COURAGE IN THE CLASSROOM: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF COURAGE

Erin M. Birden
Western Connecticut State University, erinmbaier@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.wcsu.edu/educationdis

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Elementary Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://repository.wcsu.edu/educationdis/91
COURAGE IN THE CLASSROOM: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF COURAGE

Erin M. Birden

BA Psychology, Quinnipiac University, 2011
MAT Elementary Education, Quinnipiac University, 2012

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership in the Department of Education and Educational Psychology at Western Connecticut State University

2020
COURAGE IN THE CLASSROOM: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF COURAGE

Erin M. Birden, Ed.D.
Western Connecticut State University

Abstract
This study was designed to gather information regarding the impact of social emotional learning (SEL) programming with a specific focus on student perceptions of courage. There is limited research in the field of education that characterizes courage. The researcher sought to understand perceptions of SEL competencies between students who were involved in an SEL lesson-driven condition that met particular inclusion criteria and students in a comparison group that also met specific inclusion criteria, as well as to uncover patterns in students’ thoughts about courage. A sample of convenience was comprised of fourth and fifth grade students from one state in the northeastern U.S. This mixed methods study incorporated a causal comparative design using intact groups as well as a multiple case study design. The researcher examined characteristics of social emotional learning competencies, including courage. Individual interviews were conducted to further understand student perceptions of courage. The results of a 2x2 ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference between students’ scores on SEL competencies for students not involved in a specific, lesson driven SEL program compared to students who were involved in a specific, lesson driven SEL program ($F(1,155) = 1.901, p = .170$, partial eta squared = .012). There was a significant difference for gender, ($F(1,155) = 13.301, p = .000$, partial eta squared = .079). Female students ($M = 3.451$) had significantly
higher mean scores on SEL competencies than male students ($M = 3.283$). The following four themes emerged regarding students’ perceptions of courage: (a) characteristics of integrity, (b) persistence, (c) what it takes to be courageous, and (d) cultivating courage at school.
COURAGE IN THE CLASSROOM: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING ON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF COURAGE

Presented by

Erin M. Birden, Ed.D.

Marcia A.B. Delcourt, Ph.D.  Marcia A. B. Delcourt,  4/8/20
Chair  Signature  Date

Secondary Advisor Committee Member  Signature  Date

Patricia E. Cosentino, Ed.D.  Patricia E. Cosentino  4/8/20
Secondary Advisor Committee Member  Signature  Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with a very full heart that I extend gratitude to the following people. To my primary advisor, Dr. Marcia Delcourt, I am endlessly grateful for your incredible dedication to your role and craft. You have been a tremendous mentor, thought partner, and educator. Your countless hours spent reading, discussing, and thinking about my work are so very appreciated. To my secondary advisor, Dr. Patricia Cosentino, it is beautiful and significant to me that you were the first superintendent I worked with as a new teacher entering the profession, and that you were able to serve on my committee as I take this next step in my journey as an educator. I always have and continue to admire your stewardship of the profession very much. To my secondary advisor, Dr. Pauline Goolkasian, thank you for your positivity and care. Your encouragement and insights have been a true gift. To Dr. Barbara Boller, thank you sincerely for being the reader of my dissertation. I am very grateful for your willingness to offer your guidance, feedback, and support.

To the participants in this study, thank you for your willingness to share your personal perspectives with me. To the educators and administrators who allowed for me to visit your respective settings, thank you for your support.

It is incumbent on me to extend my gratitude to Scarlett Lewis. As an educator and a researcher, your work has changed who I am in a most meaningful way. I am inspired by your courage, your gratitude, your forgiveness, and your compassion. Thank you for championing the work of the heart.

To my family and friends, thank you! To my parents, Steve and Michelle Baier, your belief in me and support of my dreams has forever been evident in all you say and do. I hope that I make you proud and that you share in this accomplishment as much as I do. To my
brother, Matt, thank you for your consistent interest in and care about this process and for the many nights you listened to me talk about where I was with my dissertation on the phone. To the Birdens, thank you for being the most helpful family to have married into. To my friends, thank you for your constant encouragement. To all my loved ones, thank you also for being understanding of my absences in the past few years. To my Cohort 7 colleagues and friends, it has been an honor to walk through this learning process with all of you and I will treasure our friendships.

And to Jesse, my husband, I thank you enormously. There have been many evenings and weekends where I spent time with my dissertation rather than you! I am incredibly grateful for your understanding, patience, and for meeting me where I needed to be met at every step along the way so that I could chase this dream. You are the greatest life partner and I cherish you.
DEDICATION

To my grandparents, Susan and Carl Brazell and Dorothy and Roman Baier. I am the first person in our family to pursue a doctoral degree. This, though, was only possible in that through you and my parents, your work ethic, conviction, and moral values are part of the very fabric of who I am. In my lifetime, you have been models of courage for me, each in your own very unique and salient way. From you, Goggy, I learned of the strength of a woman with big dreams. From you, Poppy, I learned of the importance in being authentic and true to self. From you, Mimi, I learned of altruism and optimism. From you, Pop Pop, I learned of hard work and of integrity. You raised my mom and dad, who became parents that instilled in me the very values that the students I interviewed in this study believed were essential in order to be courageous. May you share joyfully in my accomplishment and know that I have always found inspiration in your character, both individually and collectively.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC

1. Rationale for Selecting the Topic 2  
2. Statement of the Problem 4  
3. Significance of the Research 5  
4. Potential Benefits of this Research 5  
5. Definition of Key Terms 6  
6. Overview of Related Literature 11  
   - Theoretical Framework 11  
   - Review of Related Literature 12  
7. Overview of Methodology 13  
   - Research Questions 13  
   - Sampling Procedures 13  
   - Description of the Setting and Participants 14  
   - Research Design 14  
   - Instrumentation 14  
   - Description of Analyses 15  

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1. Theoretical Framework 19  
2. The Intersection of Ecological Systems Theory, SEL and Courage in Schools 19  
   - Self-Efficacy Theory and Relation to Self Perceptions of SEL 24
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief History of Social Emotional Learning in the United States</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins of CASEL as a Leading Organization in SEL</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL in U.S. Policy and Legislation</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Emotional Programming</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsive Classroom Approach</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating Emotions</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Step</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribes Learning Communities</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage as a Construct</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions and Hypotheses</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Biography</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Sampling Procedures, Setting and Participants</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling Procedures</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sampling procedures for qualitative design</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Participants</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Methods Design</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Procedures</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Coding Procedures</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Data Cleansing</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions Two and Three: Qualitative Results</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Two Results</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Three: Results</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS</strong></td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Research Process</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question One</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Results</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions Two and Three</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Results</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of Theoretical Framework with Respect to Results</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation of Results to Ecological Systems Theory</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation of Results to Self-Efficacy Theory</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Quantitative Design</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Threats to Validity</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Threats to Validity</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitation to Qualitative Results</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Trustworthiness 183
Credibility 183
Transferability 184
Dependability 184
Confirmability 185
Conclusion 185
References 187

Appendix A: Choose Love Survey 201
Appendix B: Student Survey About Courage 210
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Student Interview Protocol 212
Appendix D: Educator Survey 214
Appendix E: Permission for Use of Figure 1 217
Appendix F: Permission for Use of Figure 2 220
Appendix G: Superintendent Permission Form 222
Appendix H: Building Administrator Permission Form 224
Appendix I: Educator Consent Form 226
Appendix J: Parent Cover Letter and Consent Form for Quantitative Data Collection 228
Appendix K: Parent Cover Letter and Consent Form for Qualitative Data Collection 230
Appendix L: Parent Consent Form for Quantitative Data Collection in Spanish 232
Appendix M: Parent Consent Form for Qualitative Data Collection in Spanish 234
Appendix N: Student Assent Form

Appendix O: IRB Approval

Appendix P: Member Checking: Statement of Agreement for Students

Appendix Q: Member Checking Statements of Agreement for Parents/Guardians

Appendix R: Code List

Tables

Table 1: Meta-Analyses About SEL Programs

Table 2: SEL Programs and Student Outcome Studies

Table 3: Studies About Courage

Table 4: Program Participants by Condition, District, School, and Classroom

Table 5: SEL Program Descriptions and Frequencies by Condition and Setting

Table 6: Sampling Participants by Condition: 0, 1, and 2

Table 7: Sampling Participants by Condition: 1 and 2

Table 8: Self-identified Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 9: Self-identified Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants

Table 10: Causal Comparative Research Design

Table 11: Phase 1 Total Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range with Equal Sample Sizes for Condition

Table 12: Phase 1 Total Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range with Equal Sample Sizes for Gender

Table 13: Phase 1 Skewness and Kurtosis for Condition and Gender
Table 14: Phase 1 Kolomogrov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests of Normality

Table 15: Phase 2 Skewness and Kurtosis for Condition and Gender

Table 16: Phase 2 Kolomogrov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests of Normality

Table 17: Phase 3 Skewness and Kurtosis for Condition and Gender

Table 18: Phase 3 Kolomogrov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests of Normality

Table 19: Skewness and Kurtosis for Condition and Gender

Table 20: Kolomogrov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests of Normality

Table 21: Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances

Table 22: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range by Condition and Gender

Table 23: Summary Table for 2x2 Analysis of Variance for Condition and Gender on

CL Survey Scores

Table 24: Summary of Student Self-Identified Demographic Information for Student

Interviewees

Table 25: Qualitative Research Questions and Interview Question Matrix

Table 26: Results, Implications, and Areas for Future Research for Research

Question One

Table 27: Results, Implications, and Areas for Future Research for Research

Question Two

Table 28: Results, Implications, and Areas for Future Research for Research

Question Three

Table 29: Results Related to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory
Figures

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory 20
Figure 2: CASEL’s (2019) Competencies Wheel 26
Figure 3: Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods Research Design 86
Figure 4: Phase 1 Box and Whisker Plot for Condition 106
Figure 5: Phase 1 Box and Whisker Plot for Gender 107
Figure 6: Phase 2 Box and Whisker Plot for Condition 109
Figure 7: Phase 2 Box and Whisker Plot for Gender 109
Figure 8: Phase 3 Box and Whisker Plot for Condition 111
Figure 9: Phase 3 Box and Whisker Plot for Gender 111
Figure 10: Phase 4 Box and Whisker Plot for Condition 113
Figure 11: Phase 4 Box and Whisker Plot for Gender 113
Figure 12: Histogram of Mean CL Survey Scores for SEL non-LDP Condition 115
Figure 13: Histogram of Mean CL Survey Scores for SEL LDP Condition 115
Figure 14: Histogram of Mean CL Survey Scores for Males 116
Figure 15: Histogram of Mean CL Survey Scores for Females 116
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC

School climate and culture are addressed in some way in all classrooms in public schools throughout the United States as mandated by The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). Explicit instruction in social emotional learning (SEL) competencies is one way educators across states work towards cultivating positive school climate (CASEL, 2019). The need to teach SEL strategies while meeting rigorous curricular standards requires a great deal of balance regarding time and resources (Barnwell, 2016). Although a focus on integrating SEL skills in the classroom can compete with academic demands, school mission and vision statements often emphasize SEL competencies and virtues (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009). For example, the document outlining the core beliefs of Newtown Public Schools in Connecticut states, “continuous improvement requires courage to change” and “honesty, integrity, respect, and open communication build trust” (Newtown Public Schools, 2018). Another example of language emphasizing the importance of SEL can be found in Bridgeport Public Schools in Connecticut, which envision a learning environment “where students thrive academically, socially, emotionally, and civically” (Bridgeport Public Schools, 2018). The values and virtues named in overarching vision statements must be readily apparent in students’ daily lives in schools, which are highly social environments and microcosms of society. SEL programming is an avenue many decision makers in education take when working towards a district vision and mission.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is an organization which has targeted foundational constructs to be included in SEL programs and is widely used by educators and policymakers (CASEL, 2019). CASEL’s tenets include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2019). SEL programs have also just begun to incorporate the construct of
courage (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019; Starr Commonwealth, 2017). There is an extensive body of research that characterizes courage as a construct, however there is limited research on courage and its implications for children in schools (CASEL, 2013; Pury & Lopez, 2010).

**Rationale for Selecting the Topic**

The Merriam-Webster (2019) dictionary defines courage as “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty” (para. 1). Inherent in this definition is the notion that courage is defined by action and is individual in nature. What constitutes a courageous action for one person could be different for someone else. Further, it is contextual. People must be faced with a situation they perceive as challenging in some way and must then draw upon strength to rise above that challenge. Because action is so central to courage, it is often discussed by giving examples. Bernard Waber’s (2002) picture book for children, for instance, captures the many, varied, and nuanced examples of courage enacted by children and adults of all ages:

> There are many kinds of courage. Awesome kinds. And everyday kinds. Still, courage is courage—whatever kind. Courage is being the first to make up after an argument…Courage is if you knew where there were some mountains, you would definitely climb them…Courage is exploring heights—and depths. Courage is a blade of grass breaking through the icy snow. Courage is starting over. Courage is holding on to your dream…Courage is sometimes having to say goodbye. Courage is what we give to each other. (Waber, 2002, pp.1-20)

While Waber’s (2002) children’s text is illustrative of the deeply personal nature of courage, it is at the same time a universally accepted virtue that has been celebrated and noted
throughout history (Putman, 2010). Often, courageous acts are defining moments in people’s individual lives and while it is deeply personal, bearing witness to one person’s act of courage can be powerfully inspiring and perhaps contagious to others, even generations later (Lopez et al., 2010). This is true across cultures in addition to across time. For example, the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes language that refers to courage (Flowers, 2009). In the child-friendly version of this document, the first article states “you are born free and equal in rights to every other human being. You have the ability to think and to tell right from wrong” (Flowers, 2009). The ability to tell right from wrong and then take action accordingly refers to courage. Courage includes a complex web of both personal and collective, situational and global, mental and physical, processes that shape values. Virtually every problem facing the United States—and world—involves courage and also, relationships. At the core of relationships are social and emotional functions, processes, and competencies. Courage is, therefore, a compelling construct, related to the five SEL competencies defined by CASEL (2019).

