et al., 2017). The concept of SEL is not new and has been around for the last twenty years, but recently there has been a spur in integrating it into a

school or classroom culture (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Parents, teachers, and policymakers want to see SEL strategies integrated into a student's life. In the United States, all 50 states have SEL standards for preschool. States with SEL from preschool to 12 grades are Illinois, Kansas, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. SEL help children and adolescents gain perspective when interacting with others, dealing and managing emotions, set realistic goals, make responsible decisions, and built healthy interpersonal relationships (Bowers et al., 2017). School districts and policymakers understand that the SEL pillars would benefit underserved communities that tend to be people of color (Latinos) with environmental, family, economic, and educational challenges (American Psychological Association Task Force on Urban Psychology, 2005).

SEL helps students develop social and emotional competencies to deal with different life experiences that challenge their academic success (CASEL, 2003). Data collected from school districts and non-district schools show that 90% of school leaders support social and emotional skills to be implemented in a student's life (Duchesneau, 2020). Students spend eight hours in the school day, which is sometimes more time than being at home with their parents. Instructors can integrate social and emotional skills in a holistic manner. Academic and social-emotional learning do not work parallel to each other, but they can also not be separated (Daunic et al., 2013). In today's world, students have emotional and behavioral challenges that are serious and long lasting (Blair & Diamond, 2008). Quality education in the United States focuses on self-regulation and not only on academic achievement (Hubley et al., 2020).

SEL was developed to analyze the effects of social and emotional intelligence at school and its positive factors on academic growth (Elias, 2004). SEL programs were intended to improve academic and behavior outcomes for students (Cappella et al., 2015). It helps academics and gives students skills that would benefit them long after being in a school or classroom

setting. CASEL (2003) found that SEL skills gives students the ability to handle challenging situations, balance success, developing caring and concern for others, recognize and manage emotions, establish a positive relationship, make responsible decisions, and behave ethically. SEL skills can be integrated into different learning approaches such as curriculum, instruction, thinking process, interpersonal relationship, and problem-solving skills (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007).

### **Five SEL Pillars**

Social-Emotional pillars can be or have been integrated into a school or classroom setting. The five pillars for SEL are self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Some of the SEL pillars have been part of student's daily life, but it has been left to individual teachers or schools to initiate it. Self-awareness is the ability to personally identify once own emotions, thoughts, and values in different situations (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Regulating one's own emotion, thought, and behavior across diverse contexts is self-management (Hubley et al., 2020). Social awareness is the ability to take different perspectives and understanding different social and cultural norms. Communication, listening, cooperating, negotiating, and providing help are relationship skills. The last pillar is responsible decision making on once behavior, social interaction, and social norms (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). These five pillars have consciously and unconsciously been integrated into a student's life and classroom structure. Research shows that if they are integrated into a student's life like Math or Reading, that outcome was positive across the board.

Self-awareness is the ability to self-reflect on emotions, thoughts, and behavior (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Managing and balancing emotions allows for the ability to control a reaction that leads to problems. Consciously aware of positive and negative thoughts that allow for self-

reflection. Self-awareness allows for behaviors to be reflected on before being reactive. It is a skill needed in school, family, and professional careers (Bowers et al., 2017). Bowers et al. (2017) stated that self-awareness is the ability to conceptualize one's world experience and use it to be self-reflective on emotion, thought, and behavior. Individuals with self-awareness have self-confidence in their abilities and qualities, which helps them in the classroom environment and socially build relationships. Self-efficacy is aligned to healthy self-awareness, which means a positive perspective of one's capacity and being able to perform. It is essential to identify, understand, and manage emotions and thoughts in a school and classroom setting (Salovey & Mayer, 2004). Self-awareness is something that continues to evolve, which leads to self-reflection and individual growth. In a school environment, students' self-awareness continues to grow at each grade level. Self-awareness leads to social awareness in a classroom environment where students have to collaborate with different individuals or groups (Kress et al., 2004). It guides students to choose friends, receive praise, criticism, and receiving and giving help. Students mature and attain academic growth every year, which never stops evolving.

The second pillar of SEL is self-management, which is the ability to control one's emotions, thought, and behaviors (Hubley et al., 2020). This particular skill allows the individual to set and work towards a goal (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Bowers et al. (2017) describe the practices as the ability to manage impulse, balance stress, maneuver self-discipline, keep motivation, organizational skills, and set goals that can be attained. Self-management skills are taught in a classroom setting by encouraging students to set realistic goals that they can achieve while maintaining high motivation through the process (Bowers et al. 2017).

Self-awareness is the third pillar of SEL, which is maintaining perspective through negative and positive experiences. If an individual is self-aware, he/she has the trait to

understand social norms and ethical norms. Bowers et al. (2017) describe self-awareness as understanding different perspectives, empathy, social awareness, respect, and value diversity. These skills can be nurtured in a classroom environment where students can be encouraged to be respectful and empathetic toward others. If the students are empathetic, it will have a harmonious environment where they can work and learn together. Students need to be observant of dynamics and reflect on their actions or choices and the impact they could have (Hart & Nash, 2020).

The fourth pillar is relationship skill, the interpersonal relationship an individual can have. This skill requires making relationships by listening, cooperating, communicating, and negotiating (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). It is the ability to manage social pressures that come about with interpersonal behaviors. The teacher, students, and parents have to build on interpersonal relationships to meet social and academic goals in a school setting. The teacher as the leader builds on their students' interpersonal relationships and teaches them strong relationship skills (Bowers et al., 2017). Instructors set group collaboration with structure and scaffolding to hold each member accountable (Hart & Nash, 2020). The collaboration is set up intentionally to build on relationship skills. Providing a structured classroom encourages students to share, listen actively, and feel supportive.

The final SEL pillared is responsible decision making, which means having the skills to make personal and social choices based on social and ethical norms (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Bowers et al. (2017) describe it as the ability to identify problems, understand and examine situations, resolve problems, assess situations, being reflective, and have responsible decision-making. In a classroom, the teacher continuously evaluates his/her decision-making that will ultimately benefit the students. The teacher guides the students to make responsible decisions inside and outside the classroom. Students have to make decisions in class daily that would



benefit them as individuals and decisions that will affect their peers. The key to their decision is that it has been responsibly thought out (Hart & Nash, 2020). The student has identified the problem, generated a solution, and anticipated outcomes (Kress et al., 2004). Shonkoff and Philips (2000) added SEL skills, self-confidence that can be interwoven to all five pillars, which means having positive relationships, open communication, and listening to others.

The five pillars of SEL have been and can be implemented in a classroom or school environment. Researchers have established that SEL skills students need as they enter school (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). These pillars can benefit students' academic growth and life skills that will last them a lifetime. Different schools and districts have implemented some of the SEL skills. Policymakers want to integrate SEL skills in the classroom because students struggle to meet academic growth. The struggle to meet academic goals is due to environmental, family, emotional, and cultural challenges. SEL helps with students being self-aware, having social skills, emotional management, and behavior norms. The Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (2008) found that the first five years of children's developmental years focus on social-emotional development. They learn to express and balance emotions, build relationships, and explore their environment. According to Jones and Doolittle (2017), SEL can be taught and learned. SEL skills can be taught through direct instruction, structured into the school or classroom environment, practices used in the classroom, and integrating it into the student's expectation (John & Doolittle, 2017). Studies have shown that educational leaders and instructors focus on student behavior rather than on building relationships and a learning environment that supports SEL (Duchesneau, 2020). Parlakian (2003) state that SEL skills give students confidence and competence in building long-lasting friendships, dealing with conflict and challenges, and coping with different emotions.

## **SEL Policies**

Policymakers and educators agreed that SEL is skills that should be taught at school (West et al., 2020). Both parties agree that SEL has a positive outcome in life and academic goals (Almlund, 2011). Implementation of SEL is voluntary rather than required by states, districts, or school organizations (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). CASEL launched a program called Collaborating State Initiative (CSI) to help U.S states plan and structure the implement SEL skills to their state standards for meeting academic goals. The program offered by CASEL is voluntary and states chose to participate. Participation has increased from 18 states in 2017 to 25 states in 2018. States are seeing the benefits of integrating SEL skills, which has grown the number of states participating in CSI and start an action plan to integrate SEL. As such, SEL helps prepare students for the challenges of the world (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). West et al. (2020) state that policymakers and school districts want to integrate SEL to improve school quality and student achievement. In 2013, the U.S Department of Education in California was approved for a weaver to hold schools accountable. This allowed leeway from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) mandate. The NCLBA focused on improving the academic gaps by holding districts accountable to assess students through standardized testing. This weaver allowed instructors to focus on other factors that influence academic growth life.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) continues to collect SEL data to push policies that can benefit districts (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). ESSA is a source of funding for SEL through Title IV funds, such an increase in funding can encourage states to adopt SEL. Pellegrino and Hilton (2012) believed that interpersonal competence is as important as having academic skills. Schools teach students to stay focused and not give up on meeting academic goals, but they also help develop social and emotional skills with their peers. Excellent schools

nurture and develop academic, social, and emotional competencies (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Schools in the United States focus on academic skills and have the opportunity to focus on non-tangible skills like SELS in the classroom (Hubley et al., 2020).

Districts have to change their mindset of fixing students rather than giving them skills that can be applied to their social and emotional growth (Duchesneau, 2020). The No Child Left Behind Act held school districts accountable to meet academic goals, but it also pressured teachers to achieved academic goals and forget about non-academic skills (Ferguson, 2016). Reforms are occurring at state levels that focus on disciplinary practices that remove students from the classroom (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). For example, in the state of California, kindergarteners can be suspended for non-threatening infractions. This is not beneficial for the student and, in the long run, affects their personal and behavioral development. Gregory and Fergus (2017) found that implementing SEL practices could reduce discipline disparities and focus on academic and developmental practices.

Policymakers focus on integrating social-emotional learning to measure academic goals (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). In the United States, the understanding of social-emotional development has gained popularity in many schools, which schools have started to integrate programs that focus on SEL (Dusenbury et al., 2011). Elias (2019) found that schools establish positive behavior intervention support or School-Wide forms to incorporate SEL. Other schools are integrating SEL to be mindful, having a growth mindset, restorative justice, or building on efficiency. California has not mandated SEL into the classroom, but rather it is developing an effective way of implementing SEL systematically (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) focuses on social-emotional skills to use as tools for students to meet academic growth and life skills, which are nonacademic factors (Ferguson,

2016). The U.S Department of Labor Occupation Information Network data shows that employers value the skills from SEL and its benefits to the companies. Individuals with social-emotional skills are persistent, communicate, are socially aware, and have self-control (Mahoney et al., 2018).

### **Effective SEL Programs**

In order to integrate effective SEL programs it does require structure (Elias et al., 1997a). SEL should have a curriculum-based approach, but it has to be formatted to state standards and developmentally appropriate to grade level. Benchmark indicators and expectations guide the instructional integration of SEL (Kress et al., 2004). Reinforcement of SEL at each grade level has to be considered by instructors as students graduate to the next grade level (Elias et al., 1997a). Having a safe and supportive community is essential such as parents, instructors, and school community members (Haggerty et al., 1996). It is vital to have the presence of engage educators into SEL. They need to be academically prepare, have cultural understanding (Gay, 2000), and have professional experience in the field of education to effectively integrate SEL into a classroom setting (Fleming & Bay, 2001).

### **Teachers' SEL**

Teachers need to have a solid social-emotional balance when teaching SEL (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Students feed off their instructor's emotion and wellbeing, so the instructor is the driving force in modeling and implementing SEL (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). If instructors are stressed and overwhelmed, even though they might not tell their students, they feel the instructor's energy. The energy of the instructor starts to influence the student's behavior and performance in the classroom. It is vital to building instructors' social-emotional competence for SEL to succeed in the classroom (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

## **Pedagogy**

Social-emotional competencies are part of the educational processes and learning pedagogy in a classroom environment (Elias, 2019). The foundations for academic achievement occurs from the skills attain in primary grade and are gradually building throughout the academic journey (Curran & Kellogg, 2016). Early achievement determines the later academic success of individual students (Duncan et al., 2007). For Latino students, there is a lack of data for achievement patterns in the elementary grade (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Skills are mastered differently and are not uniformed for students, which is the challenging part for instructors (Curran & Kellogg, 2016). Instructors find it hard to focus on students' social and emotional behavior (Daunic et al., 2013). Social-Emotional Learning Foundation (SELF) developed a curriculum to implement SEL for at-risk students due to emotional and behavioral problems. Instructors recognize the need for SEL in the classroom, but they feel the pressure to focus on teaching to the assessments to show their students are meeting academic skills (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Instructors understand the toxic stress students go through in their daily lives, and they can help lead social-emotional skills in school settings (Bailey et al., 2019).

Integrating SEL programs at schools can have a positive outcome in the classroom, student's mental health, academic growth, reduce behavior problems, and improvement of teacher practices (Durlak et al., 2011). Social-emotional skills positively affect students who have socioeconomic challenges and are academically behind compared to their peers (Jones et al., 2011). Rothstein (2004) found that socioeconomic status is a strong determinant of academic achievement. This is due to a lack of opportunities, resources, role models, and lack of language (Gandara et al., 2003). Latino students can benefit from the implementation of SELS because they have the challenges of meeting academic goals, behavior problems, and lack financial

foundations (Rothstein, 2004). Negative behavior such as teasing, bullying, and mocking affect students meeting academic goals and classroom culture (Anderson & Spaulding, 2007). Students start to externalize behavior, which eventually leads to underachievement (Hinshaw, 1992).

Wiegel (2020) found that the traditional approaches to dealing with a problem do not work and worsen the behavior. For example, they are giving detention or suspension to deter the problem. Schools understand the importance of restructuring the discipline system (Frey et al., 2008).

Researchers and policymakers have disagreed on the skills and competencies that should be part of students' curriculum (Ferguson, 2016). The barriers to implementing SEL in a school are the financial cost, implementation challenges, and sustainability (Bailey et al., 2019). SEL programs are designed to be used weekly for about 30 minutes in a scripted structure, requiring training, ongoing cost, and fidelity. The approach needs to have more flexibility to be realistically integrated to individual and community challenges to be meaningful. It is essential to lead with best practices and make modifications as SEL is implemented to optimize the effectiveness (Elias, 2019).

It is impossible to measure social and emotional skills and check for understanding if thought-out as a traditional assessment (Ferguson, 2016). The difficulty is that educators will have different qualities that would be assets (McKown, 2019). Instructors have to be creative in assessing SEL because it would have to be personalized to individual students. Instructors can strategically assess their students, but they need to determine what to assess, such as identifying social and emotional competencies or indicators in the classroom (Devaney & Berg, 2016). Assessing students is essential to analyze their growth and check on what still needs to be attained. The difficulty is that educators are not trained in structuring and scoring SEL

systematically (Elias, 2019). It is important to know that SEL assessments will have strengths and limitations when collecting data on individual students and classes (McKown, 2019).

The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2011) found that students go through stages and social and emotional skills emerge through those changes, particularly early childhood, where executive function grows dramatically. In grades kinder, through second-grade students, executive functions have a drastic growth, which is essential for a student's self-regulation and successful adjustment in the classroom (Bailey et al., 2019). These skills can be integrated into SEL and lead students' emotions and behavior forward. In Kindergarten, students learn to work in groups and follow classroom routines. They start developing skills to share, taking turns, waiting for their turn, and self-management.

Students take what they learned from kindergarten to first grade. The transition from kindergarten to first grade can be difficult because first graders can be impulsive and temperamental (Liew et al., 2010). It is challenging for Latino students entering kindergarten because they have lower levels of school readiness (Duncan & Magnuson, 2005). In first grade, students build on their attention skills (Bailey et al., 2019). Students have to pay attention to the teacher and understand the content and instructions. First graders move from having activities to a structured format of having activities and expectations (La Paro et al., 2006). They also learn to listen to their peers as they work in different activities. At this stage, students learn to stay on task and finish an assignment. In second grade, students tend to be more independent and need minimal guidance on tasks (Bailey et al., 2019). They learn to take directions without the help of the teacher. Kinder through second-grade students starts to build on their emotional competence.

Teachers are already integrating social-emotional skills into their daily routine in ways that would benefit their particular group of students (Bailey et al., 2019). Giving the teachers the

power to incorporate SEL creates consistency in the school community. It empowers teachers to structure a program that would benefit their students. Schools need to move toward the whole student approach where the focus goes beyond pedagogy and more toward social, emotional, behavior, and moral (Cain & Carnellor, 2008). Yoder (2014) found that if teachers were provided with the tools to establish practices and culturally responsive pedagogy, it would have a positive academic, social, and emotional outcome.

The five SEL pillars can be divided into seven life skills integrated into a school and classroom setting. Deglan and Leung (2021) list seven life skills: focus and self-control, perspective taking, communication, making connections, critical thinking, taking on challenges, and self-directed and engaged learning. Finding meaning and connection is a basic human need of belonging (Noddings, 2017). There are communication gaps across all social classes, and it is essential to work together. Instructors need to keep in mind that it is crucial to talk to students and not at them (Miller et al., 2011).

## **Learning**

Interpersonal factors such as personal beliefs, interests, aspirations, and life experience greatly influence the learning process (Deci, 2009). The relationships between peers, teachers, and family are also factors for interpersonal connection and educational influence. According to Harlacher and Merrell (2010), those relationships are academic enablers that can improve or affect learning. If SEL skills are addressed, it will have a positive effect on learning and emotional and behavioral problems (Lazarus & Sulkowski, 2011). Children's classroom experience and academic growth occur when they display their true feelings and behaviors when interacting with their peers and teachers (Gubi & Bocanegra, 2015). Jones et al. (2017) found that integrating SEL skills into the learning process; should be approached as a learning skill



appropriate to grade level and age. The one size fits all mentality has to change in the learning process (Duchesneau, 2020).

### **Primary Grades**

Kindergarten through second grade builds social development and academic growth (D'Agostino & Rodgers, 2017). Primary grades need social-emotional components in the classroom (Mindess et al., 2008). In the early years of schooling, it is essential to identify problems and set up interventions to support the needs of students (Cappella et al., 2015). The interventions will help students to meet academic goals throughout their academic life. It is essential to have different techniques and strategies for students to have behavior, emotional, and academic competencies. In particular, in first through second grade, students need to control their emotions, make friendships, and focus on learning skills (Mindess et al., 2008). The first exposure to a structured academic environment is kindergarten, making or breaking their school experience (Robinson & Diamond, 2014). Their school experience sets the tone for their cognitive and behavioral skills (Sabey et al., 2017).

The problem is that kindergarteners are lacking social-emotional and behavior preparedness before entering school (Wasik et al., 1993). Lin et al. (2003) found that 46% of kindergarteners lacked social, emotional skills to succeed at school. In primary grades, students tend to have fewer emotional outbursts but feel intense emotions because they tend to experience anxiety and fearfulness (Gallagher, 2013). Daunic et al. (2013) found that emotional and behavior problems start becoming a problem in adolescence rather than early childhood. If students have behavior problems in kindergarten, it tends to worsen (Fox et al., 2002) as they grow up and hurt their academic growth (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011). The transition between

transitional kinder and kindergarten increases academic demands and increase behavior pressures (Ray & Smith, 2010).

According to instructors, social-emotional skills are essential for students to succeed (Stormont et al., 2005). Instructors do not get any formal training on implementing SEL skills but instead learn as they go and what individual students need (Tillery et al., 2010). According to Oliver et al. (2011), instructors tend to ask for help regarding behavior and classroom management. Instructors need to be prepared quickly and effectively to support primary students' social-emotional competencies (Sabey et al., 2017). Instructors should have intervention strategies for students' early years since the skills learned will impact the rest of their academic and personal lives. Those interventions can help address social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Hawkins (2010) found that interventions should be addressed immediately to avoid the problems and be strategic while implementing interventions to avoid the need to make individual plans. If instructors are positive, proactive, and structured in leading their class, their students tend to have self-control, behavior engagement and grow academically (Cameron et al., 2008).

In recent years schools serving the primary grade focus on academic achievement, for example, having kindergarteners in school for eight hours (Hyson, 2003). Moreover, the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) found that the focus on academic standards in the early years negatively affects students. Students are arriving ready to learn compared to prior years (Bassok et al., 2016). More is expected of students as they enter the primary grades (D'Agostino & Rodgers, 2017). In addition, the National Scientific Council on Development Children (2007) found that the two most essential foundations are students' well-being and social competence, which helps their brain development and cognitive abilities. These skills are essential as students in the primary grades enter school for the first time.

### **Student's Observation**

It is essential to understand students and school culture before any implementation can be successful (Kress et al., 2004). Instructors should do observations of their students before integrating SEL skills. Teachers tend to model social-emotional skills and model the desired behavior instead of observing the behavior (Cartledge et al., 2009). Robinson-Ervin et al. (2016) found that it is essential to do observation learning to refine strategies that can benefit students' development.

### **Cognitive**

Cognitive growth is connected to social and emotional growth; when they work together, it will positively affect emotional, behavioral, and academic needs (Aspen Institute National Commission on Social Emotional & Academic Development, 2018). The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development (2018) found that all learning is social, emotional, cognitive, and physical. They all work together and are part of meeting academic goals. Brandt (2003) states that the learning process is not purely cognitive phenomenon. Jones et al. (2017) found that children use cognitive regulation skills when they feel the emotions of planning, problem-solving, inhibiting impulses, conscious choices, conscious alternative choices, require concentration, and coordination. If students have a safe environment to take a risk and grow social-emotional skills, they will have educational and cognitive learning benefits (Lacina & Stetson, 2013). Those cognitive skills are toward meeting a goal that children need in a classroom setting, such as executive functions (attention, inhibition, and working memory) skills that structure behavior (Jones et al., 2017). Students' perspectives of themselves, others, family, and different cultures are influenced by their parents, temperament, and cognitive abilities (Gallagher, 2013).

Ashdown and Bernard (2012) stated that 60% of students enter school with cognitive skills, which allows them to be academically successful. Students have the cognitive skills to read, write, and think critically (DiPerna & Elliot, 2002). Per DiPerna and Elliot (2002), 40% have social-emotional skills before entering school; for example, having the skills to collaborate, motivate, and study skills. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) state that SEL skills positively affect academic and cognitive development for all four phases of a student's life; preschool tends to be short-term, the primary is in the process of growth, and high school and college it long term. Schools in Australia are leading the implementation of SEL skills in a cognitive-behavioral approach called The You Can Do It! Education (YCDI). YCDI focuses on students having the ability to express their emotions and behaviors. Children from kindergarten through fifth-grade experience social-emotional and cognitive changes that are substantial in the learning years (Jones et al., 2017). These years have a considerable amount of context and skills that are correlated to SEL.

### **Academic and Personal Gains**

The integration of social-emotional skills has an enduring effect on students (Sklad et al., 2012). According to Hester et al. (2009), 5-6-year-old students who entered school with behavior awareness were academically successful throughout their academic school years. Students need to hear frequent positive feedback and support from their instructor. Instructors should model acceptance and encouragement through words and actions at school (Lacina & Stetson, 2013). If the instructor motivates his/her students, it will have a more significant influence than peer relationships, school culture, or teacher methodologies (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). School establishing an intervention program to integrate SEL skills can have immediate and long-term effects (Gubi & Bocanegra, 2015).

Instructors want to integrate new methods to address minority groups' educational challenges (Skiba, 2011). Children from urban areas benefit from integrating SEL skills academically and reduces aggressive behavior (Frey et al., 2000). Elementary schools are developing programs to reduce disruptive behavior and promote social competence by providing students with problem-solving skills (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). Those skills help to reduce conduct problems in the classroom and school. Students are given tools to handle emotions and reactions. Rothbart and Bates (1996) found that SEL programs are based on temperament theory where individuals react differently to stress or change. Instructors need to understand students' temperament to provide the tools to handle demands, expectations, and challenges at school and home (Cappella et al., 2015). Students learn that there are different temperaments in a given situation. Some situations are easy to handle, while other situations are difficult. For example, two students struggle academically; one continues to work hard while the other has negative emotions. Both students have different temperaments in handling the pressure. Jones et al. (2017) found that children with social-emotional competencies such as regulating behavior and managing their thinking will succeed academically in standardizing testing scores and grades.

Nonacademic skills will have important life outcomes such as job, financial, and mental health (Jones et al., 2017). SEL skills give students the tools to handle problems and challenges in life. Those nonacademic skills are part of the SEL pillars that are of value to individuals and society. Unfortunately, nonacademic skills do not receive attention in the classroom, but part of having positive academic outcomes is the need to balance emotional and behavioral needs (Aspen Institute National Commission on Social Emotional & Academic Development, 2018). SEL skills are considered nonacademic that focus on giving students social and emotional

benefits that will help inside and outside the classroom (Hart & Nash, 2020). Durlak et al. (2011) state that SEL positively affects students' achievement and attitudes.

### **School Practices**

School and classroom practices vary because every school community and culture is different (Cappella et al., 2015). Regardless if students attend district school, private, or religious schools every school has its own identity and needs. American educators agree that every school community has its own identity, but they also agree that things need to change in the education system in order to prepare young minds (Mahoney et al., 2018). The world is complex and diverse, so school practices should provide more than skills and academic content. Social, emotional learning pillars was integrated differently because each school has students with different needs (Kress et al., 2004). Instructors should decide how to integrate SEL skill because it would benefit the students more than a set curriculum (Elias, 2019). School communities should have SEL intervention in the early elementary grades where students are influenced and engaged in learning (Cappella et al., 2015).

Schools have to determine and assess the SEL practices occurring or needs to occur at the school (Kress et al., 2004). Schools need to take inventory of SEL and organize them to create synergy and continuity (Elias, 2019). Schools should assess SEL practices that are occurring then decisions have to be made about integrating additional practices or changing them completely (Elias et al., 1997). CASEL (2003) states the importance of unjumble school practices before implementing additional SEL strategies. If schools or classrooms have implemented SEL strategies, it is positive for the students they serve.

## Teacher Practices

Instructors have found different developmental strategies to guide students in the primary grades, such as implanting social-emotional skills in the classroom (Hart & Nash, 2020). SEL can be taught while teaching their content per grade level. SEL can be incorporated into instructional practices, and teachers have found creative ways of doing it. It is critical to have intervention in the early academic years to lead students toward success (Cappella et al., 2015). Teaching practices are essential to have a successful school and classroom. Successful practices focus on emotional support such as a positive learning environment, understanding different perspectives, emotional needs, and academic responsiveness (Pianta et al., 2008). Lacina and Stetson (2013) describe the best method of incorporating SEL strategies by selecting literature that focuses on handling challenging situations. The instructor needs to assess the situation as he/she is implementing literature that might speak to a particular child. Finding literature that students can relate to is an excellent way to integrate experiences through a character (Roberts & Crawford, 2008). Instructors incorporate problem-solving activities to engage students. Small group-based discussion is a strategy teachers' use for more in-depth and personal connection (Certo, 2011). For example, literature circles can be adapted in primary grades to support positive behaviors (Tomkins, 2003). Literature circles can be used to engage students, work collaboratively, and open up to high-level discussions (Lacina & Stetson, 2013).

Role-playing is another format of integrating SEL skills in the classroom (Gallagher, 2013). This method helps to develop relationships and engage students. It is a fun way of exploring social-emotional attitudes and skills (Mindess et al., 2008). Role-playing teaches children to listen and pay attention to participate in the dialogue (Shub & DeWeerd, 2006).

Instructors need to set a responsive learning environment where relationships are built between instructors, students, and peer relationships (Cappella et al., 2012). Those positive relationships eventually build trust, bringing effective teaching practices (Schaps et al., 2004). Research shows that teachers' influence in the classroom is significant and can improve behaviors and benefit their academic growth (Lacina & Stetson, 2013). Students become engaged to the material being taught, become less disrupted, and have a high level of competence (Parr & Townsend, 2002). The students stay engaged and stay on task by listening, participating, stopping calling out, and less fidgeting (Riley-Tillman et al., 2009).

Instructors can integrate SEL as they teach language to their students. Mindess et al. (2008) found that language learning is essential for concentrating, engaging socially, and paying attention. It is not only dependent on differentiating sound or the capacity to find meaning. Language learning is essential for teachers in the primary grades as students are learning to read and write, but also as their learning to build foundations.

In primary grades, students stop having a perspective based on fantasy but rather understand different perspectives, such as activities similar to role-playing, which help students understand multiple perspectives (Gallagher, 2013). Gallagher and Sylvester (2009) state that instructors teach students to identify and reach out to students who need friends through classroom activities such as Stop, Look, Around or Who Is Not Having Fun? Integrating different vocabulary terms that focus on expressing emotional feelings allows for integrating SEL skills (Deglan & Leung, 2021). Real-life situations engage students in the content and make the activity meaningful (Raimundo et al., 2013). The activities need to have techniques and strategies, for example, posters, open-ended questions, brainstorming, and constructive feedback. Deglan and Leung (2021) state that it is essential to be intentional for students to



understand social interaction and emotion. Andrew Hacker (2016) stated that it is essential not to fall into classroom policies and practices that ultimately have no point in students' SEL skills.

Kindergartener' social-emotional competency is a predictor of reading level achievement (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). Social, emotional programs that are successful tend to be taught daily but informally and strategically intentional by the instructor (Joseph & Strain, 2003). Hamre and Pianta (2005) found those students' math and reading skills improved if they felt their instructor's warmth, responsiveness, and organization. Even if the teacher was less effective but had those qualities, it turned academically beneficial for the students.

### **Professional Development**

School systems have either a school wide approach or grade level approached for integrating SEL skills (Mindess et al., 2008). In order for SEL to be effective it is critical for professional development to be the driving force in the implementation (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). Instructors do not receive professional development for integrating social-emotional learning into the classroom. Intervention programs are developed by the instructor to best meet the students need (Mindess et al., 2008). Mindess et al. (2008) found that instructors develop their own classroom activities and curriculum to build on social-emotional competency. Some school counselors have received the training to integrated SELS in their sessions with students, but not necessary the instructor. Instructors need to continue to develop their SEL competencies through ongoing learning activities (Hart & Nash, 2020). Also, the Aspen Institute National Commission on Social Emotional and Academic Development (2018) found that if instructors are supported on SEL development from their onboarding they was successful in implementing SEL because they share about their experience and build a professional learning environment. Schools need to develop culturally responsive resources for families and educators

that foster SEL skills, but also establishes an equitable learning environment (Devaney & Berg, 2016).

States have not enacted an act for Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) to be implemented at schools but instead collected data on the positive side effects of integrating SEL in a classroom or school setting (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). Professional development would be effective if educational agencies provided support and developmental opportunities, such as hands-on workshops or coaches to support instructors. If states would get involved in setting a structure for SEL, it can provide high-quality content and resources for instructors' professional development.

The All Hands on Deck program was created for instructors and administrators to understand the importance of social and emotional competence in a school setting (Hart & Nash, 2020). Additionally, Hart and Nash (2020) found that instructors and administrators do this through building relationships, planning, structure, and implementation. It is essential to have interpersonal relationships with both the instructor and student to be motivated to learn and teach. Instructors should be training with real-life stories and anecdotes on integrating SEL in a classroom setting (Devaney & Berg, 2016). The interpersonal stories should help instructors transform schools and classrooms to benefit the implementation of SEL.

Trainings on Social Decision Making (SDM) or Social Problem Solving (SPS) provide instructors with tools to approach social and decision making skills (Norris & Kress, 2000). The trainings are identified as SDM or SPS; they both focus on giving instructors and school personnel methods to integrate SEL into the classroom. The focal point for SDM/SPS is to give instructors skills to integrate SEL in the classroom and the benefits it can have when students are under stress. Giving instructors the skills to deal with emotions can be transfer to the student daily life and school situations (Kress et al., 2004). SDM/SPS is designed for instructors to take

the content from the training and integrate it into health or guidance areas of their standards. The training instructors receive on SEL should carry over beyond the classroom environment for them as individuals and their students.

## **Culture**

Cultural differences play a massive role in a school and classroom setting. There are differences in values, virtues, and cultural experiences (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). Latin communities are diverse with different cultural traditions. Families' immigration history into the United States will not be identical (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). It will change by generation and the timeframe in the U.S. Latinos have a different national origin, socioeconomic status, and cultural characteristics. The dominant Latino group in the U.S is Mexicans, representing 59% of the Latin community; Puerto Ricans represent 10%, 7% Central Americans, and 4% South America (Ramirez, 2004). There is also a cultural difference between native-born Latinos in the U.S. According to Ramirez (2004), about 60% of the Latino populations are native born, and 53% are school-age children. Those cultural differences among the Latino community can be challenging for instructors to create interventions for individual students to nurture their SEL competencies. It is essential to create a space for marginalized students to feel active participants in the instructional process (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Cultural competency is essential for SEL because social and emotional development begins at home with the influence of cultural origin (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). Students' cultural origins are what they bring to school, and having instructors that understand their heritage is vital as SELs are being implanted to social and academic developments. Instructors intentionally include cultural examples in their instructional time. Students need to be culturally competent, which are needed to navigate multicultural perspective in the workforce.

### **Culture Assimilating**

In school Latino, students have to assimilation to American culture and language, which is stressful and challenging to balance (Drapeau et al., 2003). Schools in the U.S are structured to assimilate to American traditions, which can be challenging for immigrant children that have not had exposure to American traditions (Alba & Nee, 2003). Latino students find school stressful, which affects their health and other aspects that lead to learning (Frisco et al., 2019).

Expectations are to fall into the social norms established to be accepted by the community of peers and instructional leaders. Schools are the first to introduce the American cultural norms of socialization, behavior, and culture (Pong & Hao, 2007). Students also have to learn school norms such as rules, interpersonal relationships with peers and instructors; these pressures are different for immigrant children who are non-English speaking and academically less ready for school (Capps et al., 2005). Simmons and Limbers (2019) found that Latino students in elementary school have immediate pressure to adapt compared to American-born peers.

### **Cultural Bias**

Latinos face cultural bias because they immigrated to the United States of America. There are preconceived notions of immigrants in this country, particularly cultural traditions and family norms. It is vital to reduce the biases to guide students to move forward (Duchesneau, 2020). Educational leaders and instructors need to change their mindsets. Gregory and Fergus (2017) stated that part of the problem is not acknowledging cultural bias and holding the notion of being colorblind. These biases lead teachers to react harshly and not understanding cultural differences. The Office for Civil Rights stated that schools need to ensure discipline is not biased to race, gender, and nationality (Gregory & Fergus, 2017).

The methods used in the classroom tend to exclude cultural heritage and cultural diversity (Sugai et al., 2012). Diversity would be challenging to integrate because every child is different as they come to school and the classroom (Elias, 2019). If interventions were culturally tailored, it would positively affect students' social-emotional growth, which positively affects academic achievement (Brown, 2004). Latinos would benefit if schools were to modify any intervention since they lack academic preparedness (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). Ford and Kea (2009) found that integrating cultural heritage could reduce cultural barriers in learning and help meet social-emotional and academic needs. It is essential to be aware of strategies and practices occurring in a school or classroom setting that might oppose cultural beliefs and values (Devaney & Berg, 2016). Instructors are effective if they have cultural knowledge and prior experiences (Gay, 2002). Integrating cultural heritage reduces culture bias and increasing cultural consciousness and competence (Robinson-Ervin et al., 2016).

### **Latino Students**

The largest minority group in the United States is the Latino community (Newcomer, 2018). U.S Department of Education (2015) data show that Latinos make up 24% of the nation's students population. One out of four students are of Spanish (Hispanic/Latino) decent and has a parent considered an immigrant (Fry & Passel, 2009). Ramirez (2004) stated that a third of the Latino population is under 21 and Latino students will influence the education system; hence, the education system must serve their needs. It is crucial to provide Latino students with a competitive education for the country's well-being (Perez, 2004). Latino students have an educational disadvantage compared to other minority groups, such as poverty, education inequality, lack of parental education, cultural differences, English-language curriculum, and socially not being accepted in the U.S (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009). It is essential to

understand cultural background and contextual influence before the one size fits all mentality (Duchesneau, 2020).

Monzó and Rueda (2001) stated that it is vital for instructors to acknowledge Latino students' backgrounds and communities to serve them right and build relationships. Educators connect with students' cultural backgrounds; it builds positive relationships, and students believe in their abilities (Duchesneau, 2020). Having a sense of belonging is what students seek to feel part of the school and classroom community. If students feel part of the community, they were motivated and move academically forward (Schaps, 2005).

Gregory and Fergus (2017) stated that Latino students tend to be referred to the school administrator for discipline problems compared to other groups. Research shows that Latinos are likely to be suspended, expelled, and law enforcement called to handle a disciplinary problem. The disparities start from preschool through their academic experience. Donovan and Cross (2002) found that very few studies are done on the behavior of Latino students because they are underrepresented in social, emotional, and behavior programs. The data on the behavior of Latino students is after getting in trouble and not before ending up in juvenile correctional facilities (Hosp, 2008). The Latino population has been ignored for too long, even though they are the fastest-growing racial/ethnic minority group (Guzman, 2001). The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans was formed to pay attention to the needs of Latino students and programs that would nurture their academic success, as well as social-emotional, and behavior problems (Figuroa & Hernandez, 2000). In particular, the achievement gap continues to exist and has had very little change since the 1980s (Lee & Orfield, 2006). In 2002 the No Child Left Behind Act was intended to improve the educational gaps of minority

students (Darder et al., 1997). According to Hinshaw (1992), there is a correlation between achievement and behavior, which Latino students struggle to meet academic goals.

Latino students are likely to be identified as having emotional disturbance (ED) compared to their white counterparts (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Latino students who need behavior intervention are not receiving it because they are seen as an integrated system (Hosp, 2008). The University of Rutgers developed a program to promote social-emotional and character development called Developing Safe and Civil School (DSACS) to help students that need behavior and academic guidance (Zins et al., 2007). The program goes to urban areas where interventions are needed. Programs in urban schools have to be flexible because each student will move at a different pace and meet goals at different moments (Elias, 2019).

In the United States, the number of ELLs is about 5 million in grades K-12 (Cheung & Slavin, 2012). According to the Modern Language Association (2005), Spanish is the most spoken language other than English in the United States of America. The Spanish-speaking community is the biggest minority group that receives ELL services and has low educational attainment (Cheung & Slavin, 2012). Instructors are challenged to meet academic goals with ELL students (Snow & Biancarosa, 2004). English language learners have increased 57.17% in the last years (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2008). The highest drop-off rate comes from the Hispanic community compared to other groups (Child Trends Data Bank, 2011). Schools in 2021 serve diverse students, making it challenging to have effective academic outcomes (Gubi & Bocanegra, 2015). Frey et al. (2000) stated that SEL skills have shown to be beneficial for minority and English language learners by reducing aggression, increasing social-emotional competencies, having a positive classroom climate, and stable

classroom management. Latino's as English Language learners demonstrate the highest growth when SEL skills are implemented than their counterparts in the classroom (Brown et al., 2012).

### **Levels of Proficiency for Latinos**

Latino students lack academic proficiency and social-emotional competency. Meeting proficiency levels for Latino students is a complex process due to individual characteristic and social factors (Carhill-Poza, 2015). The lack of proficiency is evident in their levels of academic proficiency and use of English and Spanish (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Latino students reading proficiency scores are lower than their white counterparts, but their mathematical scores are higher than African-American students (Lee & Klugman, 2013). In general proficiency, Latino students score lower than African-Americans and white students. Ramirez (2004) found that nationally 21% of Latino students speak English at home, while 41% only speak Spanish at home. The dominant language for Latino's is their native language of Spanish, which can be classified as fluent, isolated, and often spoken (Verdugo, 2006), Latino subgroups vary in language use and proficiency; for example, 43% of Central Americans are proficient while 73% of Puerto Rican are proficient (Planty et al., 2008). The diversity between the Latino communities is challenging when entering into the primary grades and instructors understanding that not all Latinos are the same in language proficiency.

Latino students have the worst educational achievement in all grade levels compared to other ethnic groups (Verdugo, 2006). Verdugo (2006) found that Latino students from Elementary to High school lack reading proficiency, which is concerning due to reading being essential to learning. Part of the problem for Latinos' lack of achievement and educational motivation were the traditionally teaching strategies that continued to be used (Fletcher & Cardona-Morales, 1990). The National Education Association has identified five teaching



strategies that are effective when teaching Latino students (Verdugo, 2006). The first is culturally responsive teaching, second is cooperative learning, third is instructional conversations, fourth is cognitive-guided instruction, and lastly technology-enriched instruction. Culturally responsive teaching means understanding the challenges of Latino students and appreciating the diversity of teaching Latinos (Peregoy & Boyle, 2000). Thus, students becoming part of the learning process is cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). Latino students want to be active members in their learning and not part of the back seat. According to Verdugo (2006), instructional conversation is having open dialogue between instructor and Latino student. Teaching Latino students how to learn is cognitive-guided instruction, which also allows for students to take accountability for their learning (Padron, 1993). Technology-enriched instruction means the integration interactive visuals making the instructor a facilitator and Latino student's part of the learning (Fitzgerald et al., 2000). The common factor of teaching Latino students is making them part of the process and feeling part of the environment.

### **Meet the Needs of Latino Students**

In order to meet the need of Latino students, it is essential to understand the challenges and be academically strategic to reach minority communities (Roscoe, 2015). Entering school for the first time can be traumatic for Latino students because of cultural discontinuities (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992). Different academic approaches have to be considered to meet the needs of Latino students. Educators need to understand what needs to be achieved by analyzing the conditions established for meeting academic goals (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019). Additionally, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) found that Latinos have low-performance skills compared to their White counterparts. This is due to their socioeconomic background and cultural differences (De Los Santos & Cuamea, 2010). In the United States, the Latino

community is socioeconomically disadvantaged than non-Latinos (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Families with socioeconomic challenges tend to have family members working low-paying jobs due to a lack of education (Roscoe, 2015). In 2003, Latinos' income fell under \$33,000 a year, 69% less than their White counterparts (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2006). Families have to focus on what they need to survive, and their child's education is left to the school and instructor. Roughly, 27% of Latino students in 2000 live below the poverty level compared to their White and Black counterparts (Planty et al., 2008). Families' wellbeing is more important for the Latin community than schooling and interpersonal relationships (Romero & Sy, 2008). The family's wellbeing is dependent on their social, economic survival in the United States.

### **Equality**

There is inequality in the education system when considering the Latino community. As schools are working toward equality, it is essential to include SEL as a key component of any comprehensive program (Hart & Nash, 2020). In order for SEL practices to be implemented successfully, racial, ethnic, or any inequalities need to be addressed (Devaney & Berg, 2016). It is essential to see the integration of SELS in schools and classrooms as an equity lens (Duchesneau, 2020). Neut (2006) found that Latinos students do not receive the same education or opportunities as their counterparts. The resources provided to Latinos students are fewer compared to their White counterparts (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). The inequality is due to their social-economic status and community. The academic gap of Latino students compared to White students is due to their socioeconomic status, which has been evident since kindergarten (Fryer & Levitt, 2013). Latinos lack an equal education because students have societal realities, personal realities, and cultural backgrounds (Duchesneau, 2020).

Language proficiency and environment is another factor of inequality (Gandara et al., 2003). Students need minimum English skills to understand instructional content and learning instruction, but that sometimes is not the reality of Latino children (Henderson & Landesman, 1995). Latino parents are not always proficient in the English language, which is unequal compared to White children. It can be challenging because the parents have not attended school in the United States, so they are unfamiliar with expectations and practices compared to native-born Americans (Reardon & Galindo, 2009). Orfield and Yun (1999) found that school environments are different for Latino students compared to White children, affecting their learning and giving Latinos an unequal disadvantage.

The cultural reality of racism and discrimination affects how students see and involve in the world. Personal realities such as family's social-economic challenges, social, family life, school experience, and the availability of opportunities in the community lived. Teachers and educational leaders need to consider the life of the students they serve (Duchesneau, 2020). It is essential to have diverse leaders to represent the nation's population (Devaney & Berg, 2016). School communities serving the Latino community need to put effort into understanding cultural norms and traditions. Understanding students' backgrounds will build trust and interpersonal relationships. It is vital to recruit high-quality educators that promote equity and diversity and support them as they are placed in high-need schools.

Those relationships will help to integrate programs on SELS that will improve the inequality gap. SEL programs should be reviewed on how they promote equity and, if needed, modify the programs to serve all students (Devaney & Berg, 2016). It is important not to change students' behavior, rather it is best to implement social and emotional strategies that would benefit them in both their academic and personal lives (Duchesneau, 2020). There are many

academic SEL strategies to integrate (Pasi, 2000). Change the mindset of fixing kids, which tends to be what is found with educational leaders and instructors (Duchesneau, 2020). This tends to happen in color and low-income communities and not wanting to change the student rather than incorporating skills. Schools need to provide students with the supports and tailor the supports to ensure the success of all students (Devaney & Berg, 2016).

Not all groups will have equal opportunities to thrive, such minority and underrepresented groups (Curran & Kellogg, 2016). Hart and Nash (2020) found the disparities of SEL support for Latino students compared to their White counterparts. Latino students can have poor SEL outcomes because they feel unwelcomed and lack belonging (Blanco-Vega et al., 2008). Instructors need to provide equitable SEL outcomes, be aware of cognitive bias and deficit mindset for the communities they teach.

Schools are structuring policies around SEL, emphasizing equality and competencies (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Evans and English (2002) found that research shows that social, emotional skills are beneficial to low-income students who have challenges related to interpersonal relationships and academic struggles. The Education Trust research collected data on the importance of incorporating social and emotional skills into a community of color and not focusing on academic subjects (Duchesneau, 2020). The way discipline is handle in the United States has to do with race and gender, which begin as early as preschool (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). The social disparities for people of color (Blacks and Hispanics) have pushed policies to focus on nurturing social-emotional learning skills in the classroom. Discipline needs to be structured for it to be equitable. Gay (2002) stated that students want to see their instructors as culturally knowledgeable and can communicate with a diverse group. Instructors want to provide an equitable education to all their students, but they fall into equality where everyone receives

the same education (Noddings, 2017). Students are not all the same; they come from different cultural backgrounds and academic challenges. Further, the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (2009) found that minority groups with disenfranchised backgrounds gain competencies, but most importantly, it has a positive learning outcome.

### **Low Income Areas**

The challenge is that instructors in low-income areas are less effective and less behaviorally engaged (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2009). The reason tends to be that instructors are new to the profession and lack experience. Interventions have been integrated to low-income schools focused on SEL as a way to support students' needs at school (Cappella et al., 2015). Students from low-income families and communities are not prepared when they enter school (Pianta et al., 2007). Part of not being prepared is the lack of opportunities in low-income areas that support Latino families with educational programs. Students struggle to be valued and accepted in their neighborhoods and homes (Elias, 2019).

### **Risks**

Children at risk tend to be from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds that find the adjustment at school to be stressful and complicated (Casas et al., 1990). This is due to different cultural norms students with multiple risk factors have and thus, they would develop problems because of the lack of proactive factors (Hosp, 2008). Ashdown and Bernard (2012) found that students at risk have lower confidence, persistence, and lack organizational skills. They also lack academic skills, low grades, social skills, and behavior problems (Robertson et al., 1998). Latino students are at risk but what they do bring into school and classroom communities is their resiliency. That resilience comes from their family and the support they receive in their household, which is significant as they enter school and adapt to American social norms (Levitt

et al., 1994). Students at risk need problem-solving skills, which SEL skills can provide in their development years (Bernard, 1993). Schools are finding techniques and strategies to decrease the at-risk factors and improve academic achievement (George et al., 2003).

### **Positive Relationships**

Instructor and students relationships are defined as positive if there is support and cooperation between both parties (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Students that are given tools to deal with stressful situations are happier because they feel supported (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Having positive relationships improves the well-being within the school and classroom. They give the students the competency to understand cooperation and competition in the classroom while keeping positive relationships (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). Applying strategies to maintain a positive learning environment helps with bullying, loneliness, and anxiety in the classroom. They have interventions that support and encourage positive behavior (Sherrod et al., 2009). Social-emotional skills incorporate strategies to increase positive relationships and think of the whole student (Shankland & Rosset, ` 2017).

### **Happiness**

The instructors have the power to build a nurturing and happy environment for students to learn (Tian et al., 2015). A happy environment is having a positive attitude toward challenges and activities presented (Komarova et al., 2021). According to Komarova et al. (2021) happiness is not measured by educational millstones or intellectual capabilities, but rather a positive outlook of life. Student and teachers want to enjoy the process of learning and maintain a smile on their face. For teachers seeing a happy face is gratifying (Upbility, 2014). Instructors seek for student to feel happy and delighted to come to school (Tian et al., 2015). Happiness is contagious and motivates people in a positive manner (Solekhah, 2021). If students are happy they are

present to learn and collaborate with others. The happiness students experience in the primary grades does not go away, but rather stays with them for a lifetime (Komarova et al., 2021). A happy classroom also motivates instructors to find different methodologies and keep the classroom engaged (Upbility, 2014). Instructors are challenge to understand that culturally happiness might be viewed or reflected differently (Lee et al., 2000). Students that have a trusting environment, are respected, have high expectation and have a voice are happy and motivated to learn (Solekhah, 2021).

### **The Benefits of SEL Skills (SELS)**

The benefit of SEL skills is that it gives students social-emotional competencies and social competence, which is why schools are adopting social-emotional pillars (Greenberg et al., 2003). In today's world, children have more challenges in their environments and need to learn how to adapt to those challenges by giving them skills to handle challenges (Payton et al., 2000). It is essential to handle problems proactively instead of being reactionary (Fleming et al., 2005). SEL programs need to be carefully selected to be beneficial and effective in a school environment (Merrell & Buchanan, 2006). Schools implement SELS as a form of preventing problems (Zins & Elias, 2007). According to Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (2003), the skills learned help build relationships, make decisions, and take responsibility for their actions. SEL programs have proven to be beneficial for children between the ages of 5 and 18 years old; data shows that the implementation at school has shown an improvement in social-emotional competencies (Raimundo et al., 2013). Students have a positive attitude about themselves, others, school setting, behavior, and academic performance.

The implementation of SELS needs to be culturally and developmentally appropriate to be successful (Durlak et al., 2011). Students need to feel part of the process and not just be

taught the skills. It needs to be structured and consistent to benefit students (Humphrey et al., 2010). SEL skills can be learned and taught through different methods in the classroom, such as curriculum and instruction (Zins et al., 2007).

## **Behavior**

SEL skills are beneficial for improving behavior problems, which is significant in students' academic growth (Greenberg et al., 2017). Positive behavior leads to academic, interpersonal, community, and family success (Carr et al., 2002). Students that struggle with behavior problems lack academic skills and do not have strong interpersonal relationships skills due to the inability to maintain emotional balance (Collaborative for the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning, 2005). Instructors integrating SEL skills strategically to improve behavior challenges has proven to be beneficial to students. For example, the schools use SEL skills to structure and integrate anti-bullying policies (Smith & Low, 2013). Instructors modeling positive behaviors through interaction with peers, students, and parents strongly influence children's behavior (Zins et al., 2007). Having a student center approach prioritizes students' daily behavior (Weissberg et al., 2015). Durlak et al. (2011) found that SEL skills in the classroom improved psychological and behavior struggles such as attitude about self and others and internalizing problems. Children that lack empathetic skills and perspective were rejected and targeted by their peers (Espelage et al., 2015). The lack of self-management with anger and outburst were harassed by their peers (Garner & Hinton, 2010). Children need to have a structure in the classroom and not think they have the freedom to do what they want (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). Clear expectations should be set for both bullies and victims (Yang et al., 2020). Social competency, a pillar of SEL, can be encouraged and modeled by the instructor to interact effectively with others and reduce behavior problems (Baron & Markman, 2003). The ability to



interact with others keeps behavior outbursts and problems to a minimum but maximizes internal and external positive behavior (Arnold et al., 2012).