An examination of cross-disciplinary literature revealed that courage is an area of interest in the fields of medicine, politics, and business, as well as a concept that spans all types of organizations (Pury & Lopez, 2010). While it is customary for students and educators to study courageous individuals in history units and in reading biographies, student understanding of courage has not been investigated in the school context. Students and educators call upon courage in taking risks both big and small in their lives inside and outside of school. Students enact courage when they speak up on behalf of others in the face of mean-spirited behavior or when they approach someone new and ask, “will you be my friend?” or “do you want to play with me?” Educators enact moral courage when they question practices that violate professional
codes of ethics (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2017). It appears that both adults and children value courageous acts.

While these acts of courage can be identified, explicit understanding about students’ perspectives of this complex strength is missing from the classroom context. The school setting is a highly social environment and perhaps one of the only institutions that lends itself to the essential work of developing character, particularly courage.

Across all states, ESSA (2015) requires schools to develop plans that directly address school climate and bullying. ESSA recognizes the critical link between positive school climate and measuring school success. As such, schools must report on school climate annually (National Association of School Psychologists, 2017). There are millions of dollars in federal funding available to support positive school climate initiatives, such as the School Climate Transformation Grant (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Further, both Title I and Title IV specifically recommend that schools implement practices that directly target relationship-building skills and communication (CASEL, 2017; ESSA, 2015). Because SEL programming is being implemented across the nation, it is necessary to continually examine its impact and reflectively refine its implementation.

**Statement of the Problem**

Despite research on the critical role that highly effective SEL programs play in schools, there is little information specifically about SEL programs and the construct of courage (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). This is perplexing when courage is a universally desirable value that is celebrated across cultures (Putman, 2010). It is a trait that humans muster individually and collectively in times of great challenge. Currently none of the programs endorsed by CASEL include the construct of courage as an explicit component of the
curriculum (CASEL, 2013). There is not enough information about strategies that promote courage, nor is there adequate knowledge of students’ perceptions of courage (CASEL, 2013).

**Significance of the Research**

Courage is a foundational component of character that intersects with other virtues and strengths such as justice, humanity, and integrity (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). If people are courageous, it is likely that they can draw upon this special strength across contexts and in various situations. Winston Churchill famously stated, “Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because, as has been said, it is the quality which guarantees all others” (Churchill, 1931, p. 11). Educators are privileged to carry out the monumental task of taking part in growing future generations. Children spend well over 1,000 hours per year in school, an environment where courage can be nurtured and can grow. A need appears to exist for educational research to examine the role courage plays in schools and in turn, how school personnel can fulfill the important role of growing courageous people (CASEL, 2013; Durlak et al., 2011).

**Potential Benefits of this Research**

Research on the impact that SEL programming has on student perceptions of courage will allow for a greater understanding of how students perceive that their social emotional needs are being met and developed at school. Information gathered from students can better illuminate how educators and other social scientists may develop strategies and practices that promote the development of courage. Further, this research may spark subsequent SEL programming that fosters courage. New information about students’ perceptions of courage will allow for educators, program developers, policymakers, and social scientists to help future generations foster their identities as socially and emotionally competent individuals.
Definition of Key Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this research study:

1. Choose Love (CL) refers to the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement and Enrichment Program. The CL Movement is a charitable organization dedicated to the mission of providing all students with SEL programming and was founded after Scarlett Lewis discovered her son Jesse Lewis’s message on their kitchen chalkboard which read “Nurturing, Healing, Love” shortly before he died in the tragedy that took place in Sandy Hook, CT (Lewis, 2013, p. xi). The CL Movement is rooted in an equation that incorporates courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion as the central components to choose love (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). The Choose Love Enrichment Program (CLEP) is a free, downloadable SEL program differentiated by grade level.

a. Courage is defined by the CLEP as “the willingness to work through obstacles despite feeling embarrassment, fear, reluctance, or uncertainty. When you practice courage, you make positive choices even when they may be difficult for you” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019, p. 11).

b. Gratitude is defined as “mindful thankfulness and the ability to be thankful even when things in life are challenging,” involving sharing that feeling with others (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019, p. 13).

c. Forgiveness means “choosing to let go of anger or resentment toward yourself or someone else, to surrender thoughts of revenge, and to move forward with your personal power intact” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019, p. 13).
d. *Compassion* is described as the “understanding of a problem or suffering of another and acting to solve the problem or alleviate the suffering” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019, p. 13).

2. *Courage* is defined by character strengths such as bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality (Rate, 2010). These strengths “involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 29). Courage is multidimensional and is affected by individual perceptions and experiences (Rate, 2010).

3. *Social emotional learning (SEL)* is “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2019, para 1.) and, according to CASEL, is comprised of five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2019).

a. *Self-awareness* refers to knowing both “strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a ‘growth mindset’” (CASEL, 2019, para. 2).

b. *Self-management* is the ability to “effectively manage stress, control impulses, and motivate yourself to set and achieve goals” (CASEL, 2019, para. 2).

c. *Social awareness* means to “understand the perspectives of others and empathize with them, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures” (CASEL, 2019, para. 2).
d. *Relationship skills* include the capabilities to “communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed” (CASEL, 2019, para. 2).

e. *Responsible decision-making* involves making “constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety, and social norms” (CASEL, 2019, para. 2).

4. *SEL lesson-driven program (SEL LDP)* refers to a K-5 multiyear SEL program with weekly, repeated opportunities to practice. This program must have been in use at least one year prior to data collection and the existence of scripted lessons, or training must have been available to promote fidelity of implementation.

5. *SEL non lesson-driven program (SEL non-LDP)* means that there was not a particular SEL program in use that met the aforementioned LDP criteria. Instead, district developed programming may have been in use, however students did not have weekly, repeated opportunities to practice, the program may not have been in place for at least one year, and the use of formal training or scripted lessons and other resources may not be available on a consistent basis.

6. *Theme one: Characteristics of integrity* refers to a web of interconnected principles revealed through data analysis.
   
a. *Honesty* means telling the truth rather than lying, even when it is hard. It also is defined by doing the right thing when there is a choice, such as admitting to mistakes.

b. *Altruism* refers to selflessness or putting another’s wellbeing first.
c. *Compassion in action* is the “understanding of a problem or suffering of another and acting to solve the problem or alleviate the suffering” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019, p. 13).

d. *Forgiveness* is “choosing to let go of anger or resentment toward yourself or someone else, to surrender thoughts of revenge, and to move forward with your personal power intact” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019, p. 13).

e. *Authenticity* refers to being genuine and true to the self, even when coming up against outside pressure or judgment.

7. **Theme two: Persistence** means sticking with something, someone, a goal, or a challenge. It includes several related constructs.
   a. *Bravery* means facing danger or opposition, usually in conjunction with experiencing emotions such as fear (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).
   b. *The unknown* refers to doing something new and taking risks when outcomes or results of actions are not known. The unknown could refer to social, physical, or emotional, or mental phenomena.
   c. *Pain*, for the purposes of this study, can be physical or emotional and could also refer to feelings of loss and/or tragedy.
   d. *Perseverance* refers to a spirit of hard work, an ability to remain steadfast in the face of challenge, and experiencing failure but trying again rather than giving up.

8. **Theme three: What is means to be courageous** encompasses topics related to the belief that a person can grow courage.
a. *Optimism* means a sense of hopefulness and/or confidence about the future, about one’s own abilities, or about the abilities of others.

b. *Examples and experiences* are defined as opportunities to develop courage that are the result of witnessing acts of courage in others or being exposed to a situation which could require courage.

c. *Social support* refers to the peer, familial, or school community network that students in interviews described as necessary in order to develop courage.

9. **Theme Four: Cultivating courage at school** involved a discussion of the ways in which courage can be developed in the school context.

   a. *Models of courage* refer to both peers and adults who students found to be exemplary in demonstrating courage as described through recounted stories.

   b. *Lesson driven strategies* mean specific, explicitly taught strategies implemented through curricula by school personnel with the purpose of cultivating courage amongst students.
Overview of Related Literature

Theoretical Framework

Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory can be used to explain how children develop social emotional competencies such as courage, and the importance of both perception and context in this developmental process. The environment in which a child develops is multifaceted and layered as “a set of nested structures” (p. 3). The five systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem collectively comprise the environment in which development occurs. Bronfenbrenner asserted that it is necessary to empirically study how people perceive the situations they are involved in and this largely happens at the microsystem level, because a developing person and their environment are interconnected in that people develop their identity in the context of their environment.

The microsystem, the school, was studied to understand how participation in an SEL program impacts SE development as well as to gather students’ perceptions on courage in this context. Also, the mesosystem, which is made up of more than one related microsystem in which the developing child is an active participant, was analyzed to explore the nature of such interactions on the development of courage in students. Third, the exosystem, which is defined as “settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect the developing person,” (p. 25) were explored in relation to decisions made about focus on SEL or courage at school. The fourth system, the macrosystem, refers to cultures and subcultures within a given country. In this study, the American public school system on a governmental level has created a certain cultural landscape when it comes to school climate and school culture (ESSA, 2015). The macrosystem is largely explored through the review of related literature in providing a history of SEL in the U.S. The macrosystems were
also described across research settings as they relate to the study’s sampling, settings and participants. The final system, the chronosystem, encompasses developmental events that occur across a person’s lifespan. The chronosystem as it relates to this study’s topic is of importance in possible implications of the study as well as considerations for future research.

Additionally, Bandura’s self-efficacy theory (1986, 1994) is relevant to students’ perceptions of courage and the developmental nature of courage. Self-efficacy refers to people’s beliefs about their capabilities and these beliefs determine how people think, feel, and behave (Bandura, 1986, 1994). There are four main sources of influence for self-efficacy: (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences provided by social models, (c) level of positive appraisal through social feedback, and (d) physiological and emotional state.

**Review of Related Literature**

A brief history of SEL in the United States and related policies are included in Chapter Two. It is important to adequately understand the historical context of SEL in the United States, part of the macrosystem related to this topic, which influences students’ experiences in today’s schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In addition to the history of SEL in the U.S., there is federal and state level legislation that concerns SEL. Selected research related to outcomes of SEL LDPs, including both academic and SEL competencies amongst students, and specifically the competency of being courageous, is explained in order to adequately develop an understanding of research related to the current study.
Overview of Methodology

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP?

   Non-Directional Hypothesis: There will be a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP.

2. What are children’s perceptions of courage in themselves and others and what does it take to enact courage?

3. What is the nature of courage in classrooms?

Sampling Procedures

Convenience and purposive sampling were used to recruit participants for this mixed methods study (Merriam, 2009). Convenience sampling was used in order to gain access to research settings which were within a commutable distance, served the grade levels of interest, and were identified as public schools (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Additionally, purposive sampling was used in the establishment of selection criteria for participation in that only settings which met the criteria for inclusion as an SEL LDP or an SEL non-LDP were considered (Merriam, 2009).
Description of the Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in five different public elementary schools across four school districts in one state in New England. Schools included in this study either implemented a specific, K-5 multiyear, sequenced, lesson-driven SEL program (SEL LDP) or did not implement a specific, K-5 multiyear, sequenced, lesson-driven SEL program (SEL non-LDP). Schools from each condition were demographically matched to the best of the researcher’s ability. Fourth and fifth grade students participated in this study. Fourth and fifth grade classroom teachers also participated by completing a demographic survey and were involved in the selection of interview participants. A field notes journal was kept with the purpose of keeping pertinent notes regarding the research setting, context and any feelings experienced during the data collection period.

Research Design

This research study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design in which qualitative data built on quantitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). A causal-comparative design was used as well as a multiple case study design (Gall et al., 2003; Merriam, 2009). Interviews were conducted with participants who met researcher-established inclusion criteria. In the spring of 2019, data were collected from all participating settings. All student participants completed a survey, the Choose Love survey (Delcourt, Lewis, & Bierman, 2017). For this study, 215 students completed surveys for analysis. A total of 25 student interviews were then conducted and analyzed.

Instrumentation

Choose Love surveys. The Choose Love surveys (Appendix A) are self-report rating scales differentiated by various grade level bands and were designed to measure student
perceptions of social emotional learning (SEL) competencies related to the CLEP’s core units of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion (Delcourt et al., 2017). While all four constructs of the CLEP are represented in the survey, for grades 3-5, only a total score is produced. Demographic information was also collected.

**Student survey about courage.** In addition to the demographic information included on the CL survey, a survey was designed to collect additional information from all student participants (Appendix B). The survey included several open-ended items about students’ definition of courage. Information from this survey was used to inform participant selection for interviews.

**Student semi-structured interview.** Interviews were conducted in-person with students who met researcher-established selection criteria in order to understand student perceptions of courage in the school context. One individual interview per student was conducted during the course of the study. Interviews were audio-recorded in all schools but one, where the researcher scribed interviews. A semi-structured interview protocol was used, and each interview ranged from 10-20 minutes in length (Appendix C).

**Educator survey.** The educator survey was developed to collect information regarding characteristics of each classroom teacher, the classroom context for each participating classroom of students, and information regarding the teacher’s implementation of an SEL program, if the latter was applicable (Appendix D).

**Description of Analyses**

Research Question One was analyzed using a 2x2 ANOVA to examine mean differences between two independent variables and one dependent variable. The independent variables were condition (SEL LDP/SEL non-LDP) and gender (male/female). The dependent variable was
mean score on the CL survey. Research Questions Two and Three were explored using a multiple case study design where both research questions were examined per case through analysis of interview transcripts. Specific, cyclical coding methods as described by Saldaña (2016) were applied. The researcher reviewed the results from interviews to explore the phenomena of (a) ways children perceive courage in themselves, (b) how children perceive courage in others, (c) prerequisites or necessary competencies for enacting courage, and (d) the nature of examples of courage in classrooms.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Through this mixed methods study, the researcher sought to investigate the impact of SEL programming on student perceptions of courage as well as explore the nature of courage in classrooms of upper-elementary aged students. An explanation of the literature search process is included in the commencement of this chapter. The initial section of the review of related literature is grounded in the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory. Bandura’s self-efficacy theory (1986, 1994) will also be used as a foundation for this research. A brief history of SEL in the United States and related policies are included. Other sections review research related to outcomes of specific SEL LDPs, including SEL competencies amongst students, and specifically the competency of being courageous.