### **Relationship**

Student's relationship in school plays a crucial factor in their emotional and behavioral development. Discussions can become emotional, empathetic, and turn to fairness (Gallagher, 2013). In their disagreements, students refer to classroom rules that their instructor has established. Those structures lead students to negotiate a positive outcome. Students have relationship challenges if they are neglected or rejected because they cannot regulate and communicate with their peers (Ladd et al., 2006). Kindergarten classrooms are where students learn and are nurtured to develop friendships (Gallagher & Sylvester, 2009). Gallagher (2013) describes friendship strategies for children ages 5 through 8 years old where part of their development is relationships. Children develop relationship skills before entering a kindergarten classroom; it starts as toddlers, where they learn that relationships are based on give-and-take. In kindergarten, students can develop SEL skills, but they already can see other perspectives, negotiate, and cooperate before entering a classroom setting (Gallagher, 2013). Gallagher and Sylvester (2009) state that social-emotional skills do not develop organically; they have to be intentional to support relationships. In kindergarten, students start to feel emotions for actions committed, but they also understand that people have different emotions for actions committed that might be different from their perspective (Berk, 2012). Understanding different perspectives allow students to be sensitive towards other students' feelings and have positive relationships, making them skilled in social interaction (Berk, 2012, Jones et al., 2017).

Primary grade students comprehend cultural differences, social expectations, and rules (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). They are aware of how their actions can make their peers feel.

Their interpersonal relationships are based on emotion, which they need to learn to manage (Jones et al., 2017). If the teacher understands the social-emotional foundations of their students, they can support their interpersonal relationships through building SEL skills (Gallagher, 2013). Building social relationships is a complex matter, and it requires skills to develop into friendships, such as trust and shared interest (Gallagher & Sylvester, 2009). Denham et al. (2014) state that social, academic, and physical are linked to how students develop and learn academically. Children are engaged in the learning process if they have social skills to initiate and sustain friendships, which teachers can help by integrating classroom activities (Jones et al., 2017). Students want to be socially accepted by peers, which are skills build through SEL. They want to feel part of a group, have friendships, and be wanted by their peers when participating in group activities (Cullinan et al., 1992).

### **Competency**

Social and emotional competency is emerging as essential in the learning process for students (Kress et al., 2004). The organization called Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2003) stated it was not surprising that interest for SEL was emerging because they found that SEL skills were integral toward success in life. Students are having more social and emotional challenges that need to be addressed before expecting them to academically meet standards. Data from educational literature, literature reviews, and government reports found the competency is essential for students as they progress to adulthood (Day & Koorland, 1997). Day and Koorland (1997) state that those competencies skills that need to be nurtured can be found in social and emotion skills, which is essential in today's world. Kress et al. (2004) found that there are five competencies levels that are essential for students. The first is the ability to problem solve or high-level thinking, second decision making skills, third self-management,

fourth interpersonal communication, and lastly communicate effectively. These competency skills are similar to current common core standards that schools used to meet academic goals with students; such as critical thinking skills, read to understand, effectively communicate, make sound decisions, work collaboratively to problem solve, and demonstrate knowledge and understanding of content. These similarities makes it viable to integrate SEL into the academic sector, but also schools and states department of education recognize the need for social and emotional competency to succeed in life (Fredericks, 2003).

New Jersey State has integrated social and emotional competencies into the student's academic standards (Kress et al., 2004). Norris and Kress (2000) found that New Jersey has balanced core curriculum standards and the different levels of thinking. For example New Jersey balanced application of content, analysis, synthesis, knowledge, and evaluation. New Jersey integrated SEL to health and physical education standards such as social and emotional competency, critical thinking skills, communication skills, character development, and leadership skills (New Jersey Department of Education, 2004). They also incorporated SEL skills to social studies, world languages, and career education. States like Iowa, Wisconsin, South Carolina, and New York City are following New Jersey's path of integrating social and emotional competencies into curriculum standards (Kress et al., 2004). Each state educational department decides on how to incorporate social and emotional competency into their learning standards.

## **Environment**

It is crucial to building an environment where students do not feel this is how they should behave, with a sense of control (Duchesneau, 2020)—creating a learning environment that supports social and emotional growth and does not change students to meet the mold. Building practices that will nurture their development. Nonacademic factors positively influence the school climate, engagement, and safety (Ferguson, 2016). Students need to have an environment where they feel intellectually safe to share, the ability to grow emotionally, opportunities to grow, and culturally respected (Duchesneau, 2020). The ecological system theory focuses on the environment's influence on development, such as neighborhood, school, and family (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The environmental experience at school can determine their educational outcome (Heckman et al., 2010).

Environmental factors considerably influence students' emotional and behavioral development, such as family stress, personal stress, poverty, and trauma (Jones et al., 2017). Latino students are three times likely to grow up in poverty (Lichter et al., 2005). These factors make it hard for students to focus on their academic foundations and building healthy interpersonal connections. Students come to school with these stresses, and instructors have to figure out how to serve each student best and provide a nurturing and safe environment. Students' stresses are toxic to their development, making it challenging to manage daily functions and balance emotion (Bailey et al., 2019). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) recommends that schools provide an environment where students can academically prepare and have life skills (Ferguson, 2016). Schools can promote a healthy place where students feel supported, build relationships, and deal with challenges. SEL also improves health and can be a form of risk prevention (Jones et al., 2015). Durlak et al. (2011) found that school climate and

experiences have a profound impact on individual students but also can reduce absenteeism and suspension rate.

The classroom should be physically and psychologically safe for students. Psychologically safe from being belittled, demeaned, ostracized, or humiliated (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). If physically they feel accepted, encouraged, and welcomed, students, will take risks that will allow their SEL growth (Lacina & Stetson, 2013). Instructors influence the school and classroom climate, and part of that is the instructor's own social and emotional competencies (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). If the classroom environment improves due to the SEL interventions, it will benefit individual students, classmates, and prospective students (Cappella et al., 2015). Berkowitz et al. (2017) found that if students feel positive and have a positive attitude about the school environment, it will foster the relationship between teacher and student. McKnight et al. (2016) study in 23 countries found that an effective instructor could create a trusting, compassionate, and productive relationship at school.

Teachers structure an environment that supports students' SEL development. Instructors have to ensure they have enough supplies for students to use and furniture is set up as centers for students to collaborate (Gallagher, 2013). The structure of the classroom allows for students to transition quickly and not waste time. Elias (2006) states that it is vital for norms and expectations to be cleared. Hyson (2004) found that placing children in a caring environment is essential for social and emotional skills to be developed and fostered. If instructors are tense and demanding, students will not retain information or integrate the content into other areas (Elias et al., 2010). Pianta et al. (2009) found that classroom environments should not be strict or overly structure. School and classrooms should be a safe place where they are encouraged to be themselves (Sugai & Horner, 2006). If instructors create a relatable environment, students will

feel valued as human beings, and students will find the instructors approachable (Hart & Nash, 2020). Students want to have an atmosphere where they are heard, valued, and safe classroom culture.

Unfortunately, violence has increased, and schools have to find different methods to ensure the school environment is safe (Metzler et al., 2001). In elementary school, students transition through different environmental changes and physical changes (Jones et al., 2017). The classroom functions smoothly if children are given the tools to navigate positive and negative emotions and navigate interpersonal relationships with peers and adults. Programs are being developed in preschools and elementary schools to prevent and reduce negative behaviors and nurture opportunities for students (Arnold et al., 2006).

### **Teachers**

Instructors can find it overwhelming to support student's social and emotional competency because every student develops differently, and accessing SEL skills for every student is not feasible (Gallagher et al., 2007). Instructors in Latino communities lack preparedness and cultural sensitivity (Nieto, 2018). Latino students are likely to succeed if instructors build student-teacher relationships (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). Building strong relationships with students will create a safe environment where social-emotional development and students take academic challenges in the classroom (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Latino students want supportive and caring teachers who have high expectations to succeed (Newcomer, 2018). It is also important to have instructors who understand different cultural perspectives integrate them into curriculum and instruction (Gay, 2000). The instructor should use cultural diversity as a vehicle to engage students toward meeting academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

SEL skills in the classroom are due to the social-emotional competency and environment the instructor creates (Bailey et al., 2019). It is essential to have instructors on board and not optional for instructors to integrate SEL (Kress et al., 2004). Instructors seek to be trained in positive education (Green et al., 2012), which means integrating skills that benefit all students (Cain & Carnellor, 2008). The integration of SEL skills in the classroom has a positive outcome on standardized assessments; student's scores improve by 11% (Durlak et al., 2011).

The influence of an instructor on their students is crucial for personal and academic success in the primary grades. Children in transitional kindergarten through second grade want to have a strong interpersonal connection with their instructor (McClowry et al., 2013). The dynamic between the instructor and student occurs daily. Instructor and students in the primary grades interact for eight hours daily in a self-contained classroom. There was interpersonal interaction on class activities, individual interaction, and personal connection (Beaman & Wheldall, 2000). Instructors need to provide positive feedback because they are modeling their behavior. McClowry et al. (2013) found that instructors tend to provide more negative feedback and positive feedback tends to be related to academic performance. According to Sutherland (2000), data showed that instructors interacted more with disrupted students and less with students meeting expectations. In this situation, the interaction is negative, and the relationship is negative, ultimately affecting the classroom because the student will have disrupted behavior (Rothbart & Bates, 1996). Instructors need to change their mindset from everything has to be done right and their way to more inclusive methods (Cartledge & Johnson, 1996). Students do not connect with instructors that display a negative attitude and disrespect. Crowley (1993) found that it is vital to maximizing positive behaviors for the student to be successful at school. Instructors have to be intentional in integrating SEL skills for students to attain self-competency

(Kress et al., 2004). Successful instructors in the classroom believe that they can be the change regardless of the student's cultural background and the challenges they might encounter (Landrum & Kauffman, 1992).

The nation's classrooms have become racially and ethnically diverse, which has brought attention to diversifying instructors to integrate SEL skills (Wright et al., 2017). In the United States, 71% of instructors are white and 65% of school faculty (Ingersoll & May, 2011). This is concerning because instructors do not represent the communities they serve, such as racial and cultural background (Wright et al., 2017). The way instructors approach the social-emotional skills of children of color is different due to their experiences (Fryer & Levitt, 2013). Social-emotional skills focus on emotions, behavior, relationships, and school experiences. Duncan and Murnane (2011) found the teacher's perspective of Latino students in kindergarten as having poor attention skills and lack of persistence. SEL skills are essential in primary grade, particularly in kindergarten, where those skills attain are future predictors of academic achievement and future outcome (Chetty et al., 2011). Students not having instructors that can relate to their cultural norms can make it difficult to conform to school and behavior norms (Morris, 2005). If students have instructors representing their cultural background and experiences, it can enhance educational and social-emotional competency because the learning was relevant to their experiences (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011). Representation matters to understand cultural traditions, family dynamics, and environmental challenges (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Part of integrating social-emotional skills in the classroom is that the instructor has to observe his/her classroom to see the needs and implementation of the skills. It is also vital for the instructor to have high expectations for the students they serve and challenge them to meet them.



## Challenges

Students have different challenges throughout their development years. They have family, personal, emotional, and academic challenges. This can lead to feeling rejected, angry, and lonely. Emotions need a mechanism to handle and balance in school and life (Kress et al., 2004). Students can experience different challenges and stressors at school. Challenges such as teasing, bullying, disrespect, and dishonesty need to be emotionally and mentally handle (Roberts & Crawford, 2008). Negative experiences have a debilitating impact on the brain development, which leads to negative tendencies (McLaughlin et al., 2015). The instructor can provide strategies for handling challenges and stress in school and at home (Lacina & Stetson, 2013). Bierman et al. (2010) found that SEL skills are not being taught at home, but rather those competencies are being attained at school. Not having the foundations of social-emotional competency does not prepare children to handle academic, emotional, and behavioral challenges at school (Gibbons et al., 2005). According to the American Psychological Association Task Force of Urban Psychology (2005), when students come into the classroom, they have a hard time managing stress and balancing emotions, so the schools are left with the challenge of building those competencies. Building those competencies is essential to having a healthy adult life (Handler & Hasenfeld, 2008).

Children can feel emotionally, socially, and academically overwhelmed. Those feelings can lead to inappropriate behaviors (Warren et al., 2006). If students carry emotional burdens, it is difficult for their attention to go to their academic needs (Elias et al., 2010). Instructors have to be intentional and set individualize approaches when implementing SEL skills in the classroom (Lacina & Stetson, 2013). There are different perspectives on approaching social and emotional skills when teaching young children (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). Whittington and Floyd (2009)

found that social and emotional skills should not be taught with an explicit curriculum. The children are too young to expect them to understand the pillars of SEL without real and interpersonal examples.

Having instructors taking the need for social and emotional skills seriously can be difficult because it tends to be viewed as the parent's responsibility (Bierman et al., 2010). Teachers have the pressure for students to meet academic goals (Kress et al., 2004). The No Child Left Behind Act made it challenging for teachers to integrate other skills to nurture the whole child (Ferguson, 2016). Instructors feel these skills are already addressed in the classroom and do not necessarily need to be taught (Blum et al., 1997). Educators do not need to implement it because it is part of the classroom structure and classroom rules (Bierman et al., 2010). The challenging part is that every student brings different personalities, life experiences, and academic development that will not be similar (Elias, 2019). Those experiences influence how the student will develop academically and emotionally. It can also determine how the instructor will integrate SEL skills in the classroom.

Instructors faced challenges when the integration of common core became mandated and did not give leeway on meeting academic skills (Gubi & Bocanegra, 2015). Common core initiatives have increased instructional demands that focus on improving standardized testing scores and pushing SEL skills to the back burner. This initiative has hindered students' motivation and affected learning outcomes (Bernard & Slade, 2009). Common Core does not have any guidelines for SEL competencies, which will impede academic growth (Gubi & Bocanegra, 2015). This tends to occur in urban areas where children have social, cultural, and socioeconomic challenges (American Psychological Association Task Force on Urban Psychology, 2005).

## Chapter Summary

Giving students multiple pathways to develop their social and emotional skills in and out of school is essential (Kress et al., 2004). SEL skills being integrated at school has a positive outcome in the future for productive adults professionally, personally, and outside relationships (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009). It gives individuals a sense of purpose, has strong relationships with family members, friends, and other adults. Snapchat and Instagram influence students of the 21st century, but they also need social-emotional skills to develop and eventually go out into the workforce (Ferguson, 2016). Social, emotional learning is part of cultural competency, which is needed at school and in the workforce (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2018). SEL skills can benefit individuals at school, family, community, workplace, and life (Elias, 2006).

Schools and classrooms have implementing SEL in the primary grades. Those years are the foundation years where students learn to balance their emotions, build interpersonal relationships, and learn academic skills. SEL has been integrated formally and informally by instructors without much professional training. Integrating SEL has helped students meet academic growth because it gives techniques to balance social and emotional development (Kress et al., 2004). In particular, Latino students have emotional, family, environmental, and academic challenges. SEL gives Latinos student's strategies to deal with challenges that affect their academic development.

Instructors are the critical components of the integration of SEL (Haggerty et al., 1996). There is not a set way of bringing SEL systematically and systemically (Elias, 2019). Students need to feel welcomed and part of the classroom community. They need to feel respected and understood by their instructor. Part of understanding students is respecting their cultural

background and heritage. Instructors can provide an equitable classroom where students are given fair opportunities through the integration of SEL. Schools have to get organized in implementing SEL and the belief that all learning is social and emotional (Elias, 2019). There is also not one method of integrating SEL to schools or classrooms that would be effective across the board (Brackett et al., 2019). In order to implement SEL successfully at schools, it is vital to provide teachers and staff with clear guidance and make it clear it is an ongoing task with different elements (Pasi, 2000).

## **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Chapter 3 focused on the methodology, research design, data analysis, instruments, and procedures employed in this study. This study sought to understand the practices of SEL occurring for Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade. As such, this chapter reinstated the research questions, the purpose of the study, methodology, and research design used to examine this study. The researcher included the structure and appropriateness of using the phenomenological approach for this particular study. The process of the research design and data collection was discussed. Interview procedures, protocols, and questions was specified as well as criteria for participants. The relationship between research and interview questions was examined and considered. The reliability and validity of the study was discussed and clearly stated. Limitations and personal biases was analyzed in the study and was specified.

The study aims to examine how teachers promote SEL to Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade. The five SEL pillars was analyzed an integrated into the study. The SEL pillars include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The study looks at the possible advantages and disadvantages of integrating SEL in a classroom and school setting. The study focused on Latino students in the primary grades with academic, personal, and environmental challenges. The researcher wants to study instructors' integration, promotion, and influence of SEL in the classroom and its benefits on Latino students. The benefits it has on students' developmental years, which are the primary grades, and the lasting effects on the rest of their educational and life experiences.

## **Re-Statement of Research Questions**

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study. The research methods for this study will answer these four primary questions. These four research questions go as follow:

- RQ1: What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ2: What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ3: How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ4: What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?

## **Nature of the Study**

This study had a qualitative approach to addressing the research questions. A qualitative research analyzes and explores social and human problems (Marshall et al., 2013). Data is collected individually through interviews. Research involves the process of collecting data, data analyzes, interpreting data, emerging questions of the data, procedures, and finding general themes in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of research design looks at the complexity of the problem and finds individual meaning through observation and interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). This form of inquiry honors an inductive style of individuals and the situation for addressing the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The assumption of qualitative research is the study is based on individual perspective and view, which means there does not need to be proof for answers provided. The researcher tries to

get close to the individuals studied, but the evidence is subjective. The answers given are subjective to individual experiences and emotions. The strengths of a qualitative study are that the researcher gains an inside perspective of the study and finds issues that might be missed (Denscombe, 2010). Gaining inside helps to attain more knowledge in the subject matter. The weaknesses of a qualitative study are that the sample size is not a large data set (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The validity or reliability of the study can be criticized because the data collected is subjective. A weakness is that the collecting and analyzing of the data can be lengthy. It can also be biased in the answers and individual reflection of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2013).

### **Methodology**

The methodology for this qualitative research study utilized a phenomenological design. The essence of phenomenology is synthesized in the key phrase “going back to the things themselves” (Mortari, 2008, p. 4). Seeks to understand human nature at a deeper level (Qutoshi, 2018). Phenomenological looks at personal experiences that have been lived by several individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It looks to understand real-life experiences by interpreting the meaning and seeking to understand (Qutoshi, 2018) intellectually. It described the common factors of the given experiences described in a study (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach analyzes individual experiences and creates a universal essence (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Those universal experiences come from the experiences lived that lead to the collection of data for the qualitative study.

The researcher gains insight into the phenomenon and experiences (Qutoshi, 2018). In phenomenological studies, the researcher avoids the logical control of positivism and focuses on real-life experiences (Mortari, 2008). The researcher sought to understand the phenomenon as it appears, as being, and presented. According to Crotty (1998), the researcher seeks realities and

not truths. After the researcher gains insight on the phenomena studied the researcher will describe the findings, experience, and personal impact.

### ***Structured Process of Phenomenology***

The study will employ a phenomenological approach, which focuses on the participants' experience with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The real-life experiences of the participants was collected as the data for the study. The researcher's themes and descriptions was organized into significant statements to gain the essence of the experience. The researcher will develop a textural description as the data is reduced and set a structure description for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher has to take away their experiences to have a refreshing perspective on the phenomenon studied. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe this as epoché to take aside personal meaning and focus on the phenomenon without bias and prejudice. The researcher is collecting the data for the phenomenological experience but is placing personal beliefs and biases aside in order for the study not to be influenced.

**Appropriateness of Phenomenology Methodology.** Phenomenology was appropriate for the study because it collects data from the participants and not the researcher's perspective or interpretation of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Individual perspectives vary, and phenomenological methodology allows the researcher to understand the social context (Henriques, 2014). The researcher will collect the data from individual interviews to attain a deeper understanding of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview questions are not structured in a systematic format but somewhat open-ended (Henriques, 2014). The researcher expects the participant to share their experiences and not take the historical point of view of the phenomenon.



***Strengths.*** This phenomenological research study aims to examine how teachers teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade. Data was collected on the participants' experiences, and common factors was found (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research questions was answered by the participant through open-ended questions. The interview questions was aligned with the four research questions stated above. Interviewees will share experiences that will lead the researcher to find a textual and structural description of their experiences.

***Weaknesses.*** The phenomenological research study can have weaknesses emerge as the data is collected. The researcher has to put their assumptions aside while collecting data and allow participants the freedom to answer the open-ended questions. Creswell and Creswell (2013) found that there was philosophical assumptions that the researcher will need to identify as the data is collected. The researcher has to be aware of their personal bias and assumptions on the study that can pose challenges in collecting data. Participants have to know about the phenomenon being studied, which sometimes can be challenging when collecting individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## **Research Design**

The research design of this phenomenological studies how teachers instruct Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade, which leads to social, emotional learning strategies and practices in the classroom. In order to understand the phenomenon presented these four steps structure the process for collecting the data.

## ***Analysis Unit***

The analysis unit utilized for this study is one primary grade instructor in a transitional kindergarten through second grade. Instructors was selected from private, religious, public, and

charter schools in the United States of America. The primary focus is Latino students and the strategies instructors use to meet emotional and academic support. Participants had a minimum of two years of teaching in the classroom, either working with four-year-olds in transitional kindergarten, five-year-olds in kindergarten, six-year-olds in first grade, or seven-year-olds in second grade. The instructors' professional experience is teaching predominantly Latino communities.

### ***Population***

The population of this study is all instructors in primary grades who have integrated social-emotional learning strategies in the classroom. Instructors have to have two years of experience inside the classroom teaching transitional kinder through second grade. The study is intended to help Latino students meet academic goals by integrating social and emotional strategies into the classroom or school. Instructors can use the data to integrate social and emotional skills to serve all students, but in particular, students that have emotional and academic challenges. The results give instructors different social and emotional methodologies that best work with Latino students in the early academic years and build strong academic foundations. That can ultimately have positive effects on Latino students' academic and personal growth. It also helps instructors understand the challenges Latino students face to meet academic goals and the long-term benefits SEL can have on students.

### ***Sample Size***

The sample size for this study is 15 participants. Smith et al. (2009) suggested for the sample size to be three to 10 participants, but understands the sampling size depends on the type of study being conducted. According to Parse (1990), there has to be a minimum of two participants in the study in order to achieve redundancy and saturation. The minimum number of

participants is 15, which is approximately what Marshall et al. (2013) suggested. Participants had experience with the phenomenon being studied and have the characteristics required to participate.

### ***Purposive Sampling***

Purposive sampling was employed for this qualitative study, which is widely used for this type of study (Patton, 2002). The researcher will select the participants for the study that meet the characteristics and are especially knowledgeable in the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Purpose sampling is intentionally selecting the population that meets the characteristic or specific interest to collect the data (Andrade, 2021). Participants had experience in the classroom and have a clear understanding of the phenomenon being studied. They will understand the importance of integrating SEL strategies into students' curricula and instruction. In particular, the benefits it has on Latino students entering school in the primary grades. Lastly, participants have to be willing to participate and articulate their experiences.

### ***Participant Selection***

The selection of participants focused on transitional kindergarten through second-grade students in the United States, focusing on integrating SEL to Latino students. A browser-based search was done for schools and instructors that integrate SEL into student's academic life. Platforms such as LinkedIn and Facebook were used to seek participants that meet the criteria for the study. The search focused on schools based in California with no particular affiliation. School's website was used to research the programs offered and the population served. The results was narrowed down to schools with predominantly Latino students and have the integration of SEL components in the primary grades. School administrators was contacted via email or phone to connect with instructors in transitional kindergarten through second grade that

meets the criteria. The researcher will only bypass the administrator if the researcher has the contact information for the participant. After the participants have been selected the researcher will only communicate with the participant.

**Sampling Frame.** The researcher will create a master list with the instructor's full name, school name, phone number, email, and website or network they were found. The researcher will use LinkedIn or Facebook to search for candidates that meet the criteria to participate. The information collected was inputted on an Excel spreadsheet. The following process was used:

- The consent form was submitted to the Pepperdine Review Board for permission to interview candidates that meet the criteria for the study.
- The master list was stored on the researcher's laptop. The researcher only uses the laptop, and a password needs to be used to enter the laptop's content. The password helps to keep the content private and confidential.
- The spreadsheet was sorted alphabetically and grade level. It had the instructor's full name, grade level, email, phone number, and website or network they were found.
- The spreadsheet will only have instructors that meet the criteria for the study.
- From the master list, only 15 participants was selected that meet the criteria and was interviewed for the study.

After the participants are selected, the researcher was individually contacted via email or phone call. The researcher will validate the criteria for the participant and move forward with the next steps.

**Criteria of Inclusion.** The criteria for the participant has been set by the researcher and are as follows:

- Instructors integrate skills that fall into social and emotional skills.

- Instructors have the educational foundations and understanding of integrating different methodologies into the classroom.
- They have integrated nontraditional skills, such as SEL to help support students' needs toward academic development (Ragozzino et al., 2003).
- Instructors intentionally apply SEL skills to Latino students to meet the academic, behavioral, and emotional balance.
- Instructors for the study understand that students need more than academic competence in order to navigate through life challenges (Kress et al., 2004).
- Instructors have the perspective that helping students build character does not take away from meeting state standards (Kress et al., 2004).
- Instructors must have a minimum of two years of experience in the classroom.
- Schools serve primary Latino students or communities.

**Criteria of Exclusion.** The following were the criteria that excluded potential participants from the study:

- Refusal to sign the consent form.
- Refuse to have the interview recorded.
- Unable to interview between mid-March to late March.
- Having more than 5 years of experience in the classroom.
- Instructors not currently teaching was excluded.

**Criteria for Maximum Variation.** The researcher had instructors in transitional kinder through second grade that have insight into the phenomenon. It had diverse instructors in gender, race, ethnicities, and age that meet the qualifications. Various school sites was used to gain insight into the study while maintaining the focus on Latino students and the integration of SEL.

## **Human Subject Consideration**

Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the request to interview participants in the study. Participants were communicated to once the request for an interview was approved. Participation for the study was optional, and participants were given the option to choose not to volunteer in the duration of the study. Each participant was informed of the study and the purpose of collecting data. Procedures were clear for all participants before the interview began. Confidentiality and privacy was clear to participants and the researcher reassured them of their protection of the privacy of the data collected. Any potential risk was shared with the participant. The researcher informed the participant on how the data was used and its influence on academia. Additionally, the benefits of the data collected was shared with the participants, and the participant was asked to sign the informed consent form. The interview was recorded, and the researcher asked the participant for permission to be recorded. Identities were only disclosed if the participant consented to share their identity, otherwise, all participants had their identity removed from the study and were given pseudonyms. This is done through the consent form given to all participants in the study and protocols prior to participation.

The researcher minimized any risk to the participant. The participant was given the option of using a pseudonym for their identity to be confidential. The option of a pseudonym was given for institutional names where instructors work to keep confidentiality. Participants were reassured that data was destroyed after the completion of the study.

Interviews were recorded, and the content was transcribed verbatim. The consent form was reviewed on how the participant wanted to be identified in the study. Before the recording occurred, the participant was given the option to use their name or pseudonym. This reassured them that their information was confidential and private. If participants wanted to use a

pseudonym, the researcher only used generic names for the participant and institution. The researcher used the participant's name and not the pseudonym on the spreadsheet for the researcher's use only.

Further, the researcher secured the transcribed content in a safe area that was locked and private from an outsider's view. The researcher stored the data for the next five years of the research taking place. Identities were kept confidential if requested by the participant in the final transcript. The coding sheet used by the researcher was destroyed at the conclusion of the study. All measures were taken to keep the participants' data safe and secure.

### **Data Collection**

A master list of 15 participants was compiled by the researcher with candidates that met the criteria. The researcher contacted each participant via email or phone calls, depending on how the participant wanted to be contacted. The researcher used a standard recruitment script to recruit candidates to participate in the study. If the participant decided to participate in the study, the researcher took down additional information to set a future interview date and time. The researcher then followed up with an email to schedule an interview and provided the informed consent form. The interviews occurred in March 2022. If the participant decided to participate, the signed consent form was submitted via email to the researcher. The researcher ensured the recorder worked and check the consent form before the interview was scheduled. The participants were made aware that the interviews were semi-structured and follow-up questions would be asked to gain clarity and depth in the participants' responses. After the interview, the researcher sent an email to each participant, appreciating their contribution to the study.

## **Interview Protocol**

The researcher wanted the participants to discuss their enriching experiences for the study through the IRB approved interview questions. The information provided contributed to this phenomenological research study. The questions were semi-structured and open-ended. Each participant was warmly welcomed and told the structure of the interview. The researcher informed the participant of the number of questions asked and the freedom they had to stop the interview if they felt uncomfortable. The researcher did not pressure any participant to continue if they decided to stop and provided the option to reschedule the interview if this occurred. The participant was asked the amount of time they had for the interview, but also the researcher had a maximum of a 60-minute timeframe for each interview conducted. At the end of the interview, the researcher thanked the participants and ensured she had their contact information. The day after the interview, the researcher sent a thank you email to each participant.

## **Interview Questions**

The interview questions for the study were as follows:

- IQ 1: Tell me about yourself?
- IQ 2: Think of a class or classes that you have taught to a Latino student group that stand out in your mind of having worked particularly well. Can you describe that to me?
- IQ3: What teaching strategies did you use?
- IQ4: How did you encourage your students?

Follow-up (bring up SEL tenets)

- IQ5: What challenges/barriers do you face that prevent every class to be as exceptional as the one you mentioned earlier?



- Follow-up with what the participant mentioned earlier.
- Are all these challenges unique to Latino students? Describe how.
- IQ 6: How do you determine if your teaching methods to a Latino student group were successful?
- As a teacher, how do you define and measure your success teaching to Latino students.
- IQ 7: How do you measure Latino students' success in your classroom? Describe how it looks?
- IQ 8: In your opinion what else can teachers best support Latino students in the classroom to achieve academic and personal success?
- IQ 9: What mistakes have you made that you would warn other instructors to avoid when teaching Latino students?
- IQ 10: Is there anything else you would like to add?

### **Relationship Between Research and Interview Questions**

The research questions were developed from the literature of the study. The interview questions were developed from the literature and research questions. The four research questions structured the focus for this study and the data that needs to be collected. The 10 interview questions were intended to obtain data to answer the four research questions in the study which makes this a qualitative phenomenological study that allowed interviewers to elaborate on their experiences. The interview answers collected were integrated with the literature of the study in Chapter 4 after the data was analyzed and thematic analysis was finalized.

## **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are used to evaluate the quality of the study. To find validity and reliability, both the peer review and an expert review was conducted, and different methods were used to validate the structure and content of the study. Two peer reviewers from the Pepperdine University doctoral program analyzed the four research questions, and 10 interview questions for the researcher to gain valuable insight and feedback. The content, methods, and data were vetted for the study to be valid and used by other researchers. Reliability was reassured by the researcher keeping proper procedures and structure of the documentation and data collected. Generally, protocols have to be cleared for interviews and clear coding procedures of the data in qualitative studies.

### ***Prima Facie Validity***

Prima facie is the initial observation or examination of the study (Georg, 1994). The research questions are the initial examination of the research and the interview questions validate the research. The research and corresponding interview questions were aligned and support the data collection. The research questions were developed from the literature of the study. The interview questions contributed to the study via the data collected from the participants. Interview questions were reassessed after the feedback from two peer reviewers to validate the data collected. Revisions was made if needed after the peer review feedback is provided.

### ***Peer Review Validity***

Peer reviews were sought out to validate the interview questions used for the research. The peer reviewer will determine the relevance and quality of the interview questions. For this study, two Pepperdine doctoral students were selected to review the questions. The researcher provided a form to the peer-reviewers with instructions and steps to provide clear feedback. On

the form the researcher stated the purpose statement, problem statement, and listed the interview questions. Space was left in between the questions to allow for feedback space. On the bottom of the form space was left for additional comments to the researcher. The form provided allows the peer reviewer to add, delete, or comment on the questions. The peer reviewers and researcher met to discuss the feedback on the form and suggestions that validated their phenomenological study. The feedback by the peer reviewer was taken into account and reassessed by the researcher.

### ***Expert Review Validity***

An expert reviewed the content and data of the study for its validity. The expert provided feedback on the content, structure, and questions of the study and contributed to the feedback from the peer reviewer. An expert review helps to find an agreement between the peer reviewer feedback and the researcher with further insight and critique to the data and questions, which help to validate the research. Table 1 provided the research questions and corresponding interview questions which were also provided to the peer reviewers for their review.

**Table 1**

#### *Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Corresponding Interview Questions</b>
RQ1: What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?	IQ 1: Tell me about yourself? IQ 2: Think of a class or classes that you have taught to a Latino student group that stand out in your mind of having worked particularly well. Can you describe that to me? IQ3: What teaching strategies did you use? IQ4: How did you encourage your students? Follow-up (bring up SEL tenets) -Self-awareness -Self-management -Social-awareness -Relationship skills

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	-Responsible decision-making
RQ 2: What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?	IQ5: What challenges/barriers do you face that prevent every class to be as exceptional as the one you mentioned earlier? Follow-up with what the participant mentioned earlier. Are all these challenges unique to Latino students? Describe how.
RQ 3: How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?	IQ 6: How do you determine if your teaching methods to a Latino student group were successful? As a teacher, how do you define and measure your success teaching to Latino students. IQ 7: How do you measure Latino students' success  in your classroom? Describe how it looks?
RQ 4: What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?	IQ 8: In your opinion what else can teachers best support Latino students in the classroom to achieve academic and personal success? IQ 9: What mistakes have you made that you would warn other instructors to avoid when teaching Latino students? IQ 10: Is there anything else you would like to add?

### Interview Techniques

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The researcher had the questions ready, but there was flexibility if the questions needed to be restructured on the spot. Participants need to feel comfortable sharing their experiences, which might require readjustment of questions to attain a deeper conversation and data. The questions need to allow the participant to elaborate on their experiences. As a result, the researcher may need to lead the participant to

provide further context to their answers. The purpose of the interview protocol was so that the participant provided valuable insight to the study by sharing their experience.

### **Statement of Limitations and Personal Bias**

The study had limitations due to having a limited number of participants. Not every instructor's voice in transitional kindergarten through second grade will contribute to the study. The study is focused on improving student learning by integrating SEL into the classroom structure. The research is limited to Latino students and excludes any other group from the research. The researcher may possess their personal bias due to being in the education profession and the experience of teaching Latino students. Nevertheless, personal bias and preconceptions of the researcher will not overshadow or influence the reliability and validity of the study.

### ***Bracketing and Epoché***

The researcher left behind their preconceptions to attain the data needed for the study. Epoché allows for the researcher to clear their mind and leave their judgment behind. This allowed the researcher to refrain from making personal conclusions of the study and gather data that was meaningful to the study.

The researcher has been an instructor and principal for the last 18 years. The experience of the researcher is with primarily Latino communities. The researcher understood the inequalities and challenges Latino students faced and the value of integrating different strategies into the classroom that can help meet student learning goals. Understanding the struggle of Latino students is vital to the researcher to improve emotional and academic success. The researcher has an understanding of the influence a teacher has in the classroom and the long-lasting impact on students. Integrating different strategies in the classroom has been the researcher's passion, and using personal experiences led to this study. Thus, this passion allowed

for personal experiences to be placed aside and gave way for the participant to share their experiences inside the classroom with Latino students and SEL integration.

### **Data Analysis**

The study sought to understand the benefits of integrating SEL to Latino students in the classroom. The data was gathered using literature and interviewing professionals in the education field. Thus, 15 participants participated in the interview process, allowing the researcher to gather data on the study. The interviews aimed to understand how SEL is currently being integrated into the classroom practices and procedures when teaching primary Latino students. Interviews were scheduled via email or phone call and the researcher confirmed all interviews with participants. The researcher took shorthand notes and used a recorder when participants were interviewed. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the interview verbatim. In addition, the researcher proofread the transcripts to make sure the content shared was accurate and reviewed any and all field notes.

The researcher coded the transcripts to find common factors in the data presented. Those key concepts in coding and thematic analysis became the data needed for the phenomenological study. The coding was done on an Excel sheet by the researcher. No digital platform was used. The research questions were the first part of beginning the coding process. Key concepts and patterns were determined with the research questions. The researcher further codified the data by finding themes, phrases, or keywords. The content was digitally saved, and the researcher analyzed the data presented from the interviews.

### ***Reading and Memoing***

The researcher read the transcripts and took memos of the content collected. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to understand the data and have a clear perspective of what the

participants shared. The researcher wrote notes next to the transcripts and highlighted key themes that stood out. This allowed the researcher to validate the data collected through several different methods.

### ***Describing, Classifying, Interpreting (Coding)***

The next step after reading and memoing is coding the data. Coding is the process of putting tags, names, and labels on the data collected, which can be done in words or phrases (Smyth, 2009). The researcher manually conducted the coding process and did not use a digital software. The data was categorized using the transcripts of the interviews manually. Keywords and phrases were then pulled out. Themes and patterns became evident in the process. Quotes were pulled out and used in the study to validate the data collected.

**Interrater Reliability and Validity.** The validity of the study was reinforced by using interrater reliability. Integrated reliability helps the researcher to double-check the coding conducted and remove any biases in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During the first step, the researcher read the data collected from the participants. The data had been coded for key elements to support the study. The second step was to ensure validity, and the coding procedures were reviewed by two Pepperdine doctoral students currently working on their dissertation. These doctoral students had the knowledge of the process of working on qualitative research and coding the data. As reviewers they understood the importance of the content being validated and provided meaningful feedback to the researcher. In order to validate the process, the researcher gave the peer reviewers three interview transcripts to review the coding procedures the researcher did. The researcher provided each reviewer with the coding transcripts, and they examined the content independently. After the data was reviewed, the researcher and peer reviewers met and discussed their findings. It was vital to have consensus for the data to have

reliability and validity. The researcher might have revisions that will help to validate the data. If there was no consensus, the researcher asked the Pepperdine dissertation committee for guidance and insight into the transcripts. If the researcher and peer reviewers found consensus, then the researcher was able to move forward with the subsequent 12 interviews transcripts and coding process. The third step, the additional 12 coding transcripts were given to the peer reviewers and the same process of the first three was followed. The final step was to report the finding of the study to the Pepperdine committee. The peer reviewers were asked to destroy any data stored to protect the participants. The process was then documented to validate the procedures and structure of the data.

The coding of the research was done by the researcher manually without the use of a software as previously mentioned. The researcher reviewed the field notes and audio recording was transcribed. The researcher read through the interview transcripts and found key words, statements, or phrases that validated the research. Those key words, statement, or phrases were used to state the finding of the data collected. Charts and graphs was used to display the data collected in Chapter 4.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

Chapter 3 focused on the research design and methodology of the study. It established the techniques used to validate and have reliable qualitative research. The nature of a qualitative study was discussed, and the research questions were restated. The phenomenological structure was explained and how it is appropriate for a qualitative research study. The research design explained the analysis unit, population, sample size, purposive sampling, and participation selection. The inclusion and exclusion of the criteria for the study were explained. Interview techniques and protocols had a structure and procedure. The IRB process was described in detail



for the protection of human subjects participating in this study. Finally, the chapter concluded with the reliability and validity, prima-facie validity, and Pepperdine co-readers to oversee the process of coding the transcripts.

## Chapter 4: Findings

The study attempts to understand how SEL benefits Latino students in transitional kinder (TK) through second grade. Latino students have different social, emotional, academic, and economic challenges that affect them from meeting educational goals (Hart & Nash, 2020). Thus, this study was intended to understand the different strategies instructors used in predominant Latino communities to meet academic goals. The researcher interviewed instructors who integrated SEL strategies to improve students learning, socialization, accountability, and emotional well-being of all students in the classroom. Instructors selected for the study used different methodologies to meet academic goals in the influential years of a student's life by giving them the foundations that would benefit them as they graduate to the next grade levels. The study answered the following four research questions which focused on different classroom methodologies:

- RQ 1: What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ 2: What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ 3: How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ 4: What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?

The research questions had 10 corresponding interview questions that helped answer the four research questions for the study. The 10 interview questions had inter-rater reliability and validity procedures completed for each participant. These procedures established allowed the data collected to be accurate as possible. The 10 interview questions were as follows:

- IQ 1: Tell me about yourself?
- IQ 2: Think of a class or classes that you have taught to a Latino student group that stand out in your mind of having worked particularly well. Can you describe that to me?
- IQ 3: What teaching strategies did you use?
- IQ 4: How did you encourage your students? Follow-up (bring up SEL tenets)
- IQ 5: What challenges/barriers do you face that prevent every class to be as exceptional as the one you mentioned earlier? Follow-up with what the participant mentioned earlier. Are all these challenges unique to Latino students? Describe how.
- IQ 6: How do you determine if your teaching methods to a Latino student group were successful? As a teacher, how do you define and measure your success teaching to Latino students.
- IQ 7: How do you measure Latino students' success in your classroom? Describe how it looks?
- IQ 8: In your opinion what else can teachers best support Latino students in the classroom to achieve academic and personal success?
- IQ 9: What mistakes have you made that you would warn other instructors to avoid when teaching Latino students?
- IQ 10: Is there anything else you would like to add?

The 10 interview questions the participants answered are open-ended questions.

Participants shared their experiences and observation of the phenomenon being studied. The questions allowed the participant to share their knowledge of integrating different methodologies to meet goals with Latino students. Instructors shared how social and emotional learning skills

were integrated into transitional kinder through second-grade classrooms. The data collected offered valuable information on SEL for Latino students in transitional kindergarten, kindergarten, first, and second grade. The study's intent was to help instructors understand how to integrate SEL methods into classroom instruction, accountability, emotional stability, emotional awareness, social development, social awareness, and curriculum. Integrating SEL methodologies in the classroom can aid Latino students to meet academic goals and attain emotional stability. Chapter 4 focused on the participant answering the 10 interview questions and collecting data to answer the four researcher questions for the study. The study's findings were coded with key terms or phrases that reflect the data gathered from the participants. The inter-rater reliability and validity process for the data was outlined for the study.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were current instructors in different educational sectors. They were instructors in transitional kinder through second grade with predominantly Latino students. Their experience were in public, charter, private, religious, or independent schools. Instructors have a minimum of two years of teaching experience in a self-contained classroom. As a result of the meeting the criteria of inclusion, 15 participants were selected for the study to be interviewed. The data collected from the participants were coded to find key themes and phrases and were used for this study. Subsequently, after the writing of the findings and conclusion, the data and coding was destroyed for the protection of human subjects consideration.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher sought participants through a web-based search, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The web-based search looked for schools with SEL components, integration of different

instructional methodologies, or schools serving Latino communities. The data was collected from instructors who were teaching in California, were from different educational sectors, and had the academic foundations to teach students. Potential participants used different methodologies and techniques to meet academic, social, and emotional goals with Latino students. The researcher sent out 32 emails to the potential participants before finally selecting 15 participants who fully met the inclusion criteria. The researcher created an Excel spreadsheet with the name, phone numbers, and emails of the participants that meet the criteria for the study. Once the researcher collected the names of prospective candidates, an email invitation was sent to seek participation in the study. A master list was then created with candidates who responded to the email and chose to participate in the study with the full name, school, grade, phone number, email, and inclusion criteria to affirm the participant's eligibility. The researcher selected 15 participants from the master list and scheduled interviews with each of them. Lastly, the researcher emailed the IRB approved informed consent form to candidates and confirmed the interview.

The researcher obtained their CITI certification (see Appendix A) and went through the IRB approval process. The data collection began in late March 2022 after receiving full approval from IRB on March 22, 2022 (see Appendix B). The collection of data concluded on April 2, 2022. Participants were contacted via email with an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix C) The invitation introduced the researcher and the purpose of the study. If the participant chose to be part of the study, the researcher collected their information and proceeded to schedule an interview based on the participant's availability. Before the interview, the researcher emailed the informed consent form and interview questions (see Appendix D). If participants had questions or concerns about the study, they had the ability to call or email the

researcher. Participants remained anonymous throughout the study to maintain their privacy. Interviews lasted a maximum of 35 minutes, and participants were open to sharing their experiences in the classroom. After the interview, the researcher emailed a thank you letter and gave the participants the freedom to reach out if any questions arose after the interview. Table 2 shows the dates of the interviews with participants.

**Table 2**

*Dates of the Participant Interviews*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
P1	25-Mar-22
P2	25-Mar-22
P3	26-Mar-22
P4	26-Mar-22
P5	26-Mar-22
P6	26-Mar-22
P7	26-Mar-22
P8	26-Mar-22
P9	26-Mar-22
P10	28-Mar-22
P11	31-Mar-22
P12	31-Mar-22
P13	31-Mar-22
P14	1-Apr-22
P15	2-Apr-22

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from the qualitative phenomenological study was coded after the 15 interviews have been concluded. The researcher examined and analyzed the data collected from the interview questions to interpret the data collected from the participants. Participants' data was collected, then analyzed and coded by the researcher to find keywords and phrases. Those common factors helped to answer the research questions for the study. In order to avoid a biased approach to the study, the research engaged in epoche, or bracketing, to maintain personal

experiences from influencing the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). The researcher was aware that their experiences as an educator could not influence the study's outcome.

The researcher used their personal iPhone to record the participant's interviews. The app voice memo on the iPhone recorded the conversation between the participant and researcher. During every interview session, the researcher took notes to reflect on the provided content and used it as a second support system to collect data. After every interview, the researcher transcribes the content recorded, which then was coded by the researcher. The researcher heard the recordings twice to ensure the content was accurately transcribed. The researcher transcribed the recording on her personal computer, secured with a password. The researcher used the Word document program to type the content. Each transcript was saved with a pseudonym and organized in a folder. After transcribing the content, the researcher read the data and started a preliminary coding process to highlight similarities and write notes, then printed the transcripts to highlight keywords and phrases for a second glance. Further, the researcher continued by creating Excel spreadsheets to start the coding process for the data collected. The spreadsheet was divided into participants 1 through 15 and each interview question. The participant's pseudonyms were P1 through P15. Under each participant, keywords or phrases were pulled out to find similarities. Those similarities were coded to find the overarching themes in the data collected. The themes found from the coding are the data that answer the research questions. After the data was transcribed and coded, the audio was destroyed for no further use.

### **Inter-Rater Review Process**

The qualitative phenomenological study was validated by two Pepperdine University doctoral candidates within the Graduate School of Education and Psychology program. The two doctoral candidates reviewed the coding process and procedures used by the researcher. The

researcher provided the transcripts and coding for the first three interviews conducted. The files were uploaded into Google drive, where each candidate was invited to view the content. The spreadsheet showed keywords and phrases the researcher coded from the transcripts. The themes found in the three transcripts were color-coded for the candidates to identify. The researcher shared the research questions and interview questions for the study. The two candidates reviewed the results and gave feedback and suggestions to the researcher. In turn, the researcher considered the suggestion from the inter-raters and made the necessary changes. If the candidate disagrees with the changes, the dissertation chair was asked to guide the researcher. Finally, the researcher asked the same two doctoral students to review the final 12 transcripts to validate the content coded. The same process from the first three coding examples were followed.

### **Data Display**

This phenomenological research study aimed to investigate how SEL practices are integrated into a student's daily life. The study focused on Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade. The data was collected and input on an Excel spreadsheet and color-coded to find common themes. Themes were reviewed, redefined, and deleted in a four-step interrater reliability procedure.

- Keywords and phrases on the spreadsheet were identified and highlighted. Those keywords and phrases were categorized by themes. The spreadsheet had common themes, categories, and identifiable per question.
- The two peer reviewers provide interrater validity of the themes identified.
- The peer reviewers reviewed the coding and themes. They examined the coding process and procedure done by the researcher and either agreed or offered suggestions to themes that the researcher identified.



- The peer reviewers did not offer any suggestions or modifications to the coding or themes identified.

The themes identified were clear and answered the questions for the study. The researcher created a corresponding graph where the main themes of each interview question were identified. The frequency was denoted for each theme and participants were not specified in the diagram.

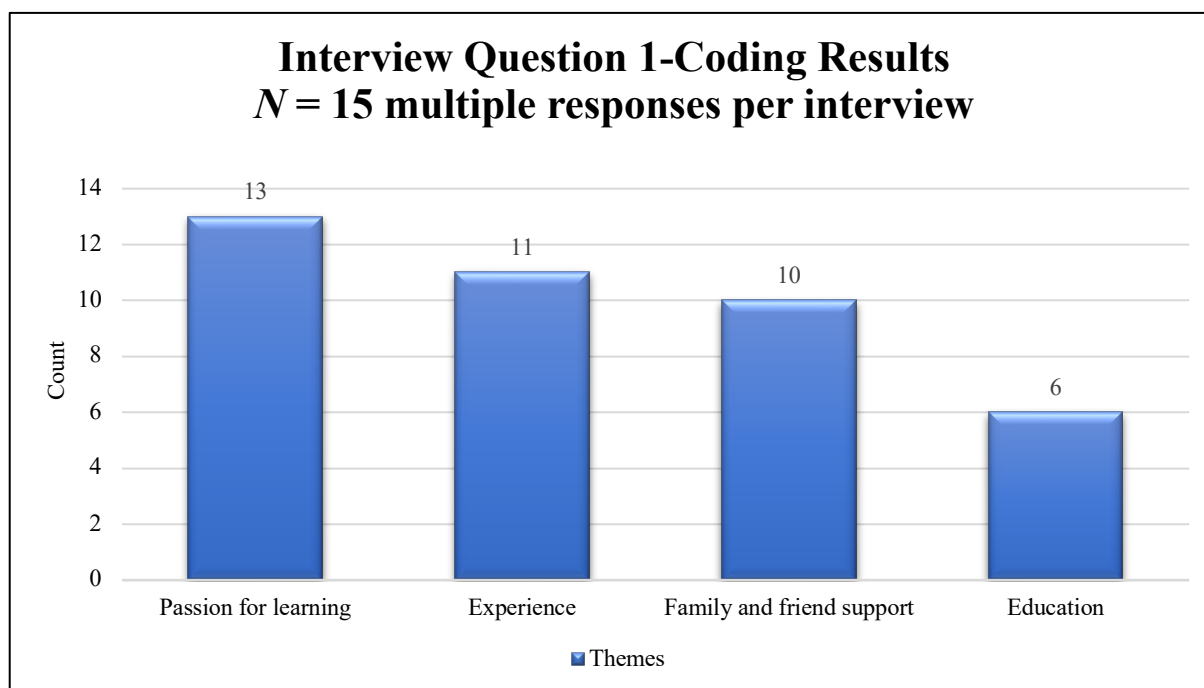
### ***Research Question 1***

The first research question centered on asking, What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade? To answer this question, four interview questions were employed.

- IQ 1: Tell me about yourself?
- IQ 2: Think of a class or classes that you have taught to a Latino student group that stand out in your mind of having worked particularly well. Can you describe that to me?
- IQ 3: What teaching strategies did you use?
- IQ 4: How did you encourage your students? Follow-up (bring up SEL tenets)

The answers provided by the participants were coded to find themes and answer RQ 1.