Literature Review Search Strategies

Online databases served as the primary sources for this review of the literature. The databases included: *EBSCO Combined Databases* and Western Connecticut State University’s physical and digital library collections. From *EBSCO Combined Databases*, the following were selected: *Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, Education Resources Information Center, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Social Work Abstracts, SocINDEX, Teacher Reference Center, Primary Search,* and *Professional Development Collection*. Only peer-reviewed articles were considered when searching for research in areas of interest. In general, the search for related literature was limited to the past 10 years, except for key areas which are mentioned in the sections that follow.

The researcher started by reading The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) to understand federal legislation connected to SEL. The researcher then used subject terms in the area of interest to search databases for: “social emotional learning and courage.” No results were found.
using this combination of terms. The researcher then tried separating these constructs. First, the search on “social emotional learning” yielded 188 references. For the purpose of understanding the historical backdrop and progression of SEL in the United States, the subject term “social emotional learning” was kept, but date ranges were limited, starting with the earliest publication date provided, 1990, and working chronologically to 2019. Titles and abstracts of all listed records were reviewed and articles that seemed potentially pertinent to the current study were saved locally. Only articles pertaining to elementary-aged students were reviewed. Also, only articles involving SEL LDPs were included. The researcher organized the listed records into folders on her hard drive. These folders included the following: background and history of SEL (24 articles), seminal meta-analyses (3 articles), economic perspective of SEL (2 articles), SEL implementation models and recommendations (17 articles), student perceptions (1 article), student outcomes (27 articles), culturally and ethnically diverse students (5 articles), teachers (11 articles), instruments (3 articles), unintended consequences (1 article), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and SEL (2 articles), and summaries and reviews of SEL programming (12 articles).

When searching for courage and elementary aged students, the search terms “courage and students” were used. This search yielded 62 results. All listed records were reviewed, and 25 relevant articles were saved locally in a folder called courage as a construct. This preliminary search process of literature related to SEL and courage allowed for the researcher to develop an understanding of a broad body of recent research related to the dissertation topic. Upon reading the saved studies, however, the researcher determined only four empirical studies were relevant for the purposes of this review of related literature, as many of the other studies were unrelated to the developing child.
In developing the section of the current review of SEL LDPs, articles were additionally selected because they were referenced in seminal meta-analytic studies and from CASEL’s (2019) website. Additionally, research from CASEL’s (2019) website was given priority, as this is the driving organization in the area of SEL in schools. Therefore, in order to be included in the current review when it comes to the section on SEL programs, effects of SEL LDPs included in CASEL’s (2013) Guide for Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs in elementary schools or in the meta-analytic studies reviewed were ultimately selected. Further, the programs needed to be available to students in grades 4 and 5, as these are the participants’ grade levels in the current study. In sum, a total of 18 peer-reviewed, empirical studies are presented in the following review, in addition to other relevant articles such as those providing historical context or providing critical analyses of extant literature.

**Theoretical Framework**

**The Intersection of Ecological Systems Theory, SEL and Courage in Schools**

Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory can be used to explain how children develop social emotional competencies such as courage, and the importance of both perception and context in this developmental process. Development is defined as “a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). The environment in which a person develops is layered and multifaceted, and Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the environment as “a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). The levels of environment will be described in detail, as they impact a child’s perceptions directly, and collectively comprise the context in which development takes place. Bronfenbrenner (1979) theorized that what matters most in both development and behavior is not necessarily some kind of objective reality, but rather how
children perceive their environment. Bronfenbrenner divides the levels of the environment into five systems, as follows: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, as depicted in Figure 1.

![Ecological Systems Theory Diagram](image)


Ecological systems theory builds upon the work of two theorists; Kurt Lewin’s emphasis on the interconnection between the person and the environment, where a situation is contained (Lewin, 1935) as well as Jean Piaget’s construction of reality in children (Wadsworth, 1989). Bronfenbrenner asserted that it is necessary to empirically study how people perceive the
situations they are involved in and this largely happens at the microsystem level.

Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1979) integrated Piaget’s developmental stages (Wadsworth, 1989) with his conception of the “structure and developmental trajectory” of both immediate and more abstract environments.

The first system, the microsystem, encompasses immediate environments in which an individual interacts, such as the school or the home. In an ecological model, the environmental events that have the greatest impact on an individual’s development are those that occur when the individual is present, or in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The definition of the microsystem is “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). The developing person’s perception of the microsystem is as important as any objective properties of that setting, particularly those that the developing person finds meaningful. The activities, interconnections between people, and societal roles filled by individuals in immediate settings need to be examined within the microsystem of the developing person. For this study, the school was the microsystem under investigation.

The second system, the mesosystem, is made up of more than one related microsystem in which the developing child is an active participant, such as school and home or school and neighborhood peer group (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). On a more abstract level, a mesosystem can also exist where knowledge and attitudes are apparent in one immediate setting about another immediate setting. When conceptualizing the mesosystem, relationships between microsystems are under consideration. These relationships “can be as decisive for development as events taking place within a given setting” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). In this study, interactions between microsystems were uncovered during data collection in the interview process and were
then analyzed to explore the nature of such interactions on the development of courage in students.

The third system is the exosystem, which is defined as “settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). Many exosystems impact the development of children, including but not limited to decisions made by local school boards, curricular decisions made by central office personnel, parenting decisions, etc. In this study, decisions impacting a child’s development of SEL competencies, such as courage, may include (a) school climate initiatives made at the central office or building level, (b) curricular decisions involving SEL, (c) parenting choices, and (d) classroom management style approaches made by grade level teams or individual teachers.

The fourth system is called the macrosystem. The macrosystem refers to cultures and subcultures within a given country (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained “it is as if in each country the various settings had been constructed from the same set of blueprints” (p. 26) and stipulated, however, that these systemic structures differ within a country based on socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, etc. In this study, the American public school system on a governmental level has created a certain cultural landscape when it comes to school climate and school culture (ESSA, 2015). For example, current events and the primacy of topics such as bullying and mass school shootings in the media and in the U.S. compared to other countries are part of the macrosystem that relates to this research study. The organization of school climate committees in American public schools along with an emphasis on positive school culture also falls into the macrosystem. The macrosystems surrounding SEL in each state, each district, and each school building may differ. These consistencies, or sometimes
inconsistencies, in form and content were explored and described across research settings in relation to SEL and the construct of courage in this study.

The final component is the chronosystem, which is concerned with the role of time and encompasses developmental events that occur across a person’s lifespan involving both action and perception (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The chronosystem can be defined as the degree of change or consistency over time in both characteristics of the developing person as well as the environment in which the developing person lives. At the chronosystem level, a person’s capacity to perceptually extend their views beyond the four previous systems and to actually apply strategies that draw upon their synthesis of the micro, meso, exo, and macrosystems is also a focus. In the current study, the chronosystem is not explicitly discussed due to its longitudinal nature. Rather, the chronosystem as it relates to this study’s topic is of importance in possible implications of the study as well as considerations for future research.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) directly relates to the development of SEL competencies, particularly courage, amongst children. The following sections of this review of literature reflect a sense of organization aligned with Bronfenbrenner’s systems. Background information and a historical review of SEL in the United States articulate with the conception of the macrosystem. Literature relating to specific SEL programming aligns with the exosystem. Outcomes and effects of SEL programming on student development are examined, which fall under the mesosystem and overlap with the microsystem. Additionally, specific SEL constructs such as courage are discussed which represent the microsystem. Courage, and related characteristics and qualities, undergird the behaviors exhibited by students in the immediate settings of school, home, and in relationships. Further, such SEL competencies are explicitly
addressed through proximal processes, or the systematic interactions related to the teaching and learning of SEL, within the microsystem of the school.

**Self-Efficacy Theory and Relation to Self-perceptions of SEL**

Self-efficacy is a major tenet of Bandura’s social cognitive theory (1986, 1994) and can be applied in interpreting students’ perceptions about courage in the present study. Self-efficacy refers to people’s beliefs about their capabilities and these beliefs determine how people think, feel, and behave (Bandura, 1986, 1994). In this study, students’ self-reports on an instrument measuring SEL competencies as well as student interview responses were illustrative of their beliefs about their capabilities in the areas of SEL and courage. There are four main sources of influence for self-efficacy: (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences provided by social models, (c) level of positive appraisal through social feedback, and (d) physiological and emotional state (Bandura, 1986, 1994). When people experience success in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort, they build strength in facing future obstacles. Social models who have characteristics that are similar to or admired by the developing person can serve as an influential source in building self-efficacy. Verbal feedback, that is positive in nature and communicates the belief that the developing person has what it takes to succeed, is another source for building self-efficacy. Emotional and physical reactions to stimuli influence how people judge their capabilities and therefore are a potential facilitator or hinderer of performance.

Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986, 1994), particularly the four sources of influence, can be applied to illuminate the results of this study. In the following sections of the review of related literature, studies related to student outcomes and SEL programming as well as research about children’s development of courage align with self-efficacy theory.
**Brief History of Social Emotional Learning in the United States**

It is important to adequately understand the historical context of SEL in the United States, part of the macrosystem related to this topic, which influences students’ experiences in today’s schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The roots of SEL lie in ancient philosophies and in developmental theories. Affective and moral development is not new. Research on attitudes, beliefs, values, and morality has shaped the field of education and related disciplines for decades in the work of educational theorists, such as Piaget (Wadsworth, 1989), Kohlberg (1981), and Dewey (1938). SEL as it is defined by CASEL (2019), though, did not become a major area of empirical research until the 1990s in the United States. CASEL’s framework is widely used by researchers, policymakers, and educators (Figure 2). See the *Definition of Key Terms* (Chapter One) for definitions of each competency.
Origins of CASEL as a Leading Organization in SEL

In 1964, Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia published a taxonomy of educational objectives for the affective domain. While this taxonomy grew out of a behaviorist paradigm, the taxonomy included concepts similar to those that would be later developed by CASEL and can be considered an early publication focusing on affective factors at school. A central birthplace of SEL research in the U.S. can be traced to New Haven, Connecticut. Throughout the 1960s-1980s, James Comer from the Yale School of Medicine’s Child Study Center created a program called the Comer School Program which focused on collaboration between stakeholders in two low income and low achieving New Haven public schools to promote positive development with successful results (Comer, 1988; Coulter, 1993). By 1980, this program had spread to 50 schools
throughout the country. The notion that nurturing social abilities is as important as growing academic abilities began to become more popular. In 1986, the National Mental Health Association issued a recommendation that schools include social competence curricula (Weissberg, 1990).

Around the same time, Roger Weissberg and Timothy Shriver, also from Yale University, worked together from at least 1987-1997 on the New Haven Social Development Project (Weissberg, Shriver, Bose, & DeFalco, 1997). This was a districtwide endeavor in coordinated programming with sweeping structural, systemic support to enhance SEL through curricular content, professional development, and program evaluation. During their tenure on the Social Development Project, Weissberg and Shriver co-founded CASEL in 1994 along with Daniel Goleman, Mark Greenberg, Eileen Growald, Linda Lantieri, and David Sluyter and it was then that the term SEL was officially coined (CASEL, 2019). Weissberg also co-chaired a project with Maurice Elias funded by the William T. Grant Foundation called the Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (1992). This five-year project resulted in a review and synthesis of SEL programming and a list of core competencies including emotional skills (e.g., labeling feelings), cognitive skills (e.g., using steps of problem-solving and decision making), and behavioral skills (e.g., responding to criticism effectively). At CASEL’s inception in 1994, the competencies listed in the aforementioned framework were made manifest in CASEL’s definition of SEL.

Another relevant framework was presented by researchers Peter Salovey and John Mayer in 1990, which was that of emotional intelligence (EI). EI is defined as a set of skills for appraising, expressing, regulating, and utilizing emotions. Salovey and Mayer’s framework is still used today as the theoretical model that guides the work of the Yale Center for Emotional
Intelligence. Then, in 1995, co-founder of CASEL Daniel Goleman popularized the concept of EI when he published *Emotional Intelligence*, a book that has over 5,000,000 copies in print (Goleman, 2019). Emotional intelligence (EI) consists of five areas: self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation. EI is defined as the ability to identify and manage one’s own emotions as well as apply the five areas to relationships with others (Goleman, 1995). Goleman’s five areas and definition of EI naturally overlap with CASEL’s five competencies. This book popularized the notion that cultivating SEL competencies was a worthy undertaking, as the text spent over a year as a *New York Times* bestseller.

It is beneficial to note other CASEL founding members' research specializations to understand the trajectory of SEL in the U.S. Mark Greenberg, professor of human development and psychology from The Pennsylvania State University (2019), has focused much of his career on prevention research among youth, including substance abuse prevention, mindfulness practices, and outcomes of particular SEL programs. Eileen Rockefeller Growald is a venture philanthropist and in addition to co-founding CASEL, she also founded the Institute for the Advancement of Health and is most interested in environmental preservation, mind and body health, and compassion and kindness amongst medical professionals in addition to SEL (Growald Family Fund, 2019). Linda Lantieri (2019) is a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and has served as a classroom teacher, administrator, founding director of The Inner Resiliency Program, and is committed to the inner lives of students and educators with a focus on mindfulness and SEL. She also co-founded the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program. David Sluyter served for many years at the Fetzer Institute and at Western Michigan University where his work focused on SEL, relationships in healthcare, and developing programs for intellectually disabled individuals (Aspen Institute, 2019).
Importantly, CASEL changed its name in 2001 from “Collaborative to Advance Social Emotional Learning” to “Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning” in order to expressly address the link between academic achievement and SEL. Between 2000-2010, CASEL released numerous guides for implementing SEL and reviews of research. In 2011, CASEL published a landmark meta-analytic study linking positive SEL outcomes to academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). In 2013, an elementary school guide to implementing effective SEL programming was released which included an extensive review of preschool and elementary school programs in addition to a hallmark report surveying teacher perspectives of SEL. In 2014, CASEL created an interactive state report card on their website which includes an assessment of the development of standards, policies and guidelines for SEL across the U.S. In 2015, a guide to implementing SEL programming for grades 6-12 was published. In 2017, an updated meta-analytic study was released as a follow up to the 2011 study which demonstrated long-term effects of SEL programming on various student outcomes (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Since 2016, national nonprofit and federal government level partnerships with CASEL have increased and will be discussed in the next section.