**Interview Question 1.** IQ 1 asked the participant to share more about themselves. This question was intended for the creation of camaraderie and trust between the researcher and the participant and allowed for the researcher to more about the participant. The first question was, tell me about yourself? This question yielded four themes: (a) passion for teaching, (b) experience, (c), family, and friend support, and (d) education (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1***IQ 1 Coding Results*

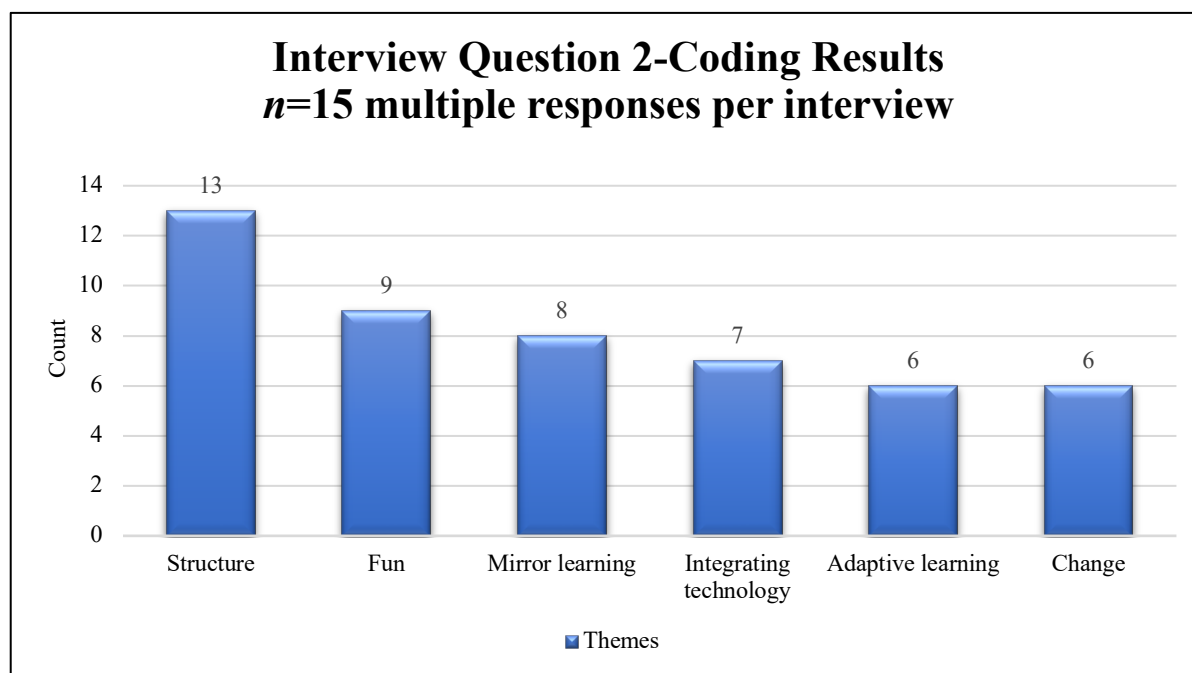
***Passion For Learning.*** The passion for learning was the first theme for IQ 1. Before concluding the answer to tell me about themselves, many of the participants said they loved what they did. Thirteen out of 15 participants (86%) ended with the passion and love they have for teaching and their students. P14 stated, “I have had a passion for education since I first stepped into a classroom and have not lost that passion after 10 years.”

***Experience.*** The second theme displayed was experience for IQ 1. The participants have two to 10 years of experience in the education system and predominantly Latino communities. Roughly, 11 out of 15 participants (73%) answered the question that most of their professional experience has been teaching in Latino communities, and they do not know anything different. P15 stated, “Being in a Latino community has been gratifying, and I do not see myself anywhere else.”

***Family and Friend Support.*** The participant's support system was the third theme for IQ 1. The participant answered the question with the importance of family or friends supporting them to meet their educational foundation and professional journey. Ten out of 15 participants (66%) responded to the question with the importance of having family or friends' support. P2 stated, "My husband and daughter supported my journey to receive my degree and dream of being a teacher." P5 stated, "My friend and mentor called me monthly when I stopped going to school due to family reasons and told me I have the potential to go back and finish my education."

***Education.*** The final theme for IQ 1 is education. The first theme provided an understanding of the participant's educational background and its influence on teaching Latino students. Six (40%) out of 15 participants answered the question with their educational background and their journey to receive their undergrad degree and credentials. P5 stated, "As a Latina, I had challenges receiving my college degree, so I can relate to my Latino students."

**Interview Question 2.** IQ 2 intended for the participant to share an activity that had a positive outcome. The participant was led to describe the scenario in detail. The questions were, "Think of a class or classes that you have taught to a Latino student group that stand out in your mind of having worked particularly well? Can you describe that to me?" IQ 2 yielded six themes: (a) structure, (b) fun, (c) mirror learning, (d) integrating technology, (e) adaptive learning, and (f) change (see Figure 2). The six themes were vital in describing the activities the instructors viewed as successful while teaching Latino students.

**Figure 2***IQ 2 Coding Results*

**Structure.** The first theme that emerged was “structure” for IQ 2. At least 13 out of 15 participants (86%) felt that structure was essential when teaching Latino students. The consensus of instructors was that a classroom with structure had clear expectations for all students. Instructors believed that students need structure to meet academic goals and emotionally not feel stressed or confused. P11 explained, "Students sometimes do not have the structure in their household, so they depend on their teacher to provide it."

**Fun.** The second theme was “fun” for IQ 2. In answering this question, nine out of 15 participants (60%) noted the importance of having fun while learning. Instructors felt that it was essential to have fun when learning for students to get engaged with the content and skills presented. According to participants, if students are having fun then the classroom environment is positive which helps build on social and emotional stability of every child. P4 noted, “If I do not present the kindergarten content in a fun way, such as song or game, then the student will not

be engaged or master the material.” Participants agree that a fun environment brings happiness in particular serving grades in transitional kinder through second grade.

***Mirror Learning.*** The third theme is “mirror learning” for IQ 2. Eight out of the 15 participants (53%) responded on the importance of mirror learning. Participants noted that students learn from seeing the teacher and peers when learning, understanding behaviors, and coping with emotions. Participants stated that students learn more from mirror learning than instructors standing in front of the class and lecturing. P1 stated, “In transitional kinder, students are looking at your every move, so I use that as an advantage when teaching them different skills.” P12 stated “ It is important for teachers to gradually release the students to work in groups and pairs so mirror learning can occur.”

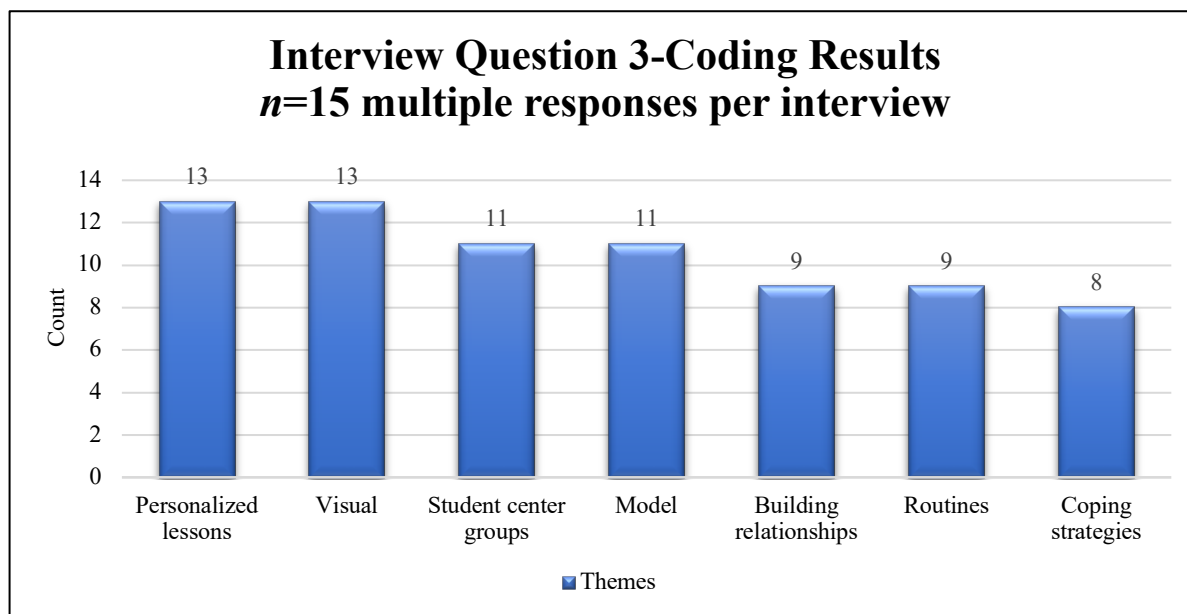
***Integrating Technology.*** Integrating technology was the fourth theme for IQ 2. Seven out of 15 (46%) instructors noted the integration of technology as necessary when teaching students in the 21st century. According to instructors the integration of technology helps to engage students to the skill being taught, which leads to mastery of the skill. Participants shared that the integration of technology can also nurture individual needs and skills that might lack or need improvement. P8 stated, "Our district has digital programs in math and reading, so it is embedded in my daily lesson plans." P5 said, "It is nice to be in a Catholic school that has integrated technology into the student's daily lesson." P6 stated, "Our school has minimal devices, so I use my cell phone or iPad to integrate programs for students that are struggling."

***Adapted Learning.*** The first theme for IQ 2 is adapted learning or adapted teaching. Instructors used either term, which means modifying or restructuring curriculum, instruction, or methods to meet academic goals. Six out of 15 instructors (40%) responded on the importance of

adapted learning or teaching in the classroom. P6 stated, “I adapt my teaching on the spot or through the data I collect on individual students.”

**Change.** Change is the final theme that appeared in IQ 2. The ability to change is essential when teaching, according to the participants. Participants shared it is crucial to make modifications while teaching to be successful in meeting academic goals. According to the answers from the participants, students learn from instructors that are open to change and are not rigid toward a given methodology. “Instructors should not get stuck in one method, formula, or structure,” according to P15. Eight out of 15 participants (53%) used the theme “change” in terms of this having worked well when teaching Latino students.

**Interview Question 3.** IQ 3 focused on the methods instructors use in the classroom and allowed the participants to share any methods they used in the classroom that have a positive outcome on Latino students. The question for the participant is what teaching strategies did you use? These interview questions yielded seven themes: (a) personalized lessons, (b) visual, (c) student center groups, (d) model, (e) building relationships, (f) routines, and (g) coping strategies (see Figure 3). The seven themes were essential in answering the question that focus on the methods being used to meet academic goals. These themes were reoccurring when answering the question for the 15 participants.

**Figure 3***IQ 3 Coding Results*

***Personalized Lessons.*** The first theme for IQ 3 is personalized lessons. The strategy instructors use for meeting academic growth is personalized lesson. The consensus among the participants is that personalizing lesson is difficult, but beneficial for student growth and should be done by instructors. Thirteen out of the 15 participants (86%) used personalized lessons for students to understand the concept or skill. P15 noted, "Most of my lessons are personalized to student's needs, but I am lucky to have a classroom aid to help me." P3 stated, "This year, I have a small class for first grade, so personalizing a lesson has not been challenging, but rewarding to see individual growth."

***Visual.*** The second theme that developed for IQ 3 is visual. Instructors shared that in transitional kinder through second grade, visuals are essential for students to understand the content and skill. They shared that they use pictures or videos to get the students to understand the concept. Thirteen of the 15 participants (86%) mentioned visuals in their interview as a strategy to meet academic goals. P7 noted, "I have visuals for everything I do in transitional

kinder because students have never been in school, but also most of my students have parents that do not speak English and might not use the terms.”

***Student Center Groups.*** The third theme for IQ 3 was students center groups. Eleven out of the 15 participants (73%) noted student center activities as essential for transitional kinder through second grade. Instructors shared that students learn more from each rather than from direct instruction. According to the participants, student center groups help students to build relationships and learn to interact with each other. P13 stated, “Everything I do in the classroom is structured as student center groups, which allows me to divide the students based on their skills or mastery.”

***Model.*** Modeling is theme four for IQ 3. Eleven out of 15 participants (73%) spoke of the importance of modeling in the classroom. Instructors stated that modeling helps students understand what is expected of them. According to instructors, it is vital to model proper vocabulary when teaching second language learners. Participants agree that transitional kinder through second grade every content presented needs to be modeled for students to understand and master the skill. P14 stated, “As a lead teacher and coach, I encourage the strategy of modeling for students entering school for the first time and particularly Latino students.”

***Building Relationships.*** Theme number five is building relationships for IQ 3. Instructors shared that relationships between teachers and students and peers motivate students to learn. According to instructors, it builds self-confidence and feels wanted by their surroundings. Participants agree that in transitional kinder through second grade relationship building needs to be taught by the teacher because it might be their first time interacting with different people outside their family. Nine out of 15 participants (60%) shared the importance of relationships in a school and classroom community. P11 noted, “As a kindergarten teacher, I focus on building

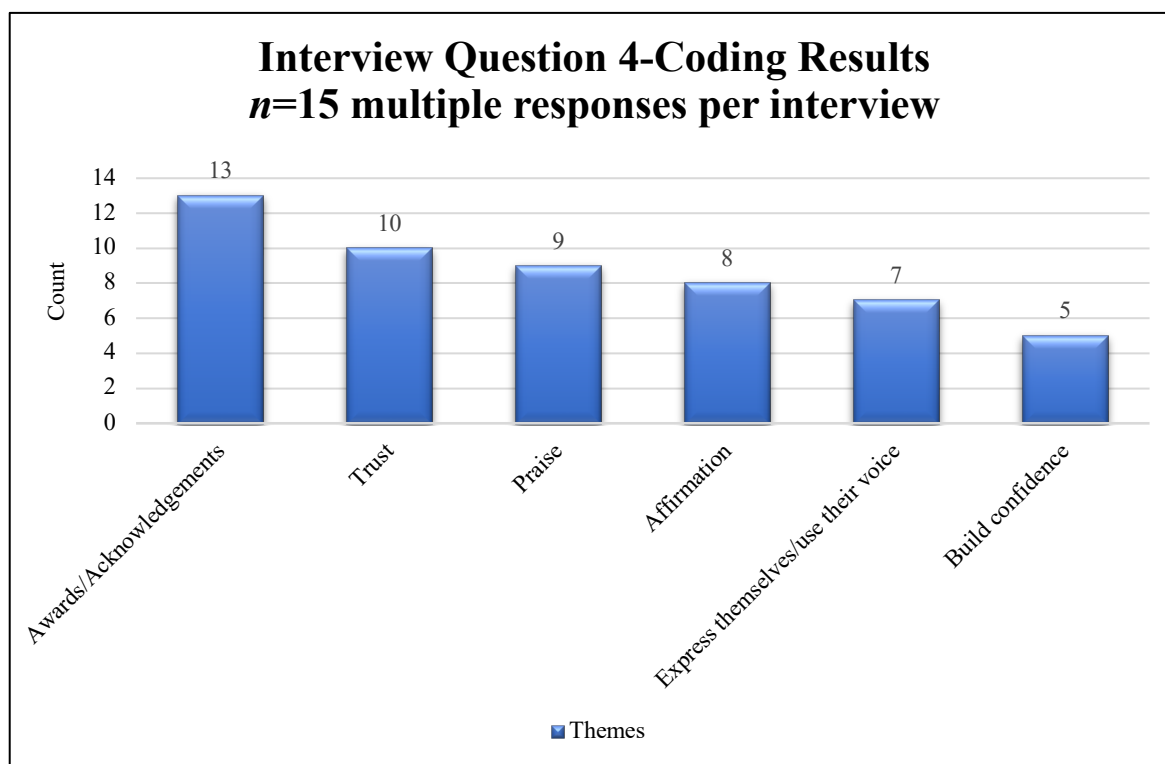


relationships with every student in my class and help them build healthy relationships with their peers.”

***Routines.*** Routines are theme number six for IQ 3. Instructors say that routines are necessary for all age groups, particularly in the foundational years. According to the participants, a classroom has established routines; it can run itself. Nine out of 15 participants (60%) noted routines as a learning strategy for Latino students. P11 shared, "I have established routines for transitioning students center groups to whole-group activities."

***Coping Strategies.*** The final theme for IQ 3 three is coping strategies. Eight out of the 15 instructors (53%) shared that coping helps with classroom behaviors and management. According to the participants, for students to learn, they have to learn to cope with challenges, stressors, and behavior before teaching a methodology. Therefore, participants shared they teach coping strategies for students to use both inside and outside the classroom. P9 stated, “At the public school I am currently teaching, we focused on coping strategies because we had behavior problems that took away from learning.”

**Interview Question 4.** IQ 4 focused on the methods instructors used to encourage students to learn. The researcher followed up with the integration on SEL skills, if they were used to encourage students. The questions were how did you encourage your students? The interview question yielded six themes: (a) awards/acknowledgements, (b) trust, (c) praise, (d) affirmation, (d) express themselves/use their voice and (e) build confidence (see Figure 4). The six themes were vital to understanding the methods instructors used in the classroom and how they integrated SEL to the learning process.

**Figure 4***IQ 4 Coding Results*

*Awards/Acknowledgements.* The first theme for IQ 4 was awards or acknowledgments. Thirteen of the 15 participants (87%) gave students awards or acknowledgments for meetings goals, being responsible, following directions, or behaving. Instructors state that students in transitional kinder through second grade respond to receiving awards, such as certificates, stickers, treasure box, class points, or individual points. According to participants acknowledging achievements with a praise or applause is powerful for students and they do not forget the gesture. P12 stated, “I have a weekly start student in my class. Students get acknowledged for meetings goals with a bulletin board honoring them. Their picture is showcased with goals they met.” P13 shared, “If my students exceed reading minutes from Achieve 3000, they get a shout out at Monday’s assembly. They love it and feel proud.”

**Trust.** The second theme that emerged was trust in IQ 4. Ten of the 15 participants (66%) felt that building trust for the students to learn is vital. According to instructors, students need to trust their teachers and classroom environment before any learning occurs. Participants believe that building trust should be the first thing instructors do before targeting curriculum. P4 noted, “The students in the community I serve have broken families, immigrant parents, or family struggles, making it hard for them to trust anyone. As a teacher, I build trust first, and it makes a difference.”

**Praise.** The third theme for IQ 4 was praise. Nine of the 15 instructors (60%) said that praising students motivates them to learn and follow classroom rules. Instructors shared that praising students should be done immediately after the action. According to the participants, students respond to positive praise because it makes them feel good and gain confidence. P2 said, “I love the concept of the marvel jar as an immediate classroom and student praise. This has worked for me in transitional kinder, kinder, and fifth grade.”

**Affirmation.** The fourth theme was affirmation for interview question number four. Eight out of 15 participants (53%) shared that affirmation to their students has to be constant, so they know you mean it and eventually believe it. Participants agreed that positive affirmation can sometimes be difficult for Latino students due to cultural differences. However, participants believed it needed to be the priority for all instructors to build confidence and trust. P10 shared, “My morning starts with morning affirmations. We chant it as a class, motivating us to start the day positively and meet goals.”

**Express Themselves/Use Their Voice.** The fifth theme that emerged from IQ 4 was the ability to express themselves or use their voice. Seven of the 15 participants (46%) noted that it was essential for students to learn to express themselves or use their voice in a classroom

environment. Instructors encourage and teach their students to express themselves or use their voice if they have a disagreement or do not understand the content. Participants believed that if students learn to use their voice they will get the help and understanding to be able to move emotionally, socially, and academically forward. P3 said, “I encourage my students by allowing them to express themselves, and in turn, they feel comfortable in the classroom.”

***Build Confidence.*** Building confidence was the final theme for IQ 4. Instructors found that building confidence helps Latino students to stay motivated when the content gets complicated and mastery of the content is a process. According to the participants, the teacher has the power to build a student’s confidence, but can also break their confidence. The general consensus was that teachers hold the power and influence on young minds. Five out of the 15 participants (33%) found that building confidence gets students to meet goals. P1 noted, “Giving students the confidence helps them seek me as a teacher when they need academic or personal help.” P10 shared, “The moment the student gets the confidence and helps another student as a teacher, that is success.”

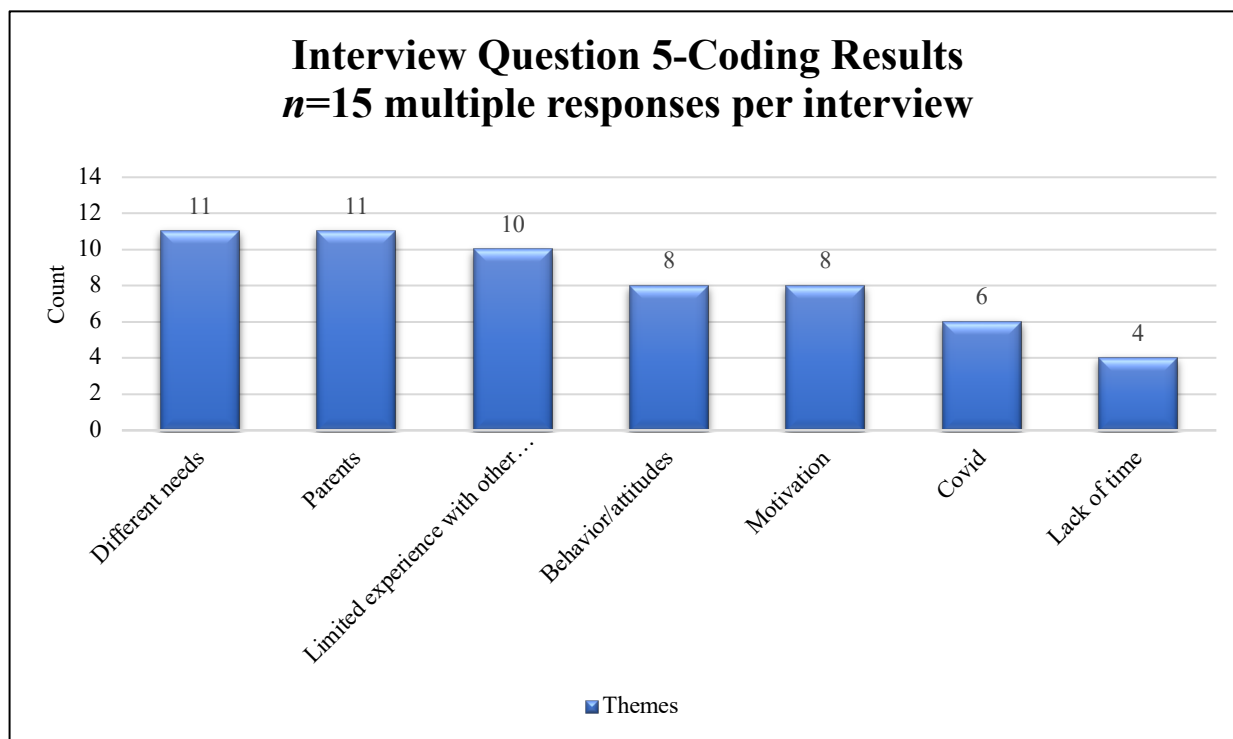
**Summary of RQ 1.** RQ 1 sought to understand the strategies and best practices teachers used with Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade. Participants shared about their educational journey and experiences teaching Latino students. They shared strategies and techniques that successfully encouraged and motivated Latino students to meet academic and personal goals. Students want to learn, but teachers need a structured environment, should be open to collaboration, acknowledge or award their students, and make it fun to learn. Instructors can have the best practices or strategies, but if they have not established trust between their students, it would be difficult for the teacher and student to create an engaging environment.

### ***Research Question 2***

The second research question centered on asking, what challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade? To answer this question, one interview question was employed.

- IQ 5: What challenges/barriers do you face that prevent every class to be as exceptional as the one you mentioned earlier? Are all these challenges unique to Latino students?

**Interview Question 5.** The fifth interview question sought to understand the challenges and barriers instructors had while teaching Latino students. The second part of the question was asked to understand if these challenges and barriers were found to be unique to Latino students. IQ 5 yielded seven themes: (a) different needs, (b) parents, (c) limited experience with other ethnic groups, (d) behavior or attitude, (e) motivation, (f) Covid, and (g) lack of time (see Figure 5). The seven themes were vital to understanding the challenges and barriers instructors faced, but also if those challenges and barriers were unique to Latino students.

**Figure 5***IQ 5 Coding Results*

***Different Needs.*** The first theme for IQ 5 was meeting different needs. Eleven out of the 15 participants (73%) shared that every student has different needs, and it is essential to acknowledge those differences for student growth to occur. Participants understand that meeting every student's need is difficult, but teachers need to try and see their differences as strengths to learn. According to the participants, if differences are acknowledged, it will create an environment where students are happy, feel welcome, feel part of a group, and are celebrated for being uniquely themselves. P6 noted, "Teachers have to acknowledge the differences in Latino students' understanding of the language to help them meet academic goals."

***Parents.*** The second theme for IQ 5 was parents. Instructors shared that parents' support is essential, and sometimes can be challenging. Participants agree that instructors need to hold parents accountable to participate and be part of the learning process. According to the

participants, parents can sometimes feel intimidated to participate due to language barriers or lack of education. Eleven of the 15 participants (73%) found this can be a challenge and barrier when teaching Latino students. P15 noted, "The last few years, I have seen parents supporting or justifying their child's actions, which is challenging when you want to teach them and hold them accountable."

***Limited Experience With Other Ethnic Groups.*** The third theme for IQ 5 was limited experience with other ethnic groups. Ten out of 15 participants (67%) felt that these challenges are not unique to Latino students. Five of the participant felt these challenges were unique to Latino students. Instructors agreed that their limited experience outside the Latino community made it hard for them to know if these challenges were unique. The instructors shared that all students have challenges or barriers when learning. P9 stated, "My experience has been in Latino communities, so I do not know anything different."