**SEL in U.S. Policy and Legislation**

Federal, state, and local policies create conditions to support the implementation of SEL in schools stemming from legislative recommendations to promote positive school climate in all U.S. public schools. An overview of federal policy related to SEL in schools will be provided in this section along with summaries of relevant policies in northeastern states. Local municipality policies will not be included as it is important to protect the identity of districts included in this study.
The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. The Every Student Succeeds Act was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, which reauthorized and built upon the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Specifically, Title I and IV of ESSA (2015) provide opportunities for states to use funding to implement SEL programming and initiatives. Title I is concerned with improving basic programs in schools operated by state and local educational agencies (LEAs). There are numerous sections of Title I that create structural opportunities for “improving school conditions for student learning” which include reducing bullying, harassment, exclusionary discipline, or aversive behavioral interventions (p. 1844). Additionally, measures of school climate are explicitly noted as a data source that should be included in receiving funding under Title I (p. 1848). The purpose of Title IV, 21st Century Schools, Part A, Student Support and Enrichment Grants, is in part also to “improve school conditions for student learning” and this is further defined by language that includes a school’s ability to “foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments” (p. 1972). States and LEAs are expected to conduct a needs assessment of “school conditions for student learning to create healthy and safe schools” once every three years (p. 1975). In Section 4101, Activities to Support Safe and Healthy Students, the law states that programs and activities may “improve instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills, such as effective communication, and improve safety” (p. 1980). In a state’s application for funding under Title IV, Section 4108, the law explicitly names “implementation of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports” as a qualifier in the decision to grant funding (p. 1981). The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Safe and Healthy Students (2019) further states that the purpose of Title IV is, in part, to cultivate a positive school climate and the actual components of that climate are the conditions for learning stated in legislation.
Since 2011, there have been several bills introduced at the federal level by legislators specifically related to SEL. For example, Representative (Rep.) Judy Biggert (R-IL-13) introduced the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011 (H.R. 2437) which would amend Title II to include training for educators in practices to address SEL. In 2018, Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH-13) introduced the Social and Emotional Learning for Families Act (H.R. 6120) which specifically targets funding for educational institutions to provide trainings for students’ families on SEL competencies. Also, in 2018, Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA-3) introduced the Aim Higher Act, which would include SEL training in teacher preparation programs. The statuses of these three acts remain as introduced. Additionally, an unprecedented vote by the House Appropriations Committee for the 2020 education budget took place on May 8, 2019 in support of $260 million for SEL including research grants, educator professional development, increasing mental health workers in schools, and overall support for schools (CASEL, 2019). This bill will now move through the House of Representatives.

**State legislation and developments in the northeastern United States.** While only legislation pertaining to the northeastern states of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont will be summarized, it is pertinent to note that in 2002, Illinois was the first state to form a task force to generate SEL standards for students, and in 2004, became the first state to adopt preK-12 SEL standards. Also, CASEL had relocated from Yale University to the University of Chicago in 1996. All northeastern states except Vermont currently have legislative bills introduced or pending related to SEL as of 2019, compared to six states in 2018 and just three northeastern states in 2017 (Committee for Children, 2019). All of these states currently have legislation introduced and referred to state education or finance committees and involve establishing SEL
programming, providing training for practitioners and pre-service teachers, establishing measures of assessing school climate, and appropriating funding for research on best practices in SEL (CASEL, 2019).

In addition to the introduction of legislation, all states in the northeast have developed and adopted SEL standards for at least early childhood and preschool (CASEL, 2019). Maine, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island have done so through 12th grade. Pennsylvania has created standards through grade two while Vermont and Connecticut have created standards through grade three. Also, 21 states in the U.S. have established webpages and resource guides with support materials for SEL. For example, the state of New Hampshire released a school safety preparedness report with recommendations and specifically named the CLEP as an SEL program with academic, social, and emotional benefits for students (Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019; School Safety Preparedness Task Force Report, 2018). Other states offer guidelines for best practices, general teacher-created lesson plans or links to sites such as Edutopia on their resource pages (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2019; New Jersey Department of Education, 2019).

The federal legislation included in ESSA (2015) created pathways for SEL in schools and legislators at the federal and state level are working to make legislation in support of SEL more explicit. These policy decisions represent actions and a collective focus on SEL at the macrosystem level, which in turn affects exosystems, mesosystems and microsystems for the development of children in public schools.

Social Emotional Programming

Just as policymakers and legislators have increased their attention to SEL in recent years, studies on the impacts of social emotional programming have proliferated in the past two
decades and a review of such studies is provided in this section. For the purposes of this study, SEL LDPs as they directly relate to elementary school students will be summarized with an emphasis on student SEL competency outcomes as a result of participating in this programming. Studies on SEL LDPs fit with Bronfenbrenner’s conceptions of both the exosystem and mesosystems, as decisions around implementation of SEL programming do affect students, but they are environments in which students are not necessarily directly involved, and they also involve interactions between systems.

SEL program development has burgeoned in recent years. This increase in both for-profit and not-for-profit program availability has also led to the need for empirical research to support the use of evidence-based practices (ESSA, 2015). Studies on the effectiveness of SEL programs have accumulated substantially in the past two decades. As a direct response, CASEL began supporting stakeholders with published guides for identifying, comparing, and deciding upon which SEL program(s) to adopt (CASEL, 2005, 2013, 2015). These guides set forth three specific criteria for inclusion as a “CASEL SE Loot” program in their organization’s review documents: be well-designed, include training and implementation support, and be evidence-based (2013, p. 4). Well-designed refers to programs that are multiyear, classroom-based, and have the availability of multiple opportunities for students to practice given SEL skills. Availability of training and implementation support means that programs include initial training for faculty and staff members as well as follow-up, ongoing training for fidelity of implementation. Evidence-based criteria holds that the programs included in the review must have at least one “carefully conducted evaluation that documents positive impacts on student behavior and/or academic performance” (p. 7).
The 2013 guide included 23 specific programs that met these criteria. The availability of CASEL’s review guides, the publication of several large-scale meta-analytic studies of positive SEL and academic outcomes, and the abundance of peer-reviewed studies on specific SEL LDPs signal the need for continued contributions to this ever-growing body of literature. Seminal meta-analytic studies as well as a sample of studies investigating the effects of specific SEL programming were reviewed to highlight the pertinence of the present study.

**Seminal meta-analytic studies and student outcomes.** Three widely referenced meta-analyses have been conducted to synthesize the results of studies designed to evaluate SEL program efficacy. Meta-analyses involve the selection of studies with quantitative outcomes on a specific issue which meet a series of criteria, the coding of as many related features as possible, and the subsequent analysis using statistical procedures to relate the studies and summarize results (Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, Ben, & Gravesteijn, 2012). Three seminal meta-analytic studies are reviewed here and are included in Table 1.
## Table 1

**Meta-Analyses About SEL Programs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Authors</th>
<th>Studies Included</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact of SEL programming on SE and academic outcomes; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011)</td>
<td>213 studies: published in English, on school-based, universal, preventive interventions, for ages 5-18, published on or before 12/2007, emphasizing 1+ SEL competency, included a control group, sufficient information to calculate effect sizes (n = 270,034)</td>
<td>To explore the effects of SEL programs across multiple SE skills, attitudes towards self and others, conduct problems, emotional distress, and academic performance</td>
<td>SEL programs yielded (a) significant mean effects across SE skills (ES = .57), and attitudinal (ES = .23), behavioral (ES = .24), and academic domains (ES = .27), (b) classroom teachers were effective in implementing programs, (c) program outcomes were moderated by the use of recommended training practices and fidelity of implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigation of usefulness of SEL programs in schools; Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, Ben, and Gravesteijn (2012)</td>
<td>75 studies: school-based, universal, preventive interventions, ages 5-18, published between 1995-2008, sufficient information to calculate effect sizes, experimental or quasi-experimental design used; Avg. intervention group size = 543</td>
<td>To investigate whether involvement in an SEL program enhances students’ development in social skills, behavior, adjustment, an academic performance</td>
<td>Involvement in an SEL program resulted in significantly higher academic achievement (ES = .46), positive self-image (ES = .46), prosocial behavior (ES = .39), overall SEL skills (ES = .70), and less antisocial behavior (ES = -.43), mental disorders (ES = -.19), and substance abuse (ES = -.09).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term effects of SEL programming; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, and Weissberg (2017)</td>
<td>82 studies: school-based, universal, preventive interventions for ages 5-18, published on or before 12/2014, had to have control groups and collect follow-up data 6 months or longer postintervention, and must have calculated an effect size for at least 1 outcome (n = 97,406)</td>
<td>To review follow-up effects of SEL programs (ranging from 6 months to 18 years postintervention)</td>
<td>Follow-up effects significantly favored SEL program participants (SEL skills, ES = .23; attitudes, ES = .13; positive social behavior, ES = .13; academic performance, ES = .33) across diverse racial and socioeconomic populations, and SEL competencies at postintervention predicted long-term well-being at follow up.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2011, Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger conducted an extensive meta-analysis involving 213 studies and 270,034 students in grades K-12. These researchers were interested in exploring outcomes achieved by programs that attempted to develop SEL skills, whether or not these interventions did promote positive outcomes and prevent further problems, whether or not SEL programs could be successfully implemented within the school setting by school staff, and if program implementation fidelity and adhering to best practices captured by the acronym SAFE (sequenced lessons, active engagement, focused time on skill development, and explicit learning goals) moderated outcomes. After conducting a literature search for studies meeting inclusion criteria, a coding system was developed to record information from each study report about each variable and the coding process was carried out by trained research assistants. One effect size value per study was calculated for each outcome variable. Of the studies included in the meta-analysis, 56% of the studies involved programs implemented with elementary-aged students, 47% of the studies included were conducted in urban settings, and 53% of the studies were implemented within the classroom setting by classroom teachers.

Results indicated that, compared to controls, SEL programs significantly improved SEL competencies (ES = .57), attitudes towards self and others (ES = .23), more positive social behavior (ES = .24), higher academic performance (ES = .27), fewer conduct problems (ES = .22), and less emotional distress (ES = .24). All significance levels were set at $p < .05$. All of these effects remained significant 6 months post-intervention. Further, implementation of programming within the classroom by classroom teachers was effective in all six outcome categories while implementation of programming by non-school personnel was effective in three of the outcome categories. Similarly, programs which followed all four SAFE practices
demonstrated significant effects in all six outcome variables while programs that did not meet the SAFE practices requirements had significant effects in three of the outcome categories.

Specifically regarding academic performance, though only 16% of the studies included in the meta-analysis reported academic achievement outcomes, researchers concluded that in this subset of studies, students who participated in an SEL program, on average, performed 11 percentile-points higher on standardized reading and mathematics assessments than those who did not participate in an SEL program. This is the most well-known finding regarding increased academic achievement as a result of participation in an SEL program. Of the 270,034 K-12 students included in the study, academic achievement information was available for 135,396 of those students. This academic achievement gain was calculated by translating effect sizes on academic measures into percentile rankings. This finding was situated in the context of an increased level of instructional, interpersonal and environmental support in that students participating in SEL programs may experience an increased level of caring relationships, connectedness, and sense of safety at school. This translates to ideal conditions for learning. The results from this meta-analysis highlighted the benefits of SAFE implementation of SEL programming carried out by school personnel on various student outcomes.

In 2012, Sklad, Diekstra, De Ritter, Ben, and Gravesteijn published another meta-analytic review of 75 studies regarding the increase of SE skills and decrease of antisocial behavior through the use of universal, school-based programs. The researchers sought to explore the usefulness of SEL programs in schools. The researchers defined their literature search process and inclusion criteria, retrieved studies, and four trained research assistants coded the studies. Outcomes included SE skills and positive self-image and behavioral adjustment such as antisocial and prosocial behavior, substance abuse, mental health disorders, and academic
achievement. Approximately 75% of studies included were from North America and 41.3% of the studies were with elementary aged students. Results indicated that involvement in an SEL program resulted in significantly higher academic achievement (ES = .46), positive self-image (ES = .46), prosocial behavior (ES = .39), and overall SEL skills (ES = .70), and less antisocial behavior (ES = -.43), mental disorders (ES = -.19), and substance abuse (ES = -.09). All significance levels were set at $p < .001$. There were overall beneficial effects on social skills, antisocial behavior, substance abuse, self-image, academic achievement, mental health, and prosocial behavior. Similar to Durlak and colleagues’ results (2011), Sklad et al. (2012) found that effect sizes were significant when classroom teachers were the implementers of SEL programs as well as other trainers who were not classroom teachers. The researchers concluded that SEL programs are beneficial and that SE development is indeed enhanced through the use of specific SEL programming.

Most recently, a 2017 follow-up meta-analytic study to the 2011 meta-analysis by Durlak et al. was conducted to examine follow-up outcomes of previous participation in school-based, universal SEL programs (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg). Taylor et al. (2017) sought to fill a gap in the research in examining follow-up effects at six months or more postintervention. The researchers hypothesized that participation in an SEL program would protect against negative subsequent outcomes as well as promote subsequent wellbeing. Specifically, SEL skills, attitudes towards self and others, positive social behavior, academic success, conduct problems, emotional distress, and substance abuse were all outcomes that were included in this meta-analytic study. A literature search and study selection process similar to the 2011 meta-analysis was conducted and 82 studies were included (Durlak et al.). Of the studies included, 37.8% involved elementary aged students. An effect size was calculated for each outcome.
Statistically significant effect sizes were found for all seven outcomes: SEL skills (ES = .23), attitudes (ES = .13), positive social behavior (ES = .13), academic performance (ES = .33), conduct problems (ES = .14), emotional distress (ES = .16) and drug use (ES = .16) and this was true across demographic categories from 56 weeks-195 weeks postintervention. All significance levels were set at $p < .05$. Further, hierarchical meta-regression was used to test the strength of the relationship between SEL skills at postintervention and wellbeing at follow up. Higher levels of SEL skills at postintervention were also associated with higher levels of wellbeing at follow up ($R^2$ change = .15; $B = .29; \beta = .35$, $p < .01$). Additionally, original results from the 2011 meta-analysis by Durlak et al. not only held, but were expanded in that the students who participated in SEL programs had a 13% higher academic performance average than non-SEL peers 3.5 years post-intervention and experienced more positive development in the same social and emotional skill areas and behaviors that were originally examined.

Overall, higher SEL skills immediately postintervention were associated with greater wellbeing and more positive long-term outcomes. Taylor et al. (2017) were able to calculate both percentages of advantage for students who participated in SEL programs as well as lifetime monetary benefit for 29 of the studies included in the meta-analysis. They found, for instance that participation in an SEL program yielded long term positive effects such as a 6% reduction in placement in a special education class, a 12.5% reduction in repeating a grade level, an 11% advantage in earning a college degree, a 13.5% reduction in receiving a mental health disorder diagnosis.

While the effect sizes from the three meta-analyses included in this review may at first seem small, it is recommended that these values be compared to other educational interventions rather than to Cohen’s suggestions for judging magnitude (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al.,
This recommendation is generally held across SEL outcome research. These meta-analyses demonstrate that involvement in SEL programming promotes positive SE growth, behavior, and various positive life outcomes.

Results from the three meta-analyses reviewed suggest that in relation to Research Question One in the current study, there may be a significant difference between students’ SEL competencies as measured by the CL survey based on condition. Also, whether they are involved in an SEL LDP or not, students have important experiences at school to speak from when it comes to SEL competencies related to a variety of outcomes. This researcher sought to capture students’ insights on this topic. Further, courage is a construct that was not noted in any of the reviewed meta-analyses, so the researcher was interested in learning more about students’ perceptions on this construct.

**SEL programs and student social emotional outcomes.** Because the current research relies on the supported benefits of SEL competence amongst students on a variety of outcomes, the researcher conducted a review of studies that focused on specific SEL program effectiveness as evidenced by increased positive outcomes or decreased negative outcomes for students. The explicit teaching of SEL competencies has been linked empirically to extensive positive student SE outcomes including short-term and long-term outcomes, as summarized in the previous section of meta-analytic results. Additionally, in an era of accountability and data-driven decision making mandated at federal and state levels, academic performance continues to be a driving force in programmatic choices, just as it was during the time of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The intersection of participation in an SEL program and academic achievement has therefore been the focus of some empirical research, in addition to SE outcomes.
Many programs are available for adoption to foster SEL competencies (CASEL, 2013). According to CASEL’s (2013) guide for effective SEL programs, SEL programs traditionally include explicit lessons which target SEL skills. However, some programs included in CASEL’s elementary school level guide incorporate SEL skills while teaching academic content. Still others offer classroom management practices to foster SEL skills. A sample of studies were reviewed to highlight the SE outcome benefits that some of the programs included in CASEL’s (2013) guide have. Priority was given to any SEL programs named by participants in the current study. Because the present study took place in the northeastern U.S., other studies were selected based on researcher knowledge of programs being used in surrounding districts. In Table 2, studies relate to specific SEL LDPs, program effectiveness, and student outcomes.
### Table 2

**SEL Programs and Student Outcome Studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Authors</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effects of Responsive Classroom (RC) approach on teacher perceptions of academic and social competencies; Rimm-Kaufman and Chiu, (2007)</td>
<td>Teachers ($n = 62$) and children ($n = 157$) from 6 schools, grades 1-4</td>
<td>To determine teachers’ perceptions of student academic and social competencies as a result of using the RC approach</td>
<td>Use of RC approach was associated with modest increases in teacher perceptions of student reading achievement and in improvement in prosocial behavior, assertiveness, and decreased anxious-fearful behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy of Responsive Classroom (RC) approach on reading and mathematics achievement; Rimm-Kaufman et al., (2014)</td>
<td>Students ($n = 2,904$) from 24 schools, grade levels 2-5, randomly assigned to RC condition or control</td>
<td>To investigate whether or not the use of the RC approach increases student achievement in the areas of mathematics and reading</td>
<td>Students in RC condition did not outperform students in control condition. However, use of RC mediated treatment assignment and achievement. Results emphasized the importance of fidelity of implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of RULER Feeling Words Curriculum on academic and social performance; Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, and Salovey, (2012)</td>
<td>Students ($n = 273$) from 3 schools, grades 5-6 assigned to RULER or comparison condition</td>
<td>Tested the impact of RULER on academic performance and SE competence</td>
<td>Students participating in RULER had higher year-end grades on report cards and higher teacher ratings of SE competencies than students in comparison group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RULER approach and SE climate of classrooms; Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Elbertson, and Salovey, (2013)</td>
<td>Teachers ($n = 105$) and students ($n = 3,824$) from 62 Catholic schools, 155 classrooms, grades 5-6</td>
<td>Determined whether RULER improves classroom emotional climate</td>
<td>RULER classrooms were rated as having a higher degree of teacher-student warmth and connectedness, student autonomy, and student-centered focus than comparison schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

**SEL Programs and Student Outcome Studies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Authors</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes of the social competence program Second Step; Holsen, Smith, and Frey, (2008)</td>
<td>Students ($n = 1,153$) after one year of implementation from 11 schools, in Norway, grades 5-6</td>
<td>Investigate outcomes of Second Step as measured by level of internalizing and externalizing problems</td>
<td>Second Step had positive effects on social competence for students in grade 5, boys in grade 6, and girls in grade 7 involved in the program compared to students who were not as well as fewer externalizing behavior problems for boys in grade 6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in particular SEL LDP, PATHS, and impact on academic achievement; Schonfeld et al., (2015)</td>
<td>Students from 24 schools in 1 large, urban, northeastern district, grades 3-6 ($n = 705$)</td>
<td>To determine whether involvement in the intervention improves student academic achievement and whether improvements would be influenced by a dosage effect</td>
<td>Students participating in the PATHS curriculum demonstrated higher scores in reading, writing, and mathematics according to state mastery test data in at least one of these subject areas per grade level. There was also a dosage effect for reading and mathematics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in Tribes Learning Communities (TLC), and impact on student achievement; Kiger, (2000)</td>
<td>Students in a midwestern, urban district from 5 schools, grades 1-8 ($n = 495$)</td>
<td>To evaluate the implementation of TLC and its impact on student achievement</td>
<td>When the TLC process was implemented with fidelity, it had a positive impact on student achievement ($M = 54.26$) compared to classrooms where TLC was partially implemented ($M = 48.91$) or not implemented ($M = 50.41$).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responsive Classroom Approach. Two empirical studies on the efficacy of the Responsive Classroom (RC) approach were reviewed. RC is defined as “a student-centered, social and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline. It is comprised of a set of practices designed to create safe, joyful, and engaging classroom and school communities for both students and teachers” (Responsive Classroom, 2019, lines 1-5). Rimm-Kaufmann and Chiu (2007) completed a longitudinal quasi-experimental study to compare teachers’ perceptions of student social and academic competence at schools implementing the RC approach compared with schools in a control group over the course of 3 years. Teacher perceptions of children’s reading achievement, closeness toward their students, children’s assertiveness, and children’s prosocial behavior were examined using a variety of valid and reliable measures. Hierarchical regression analysis was used. There was a small main effect for reading ($R^2 = .02, F = 8.39, p < .01$) where teachers’ use of RC practices related to improvement in this area ($\beta = .15, p < .01$), though it only explained 2% of the variance.

Use of the RC approach led to more positive perceptions in teacher-child relationships, accounting for 6% of the variance ($R^2 = .06, F = 10.52, p < .01$). Additionally, use of the RC approach led to increased level of assertiveness ($R^2 = .04, F = 5.95, p < .05$), prosocial behaviors ($R^2 = .03, F = 4.80, p < .05$), and decreased anxious-fearful behavior ($R^2 = .03, F = 5.91, p < .01$). These results suggest that the RC approach modestly improves reading performance and has a positive impact on various social competencies, including prosocial behavior with peers and assertiveness, and results in less anxious or fearful behavior amongst students.

In 2014, the first randomized controlled study of the efficacy of the RC approach on student achievement took place in 24 schools with 2,904 students in grades 2-5 (Rimm-Kaufman et al.). The longitudinal study took place over the course of 3 years. Students were from a large,
A culturally and ethnically diverse district in the mid-Atlantic U.S. Schools were randomly assigned to RC condition or control condition. Fidelity of implementation was measured through the use of a classroom observation protocol as well as two different teacher-report measures. The state standardized achievement test was used to measure student achievement outcomes. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the main effect of treatment on outcomes as well as the mediated effect of treatment on outcomes through fidelity. Students at schools assigned to the treatment condition did not outperform students in the control condition in reading or mathematics when controlling for fidelity to measure direct treatment effects. Girls outperformed boys across conditions. Fidelity for RC practices was positively related to mathematics and reading scores, $\beta = .26, p < .01; \beta = .30, p < .01$, respectively. Random assignment to treatment resulted in increased fidelity as well as improvement in mathematics and reading scores, $\beta = .44, p < .01; \beta = .52, p < .01$, respectively, which allowed for an examination of the SEL program’s impact on mathematics and reading scores.

Rimm-Kaufman and colleagues (2014) believed that although a priori power analysis suggested the statistical power applied was sufficient, this may not actually have been the case and perhaps the study lacked sufficient statistical power. Authors concluded that on one hand, the direct effect of the RC approach on student achievement was not significant, but on the other hand, random assignment to RC condition resulted in increased use of RC practices which then resulted in increased achievement. Fidelity of implementation may still have been a concern. They stated that administrative support was an important factor in high quality implementation.

These two studies on the RC approach were selected for review because they highlight salient challenges pertaining to empirical results related to SEL programming as well as the challenges fidelity of implementation pose to program efficacy. For example, Rimm-Kaufman
and colleagues (2014) stated that teachers’ perception of principal buy-in of the RC approach, teacher psychological state related to burnout and self-efficacy, teacher commitment to SEL and school climate, and overall organizational health all contribute to implementation fidelity.

**Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating Emotions (RULER)**. RULER is an approach that is based in the ability to recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate emotions in oneself and others through the use of formal lessons, such as those found in the RULER Feeling Words Curriculum, as well as a set of overarching anchor tools and professional development opportunities for school staff (Brackett et al., 2012). RULER originated from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and is grounded in Salovey and Meyer’s (1990) emotional intelligence framework. Specifically, the efficacy of the RULER Feeling Words Curriculum was investigated in 2012 to determine its impact on academic performance as measured by report card grades and SE competence as measured by teacher reports on the Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC; Reynolds & Kamphuas, 1992).

A quasi-experimental design was used with pre- and post-testing. Participants were from three ethnically and racially diverse elementary schools on Long Island, New York in grades five and six. Schools were randomly assigned to intervention or comparison condition. Repeated measures ANCOVAs were used to assess mean differences. Students in the RULER group had significantly higher adaptability scores and significantly lower school problem scores than students in the comparison group, \( F(1, 244) = 7.66 \) and \( 9.34, p = 0.006 \) and \( 0.002, \) partial \( \eta^2 = 0.030 \) and \( 0.037, \) respectively. Also, students in the RULER group had higher grades in ELA and work habits/social development at post-test than students in the comparison group, \( F(1, 221) = 12.65 \) and \( 10.04, p < 0.002, \) partial \( \eta^2 = 0.05 \) and \( 0.04, \) respectively. Overall, there were some
significant, positive results for students in the RULER group in both academic and SE competencies. This study provided preliminary empirical evidence to support the use of RULER with elementary school students.

In 2013, Rivers et al. examined the impact of RULER on the SE climate of classrooms. Participants were from 62 Catholic schools in Brooklyn and Queens, New York. There were 155 grade five or six classrooms in the study, 105 teachers, and 3,824 students. Classrooms ranged substantially in terms of demographic makeup. Classroom emotional climate was measured through use of an observational protocol, teacher reports, and student reports. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to analyze the impacts of RULER on classroom SE climate. RULER classrooms were associated with higher ratings of overall emotional climate. For example, emotional support (ES = .50, p < .05), positive climate (ES = .55, p < .01), regard for student perspectives (ES = .60, p < .05), emotion-focused interactions (ES = .52, p < .05), and use of cooperative learning strategies (ES = .53, p < .05) were higher for RULER classrooms than comparison classrooms. Student reports of SE climate were not significant. This randomized control trial provided rigorous empirical support for the use of RULER in improving SE climate in classrooms as measured by observations and teacher-ratings.

Taken together, these two studies illustrate the potential of specific SEL LDP impacts on academic achievement, SE competence, and classroom climate using EI as a guiding framework.

**Second Step.** Second Step (SS) is a program with units on learning, friendship, problem solving, emotion management, and empathy skills for students in pre-K-grade 8. In 2008, Holsen, Smith, and Frey investigated program effectiveness by measuring social competence and externalizing problem behavior among students participating in SS using an age-cohort design. This study took place in Norway, where 60% of schools had purchased SS and all schools in
Norway were required to explicitly teach social skills. Because of this government mandate, it was not possible to compare students in SS to a non-intervention group. Therefore, the researchers first used a repeated-measures design in which pre-test data of students in fall of one year were compared to post-test data on the same students the following year. A second set of analyses were conducted using an age-cohort design. For example, fifth-grade students’ post-test data after one year of intervention was compared with pre-test data from sixth-grade children before they had received the intervention so that age-equivalent comparisons were possible.

Students completed the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) by Gresham and Elliott (1990) which assesses cooperation, assertiveness, empathy, and self-control. They also reported on externalizing and internalizing problem behavior and hyperactivity (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Linear mixed modeling analysis was used to calculate effect sizes. Regarding repeated measures analyses, Holsen et al. (2008) found “a significant effect of time, $F(1, 1726) = 66.32, p < .0001$, gender, $F(1, 1739) = 46.69, p < 0.0001$ and time by grade interaction, $F(1, 1727) = 10.09, p < 0.01$” (p. 79). In terms of the design’s intervention effects, social competence for the sixth grade intervention group ($M = 3.19$) was significantly higher than the mean for the comparison group ($M = 3.12$), $F(1, 681) = 4.62, p < 0.05$, ES = 0.18. This was not true for students in grades 5 or 7.