***Behavior or Attitudes.*** The fourth theme for IQ 5 is the behavior or attitudes of students. Instructors shared that behavior problems take time from learning and meeting academic goals. According to participants teachers need to deal with behavior issues on their own, which is stressful and can be unrealistic for one person to handle. However, they understand it is part of being a teacher and building an environment of holding students accountable for their actions. Eight (53%) out of the 15 participants felt that behavior problems are challenging and create barriers in the learning process. P8 shared, "I remember a student that came mid-year and had behavior problems. It was hard to control his behavior because I speak English, and he spoke Spanish. Controlling his behavior took time from the rest of the class learning. His behavior did improve at the expense of everyone else."

**Motivation.** Motivation is the fifth theme for IQ 5. Eight of the 15 participants (53%) noted the importance of this theme, which included keeping students focused on meeting class objectives. Instructors shared that building motivation is not easy when students have academic challenges, but they do it through praise and mantras to build their self-esteem. P13 made the point, “Teachers have the power to motivate their students to learn more than their parents.”

**Covid.** The sixth theme for IQ 5 was Covid. The instructors mention Covid as a challenge they currently have and state that students now have social, emotional, and academic difficulties. This is due to learning remotely for the last two years via Zoom and not having individualized instruction, group centers, and socialization as there was before. Six of the 15 participants (40%) identified Covid as a challenge. P12 noted, “Teaching kindergarten during Covid was the hardest thing I have ever done because it is challenging to keep the students focused and on the task in class; now imagine on Zoom.”

**Lack of Time.** The final theme for IQ 5 was lack of time. Instructors felt that eight hours in their day was not enough to accomplish their daily objectives. Participants agreed that structure was essential to meet daily goals and feel accomplished in the eight-hour day. Four of the 15 participants (27%) want more time in their instructional time. They find it challenging to cover everything they need to do within the timeframe allotted. P10 shared, “I wish we had more time to explore. Exploring is learning, but I have learned to move my schedule around and meet my objectives for the week.”

**Summary of RQ 2.** Research question number two sought to understand the challenges and barriers instructors can have when teaching Latino students. Participants noted that different needs, behavior, lack of time, Covid, self-motivation, and parents make meeting expectations challenging. Instructors were divided when answering if these challenges were unique to Latino



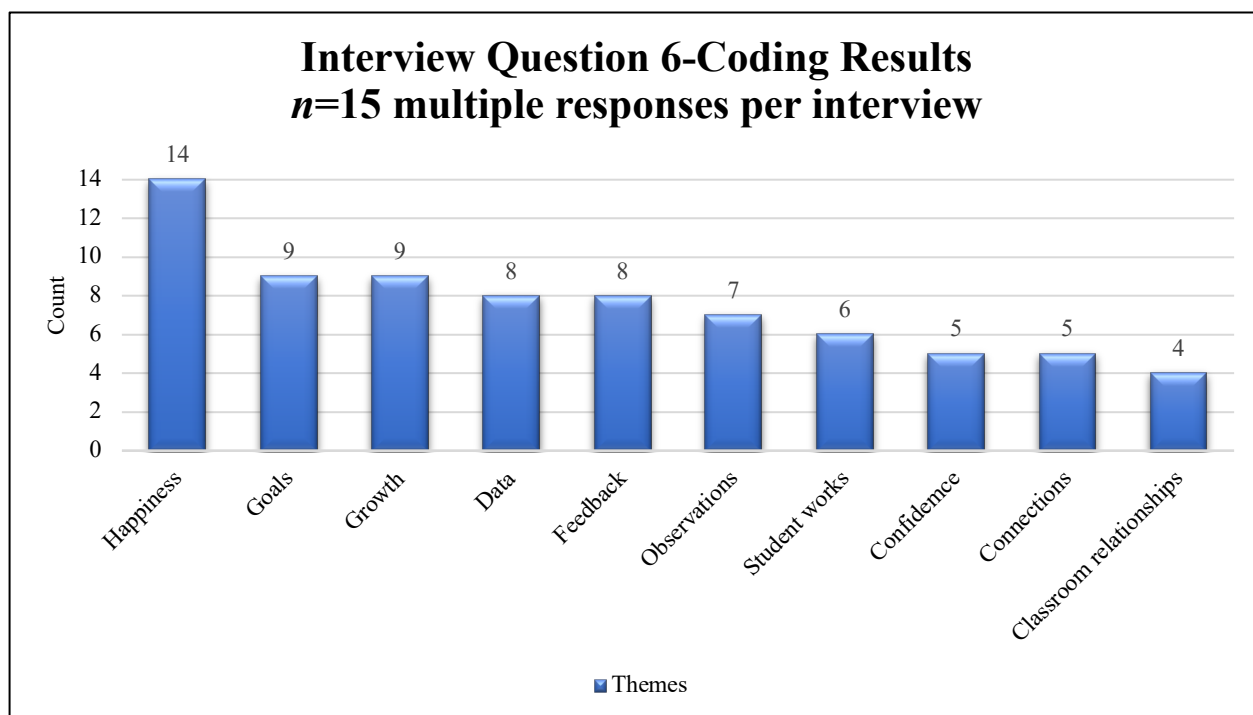
students because they have not taught diverse communities to answer this question. They shared that challenges or barriers are part of the job description when teaching TK through second grade.

### ***Research Question 3***

RQ 3 centered on asking, how these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade? To answer this question, two interview questions were employed:

- IQ 6: How do you determine if your teaching methods to a Latino student group were successful? As a teacher, how do you define and measure your success teaching to Latino students?
- IQ 7: How do you measure Latino students' success in your classroom? Describe how it looks?

**Interview Question 6.** IQ 6 centered on the instructors methods for determining success. The second half of the questions focused on the instructors' definition and methods of measuring success. Based on the results, there were 10 themes that were found. Those themes were: (a) happiness, (b) goals, (c) growth, (d) data, (e) feedback, (f) observations, (g) student works, (h) confidence, (i) connections, and (j) classroom relationships (see Figure 6). These themes answered the IQ of measuring and tracking success. The data collected is needed to understand the different forms instructors used to attain success with Latino students.

**Figure 6***IQ 6 Coding Results*

***Happiness.*** The first theme was happiness for IQ 6. Fourteen (93%) of the 15 participants define and measure their success if their students are happy. Instructors shared that it is vital for students to feel happy and want to come to school. If students are happy, they were motivated to learn. According to the participants they rather have students that are happy and need academic nurturing rather than having high academic skills. P13 said, “Success for me is my student are happy and understand the concepts as best as possible.”

***Goals.*** In IQ 6, the second theme was goals. Nine (60%) of the participants define and measure their success by their students meeting goals. According to the participants, meeting goals is learning how to read, write, do the math, personal relationships, and following classroom rules. Participants shared it is important to set realistic goals and share those goals with parents and students. P15 noted, “If students are not meeting goals, I need to figure out what I can do.”

**Growth.** The third theme for IQ 6 was student growth. Nine (60%) of the 15 participants analyzed student growth as a form of being successful in the classroom. Instructors felt that if students are growing in reading, math, and writing, their methodologies successfully meet students' needs. Participants also agree that growth can be identified in students confidence, relationships, and happiness. P9 shared, "Students might not meet grade level, but it is important to honor any growth as teachers." P10 explained, "The teacher and student should celebrate any growth because they are moving academically forward."

**Data.** Data was the fourth theme found for IQ 6. Instructors state they look at standardized test scores to guide their instruction. They also stated that formative and summative assessments are necessary to understand if students are mastering the skills presented. Eight (53%) participants of the 15 feel that understanding the data is essential to meet students' needs. P11 believes, "It is important to read and understand data, but most importantly let it direct your teaching methodologies."

**Feedback.** IQ 6 had feedback as the fifth theme in its thematic analysis. Instructors define and measure their success by receiving feedback from students and parents. Eight (53%) of the 15 participants felt that feedback is the best way they can measure their success. Instructors believe that it is vital to ask for feedback to know what is working or needs improvement. Parent feedback according to participants is essential because it can give perspective to challenges happening at school or home. P3 shared, "When students come back and share their experiences in first grade, it makes me emotional and gives me feedback on my teaching strategies and methodologies that helped them or they still remember."

**Observations.** The sixth theme was observation for IQ 6. Seven out of 15 participants (47%) shared that the best way to determine if teaching methods are working is to look at

students' faces, demeanor, interactions, and happiness. Those components according to participants should be observed and considered before moving forward with new content. P6 noted, "Observations are essential for the foundational grades and should be used to guide instruction."

***Student Works.*** The seventh theme for IQ 6 was student work. Instructors shared that students' work can help guide them if their teaching methods work. According to the instructors, they were able to see students' work evolve as they met learning goals. Six (60%) of the 15 participants determined their success by analyzing student work. P11 shared, "I had a student who did not speak a word of English, but as the year progressed, I saw my student work from writing words to writing a full sentence."

***Confidence.*** The eighth theme for IQ 6 was confidence. Five (33%) out of the 15 participants determined their classroom methods were working by the confidence each student demonstrated. According to the instructors, students who participate in class discussions and help others show strong confidence and move academically forward. They shared that teachers need to build students' confidence and never assume they have support at home. P1 shared, "If I see my students helping each other, I know I gave them the confidence they lacked."

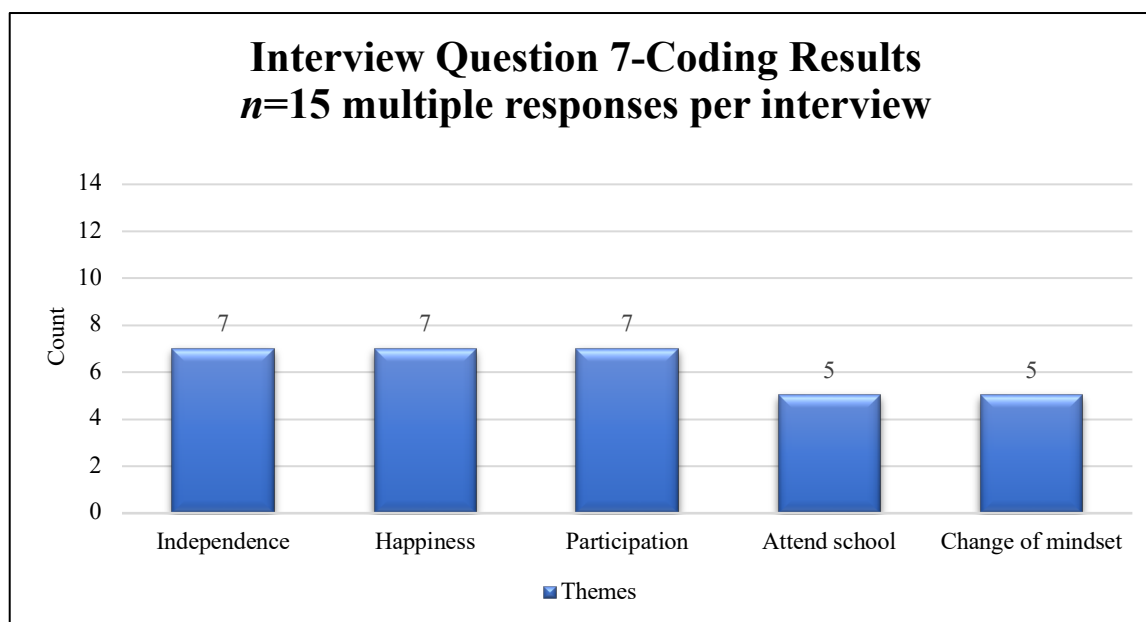
***Connections.*** Connection is theme number nine for IQ 6. Instructors measure their success if their students make connections to what they learn in class. They start connecting the different learning methodologies without direct instruction from the teacher. As instructors, they also relate the content to students' life experiences and interests. Five (33%) of the 15 participants measured and defined their success by the connections their students made. P10 said, "I try to find real-life connections with the material to engage and motivate students to learn."

**Classroom Relationships.** The third theme is classroom relationships for IQ 6. Four of the 15 participants (26%) felt that classroom relationships were an excellent method to determine if the teaching strategies are successful in the classroom. According to the participants, if the students collaborate without the teacher’s guidance that is a success for them as instructors. Participants agree that relationships are built if students have an environment of trust, respect, and structure. P9 shared, “Seeing them grow, feeling better about themselves, and building healthy relationships is important to get students to learn.”

**Interview Question 7.** IQ 7 focused on the format of measuring success. Instructors were asked to describe how success looked like in their classroom. The questions asked, how do you measure Latino students’ success in your classroom? Describe how this looks? IQ 7 displayed five themes: (a) independence, (b) happiness, (c) participation, (d) attending school, and (e) change of mindset (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*IQ 7 Coding Results*



***Independence.*** The first theme for IQ 7 is independence. Teachers shared that students independently working and meeting classroom expectations is a significant accomplishment. Seven out of the 15 participants (46%) stated that Latino success in the classroom occurred by the students displaying independence. According to instructors, students who struggle do not want to work independently and want to be guided by the teacher, which is challenging in a classroom that serves 25 students with no aid. P14 shared, “When I see students working independently and moving their pencil, my heart is full.”

***Happiness.*** The second theme for IQ 7 was happiness. Seven (46%) of the 15 participants measured Latino success in their classroom by seeing their students happy. Participants felt that a successful classroom has happy students. According to the participants, students should not have a stressful environment, which can happen when teachers are pressured to meet goals. Participants agree that instructors need to be aware of students stress level, which can lead to unhappy students. Happiness of the students should be the priority according to participants. P11 expressed,

My students tend to be happy, but they were unhappy and tired when I took naptime. I was concerned because some students did not want to come to school, so I changed the mindset and made the time fun time.

***Participation.*** Participation is the third theme for IQ 7. Seven (46%) of the 15 participants found that participation measures success in the classroom. Instructors stated that students’ participation meant they understand the concept and felt confident to raise their hands. Participants also agreed that students who participate are happy in their classroom environment. P10 said, “As a teacher, I want to see my student’s hand go up and participate in class. I want to know if they understand the material or need help.”

***Attend School.*** The fourth theme for IQ 7 was attending school. Five (33%) of the 15 participants said that students attending school are a way to measure success in the classroom. As teachers, when instructors see their classroom full of students, it is gratifying and means these students want to come to school. Participants understand that students need to feel comfortable and happy to want to attend school. The classroom environment is powerful according to participants. P2 stated,

I have seen teachers happy when struggling students do not come to school, but it is a concern for me, and I want them at school. Success in my classroom is all my students are present and willing to learn.

***Change of Mindset.*** The fifth theme was a change of mindset for IQ 7. Teachers shared that it is vital to change the mindset of students when learning for them to feel motivated to learn and ultimately be successful in class. According to the participants, the teacher has the ability to influence and change the mindset of young minds. Five (33%) of the 15 participants felt that success in their classroom is when students change their mindset. P15 shared,

As a teacher, I change the mind of my students from I do not know how to solve the problem to I will try to solve the problem. This is diffidently a daily struggle, but as teachers, we have the power to change their mindset and put a positive spin on everything we do.

**Summary of RQ 3.** RQ 3 focused on defining, measuring, and tracking success in transitional kinder through second grade. Instructors had different measures of success from observations, confidence, data, feedback, participation, and students being happy. Instructors want students to have personal growth and academic growth. Their primary focus is on giving them the tools to show leadership and ask for help. Learning to read and write is essential, but teachers want them to come to school and be happy through the process of learning.

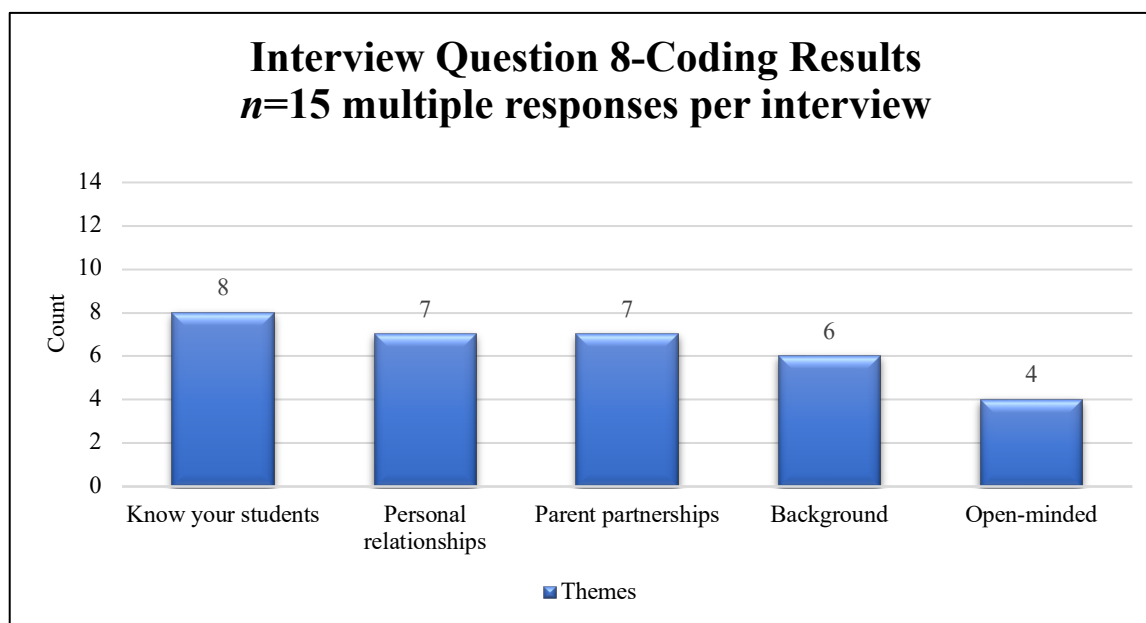
***Research Question 4***

The fourth research question centered on asking, what lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade? To answer this question, three interview questions were employed.

- IQ 8: In your opinion what else can teachers best support Latino students in the classroom to achieve academic and personal success?
- IQ 9: What mistakes have you made that you would warn other instructors to avoid when teaching Latino students?
- IQ 10: Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Interview Question 8.** IQ 8 asked participants to describe the support methods used when teaching Latino students. Participants had the opportunity to share the different strategies used to meet goals in Latino communities. The question is structured as in your opinion what else can teachers best support Latino students in the classroom to achieve academic and personal success? The five themes included: (a) know your students, (b) personal relationship, (c) parent partnership, (d) background, and (e) open-minded (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8***IQ 8 Coding Results*

***Know Your Students.*** Know your student is the first and most prominent theme that emerged in IQ 8. Eight (53%) of the 15 participants found that getting to know students is essential for students to achieve academic and personal success. According to participants instructors should check-in with students and parents to see and understand the family dynamic. Participants agree that it is vital for teachers to know their students to socially, emotionally, and academically guide students. P10 shared, “The first activity I do with my class in August is a tell me about yourself activity. I share about my family, so they get to know me as a teacher, but I also make it a point to sit with them at lunch and understand their personalities.”

***Personal Relationships.*** The second theme was personal relationship for IQ 8. Participants felt that building personal relationships was vital for students to have an environment of trust. As teachers, if they achieve personal relationships with each student, it would help them understand their emotional struggles that sometimes create barriers to learning. Seven (46%) of the 15 participants felt that teachers could support Latinos by building

relationships. P9 elaborated, “Building personal relationships with children helps to know what they like and from there build trust.”

***Parent Partnerships.*** The third theme for IQ 8 was parent partnership. Seven (47%) of the participants felt they could support students by creating a bridge between school and home life to make a strong partnership. Participants have tried different methods to build a relationship with parents and work as a collaborative team. According to participant the teacher has to make the effort in building that partnership. P2 shares, “As a parent of a young daughter, I know the importance of working with parents. I have learned that you have to be the first to reach out in the Latino community, but it has been a positive experience.”

***Background.*** The fourth theme for IQ 8 was background. Six (40%) of the 15 participants agreed that understanding a student’s background is essential to meeting goals. Instructors shared that it is vital to get to know the Latino culture and traditions to serve the families best. Participants understand that cultural differences can create barrier, but also understand that teachers can break barriers by acknowledge those differences. P14 explained, “Some students have parents who do not speak English but want to participate in school. As a Black teacher in a predominantly Latino community, I make it a point to ask my students to share about their traditions and family. I share my traditions and family as well. But I also read literature to get informed.”

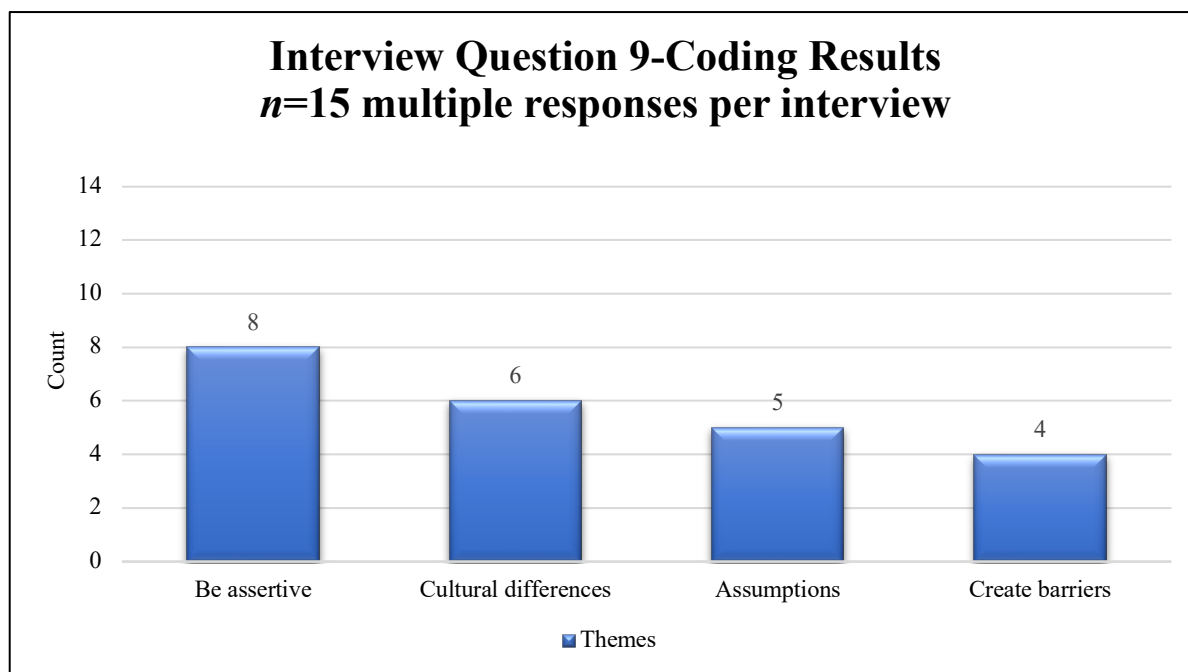
***Open-Minded.*** The final theme was open-minded for IQ 8. Instructors shared that they have to stay open-minded when teaching students because it will help students meet emotional and academic roles. According to instructors, if you keep open-minded, you will consider different learning methods and deal with behavior issues. Four (26%) of the participants felt that their classroom success was due to being open-minded. P3 noted, “As teachers, we need to be

open-minded when dealing with students because of the emotional and academic challenges they might be going through.”

**Interview Question 9.** IQ 9 focused on understanding the mistakes participants have made as instructors and the warnings they would give future teachers. The question asked, what mistakes have you made that you would warn other instructors to avoid when teaching Latino students? The four themes analyzed based on the data collected were: (a) be assertive, (b) cultural differences, (c) assumptions, and (d) create barriers (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9**

*IQ 9 Coding Results*



***Be Assertive.*** The first theme for IQ 9 was being assertive. Eight (53%) of the 15 participants agree that being assertive is important when teaching students. Instructors stated they wished someone would have shared the importance of being assertive before entering the classroom, mainly when dealing with parents and holding students accountable for not meeting classroom expectations. According to the participants, the more experience you have the more

assertive you become with decisions and teaching methodologies. P12 noted, “I questioned myself and sometimes belittled myself. I constantly have to change my mindset and stay assertive.”

**Cultural Differences.** Cultural differences are theme number two for interview question number nine. Participants feel that it is important to acknowledge cultural differences even in the Latino community. According to participants it is essential to integrate students culture into the classroom setting for the environment to feel open and welcoming to students differences. Six (40%) of the 15 participants agree that cultural differences are significant when teaching any ethnic group. P4 explained, “Being in a dual language school made me reflect on the cultural differences of my students. I did not think about it because 95% of my students are Latino, and I am Latina. I learned to be open to understanding families and different cultural aspects.”

**Create Barriers.** The first theme for IQ 9 is creating barriers. Four (27%) of the 15 participants felt the biggest mistake they made was not creating barriers. Instructors shared that being from similar backgrounds made it challenging to create barriers. Participants agreed that barriers need to be set by instructors, so parents understand they are professionals that seek the wellbeing of their children. According to participants creating barriers is not a negative but a positive to building a strong and respectful relationship. P1 shared, “ After my first year of teaching, I realized some barriers have to be kept regardless of similarities.” P5 noted, “Do not be afraid of creating barriers.”