Regarding change over time for social competence, students significantly increased their scores ($p < .01$) from grade 5 ($M = 3.08$) to grade 6 ($M = 3.18$), but not from grade 6 ($M = 3.12$) to 7 ($M = 3.11$). Only girls from the sixth to the seventh grade showed an increase in social competence, $F(1, 733) = 4.69, p < .05$, ES = 0.32. There was also a significant difference in externalizing problem behaviors for boys in grade 6, $F(1, 669) = 8.19, p < 0.01$, ES = 0.27. The intervention group ($M = 1.60$) had significantly lower scores than the comparison group ($M =
Regarding group differences, Holsen et al. noted that overall, the literature reveals that girls consistently reported higher levels of social competence than boys. Researchers concluded that Second Step shows some positive impacts on social competence as well as on externalizing problem behavior. In the current study, Second Step was a program explicitly named by some participants.

**Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies.** In 2015, the effect of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program on academic achievement was evaluated using a four-year, cluster-randomized, controlled, longitudinal design (Schonfeld et al., 2015). PATHS is an SEL curriculum for students in grades K-6 that focuses on emotional awareness, self-control, interpersonal problem solving, perspective taking, developing relationships, and enhancing self-esteem and social responsibility. Participants were 705 third-sixth grade students who attended 24 elementary schools from a large, urban, high-risk district in the northeastern U.S. Prior to the study, Schonfeld et al. (2015) conducted an independent samples t-test which revealed there were no differences in achievement as measured by state mastery test scores between intervention and control schools (reading $t(22) = 0.19, p = .85, d = .08$; writing $t(22) = 0.28, p = .78, d = .12$; mathematics $t(22) = 0.64, p = .53, d = .27$).

Results indicated that at post-intervention, fourth grade students who had participated in the PATHS program were 1.72 times more likely to attain basic reading proficiency on the state mastery test compared to students in the control group (63.2% vs. 54.5%, respectively; $OR = 1.72, p < .05$; $OR 95\% CI = 1.49–1.95$). In writing, fifth grade students in the intervention group were 1.52 times more likely to attain basic proficiency than peers in the control group (91.7% vs. 89.1%, respectively; $OR = 1.52, p < .05$; $OR 95\% CI = 1.26-1.78$). Sixth grade students in the intervention group were also more likely to achieve basic writing proficiency than peers in the
control group (91.9% vs. 89.4%, respectively; \( OR = 1.51, p < .05 \); \( OR \) 95% CI = 1.24-1.78). In mathematics, fourth grade students in the intervention group were 1.63 times more likely than students in the control group to attain basic proficiency (87.9% vs. 82.2%, respectively; \( OR = 1.91, p < .01 \); \( OR \) 95% CI = 1.63-2.19). To summarize, students in intervention schools demonstrated higher scores in reading, writing, and mathematics according to state mastery test data in at least one of these subject areas per grade level.

For reading and mathematics over time, there was also a dosage effect in that the number of PATHS lessons students experienced predicted grade level basic proficiency for sixth grade. Specifically, in reading, the number of lessons students experienced increased the likelihood of attaining basic proficiency by 1.37 times for each lesson taught (\( OR = 1.37, p < .05 \), 95% CI = 1.10-1.64). In mathematics, the number of lessons taught was also a significant predictor of sixth grade basic proficiency (\( OR = 1.29, p < .05 \), 95% CI = 1.02-1.30). Regarding group differences, females were more likely to score basic proficiency in fourth and fifth grade reading and across all three grade levels in writing. Researchers noted that training for teachers was available, which may have contributed to the overall positive effects demonstrated in this study. In a national and local landscape of continued emphasis on academic rigor, this study supports Durlak et al.’s (2011) meta-analytic results that SEL programming can increase academic achievement.

**Tribes Learning Communities.** There is one existing study which evaluated the impact of Tribes Learning Communities (TLC) on student achievement (Kiger, 2000). Although this study is 2 decades old, it was important to include in this review of related literature as TLC is one approach that was named by participating classroom educators and students as an approach used in the current study by some participants. TLC is not an SEL LDP but rather a process for
building caring, supportive relationships, positive expectations, and meaningful participation (Tribes Learning Community, 2019). Students in TLC classrooms sit in collaborative groups of 3-6 students and four “tribal agreements” are honored in a TLC classroom. These agreements are “attentive listening, appreciation/no put downs, mutual respect, and the right to pass” (Kiger, 2000, p. 587). Participating teachers were trained and certified in the TLC process prior to the study. Kiger (2000) collected implementation information from teachers and students in the fall and spring of one academic year regarding how often they perceived their classroom activities reflected the TLC process. This survey was written by the authors of TLC. A mean was calculated from this survey. District administrators determined that a mean score of at least 2.50 was necessary in order to identify a classroom as reflective of the TLC process. In order to determine whether TLC impacted academic achievement as measured by two standardized achievement measures, Kiger (2000) divided participants into three categories: Tribes, Part Tribes, and Not Tribes. Tribes students were the only group with mean survey scores > 2.50. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) indicated a significant difference in reading comprehension by group, $F(2,132) = 7.26, p < .001$. Reading comprehension scores were significantly higher for Tribes students ($M = 54.26$) than for Part Tribes ($M = 48.91$) and Not Tribes ($M = 50.41$) students. Results suggested that fidelity of implementation was important in order to have a positive impact on student achievement.

The studies reviewed in this subsection on SEL programming and student outcomes highlight the importance of ensuring that children’s time at school is spent in classrooms that carefully attend to their social and emotional needs, because as ecological systems theory holds, the immediate settings as well as broader systems children move between will shape their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).
Economic impact of SEL. Aside from research focusing on SEL programming and student outcomes, an alternate perspective is emerging for considering the impact of SEL programming. This area of research involves the economic impact of SEL programs. Districts and states have to make many difficult decisions in where to invest a limited amount of funding for schools. Considering impact from an economic perspective may be an important one in making spending decisions.

One tool used in analyzing the economic implications of programming is benefit-cost analysis, which compares the monetary cost of programming with the monetary value of its outcomes (Belfield et al., 2015; Hunter, DiPerna, Hart, & Crowley, 2018). A benefit-cost analysis of six SEL interventions was conducted and showed that relative to the costs of implementation, both at individual and aggregated levels, these programs showed benefits that exceeded their costs (Belfield et al., 2015). The SEL interventions included in this analysis were 4Rs (Reading Writing, Respect, and Resolution), Positive Action, Life Skills Training, SS, RC, and Social and Emotional Training. To conduct a benefit-cost analysis, costs needed to be estimated for each intervention, then benefits must be estimated, and then a benefit-cost ratio can be calculated. In the aggregate, the benefit ratio of 11:1 was calculated so that for every dollar spent among the six interventions analyzed, there was a return of $11.00.

A second type of economic analysis, a cost-effectiveness analysis, was conducted using a particular program, the Social Skills Improvement Program—Classwide Intervention Program (SSIP-CIP; Elliott & Gresham, 2007; Hunter et al., 2018). A cost-effectiveness analysis involves three phases: calculating costs through a cost analysis, calculating effects as measured by effect size to calculate a cost-effectiveness ratio, and comparing costs to an intervention effectiveness metric (Hunter et al., 2018). To calculate costs, personnel, facilities, materials and equipment,
and any other program component are added to benefit-cost software. Then, to calculate effects, usually results from an efficacy study in the form of effect sizes are used. Finally, after cost and effectiveness values are collected, a ratio can be created. In this particular study, for the SSIP-CIP, a cost-effectiveness analysis was conducted for first \( (n = 696) \) and second grade students \( (n = 426) \) across seven Pennsylvania elementary schools (DiPerna et al., 2016). It was determined that first grade students experienced a 7% increase in social skills, with an incremental cost-effectiveness ratio of $2.66 per student and second grade students experienced a 14% increase in social skills with an incremental cost-effectiveness ratio of $1.35 per student. Together, these studies signal an emerging area of research in examining economic impacts through benefit-cost analyses and cost-effectiveness analyses as districts grapple with making decisions on funding SEL programs.

**Culturally and ethnically diverse populations.** In addition to studies that contribute to the effectiveness of SEL programs in general, researchers have called for more empirical studies examining the effectiveness of SEL programs specifically with culturally and ethnically diverse populations and have even questioned whether or not some SEL curricula adequately acknowledge and address implicit bias or a permeating a culture of compliance rather than empowerment for diverse populations (Elias, 2013; Elias & Haynes, 2008; Hoffman, 2009; Soutter, 2018). Given prominent political and racial tensions that face the U.S., students of color, especially those living in poverty, require excellent, evidence-based programming that has been evaluated and implemented successfully with demographically similar populations (Hatchimonji et al., 2017). In her critical analysis of SEL, Hoffman (2009) questioned whether SEL programs adequately honor cultural diversity or operate from a single narrative of emotional competency. Some researchers have investigated this point, because while many of the
programs reviewed by CASEL (2013) attempted to include culturally and ethnically diverse learners in their studies, few programs have undertaken systematic, thorough efforts to account for sociocultural factors that may impact program effectiveness (Garner, Mahatmya, Brown, & Vesely, 2014).

One example of ensuring culturally responsive SEL programming lies in an examination by Graves and colleagues (2017) of the effectiveness of a culturally adapted SEL program, Strong Start, for K-2 students identified as at-risk and in need of emotional support. This study was conducted in a predominantly African American (98.8%) school in an urban setting in a mid-Atlantic state. Graves et al. employed a randomized delayed treatment control design. Knowledge of social emotional skills, assets, and externalizing behaviors were measured using Strong Start’s assessment tool for social emotional knowledge as well as the BASC and the Social Emotional Assets and Resilience tool (Merrell, Cohn, & Tom, 2011; Reynolds & Kamphuas, 1992).

Using repeated-measures ANOVAs, treatment effects of SE knowledge were analyzed. Students’ scores regarding SE knowledge increased from 68% at pre-test to 84% at post-test. Further, students experienced significant gains in self-regulation, $F(1, 59) = 37.8, p < .001$, and self-competency, $F(1, 59) = 194.7, p < .001$, over the course of the intervention. These results suggest that skills can be effectively taught over a relatively short period of time (14 weeks, 1 session per week). The authors noted that because there is overrepresentation of African Americans identified as emotionally and behaviorally disturbed in special education populations, an intervention such as Strong Start should be a policy focus. The decision to apply cultural adaptations to the Strong Start program speaks to cultural responsiveness that is necessary in careful SE program implementation (Durlak, 2016; Hoffman, 2019).
In order to create culturally, racially and ethnically adaptive SE programming, Garner et al. (2014) developed a “multilevel, heuristic, socio-culturally grounded framework” with recommendations for modification of existing SEL programs to increase responsiveness (p. 166). With this model, Garner et al. posited that children’s SE competence is directly influenced by three areas: (a) home and neighborhood context (family emotion socialization practices, cultural values, neighborhood characteristics, and geographic location), (b) child sociocultural characteristics (race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, disability status), and (c) school context (geographic location, economic/material/teaching resources, racial/ethnic composition).

With this model in mind, Garner et al. proposed that when studying impacts of SEL programming, adequate numbers of children across racial and ethnic subgroups should be included and perhaps oversampling of students from these subgroups will be necessary. Also, race and ethnicity are separate constructs that have been collapsed across studies and should not be. When this empirical work is completed, program developers and researchers will know better how to adapt SEL interventions for diverse populations. Second, SEL programs may require multiple shifts in individual, family, or neighborhood elements portrayed in the form of vignettes and scenarios used in programming, or even characters in videotapes. Garner et al. warned that just including, for example, a single parent family structure in a videotape vignette is not sufficient, though. In other words, all aspects of SEL programming need to be examined for cultural responsiveness, including language in SEL measures and lesson materials. After accounting for these factors, programs would result in greater compatibility with sociocultural characteristics, be contextually and relationally grounded, account for appropriate choice in outcome measurement, allow for flexible adjustments of dosage and timing of interventions, and provide formal training of sociocultural competence for implementers. Garner et al. stated that
their aim was not to criticize existing programs, but to increasingly improve cultural sensitivity and perspective-taking.

These studies demonstrate the necessity of critical analysis and shifts in practice in order to achieve truly responsive teaching of SEL and thus meaningful student outcomes for all populations.

**Unintended outcomes of SEL programs.** In seeking to explore all perspectives in relation to SEL programming, the researcher uncovered some unintended outcomes of SEL programs in reviewing related literature. These insights are important, as once they surface, program developers, policymakers, and implementers can be responsive. Soutter (2018) examined SEL development and youth voice among 982 fourth and fifth grade students from 12 schools across three urban and suburban districts in the eastern U.S. Six schools were treatment schools and implemented a particular program, The Leader in Me, and six were control schools. The Leader in Me draws from the widely read *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989) and aims to teach students to “be proactive, begin with the end in mind, put first things first, think win-win, seek first to understand then to be understood, synergize (work together), and sharpen the saw (self-improvement and balance)” (Soutter, 2018, p. 6). Students were surveyed and interviewed regarding youth voice, perceptions of support at school, self-efficacy (aligned with self-management), teamwork (aligned with relationship skills), and perseverance. Results indicated that students in this SEL program actually experienced significant decreases in SEL competencies, student voice, and teacher support as reported by self-report surveys compared to students in the control condition. Interviews indicated that some students in the SEL program had an understanding of the five CASEL defined SEL competencies. However, students evidenced varying levels of understanding of the components of the particular program
in which they participated. Most surprising, though, as some students spoke about the program’s benefits, Soutter discovered that student perceptions largely evidenced a theme of compliance and not empowerment, even though teachers in the study believed the program to empower students to be leaders. Soutter concluded that 22 of the 36 students interviewed spoke of behaving and being quiet rather than of the leadership qualities the program intended to foster. Soutter’s conclusions draw attention to the need for including student perceptions qualitatively as well as quantitatively in investigating SEL program impact.

Another unintended consequence of well-intended approaches to fostering positive SE and character growth lies in the common practice of implementing multiple initiatives at once (Hatchimonji et al., 2017). Part of this challenge lies in nomenclature. For example, SEL, character education, emotional intelligence, moral education, positive behavior supports, school climate, school culture, positive youth development, civic education, ethics, prosocial development, prevention, non-cognitive skills, 21st century skills, soft skills, whole-child approach, etc. are all terms utilized by stakeholders. While some terms are interchangeable, many emerged from theoretically distinctive frameworks, employ different approaches, and are concerned with different constructs (Elias, 2013). Not only is the use of language problematic, but the multiple-initiative approach of many districts too often results in significant implementation challenges and underwhelming results (Elias, 2013; Hatchimonji et al., 2017; Tolan, Ross, Arkin, Godine, & Clark, 2016). A lack of cohesion in programming leads most concerningly to ineffectual student growth, but also to staff burnout, frustration, and wasted, limited resources (Elias, 2013; Hatchimonji et al., 2017).

Overall, the selected studies for review in this section on SEL programming and student outcomes demonstrate the complex, yet overall promising effects of SEL approaches and
programs. In keeping with the ecological model of development, it is clear from the studies reviewed that SEL in schools substantially affects multiple systems, all of which hold student development and growth as the impetus for continued research.

**Courage as a Construct**

There are few SEL programs that incorporate courage explicitly as a critical component. Courage as a character strength has deep philosophical roots dating back to ancient thinkers such as Aristotle and Epictetus and 20th century philosophers such as Sartre and the existentialists (Putman, 2010). Aristotle conceived of courage in part as making a difference through action, largely in considering physical courage, while Epictetus and the Stoics added the dimension of moral courage to this concept when they placed value on maintaining integrity (Putman, 2010). The existentialists built upon this concept in holding that courage at its essence is about who a person is going to be, while Eastern perspectives of courage have historically held that psychological courage matters in openness, presence, and metacognitive awareness (Putman, 2010).

The search for agreed upon definitions of courage to date continues across disciplines, particularly in the social sciences, and research on courage in the area of education has been limited (Rate, 2010). Courage can be conceived of as an accolade, but it can also be characterized as a process involving various amounts of strength and risk (Pury & Starkey, 2010). While overcoming fear is a component of many definitions of courage, courage can also be acquired or consciously grown (Rachman, 2010). For example, research on bomb-disposal operators, assault troops, and paratroopers has yielded results that suggest skill training, self-confidence, and support from a group with whom one has close relationships enhances courage.
(Rachman, 2010). The conceptualization of courage is evolutionary. Thus, the nature of courage as a construct for research purposes is still developing.

The Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program (CLEP) is one SEL program that does explicitly focus on the construct of courage. The CLEP is grounded in courage and the first unit taught across grade levels Pre-K-12 is courage (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019). The Circle of Courage is also a positive youth development model, which hinges upon this concept (Starr Commonwealth, 2017). While these are the only two SEL programs or approaches the researcher found that explicitly identified the concept of courage and only the CLEP has structured lessons to cultivate courage, this construct may be implicitly fostered through other SEL program components (CASEL, 2013). Table 3 summarizes studies that the researcher identified as related to courage and SEL competencies in students.
### Table 3

#### Studies About Courage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Authors</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s self-perceptions of courage and fear; Muris, (2009)</td>
<td>Children, from 1 Dutch elementary school, ages 8-13, ((n = 51))</td>
<td>To determine whether or not fear and courage are explicity linked in situations requiring courage</td>
<td>Fear and situational courage were not significantly related ((r = .08)). Children who were sensation seeking generally were more courageous ((r = .63, p &lt; .001)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage and its relationships to anxiety, personality traits, and sex roles; Muris, Mayer, and Schubert, (2010)</td>
<td>Children, ages 8-13, from Dutch elementary schools ((n = 327))</td>
<td>To explore whether courage is positively linked to extroverted personality trait and a masculine sex role and negatively linked to anxiety symptoms</td>
<td>Courage was significantly related to extraversion and masculine sex role and negatively related to anxiety ((r = .37; r = .50; r = -.30, \text{ respectively})).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of moral identity and moral courage in moral rebellion; Sonnentag and Barnett, (2016)</td>
<td>Students, ages 12-15, from public middle schools in midwestern US, in grades 7-8 ((n = 243))</td>
<td>Whether moral identity and moral courage influenced tendency to be a moral rebel in adolescence</td>
<td>Indices of moral courage predicted the tendency to be a moral rebel (R^2 &gt; .06, p &lt; .01).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longitudinal study of parenting and gender as predictors of moral courage in late adolescence; Bronstein, Fox, Kamon, and Knolls, (2007)</td>
<td>Students, fifth grade at start of study, from public schools in northeastern US ((n = 93))</td>
<td>Investigated whether parenting style and gender were predictors of moral courage from fifth grade to twelfth grade</td>
<td>Aware parenting was a positive, significant predictor of twelfth grade moral courage for girls ((r = .25, p &lt; .05)). For both boys and girls, aware parenting was a significant, negative predictor for moral reticence ((r = -.47, p &lt; .001)).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Courage and fear.** Muris (2009) set out to explore whether children perceive of courage and fear as separate constructs or whether, as his article is titled, “fear and courage are just two sides of the same coin” (p. 487). Participants were 18 boys and 33 girls from a Dutch elementary
school with a mean age of 10.8 years. Students were given several questionnaires, including the *Courage Measure for Children* (CM-C), which is a 12-item, self-report rating scale (Norton & Weiss, 2009). A total mean score is reported, with higher scores indicating more courageous behavior. Also, the *Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders* (SCARED) was used, which is a 41-item self-report rating scale where higher scores indicate higher anxiety (Birmaher et al., 1999). The *Sensation Seeking Scale for Children* (SSSC) is a 10-item self-report scale that measures the tendency to engage in physically risky activities (Russo et al., 1991). An interview was conducted with each student, when each participant was asked to define courage and after each interview, was provided with a definition by the researcher. Students were asked to share the most courageous action they had performed during their life and to rate how much fear they experienced during that time as well as how courageous they believed that act was using scales of 1-9 where 1= not at all and 9 = a lot/very.

Muris (2009) found that students said that courage meant to do something scary, or to dare to do something. Also, 94.1% reported that they had done something courageous in their lifetime. When asked to further describe that action, 33.3% of students described a physically risky action, 18.8% of students described going on a roller coaster, and 12.5% described facing a feared animal. Correlations were computed between the measures used. Muris (2009) found that fear and courage were not related ($r = .08$). Significant, negative correlations were found between children’s self-perceptions about courage and two subscales from the SCARED, separation anxiety ($r = -.031, p < .05$) and social phobia ($r = -.37, p < .01$). Higher levels of courage were associated with lower levels of anxiety. Also, children who rated themselves as anxious had higher fear levels during their courageous event ($r = .31, p < .05$). The more
students perceived themselves as courageous, the higher they also rated themselves as sensation seeking ($r = .63, p < .001$).

To summarize, Muris (2009) concluded that students generally understood the concept of courage, reported that they had been courageous in their lifetime, and the more courageously students rated themselves, the less anxiety symptoms they reported. Muris (2009) explained that this is because students who are courageous are more likely to expose themselves to hard situations. Higher levels of courage were associated with higher levels of sensation seeking. However, children who had low levels of fear were not necessarily rated as the most courageous. Fear was determined to be a separate construct from courage.

**Courage, anxiety, personality traits, and sex roles.** Muris, Mayer, and Schubert (2010) explored the relationships between courage and anxiety symptoms, personality traits, and sex roles in children ages 8-13. Participants were from Dutch elementary schools from two independent samples. Children completed a set of questionnaires. Sample 1 was comprised of 168 children who completed measures related to courage, personality traits, anxiety symptoms, and social desirability while sample 2 was comprised of 159 children who completed measures related to courage and sex roles.

Students from both samples completed a self-report courage scale, the CM-C (Norton & Weiss, 2009). Parents completed a version of the CM-C, too. Students from sample 1 completed the SCARED to measure anxiety symptoms (Birmaher et al., 1999). They also completed the *Big Five Questionnaire for Children* (BFQ-C), which consists of 65 items measuring extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness/intellect (Barbaranelli et al., 2003). The last instrument used with sample 1 was a social desirability measure, which was a 7-item subscale from the Amsterdam Biographical Questionnaire for
Children (Van Dijl & Wilde, 1982). For sample 2, in addition to the CM-C, students completed the *Children’s Sex Role Inventory* (CSRI), which was a 22-item scale that measures sex role orientation with 11 masculinity items and 11 femininity items (Boldziar, 1991).

Muris et al. (2010) found that 71.4% of students reported having carried out at least one courageous act in their life, the most prevalent being doing something physically risky. They stated that some students reported “less clear-cut acts of courage (e.g., helping another person)” (p. 207). Boys rated themselves as more courageous than girls (Sample 1: $t(166) = 4.72, p < 0.001$; Sample 2: $t(157) = 2.21, p < 0.05$). Other sex differences included that girls described themselves as more agreeable ($t(166) = 2.40, p < 0.05$), conscientious ($t(166) = 3.72, p < 0.001$), anxious ($t(166) = 3.05, p < 0.01$), and feminine ($t(157) = 4.87, p < 0.001$), whereas boys rated themselves as more masculine ($t(157) = 6.81, p < 0.001$). Researchers had hypothesized that courage would be positively linked to extraversion and masculinity and negatively linked to anxiety. These hypotheses were confirmed ($r = .37, p < .001$; $r = .50, p < .001$; $r = -.30, p < .001$, respectively). Additionally, courage was also positively linked with conscientiousness ($r = .18, p < .05$), and openness/intellect ($r = .33, p < .001$). Further, higher levels of courage were linked to lower levels of anxiety symptoms in that courage explained 5% of the variance in SCARED scores.

In conclusion, children demonstrated an understanding of courage. Children’s courage scores were related positively to extraversion and masculinity, and negatively to anxiety symptoms. Openness/intellect and conscientiousness were also positively related to courage.

**Courage and adolescence.** Studies focusing on courage as a construct amongst students in the age range of the current study were limited to Muris (2009) and Muris et al.’s (2010) results. However, there were other studies the researcher identified as relevant topically, though
not focused on the age range targeted in the present study. Two studies in particular were topically relevant, though focused on adolescence (Bronstein et al., 2007; Sonnentag & Barnett, 2016). Results are reviewed here due to the paucity of research related to courage as a construct amongst elementary aged children.

In 2016, Sonnentag and Barnett examined the role of moral identity and moral courage in adolescents’ tendencies to be a moral rebel. Moral rebellion is defined as refusal to compromise values and beliefs in situations where conformity and pressure to comply may overpower some people’s tendency to hold true to their values. They tested whether moral rebelliousness is predicted by moral identity and moral courage. Moral identity refers to holding beliefs and values central to self-concept while moral courage refers to action in the face of opposition. Therefore, Sonnentag and Barnett (2016) posited that high moral identity and thus moral courage would predict moral rebellion. Specific moral courage characteristics examined included self-esteem, low need to belong, self-efficacy, assertiveness, and social vigilantism. These concepts were included because Sonnentag and Barnett (2016) saw them as important characteristics of moral courage. They believed having a positive attitude toward the self, a low need to belong or fit in, a high sense of competence, a high level of assertiveness, and heightened defense of beliefs and values would predict moral rebellion.

Participants were 243 seventh and eighth grade students from public middle schools in the midwestern U.S. who self-identified as 80.7% White and ranged in age from 12-15 years old. Multiple self-report measures were used, and all were rated on a scale from 1 (disagree a lot) to 6 (agree a lot). Scales used measured moral identity, self-esteem, low need to belong, self-efficacy, assertiveness, social vigilantism, and social desirability. Additionally, peer and teacher
ratings of the aforementioned moral courage characteristics and moral identity were completed using sociometric rating forms.

Results indicated that self, peer, and teacher ratings of participants’ tendency to be a moral rebel were significantly, positively intercorrelated and that moral identity and moral courage characteristics were positively related ($p < .001$). Hierarchical regression analyses suggested that participants’ moral courage characteristics were positively associated with moral rebelliousness, and this relationship was strongest at high levels of moral identity ($\beta = .820$, $t = 10.09$, $p < .001$) versus low levels ($\beta = .631$, $t = 8.09$, $p < .001$). Therefore, moral courage characteristics were determined to be significant predictors of adolescents’ moral rebelliousness ($R^2 > .06$, $p < .01$). Sonnentag and Barnett stated that the particular moral courage characteristics identified in this study are character strengths that students can draw from in situations which require them to challenge the status quo and resist conformity or social pressure when it is not aligned with their values and beliefs.

A second study on moral courage in adolescence was specifically focused on longitudinal predictors of moral courage (Bronstein et al., 2007). Researchers examined whether parenting and gender are predictors of moral courage, as parenting plays a central role in moral development and prosocial behavior and gender has been shown to make a difference in self-esteem in adolescence (Bronstein et al., 2007). Bronstein et al. (2007) examined the relationship between parenting in the fifth grade year and adolescents’ self-report of moral courage at the end of twelfth grade. Moral courage was defined as “the willingness to speak up or take action in the interest of fairness and justice for oneself or others” (Bronstein et al., 2007, p. 665).

The researchers hypothesized that a particular parenting style, called aware parenting, would be likely to promote the development of moral courage. Aware parenting was defined by
the researchers as supportive, attentive, responsive, marked by guidance, and receptive to emotion. If students experienced parents who were responsive to their social emotional needs, were encouraging, warm, and provided guidance and opportunities to express and work through emotions, then students would have higher moral courage when measured eight years later, with effects being stronger for girls than boys as parental support for girls may be especially important given social pressure girls tend to experience during adolescence.