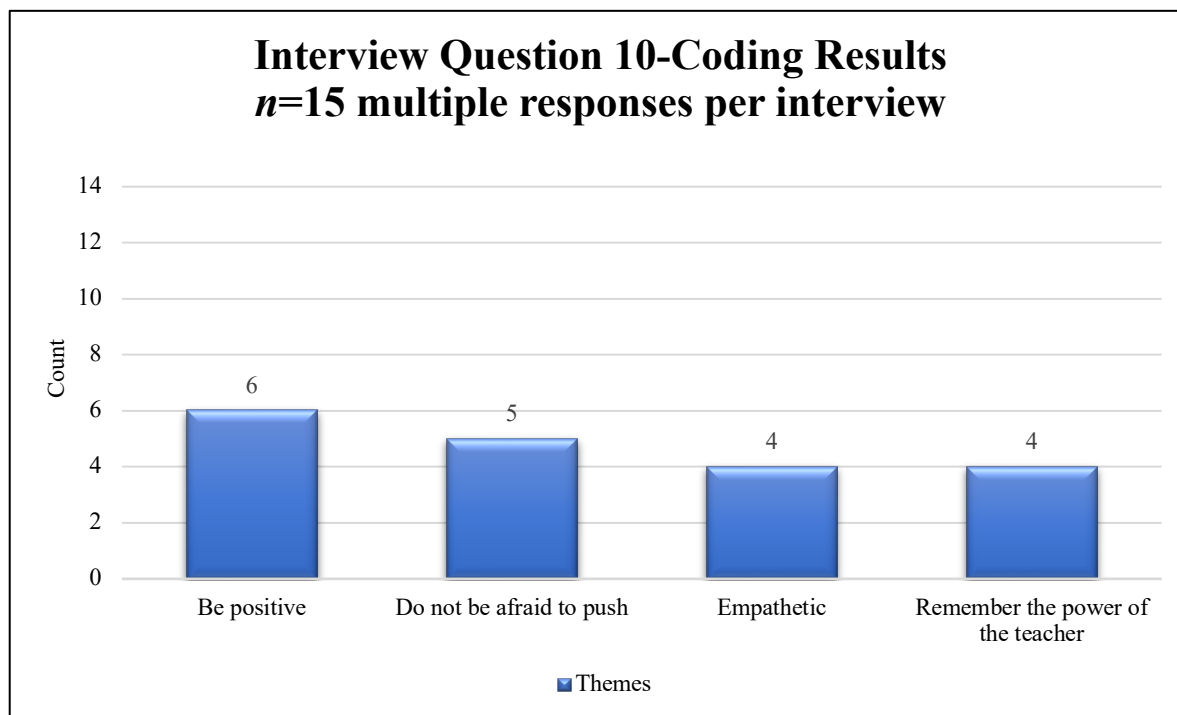
**Assumptions.** The fourth theme is assumptions in interview question number nine. Five (33%) of the participants feel it is important not to make assumptions about the community being served. Instructors admit that before taking their position they made assumptions of the community. The Latino participants also made assumption even though they are from Latino

backgrounds. According to participants it is difficult for instructors not to make assumption, but it is important to acknowledge you made those assumption and void bringing them into the classroom. P15 explained, “It is vital to understand not every Latino lacks academic foundations or comes from a family that does not speak English.” P8 stated, “Not every Latino student lacks performance abilities due to language barriers.”

**Interview Question 10.** The final interview question allows for participants to share additional information that would benefit the research and collection of data. It gives the participants the freedom to add any additional comments. The question is as follows is there anything else you would like to add? The four themes displayed were (a) be positive, (b) do not be afraid to push, (c) empathetic, and (d) remember the power of the teacher (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10**

*IQ 10 Coding Results*



***Be Positive.*** The first theme is being positive for research question number 10. Six (40%) of the participants felt it is vital to tell future teachers to stay positive because teaching has challenges and curveballs. According to participants it is difficult to stay positive when students struggle academically, emotionally, and socially. But part of staying positive according to participants is having outside support and leaving classroom problems at work. P1 explained, “It is vital to remember to be positive and a support system for the students.” P12 noted, “Stay positive and keep your purpose.”

***Do Not Be Afraid To Push.*** The second theme is not being afraid to push for IQ 10. Five (33%) participants wanted to remind teachers not to be afraid and push students to meet academic goals. Participant shared that they were sometimes afraid to push students because the parents would complain to the administration. But the participants agree that should not stop you from pushing students forward. P10 explained, “As Latino teachers, we should push a little more because we understand the challenges. My teacher pushed me to stay focused and have goals.”

***Empathetic.*** Empathy is the second theme for research question number 10. According to participants, it is essential to remember to be empathetic even though some challenges will make it difficult. Four (27%) of the 15 participants wanted to add the importance of being empathetic as instructors. Participants have seen instructors struggle when they lack empathy toward their students. According to participants instructors need to remember how they felt when learning and the takeaways they had from school. P15 shared, “My son is special needs, and part of the reason I am a teacher is due to him, but before getting diagnosed, I realized that not many teachers are empathetic. I use my experience and make sure I am empathetic with all my students.”

***Remember the Power of the Teacher.*** The final theme for IQ 5 is remembering the power of teaching. Four (27%) of the 15 participants wanted to add teachers' influence and the power teachers have to build students and academic foundations. According to participants instructors have a unique power to build students emotionally, socially, and academically that is different from parents. P7 shared, "As a Latina teacher, we need to remember we have the power to nurture our Latino children and give them the tools to succeed."

**Summary of RQ 4.** RQ 4 gave the participant the freedom to contribute additional content or thoughts to the study. Ten out of 15 participants decided to contribute additional comments. The participants focused on remembering to be positive, empathetic, push students, and the power of a teacher in a classroom. They wanted to add those critical themes because teachers can be hard on themselves and forget the influence they can have in a community. Participants understand the study is focused on Latino students, but they made it clear all students have challenges.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

This study aimed to understand classroom practices that incorporated Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade. Fifteen participants were gathered and asked 10 corresponding semi-structured interview questions, which answered the four research questions. The four research questions are:

- RQ1: What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ 2: What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?

- RQ 3: How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ 4: What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?

The participants who met the criteria were sought out through a web-based search, such as through LinkedIn, and Facebook. If they decided to participate in the research, the researcher communicated via email or a phone call. Both parties would set the date and time to meet in person. The researcher recorded the interview and transcribed the data collected. The data was coded to find keywords and phrases, which led to finding key themes to answer the research questions. To validate the coding procedure used by the researcher, two Pepperdine University doctoral students reviewed and suggested modifications as needed. Over the course of the interviews, 58 themes were found (see Table 3) that were used to answer the research questions for the study.

**Table 3**

*Summary of Themes for the Research Questions*

<b>RQ1: What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</b>	<b>RQ 2: What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</b>	<b>RQ 3: How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</b>	<b>RQ 4: What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</b>
Teaching strategies	Different student needs	Observations	Open-minded
Building relationships and confidence	Behavior	Happy	Barriers



<b>RQ1: What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</b>	<b>RQ 2: What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</b>	<b>RQ 3: How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</b>	<b>RQ 4: What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</b>
Encouraging students Trust	Parents Background	Independence Confidence	Assumptions Be assertive

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study examined how instructors teach SEL to Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade. It is instrumental in determining the ways Latino students learn and the pedagogical practices employed by educators. Latino students have different learning challenges due to language, environment, and social-economical (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Instructors utilize different learning methodologies to engage students to meet academic goals. Latino students lack academic foundations and emotional stability, making it challenging for teachers (Newcomer, 2018). Students need to be encouraged in the classroom to build confidence and healthy relationships with peers and teachers. This is not easy due to challenges and barriers inside and outside the classroom. Learning has several levels that must be nurtured and acknowledged in the classroom for students to be successful.

This research study examined instructors' role in building social and emotional foundations in the classroom. The study's overarching goal was to identify the practices teachers used to build social, emotional, and academic foundations for Latino students. The research gathered for this study can be used by school districts, administration, or instructors seeking to understand or implement SEL in student learning, and can also give insight into how instructors have to build students socially and emotionally before any learning and mastery occurs. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature on practices teachers use to engage and meet academic goals. Chapter 5 summarized the study and reiterated the purpose of the study. The results collected was discussed, recommendations for future research and a conclusion was drawn from the study.

## Summary of the Study

The integration of SEL (SEL) in the classroom is beneficial for students to meet academic success and have positive life outcomes (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Latino students need support systems that will help in meeting academic, social, and emotional foundations (CASEL, 2003). Latino students have different challenges such as, language barriers, cultural differences, social inequalities, and environmental challenges (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009). Those challenges affect their social and emotional wellbeing, which contributes to the lack of academic foundation (Blair & Diamond, 2008). Instructors have to be creative and have meaningful lesson when teaching Latino students (Harris et al., 2008). Reinforcing the material is essential for students to master the skill and meet grade level goals (Belanger, 2011). Students need to feel part of the learning process by being allowed to explore and examine different beliefs and viewpoints (Harris et al., 2008). The primary grades are the foundational years where students obtain skill that are nurtured throughout their academic journey (Curran & Kellogg, 2016). Instructors have integrated SEL skills for behavior balance, emotional tools, and critical thinking methods (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Individual and group needs are nurture by instructors, which has led to the implementation of SEL in the classroom with no formal for instructors (Tillery et al., 2010). The integration of SEL has positive benefits in meeting academic goals, mental health, reducing behavior problems, and instructional practices (Durlak et al., 2011).

Participants for the study were instructors in transitional kinder, kinder, first, or second grade. They were recruited by utilizing a Google search, LinkedIn, and Facebook. The criteria for the search were two years of experience serving predominant Latino communities, academic preparation, and in grades TK through second grade. Fifteen participants were identified and

participated in the study. Participants had to be available for a face-to-face interview to be part of the study. The researcher made themselves available at the convenience of the participant. Lastly, instructors were selected from public, charter, private, and religious organizations in California for maximum variation.

The collection of data for this study was through semi-structured interviews. Fifteen candidates participated in the study who answered the 10 overarching interview questions. The participants shared their methodologies for Latino success in their classrooms. The questions were validated by two Pepperdine University, doctoral students and reviewed by an expert panel. Prior to the interview participant received informed consent form and interview questions. All interviews were recorded on the iPhone recording application and transcribed by the researcher. Transcripts were done on the researcher's computer using a Word document. The transcripts were reviewed and analyzed before being coded. The researcher coded the transcripts for keywords or phrases on an Excel spreadsheet. The first three coding's were reviewed by two Pepperdine University, doctoral students who gave recommendations or modifications for the study. After the coding has been reviewed, the research can continue and follow the same process for validation. Themes were identified through the coding process. After themes were identified, the findings were summarized in bar graphs and data.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This section will further elaborate on the themes derived from corresponding interview questions. The study sought to decode instructors' learning methodologies that have SEL components. Four research questions were utilized to meet the objective of this study:

- RQ1: What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?

- RQ2: What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ3: How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?
- RQ4: What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?

Each research question was reviewed thoroughly from the data drawn in this section. The findings were compared between the data collected and the existing literature review found in Chapter 2. The findings of this study identified methodologies instructors used to support the social, emotional, and academic well-being of each individual student.

### ***Results for RQ 1***

RQ 1 asked, What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade? The first research questions sought to understand teachers' strategies and best practices to teach Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade. The question opened up the conversation for instructors to share about themselves. This question allowed participants to share their personal and professional backgrounds. Participants focused on their foundational years and what has lead for the passion to teach. Instructors love teaching because of their educational experience, personal and professional experience, passion for teaching, and family support. Their backgrounds lead participants to teach and integrate different methodologies to meet academic goals.

The second interview question had participants reflect on a class or classes they taught to a Latino student group that has worked remarkably well. Participants can share a lesson or activity they taught that is memorable in reaching Latino students. The question found that

adapted learning, change, structure, technology integration, fun, and mirror learning stand out for participants. The third interview question under RQ 1 focused on the participants' teaching strategies. This question allows participants to share their methodologies when teaching Latino students. The question discovered seven strategies that stand out visual, modeling, building relationships, student center/group base learning, routine/procedures for learning, coping strategies, and personalize lessons. The final interview question for RQ 1 centers on teachers' methods to encourage their students to learn. The question allows for SEL tenets to be brought up. This question found that students are encouraged by the ability to express/use their voice and build confidence, trust, affirmation, awards/acknowledgments, and praise.

**Discussion RQ 1.** RQ 1 aims to discover the strategies and methodologies that worked best when teaching Latino students. Instructors revealed memorable class or classes that worked exceptionally well. Participants disclosed the approach utilized to encourage students to meet learning goals. It is evident that the teacher's role is beyond the academic foundations but depends on building students' social and emotional competency. Latino students have different challenges that affect their learning compared to other counterparts (Hart & Nash, 2020). The key concepts that emerged for RQ 1 explained the different formats instructors use when teaching Latino students. Latino students need different methodologies that support social, emotional, and academic challenges. The four main strategies and methodologies discussed:

- teaching strategies,
- building relationships and confidence.
- encouraging students, and
- trust

*Teaching Strategies.* The first method was to have teaching strategies as instructors. Latino students struggle to meet academic goals, and instructors agreed there had to be different practices to move them academically forward. The participants concurred that not all students learn the same way, and there had to be a willingness to adapt methodologies, strategies, or content. Strategies and practices instructors utilized were adapted learning, change, visual, personalized lessons, mirror learning, modeling, and student centers or groups. Adapted learning is a method that personalized learning for individual students or group of students (Horton et al., 2015). It is customized learning to engage students and meet their needs. Of course, participants agreed that change is a best practice because they are open to finding different ways of presenting the material and helping students understand the concept. Making changes to the curriculum is difficult but necessary when teaching students. Visuals are essential in the foundational years because students learn vocabulary and listen to stories. A picture helps them to understand what is being expressed. Instructors shared that everything they present needs an image to guide students to understand the concept.

A personalizing lesson is another method to get Latino students to meet standards. Instructors prepare lessons specific to the needs of the class or individual students. There are times teachers do not teach to grade-level standards due to students being behind; this is where personalized lessons are done by instructors. Mirror learning is a reoccurring theme. Much of the instruction in transitional kinder through second grade is mirror learning. Instructors show students how to collaborate, sit, show respect, work in groups, sentence structure, or paragraph building. Modeling is another method used when teaching, where instructors guide students to understand a concept by replicating the steps. Another strategy is student center learning or group collaboration as a best practice to meet Latino students' needs. According to teachers,

students learn from one another than direct instruction. Working in groups helps teachers travel to individual groups and check for understanding. The different methods presented above help Latino students understand the material taught and move academically forward.

***Building Relationships and Confidence.*** Building relationships and confidence is another essential aspect teachers use in the classroom. If the instructors show that they care and build a relationship, it builds confidence in the students to move academically forward and meet goals (Newcomer, 2018). Instructors guide students on how to build healthy relationships by making rules and guidelines in the classroom. Students learn from one another, and instructors want them to collaborate in a positive matter. Instructors also encourage students to ask a friend when they do not understand a concept. After asking a classmate, students tend to understand the concept and work individually. Students are nurtured to build relationships in the classroom by instructors having activities, modeling relationships, or mirroring best practices to make friends. Building on students' confidence is another method instructors use to motivate them to learn. Latino students tend to lack confidence (Bailey et al., 2019). Teachers build students' confidence by encouraging them with positive words or actions. Such as you can do it, try again, and do not give up. The intention is to get them to believe in themselves. If Latino students are confident, they will work independently, with groups, and ask for help when they do not understand the concept.

***Encouraging Students.*** Encouraging students through affirmation, awards/acknowledgments, and praise is some of the best practices teachers shared. Affirmation is a method instructors believe helps students to want to learn. Latino students sometimes lack positive affirmation at home due to different cultural traditions (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). Instructors shared that just smiling or shaking their heads gives students positive affirmation that



their meeting expectations. Writing on assignments reassures students and motivates them to learn. Awards or acknowledgment encourage students to want to learn. Instructors give certificates, stickers, points, or a gift from the treasure box to motivate students to meet goals. Students like to get recognized for hard work and dedication. Instructors want students to be self-motivated but recognize that different individual challenges make it difficult, and it is left to the teacher. Constant praise gives students the motivation to learn. According to instructors, praise has to be constant and intentional. Praising students is a method that encourages and builds confidence for all students in the class.

***Trust.*** The last strategy or method for instructors is building trust. Students will learn if they trust their teacher has their best interest. Instructors have to build trust with students to get them to engage in learning and meet standards. According to instructors, building trust should be the priority before teaching content is presented. Instructors can build trust through classroom activities and group collaboration. Instructors agree that trust is a process and cannot be gained with one activity or discussion. Once the students trust their instructor, they are open to learning, building relationships, and taking corrections.

The data collected for RQ 1 demonstrates that learning has different layers. Learning does not necessary mean academic skills, but rather social and emotional components that contribute to the learning process. The instructors are key players in analyzing and understanding individuals and individual groups in their classrooms. Instructors have the power to modify and implement strategies that best benefit their students. The data collected for RQ 1 discussed the key elements instructors found essential when reflecting on strategies and best practices. The data found teaching strategies, building relationships, building confidence, encouraging students, and trust as key elements for instructors to meet academic goals. Those key elements were

thoroughly discussed above, but what it means is that learning is not just academic skills but rather building the individual social and emotional competency. Through building the individual, the academic skills was nurtured and grow over time. Teaching to learn has changed, and the data collected from the participants demonstrate that the strategies and practices go beyond learning.

### ***Results for RQ 2***

RQ 2 asked, What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade? The participants for RQ 2 shared the challenges teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade. IQ 1 asked participants to share challenges or barriers that prevent every class from being exceptional. They discussed the challenges or barriers that prevent students from meeting social, emotional, and academic goals. Latino students are academically behind, which is challenging for instructors to find different strategies or practices to get them engaged and motivated. Nevertheless, instructors are finding different methodologies and strategies to support them for personal and academic growth. Instructors personalize lessons, group activities, and individualize help. It is essential according to participant to build their confidence, independence, accountability, and ability to balance emotions.

RQ 2 stemmed from the first question. Instructors were asked if these challenges or barriers are unique to Latino students, but they believed it is not unique to Latino students. The participants shared that all students have challenges or barriers when learning, and it does not have to do with ethnicity but rather individual's background, such as, the lack of parent involvement, lack of emotional support, or learning disability not identified. Instructors also

shared their answer to the second half of the question might be bias because they have not taught in diverse communities. Their perspective is based on teaching Latino communities.

**Discussion of RQ 2.** RQ 2 aims to understand the challenges and barriers teachers face in the classroom when teaching. Research shows Latino students have several challenges, such as language barriers, environmental, family, economic, and emotional (Jones et al., 2011). These challenges are brought into the classroom, and instructors have to learn to adapt and guide students socially, emotionally, and academically. Instructors shared that creativity is essential when students have challenges understanding concepts, content, and mastering material. According to instructors, it is not an easy task, but it is gratifying when students meet academic goals, and you are part of the process. The researcher found four key challenges and barriers to discuss further. The four challenges and barriers are:

- different student needs,
- behavior,
- parents, and
- background

***Different Student Needs.*** The participants for the study identified different students' needs as a challenge instructor's encounter. Students have different needs and capabilities, which make a teacher's job difficult. In order to meet students, needs, instructors have to know the student's personalities and backgrounds. Instructors have to build a relationship of trust and respect where the students know the teacher is there to teach and guide them. Students' needs can also be identified through data collection from formative, summative, and standardized assessments. The data can guide instruction and identify academic gaps students have. Instructors stated that to meet students' needs, it is vital to prepare lesson plans and have clear

objectives for the day. It is also essential to modify techniques on the spot if the student or students do not understand the material. Integrating social and emotional skills can support instructors in meeting academic goals (Zins et al., 2007). It is evident from the analysis of responses that instructors do understand the importance of identifying and teaching to students' needs. Instructors are integrating SEL skills in the classroom and understand students need to be part of the process for it to be successful (Durlak et al., 2011). Instructors wear many instructional hats, but the instructors interviewed understand that is part of their professional responsibilities.

***Behavior.*** Behavior is an obstacle for instructors and students to meet academic goals. Instructors face additional challenges when students have behavior problems. When instructors have to work with academic and behavioral challenges, the priority is dealing with behavior in order to teach. It is apparent that participants in this study have dealt with behavior issues and have found strategies to continue to meet academic, social, and emotional growth. Social and emotional skills in the classroom help reduce behavior problems because it gives students the tools to problem solve (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). If students know how to handle their emotions the instructor does not have to stop the lesson to handle the problem.

***Parent.*** The third challenge teachers face when teaching Latino students is parents. The term parent focused on parent participation, understanding their position as teachers, and lack of support. Instructors shared that there is very little support from parents, even though they send invitations for classroom activities or make themselves available for meetings. They also feel parents do not understand their position as instructors in holding students accountable. Instructors want to work with parents as a collaborative team, but parents need to hold their children accountable and support the teacher. It is evident that instructors have to find strategies

to get the parents to participate and continue integrating different methods for students to learn. Instructors understand the challenges of Latino parents and the reason they do not participate such as educational inequality, lack of education, language, and cultural differences (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009). The teacher and parent have the best interest of the student, but it is essential for both parties to collaborate.

**Background.** The final challenge and barrier discussed is understanding students cultural background and academic background. It is essential for instructors to understand the background of individual students. Duchesneau (2020) state, it is vital that instructors and schools stop having the one size fits all mentality when understanding different cultures or ethnicities. Participants shared that teachers need to know the students' background because it will help them gain perspective on their history, traditions, and where they come from. Instructors need to acknowledge the cultural and community differences in order to provide a quality education and built genuine relationships (Monzó & Rueda, 2001). Latino students have different backgrounds and cultures; no Latino has the same journey. If instructors connect with students' cultural backgrounds it motivates students to learn and meet academic milestones (Duchesneau, 2020). Students need to feel welcome and part of the environment, and the best place to start is to understand where they come from and where they are heading.

Instructors face challenges and barriers when teaching students in transitional kinder through second grade. Those challenges multiply when teaching Latino students because they academically struggle to meet foundational skills and social and emotional competency lacks. It is also environmental, and inequality challenges that instructors face. The data reflects that instructors must be creative in overcoming those challenges and barriers when teaching. Instructors must identify the needs and make accommodations to build students in all aspects.

According to the data, those challenges are different student needs, behavior problems, parent involvement, and understanding student's background. This might require modifications in curriculum, instruction, classroom structure, accountability, and other methods used to meet academic, social, and emotional competency. It also requires instructors to understand the challenges of the community they serve and have the wiliness to exceed their expectations.

### ***Results for RQ 3***

How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade? RQ 3 sought to examine how teachers define, measure, and track success in transitional kindergarten through second grade. Participants explained the different methods they utilize to measure the success of Latino students in their class. Instructors shared that success looks different for every student, and instructors should avoid comparisons. Success for students does not necessarily mean they have met grade-level goals, but rather they are growing academically, socially, or emotionally. Growth is occurring, and that is success for teachers. Success when teaching students is a gradual process and not an immediate process.

**Discussion of RQ3.** Participants define and measure success based on the students' performance, emotional stability, and happiness in the class. Instructors analyze data from formative, summative, and standardized tests as a form of success. However, it is not the only method of defining success in the class. Instructors focus on students' well-being, socialization skills, and behavior as a measure of success. According to participants, students trying to understand the concept and independently working is a success. The four methods instructors use to track and measure success are:

- observations,
- happy,
- independence, and
- confidence

**Observation.** Student observation is a method participants measure students' success. Students' success is measured by noticing students' demeanor, gestures, collaboration, and class participation. Participants shared that when students understand the concept, they raise their hands and seek to help other peers. Students' work is a great way to see progress and view growth. Observing class relationships can give insight into students' openness to learn and collaborate skills. Instructors can assess students through observation to see if they understand the content. According to transitional kinder and kinder instructors, much of their measures are done through observation. Through observations, instructors know if they can push forward or slow down.

**Happy.** A measurement for success according to the participants is the happiness they can provide the students. According to instructors, if students are happy, they want to learn and come to school. As teachers, they make every effort to have happy students who enjoy the learning process. Participants understand that having all students happy about learning is not an easy task, but having fun and interactive activities allows students to enjoy learning. Instructors value the happiness of their students as much as meeting academic goals. Students that are happy will have social and emotional balance and growth.

**Independence.** The third measuring of success in the classroom is independence. Teachers seek for every student to understand the concept and work independently, but that does not necessarily happen in transitional kinder through kinder. Students tend to work

independently in first and second grades if they understand the task and material. Participants shared that as teachers, they know a student has grown academically when they work independently and do not seek their help. According to instructors, a student who works independently is the best measure of success because they do their work on their own without help.

**Confidence.** The last is confidence as a way of measuring and tracking success in the classroom. Participants shared that confidence is something they work on from the beginning of the school year to the end of the school year. In the primary grades, students learn to be confident in a classroom, and teachers have to build their confidence. Teachers have different activities such as games, storytelling, and dance contest to build on student's confidence. Instructors have to constantly verbally acknowledge students to build confidence and motivation. According to instructors, when they see students asking for help or helping other students, they are confident in the content learned. Building confidence in transitional kinder through second grade is essential for instructors to do.

RQ 3 found that instructors measure success beyond students meeting academic skills. Instructors continue to measure and track success through standardized testing, formative, and summative assessments. The researcher found that participants measure success through observations, happiness, independence, and confidence. The data reveals that instructors believe that success in the classroom needs to be redefined so student achievement can be measured through other methods that can build social and emotional skills. Instructors feel that students' happiness is essential for them when analyzing and measuring their success and the success of their students. If students are happy, they feel accomplished as instructors.



### ***Results for RQ 4***

What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade? The final research question gave recommendations on lessons teachers have learned from teaching Latino students. The question was divided in two halves. The first question asked what else can teachers do to support students to achieve academic and personal success. Participants shared that the best way to support students is to nurture them and build their confidence. Students want to feel respected and wanted. Instructors will have to go beyond their job description to support students academically, emotionally, and socially. The second question allows the instructors to share mistakes and warn future instructors to avoid them. According to instructors, they have made several mistakes, but those mistakes have made them better teachers. It is essential to reflect on our mistakes and push forward with every student.

**Discussion of RQ4.** RQ 4 focuses on lessons teachers have learned and want to share with future instructors. The final questions allow instructors to share how they achieved success and warn future instructors to avoid it. Four key concepts were identified that instructors would share with future instructors. Those concepts are:

- open-minded,
- barriers,
- assumptions, and
- be assertive

***Open-Minded.*** The first lesson instructors would give to future teachers is to keep an open-mind when supporting students to achieve academic success. Teaching has its challenges, but to have success, instructors have to be open-minded and not closed to changes or

modifications in instruction. According to participants, if teachers are unwilling to consider different ideas, they was stressed and have difficulty understanding why students are not meeting goals. Considering different ideas and opinions helps support students socially, emotionally, and academically. Participants shared that being open-minded with parents is essential to working as a collaborative team. Dealing with parents is not easy, but the goal is to have them as a support system through the learning process.

**Barriers.** Creating barriers between students and parents is essential according to participants. Parents need to respect the role of the instructor, but the instructor needs to set the tone of respect. According to participants, do not see parents as friends because it gets tricky when a problem emerges. Keep it professional at all times. Build the trust with students but maintain your role as the class leader. Participants emphasize avoid opening the friendship door with students because it was a hard door to close. In particular, in the foundational years where students are learning barriers and the concept of friendship.

**Assumptions.** Assumption is the third lesson instructors want to share with the next generation of teachers. Instructors need to avoid making assumptions about a student or group of students. In particular, in communities that are not diverse, avoid making presumptions and learn about the community and the students being served. Latinos are diverse, and instructors need to know that before approaching a Latino family and making assumptions. Not all Latino people have the same traditions or background, which is vital for an instructor to identify. Participants want to warn teachers to avoid making assumptions on student's skills or abilities before properly assessing or seeking professional advice from colleagues. This avoids miss labeling and future problems with parents.

*Assertive.* The last warning or lesson participants want to share is to be assertive in the role of teaching. The teacher is the leader and the ultimate deciding factor in how to run their classroom. Avoid second-guessing yourself in front of the students or parents. Stick to your decision regardless of the outcome. Administrator will support your decision if it is logical and fair. Participants shared do not be afraid to push their students, correct them, or hold them accountable. According to instructors, students and parents respect assertive teachers that have high expectations.

The lessons instructors want to share with future generations are to exceed the expectations and enjoy the process of teaching. Participants shared that it is hard to prepare for teaching because not all learning environments are the same. Each learning environment has a uniqueness that can be a learning process for an instructor. Participants shared that staying open-minded, creating barriers, not making assumptions, and staying assertive is essential. The results for RQ 4 dealt with the instructor's personal habits and not the methodologies to meet academic goals. It also does not give lessons on integrating social and emotional components in the classroom. Participants shared that it is crucial to enjoy teaching because it has challenges and rewards.

### **Implication of the Study**

The study sought to examine how teachers promote SEL for Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade. The study implies that teachers have different methods to nurture their students to meet academic goals through social and emotional foundations. Those social and emotional foundations build on students' abilities to progress academically and grow. For students to produce academic growth, instructors need to foster and build student emotions through praise, acknowledgments/rewards, motivation, and affirmations. According to Ashdown

and Bernard (2012), instructors that motivate students have a more significant impact than skills learned or relationships build. While building students' confidence and emotional stability, instructors have to teach academic skills through modeling, visual learning, differentiated instruction, and group collaboration. It is essential to understand that a teacher's role goes beyond the job description. Instructors integrating social and emotional components can have immediate and long-term effects on a student's personal and professional life (Gubi & Bocanegra, 2015). This study's findings aim to support administrators, teachers, students, parents, and societal needs through professional development training focused on integrating SEL and instruction methodologies.

Administrators can benefit from this study because it gives perspective on teachers' strategies and best practices to push students forward. They were able to provide professional development to other administrators or instructors that serve predominantly Latino communities or any communities that face challenges in meeting academic goals. Instructors need to integrate different techniques in the classroom that can support students academically, emotionally, and socially. The administrator can support instructors' needs through professional development and nurture students' growth. Professional development helps integrate different methodologies or strategies that can change school-wide behaviors. Skiba (2011), states that instructors want to find methods to support and address the challenges that impact minorities from academic achievement. Administrators can support instructors by providing them the tools that can push students to meet goals.

Instructors will gain knowledge and understanding of how to approach Latino students who are struggling socially, emotionally, and academically. The professional development will give them insight into how students respond to being emotionally and socially supported.

Integrating SEL skills into the primary grades by the instructor can be impactful because students grab material and learn to apply it (Zins et al., 2007). Instructors can use the methodologies and strategies provided by the training and apply them to any primary grades.

Students and parents benefit from professional development because they will receive a quality education. The education will focus on supporting Latino students or students that need a support system to move academically forward. Administrators and instructors were prepared to teach Latino students that have challenges meeting academic goals. Social-Emotional Pillars was integrated and aligned to their learning methodologies, strategies, and curriculum. Instructors will communicate to parents the support systems used to motivate and engage students to learn.

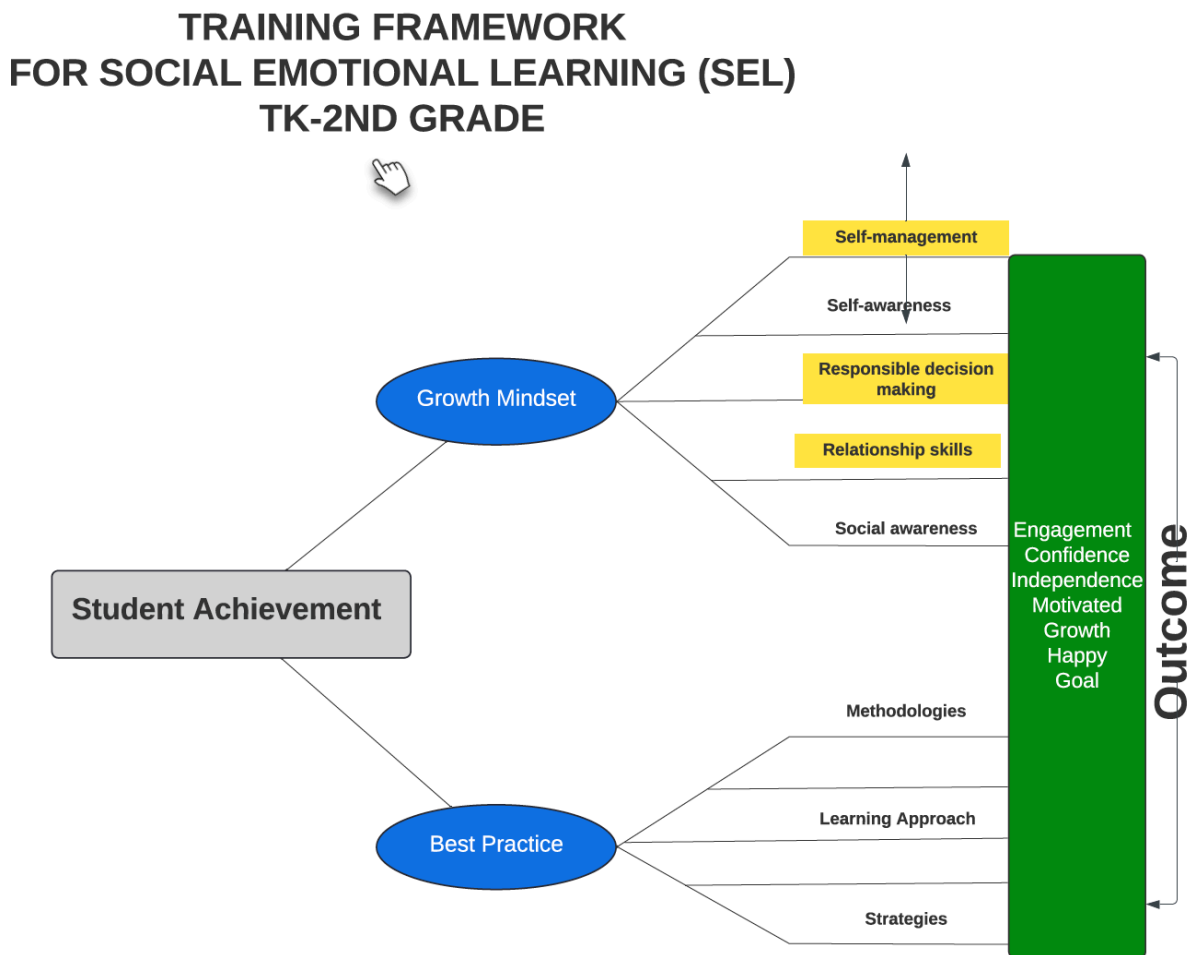
The last implication is that it benefits society to have students meeting academic goals and pursuing higher education. In particular, Latinos have academic challenges and obstacles graduating from high school and moving on to higher education. Society was able to understand the benefits of integrating social and emotional components into a classroom setting. Integrating SEL will gain support for instructors and schools districts to incorporate school instructional methodologies and strategies.

### **Application**

A training model was developed to further benefit administrators, teachers, students, parents, and society and teach SEL to Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

*Training Framework for SEL From TK-2<sup>nd</sup> Grade*



The training framework was developed to improve educational practices when teaching Latino students. It was also developed to support all the shareholders in a school setting, such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents. The final purpose is to support society and increase academic achievement. The framework will provide information, strategies, and methodologies to instructors or school professionals when teaching Latino students. SEL skills was critical components to meeting academic goals. The framework will have three instructional methods and three social and emotional components that were integral themes for the study. The

three instructional methods are methodologies, learning approaches, and strategies. The three SEL skills are self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Current literature finds that instructional methods and SEL skills can work hand in hand and have positive learning outcomes for students with learning challenges. The researcher's goal is to educate Latino students and give them equal opportunities to meet academic skills and pursue higher education.

The framework was presented in a two-day training for eight hours a day. The training was open to superintendents, administrators, teachers, parents, trainers, or coaches. In order to engage participants, the training had digital components, collaboration, and question and answer time. The first day of the training focused on instructional methods, and the last day will discuss SEL skills. Participants was given tools to integrate into their schools or classrooms.

The first day of professional development focuses on methodologies, learning approaches, and strategies the researcher describes as three instructional methods day. The first instructional methods discussed was methodologies. The methodology is the process or approach instructors use when teaching. The speaker will discuss the importance of procedures and processes for presenting content. It is vital to give daily tasks and allow students to apply what they have learned. The study was used as a reference to how instructors found procedures, routines, and structures valuable instructional methods. The second method presented is learning approaches. The focus was on instructors' different learning approaches when teaching, such as students centered, personalized learning, customized learning, and adjusted learning. The participants in the study referred to mirror learning and adapted learning as learning approaches students respond to. The responses from the study was shared in the presentation. The final instructional method presented in the training is strategies. The presenter will share strategies

that engage students, such as group collaboration, peer collaboration, learning activities that are fun, and allowing the students to discover a concept.

The second day of the training focuses on SEL skills. The presenter will give an overview of the SEL pillars and focus on three SEL skills. The three SEL skills are self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The first SEL skill presented is self-management. Self-management focuses on regulating emotions and behaviors. However, it also emphasizes motivation, confidence, and building self-esteem. According to Jones & Doolittle (2017), this social and emotional skill sets goals and works toward the goal. The presenter will use examples from the study of instructors using mantras to motivate their students and build on their confidence. Strategies to build self-esteem was introduced, such as different types of praises. Those praises can be in the format of a sticker, points, written or spoken words, or a cheerful look or hand gesture. The second topic is relationships skill, which looks at methods to foster healthy relationships with individuals or groups. The skill teaches students to listen, cooperate, communicate, and negotiate in friendships (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). The presenter will share different activities that build relationships and trust between peers and teachers.

Noddings (2017) stated, instructors are essential in building healthy relationships in the classroom. The presenter will also discuss building relationships to have group collaboration or centers to learn. Students learn from their peers, but instructors have to guide students in building relationships. The final topic for day two is responsible decision-making. The presenter will discuss the skill of responsible decision-making based on social and ethical norms (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). Students make several decisions in the day, but it is vital to understand and examine situations before making decisions that can have consequences (Bowers et al., 2017). Participants will listen and collaborate with the presenter on different ways students are guided to



make responsible decisions, such as giving students a different perspective and having them think of a solution. Instructors can allow students to make decisions on classroom activities or responsibilities. Instructors in the study allow for students to have a voice and make decisions because it will build confidence and get them to engage with the material being taught. As students are building confidence their learning to be self-aware, which is a SEL skill. According to Bowers et al. (2017) being self-aware helps to conceptualize experiences and be self-reflective on behaviors and emotions. Instructors can use the SEL skills as a foundation or integration to their methodologies, strategies, or classroom structure.

To conclude the training, participants can ask questions or seek clarification on the content introduced. The participant will receive a sheet with the content covered in the last two days. The presenter will share their personal information to communicate with the participants. The training will end with open discussion, and participants will feel empowered to integrate the tools learned into any grade level or school culture..

### **Study Conclusion**

The study sought to improve student learning for Latino students through the integration of SEL skills. It attempted to find different strategies and practices to teach Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade. Participants had to teach predominate Latino communities, which is not difficult in Los Angeles County. Latino students were selected because they lack academic foundations due to different circumstances. Transitional Kinder through second grade was the main focus because those are the foundational years for students. Fifteen participants shared their experiences teaching Latino students to understand the issue better. Participants had to answer 10 open-ended questions, which the researcher recorded, transcribed, and coded.

The participants' interviews indicate that instructors use several methods for students to understand and master content. Instructors use instructional methods and social-emotional components. According to the study, students need to get nurtured through affirmation, praise, and motivation to build their self-esteem. The instructors have to create an environment of trust and happiness and allow students to express themselves/and use their voices. Different strategies should be used when teaching students, such as group collaboration, peer learning, mirror learning, modeling, or personalizing lessons to meet objectives. The training focused on providing these methods to nature and meeting goals with Latino students. The training will help new teachers, current teachers, schools, or administrators looking to improve student learning and integrate SEL skills.

### **Recommendation of Future Research**

The study was intended to improve student learning for Latino students while integrating SEL skills. Instructional practices were analyzed for social and emotional support. It sought to understand how students learn and meet academic goals. Several works of literature focused on Latinos lacking skills and the challenges that make it challenging to meet learning goals. However, very little literature is available on integrating SEL skills to nurture the skills they already have to meet academic goals. Future researchers can contribute to the existing body of literature by conducting studies that explore:

1. A future study that examines college students with Latino backgrounds who had instructors that integrated social and emotional components.
2. A future study that looks at Latino students prospective of SEL skills.

## **Final Thoughts**

This study was intended to find different strategies that can be integrated to support Latino students. The social and emotional component was an interest the researcher had when looking at how students learn. The final focus for the researcher was to examine how teachers promoted SEL to Latino students in transitional kinder through second grade. The data collected showed that instructors felt success was more social and emotional growth, rather than learning to read or write. Learning to read and write is essential to instructors, but students need to trust, feel safe, and motivated to meet goals. Participants define success as students feeling happy and positive to learn. Happiness is an integral part according to participants when measuring success in the classroom. Students that are happy want to come to school and feel like they belong in the school community. If a student or students are not happy participants make modifications or adjustment to get them to be happy in the classroom. Instructors understand that happy student learn, respond to correction, and are engaged in the classroom.

The researcher has 10 years of experience teaching and seven years as an administrator. The researcher understands the challenges Latino students face in academia and the long-term influence an instructor can have on a student life. The seventeen years of experience the researcher has in education helps to understand the participant's measure of success being the happiness of students. The researcher agrees that happy students want to come to school and are motivated to learn. Instructors need to consider the social and emotional wellbeing of students and not assume they have those foundations prior to attending school. The data collected from the participants showed that instructors nurture and help develop the student's social and emotional wellbeing. As a Latina educator, the researcher wanted to find methods to support Latino students and this dissertation was a means to achieve that end.

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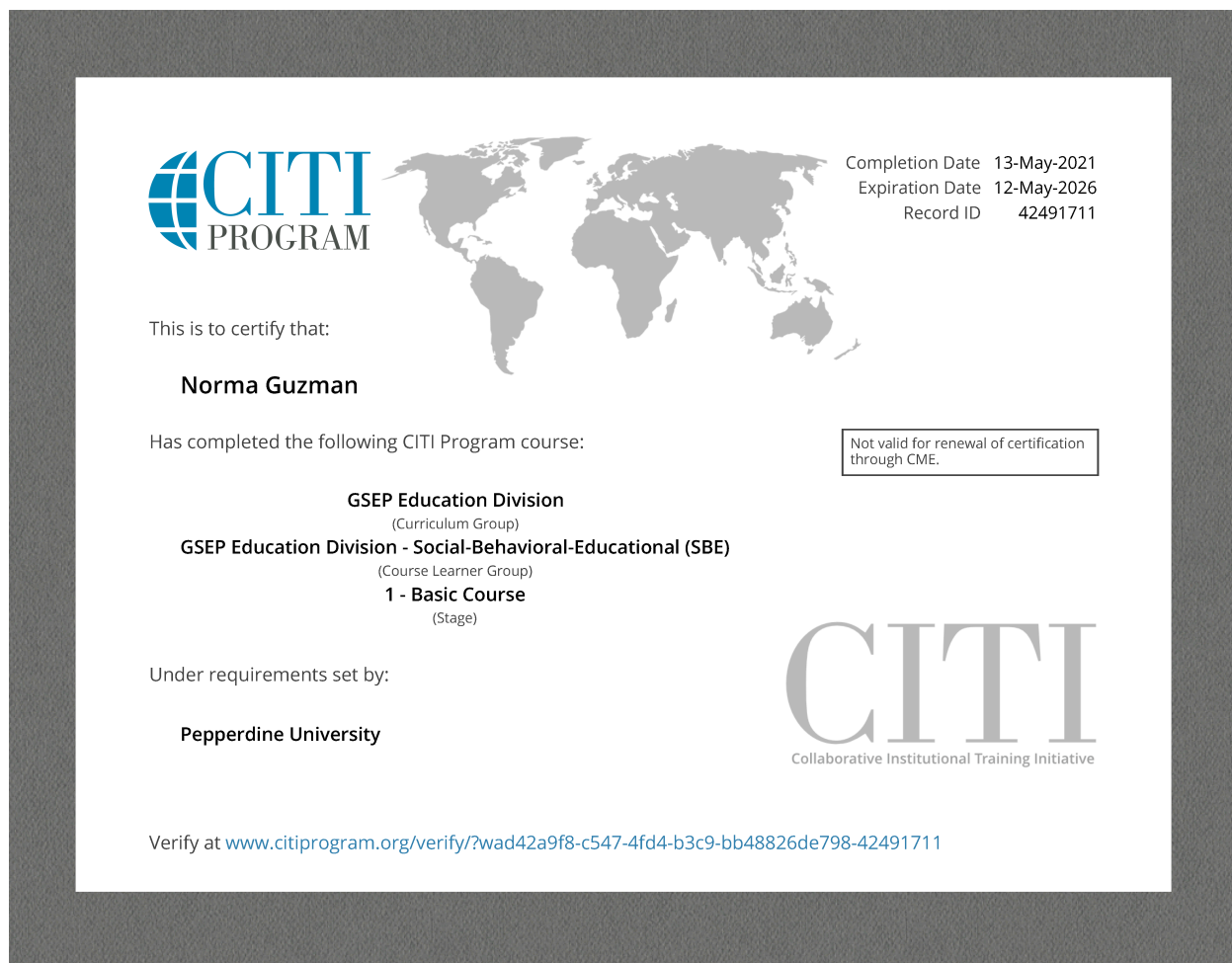
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## APPENDIX A

## CITI HSR Certificate

**Figure A1***CITI HSR Certificate*

## APPENDIX B

### IRB Approval Letter

Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

#### NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: March 22, 2022

Protocol Investigator Name: Norma Guzman

Protocol #: 21-10-1696

Project Title: Social Emotional Learning for Latino Students

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Norma Guzman:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research

## APPENDIX C

## Recruitment Script

Dear [Name],

My name is Norma Guzman, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a qualitative research study examining how teachers promote social-emotional learning (SEL) to Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade. You are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in a face to face interview to discuss your teaching strategies and methodologies. The interview is anticipated to take no more than an hour. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. Confidentiality will be maintained using a series of security measures, including password protected email communication using university firewall protections, deidentification of data using pseudonyms as well as compartmentalization of the various data elements, keeping all information separate. If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me via email.

Thank you for your participation,

Norma Guzman

Pepperdine University| Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Doctoral Candidate

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## APPENDIX D

## Informed Consent Form

## BEHAVIORAL ADULT PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

**IRB #: 21-10-1696**

**Formal Study Title: Social Emotional Learning for Latino Students**

**Authorized Study Personnel: Dr. Gabriela Miramontes**

Principal Investigator: Norma Guzman

**Key Information:**

**If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:**

- (Males and Females) between the ages of (18-80)
- Procedures will include (Contacting participants using the recruitment script, informed consent, data collection via structured interview, transcription of data, analysis of data, documentation of findings)
- One in-person visit is required
- This visit will take 60 minutes total
- There is minimal risk associated with this study
- You will not be paid any amount of money for your participation
- You was provided a copy of this consent form

**Invitation**

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

**Why are you being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a leader in the education industry. You must be 25 years of age or older to participate.

**What is the reason for doing this research study?**

The purpose of the study is to examine how teachers promote social-emotional learning (SEL) to Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade. The teacher's methodologies for integrating SEL skills was analyzed. Teachers play a crucial role in how they integrate SEL components into the classroom. The role of the school was considered; for example, is SEL part of the school culture in strategies or practices being promoted inside and outside the classroom. The researcher will look at Latino students and the positive or negative effects of socialization and academic achievement in the classroom. Elementary students in TK-2nd grade are in their developmental years, and integrating SEL tools in the classroom can



benefit the rest of their academic years. The study analyzes how SEL is part of the classroom at each grade level and its impact on Latino students. Implementing SEL into the classroom culture can positively impact students meeting academic goals and interpersonal relationships. In particular, Latino students have academic challenges due to language barriers, environmental, family, and lack of parent education.

It is a qualitative study that will help get insight into how SEL can benefit Latino students. It will analyze how teachers integrate SEL into the classroom and the benefits of integrating SEL skills. The study focuses on instructors that teach predominantly Latino students in the classroom. The researcher will get participants from different educational sectors such as private, public, charter, and religious. The data was collected from teachers in grades TK-2nd grade who have five years of experience inside the classroom. Understanding the type of implementation the teachers do with SEL for Latino students was analyzed. The structure might look different for each teacher and grade level, but the pillars of SEL are part of the classroom environment.

**What was done during this research study?**

You were asked to complete a 60 minute semi structured in-person interview. The PI will ask you a series of questions aimed at figuring out what strategies are used by leaders in your field. While the research will take approximately 26 to 52 weeks, your interview will only take 60 minutes.

**How will my data be used?**

Your interview responses were transcribed, analyzed, and aggregated in order to determine the findings to the established research questions.

**What are the possible risks of being in this research study?**

This research presents minimal risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and/or psychological distress because the interview involves questions about your leadership practices. You may also experience fatigue, boredom, or anxiety as a result.

**What are the possible benefits to you?**

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

**What are the possible benefits to other people?**

The benefits to society may include better understanding of leadership strategies used within your industry. Other emerging leaders might also benefit from any additional recommendations that are shared through this process.

**What are the alternatives to being in this research study?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no alternatives to participating, other than deciding to not participate.

**What will participating in this research study cost you?**

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

**Will you be compensated for being in this research study?**

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

**What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?**

Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

**How will information about you be protected?**

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be deidentified and stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and until the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity was kept strictly confidential.

**What are your rights as a research subject?**

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

*For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.*

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Phone: 1(310)568-2305

Email: [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu)

**What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?**

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

**Documentation of informed consent**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**Participant****Name:**

---

(First, Last: Please Print)

**Participant****Signature:**

---

Signature

Date

## APPENDIX E

## Peer Reviewer Form

Dear Reviewer:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The table below is designed to ensure that may research questions for the study are properly addressed with corresponding interview questions.

In the table below, please review each research question and the corresponding interview questions. For each interview question, consider how well the interview question addresses the research question. If the interview question is directly relevant to the research question, please mark “Keep as stated.” If the interview question is irrelevant to the research question, please mark “Delete it.” Finally, if the interview question can be modified to best fit with the research question, please suggest your modifications in the space provided. You may also recommend additional interview questions you deem necessary.

Once you have completed your analysis, please return the completed form to me via email. Thank you again for your participation.

**Table D1***Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Corresponding Interview Question</b>
RQ1: What strategies and best practices do teachers use to teach Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?	IQ 1: Tell me about yourself? IQ 2: Think of a class or classes that you have taught to a Latino student group that stand out in your mind of having worked particularly well. Can you describe that to me? Q3: What teaching strategies did you use? Q4: How did you encourage your students?  a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b> b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b> c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested</b> :  _____ _____  I recommend adding the following interview questions: _____

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question
	<hr/> <hr/>
<p>RQ 2: What challenges do teachers face in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</p>	<p>Q5: What challenges/barriers do you face that prevent every class to be as exceptional as the one you mentioned earlier?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></p> <p>b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></p> <p>c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested:</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>RQ 3: How do these teachers define, measure, and track success in teaching Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</p>	<p>IQ 6: How do you determine if your teaching methods to a Latino student group were successful? As a teacher, how do you define and measure your success teaching to Latino students.</p> <p>IQ 7: How do you measure Latino students' success in your classroom? Describe how it looks?</p> <p>a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></p> <p>b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></p> <p>c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested:</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>RQ 4: What lessons do teachers want to share with the next generation of teachers who want to teach</p>	<p>IQ 8: In your opinion what else can teachers best support Latino students in the classroom to achieve academic and personal success?</p>

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question
<p>Latino students in transitional kindergarten through second grade?</p>	<p>IQ 9: What mistakes have you made that you would warn other instructors to avoid when teaching Latino students?</p> <p>IQ 10: Is there anything else you would like to add?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The question is directly relevant to Research question - <b>Keep as stated</b></li> <li>b. The question is irrelevant to research question – <b>Delete it</b></li> <li>c. The question should be <b>modified as suggested:</b></li> </ul> <hr/> <hr/> <p>I recommend adding the following interview questions:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>