Participants were 93 fifth grade students and their parents from a small city in the northeastern U.S. At the beginning of the study, children were ages 9-12 and 58% of children lived in two-parent households while 42% lived in divorced, never married, or reconstituted families. Parenting behavior was measured in the students’ fifth grade year through four visits to the families, where 15-minute, naturally occurring parent-child interactions were tape-recorded. Recordings were later coded using the Behavioral Coding of Family Interaction (Bronstein, 1985), which includes 45 categories of interpersonal behaviors. Percentage scores of behaviors were used for subsequent analyses. Parents and children also filled out a family functioning questionnaire to further measure aware parenting (Bloom, 1985). Moral courage was measured with a 17-item scale and was completed by the 78 participants who remained in the study through twelfth grade. Self-esteem was measured using a self-report scale in fifth grade and in twelfth grade. Social competence was also measured using a scale completed by students’ teachers in fifth grade.

Only one significant difference between means existed, and that was that girls in twelfth grade had significantly lower self-esteem than boys ($t = 3.47, p < .001$). Regarding parenting, there were more significant effects for girls than boys. Fifth grade aware parenting was a positive, significant predictor of twelfth grade moral courage for girls ($r = .25, p < .05$). For both
boys and girls, aware parenting was a significant, negative predictor for moral reticence ($r = - .47$, $p < .001$). Self-esteem in twelfth grade was also significantly, positively related to twelfth grade moral courage for both boys and girls ($r = .33$, $p < .05$). For boys, fifth grade self-esteem mediated aware parenting ($\beta = -.46$, $p < .001$). For girls, social competence in fifth grade mediated parenting styles (supportive guidance, $\beta = .43$, $p < .001$; punitive control, $\beta = .38$, $p < .001$; aware style, $\beta = .41$, $p < .001$) and moral courage in twelfth grade ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). In addition, for girls, twelfth grade self-esteem mediated aware parenting and moral courage ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$). Overall, the results suggested that aware parenting may foster moral courage amongst girls. Further, socially competent girls may have incorporated the aware parenting style they experienced into their skill set, thus being more likely to display moral courage.

The studies reviewed on courage amongst children and adolescents provide a working understanding of this construct in the present study. Specifically, the literature provides support that children in the age range included in this study do have an understanding of courage (Muris, 2009; Muris et al., 2010). Further, courage is a developmental construct pertinent to the microsystem of the school and the home, but also to the exosystem of home and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronstein et al., 2007, Sonnentag & Barnett, 2016). Also, gender differences may exist when it comes to the nature of courage (Bronstein et al., 2007).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided the reader with a foundation for the rationale and purpose of the present study. The following sections were included: (a) literature review search strategies, (b) brief history of SEL in the U.S., (c) SEL programming, and (d) courage as a construct.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

This chapter provides details of the methodology used to examine the topics of the impact of SEL programming on SEL competencies and students’ perceptions of courage. Collecting and interpreting data using multiple data collection techniques and from varied school settings provided rich information from which meaning was derived. The following sections are included in this chapter: (a) research questions and hypothesis, (b) biography of the researcher, (c) research design, (d) description of the setting and participants, (e) data collection procedures, (f) instrumentation, (g) description of the analysis, and (h) timeline.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Although there is limited research specifically regarding the impact of SEL programming on students’ development of courage, the research related to SEL programming and to courage supports the need for this study. This study was designed to gather information regarding the impact of SEL programming with a specific focus on student perceptions on courage. The researcher sought to understand perceptions of SEL competencies between students who were involved in an SEL program and students who were not, as well as to uncover patterns in students’ thoughts about courage. The following research questions guided the data collection and analysis:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP?
Non-Directional Hypothesis: There will be a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP.

2. What are children’s perceptions of courage in themselves and others and what does it take to enact courage?

3. What is the nature of courage in classrooms?

Researcher Biography

According to the worldview of pragmatism in mixed methods research, “the focus is on consequences of research, on the primary importance of the question asked rather than the methods, and multiple methods of data collection inform the problems under study. Thus, it is pluralistic and oriented toward ‘what works’ and practice” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 23). With this type of orientation, researchers are interested in testing hypotheses and providing multiple perspectives. A pragmatic worldview in mixed methods research acknowledges both biased and unbiased perspectives and is motivated by epistemological practicality. Providing a short biography may contextualize how the researcher arrived at this orientation.

I am a second grade classroom teacher. I teach in the Connecticut public schools and attended Newtown Public Schools for my career as a student. I was compelled to become a teacher because of my belief in the importance of human connection, its role in teaching and learning, and the positive relationships I cultivated with my own teachers and peers. School has always been a joyful place of connectedness for me. In my first two years as a beginning teacher, I was afforded the opportunity to attend extensive Responsive Classroom training and subscribed wholeheartedly to this approach in my own classroom. The Responsive Classroom
Approach includes employing practices and strategies with the intent of strengthening social and emotional skills and fostering a positive learning community (Responsive Classroom, 2018).

After the tragedy at Sandy Hook in 2012, I attended an Educator Conference sponsored by the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement. It was there that I first heard Scarlett Lewis share her story, her son Jesse’s story, and the program she had created to teach students how to choose love, no matter the circumstance through explicit focus on courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). The program was then in its pilot year, so I piloted the program with my students and participated in a validation study for the Choose Love survey instrument. I have implemented the CLEP with my second grade students for four years. I feel the language, strategies, and overarching philosophy of the CLEP has beautifully transformed the experiences and relationships that my students and I have throughout our year together time and again. I am the only teacher in my building to use this program, with permission from my administrators. Professionally, I have served on the Safe School Climate committee at my school for six years. I have been trained in Restorative Practices, an approach that seeks to strengthen relationships within communities (International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2019). I have also been trained at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence with their approach to teaching the skills of emotional intelligence (Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, 2019).

As my own building and district personnel discuss our ongoing journey towards meaningfully cultivating social emotional competencies and as this topic gains increasing attention in the field of education, I was inspired to investigate the impact of SEL programming and also the nature of courage in classrooms according to students. Understanding the impact of
SEL programming and student perceptions of courage may contribute to the ever-growing body of research that seeks to make our students braver and our schools more joyful, safe spaces.

**Description of the Sampling Procedures, Setting and Participants**

**Sampling Procedures**

Both convenience and purposive sampling were used to recruit participants for this mixed methods study (Merriam, 2009). Convenience sampling was used because the researcher needed to gain access to research settings that were located within a commutable distance and were available in that administration, staff, families, and students were open to participating (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). For this study, selection criteria were first developed based on the foundation that all public schools in the United States are required to have a safe school climate plan which must address the social, emotional, and behavioral health of their students in some way in order to promote safe, positive learning environments (ESSA, 2015). Specifically, there are public schools using particular SEL LDPs, such as the CLEP, which includes the construct of courage as an explicit, central component (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019). There are also schools where school personnel address the requirements of ESSA (2015) through initiatives focused more on safety, for instance, than on the promotion of SEL skills in students.

Before contacting and choosing sites to be included in a study, it is customary to determine criteria for selection of participants (Merriam, 2009). The researcher generated criteria for determining two programming conditions: Condition 1 is referred to as SEL non-LDP, meaning that a sequenced, K-5, consistently delivered SEL LDP was not in place one year prior to the school year and during the school year when the study took place; Condition 2, called
SEL LDP, included schools that fit the requirements for implementing the CLEP or another sequenced, K-5, consistently delivered SEL LDP (CASEL, 2013).

Participants from schools that were not using the CLEP or any other SEL LDP were considered for Condition 1 if they met the following criteria:

- Multiyear program: A sequenced K-5 SEL LDP was not in use.
- Repeated opportunities to practice: Students did not participate in weekly sessions, at least 15-30 minutes per week, for at least 12 weeks.
- Program continuity: Students had not consistently experienced a sequenced K-5 SEL LDP one year prior to the school year and during the school year when the study took place.
- Participant consistency: The students had not experienced a sequenced K-5 SEL LDP for one year prior to the school year when the study took place.
- Educator experience: The teacher had not implemented a sequenced K-5 SEL LDP in at least one year prior to the school year when the study took place.
- Fidelity of implementation: Individuals were not implementing a specific sequenced K-5 SEL LDP.
- Availability of resources: The teacher did not utilize resources related to a particular sequenced K-5 SEL LDP.

Based on recommendations provided by CASEL (2013) schools were considered for inclusion in Condition 2 if they met the following criteria:

- Multiyear program: The particular SEL LDP was at least a K-5 sequenced program.
- Repeated opportunities to practice: The sequenced K-5 SEL LDP was at least a 12-week program, with at least one 15-30-minute session weekly.
• Program continuity: The sequenced K-5 SEL LDP was in use at least one year prior to the school year when the study took place.

• Participant consistency: The students had experienced the sequenced K-5 SEL LDP for both the prior year and school year when the study took place.

• Educator experience: The teacher had used this sequenced K-5 SEL LDP at least one year prior to the school year when the study took place.

• Fidelity of implementation: Individuals implementing the sequenced K-5 SEL LDP needed formal training or if no formal training had been given to the teacher, the SEL LDP needed to have contained scripted lessons to promote fidelity in implementation.

• Availability of resources: There were appropriate resources to fully support the implementation of the sequenced K-5 SEL LDP.

Schools from one northeastern state in the United States were selected for the study based on convenience. Only public elementary schools which serve upper-elementary aged students in grades 4 and 5 were considered for participation. The researcher first contacted Scarlett Lewis, the originator of the CLEP, to ask if she would be willing to share the names of schools that implemented the particular SEL LDP, the CLEP. Scarlett Lewis, mother of Sandy Hook School tragedy victim Jesse Lewis, collaborated with experts to build the CLEP, a free, downloadable PreK-grade 12 SEL curriculum (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, 2019). The researcher was given the names of four schools to contact, but only one was a public school located in the northeastern U.S. Therefore, in addition to this one school, schools where personnel were implementing other specific sequenced K-5 SEL LDPs were also considered for inclusion in the study.
The researcher contacted school personnel from the district implementing the CLEP first. Personnel agreed to be considered for inclusion in the study under Condition 2. Schools where personnel were implementing a sequenced K-5 SEL LDP other than the CLEP were then contacted and asked to participate in the study. Lastly, schools where personnel were not implementing any specific sequenced K-5 SEL LDP were contacted and considered for inclusion in the proposed study under Condition 1. The schools in Condition 1 needed to be demographically similar to the schools in Condition 2, for comparison purposes. Schools in Condition 1 were identified using the state education data repository. In applying this sampling criteria, the researcher gained access to collect data in a total of five schools, located within four school districts, across one state. Two school districts represented Condition 1 and two school districts represented Condition 2.

In contacting school personnel to recruit potential participants, the researcher used the protocol that follows for all districts. The researcher first contacted each superintendent or assistant superintendent via a standardized, scripted email explaining the purpose of the study which was based on the letter of permission found in Appendix G. Then, the researcher contacted the particular school building administrator of the potential participating school using a scripted email explaining the purpose of the study, which was based on the letter of permission found in Appendix H. The researcher spoke on the telephone and via email with all building administrators also using a standardized script.

**Sampling procedures for the quantitative design.** After receiving both district and building level permission to move forward with the study, all fourth and fifth grade classroom teachers at participating schools were invited to participate in the study. Either the researcher or the building administrator made initial contact with teachers via email using a scripted letter
explaining the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate. Classroom teachers who agreed to participate by signing the letter of consent found in Appendix I were then responsible for sending home parent or guardian consent forms using an opt-out format (Appendix J-M). All students in participating classrooms were invited to participate. Based on responses to the consent forms, the researcher gathered student assent in person at the time of site visits (Appendix N).

Sampling procedures for qualitative design. Students were invited to be interviewed purposively (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Purposeful sampling is used when a researcher wants to “discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Based on Merriam’s (2009) description of purposeful sampling, the researcher chose to seek nominations for interviews because it was important that the researcher conducted interviews that were as information-rich as possible (Merriam, 2009). Each participating classroom teacher nominated 3-5 students they perceived as courageous or perceived as having a conceptual understanding of courage. These recommendations were utilized to preliminarily narrow the process of interview participant selection. For the purposes of this study, teacher recommendations were viewed as a methodological tool because by the time data collection for this study was under way, it was spring of an academic year and the classroom teachers had ample time to observe students’ daily interactions with others as well as the character qualities each student demonstrated. These expert opinions were sought due to limited time in each research setting and the need to conduct interviews that would be robust (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, only students who teachers perceived as courageous or perceived
as having a conceptual understanding of courage were recruited for interviews for both the SEL
LDP and SEL non-LDP conditions.

In addition to utilizing teacher recommendations in the process of interview participant
selection, the researcher created a short survey involving two open-ended questions to further
elicit information regarding the depth of student understanding of the concept of courage which
was reviewed by the researcher (Appendix B). Third, students’ scores on the courage subscale
of the CL survey were corroborated with teacher recommendations and open-ended student
surveys such that students who scored at least an average of 3 on a 4-point scale on the Choose
Love Survey (Delcourt et.al., 2017), were recommended to be interviewed by their teacher, and
demonstrated some understanding of courage on their open-ended responses were invited to be
interviewed.

Description of Settings

Schools were selected based on condition. Schools were also selected on a
demographical basis, using the most recently published strategic school profile data available as
well as by District Reference Group such that schools needed to be in the same District
Reference Group and have as similar as possible amount of students enrolled, percentage of male
and female students, racial/ethnic makeup, free and reduced price meal percentages (FRDPM),
and English Language Learner (ELL) populations across conditions (State Department of
Education, 2019). Schools from both urban and suburban settings were included in each
condition of this study. During the process of selecting and gaining access to participants,
district superintendents and building principals indicated that two districts would meet criteria
for each respective condition. However, after receiving proper levels of consent for teacher
participants and consent and assent for student participants, it became clear through teacher
surveys that implementation of SEL non-LDP as well as implementation of SEL LDP was more nuanced than originally anticipated when criteria for inclusion across conditions was initially set by the researcher in order to recruit participants. The distribution of participants by condition, district, school, and classroom is shown in Table 4. Table 5 summarizes programmatic information related to all schools. As illustrated in Table 5, all schools were implementing some initiative specifically related to SEL classes. Each school’s activities related to SEL will be described by condition in the section that follows.
Table 4

Program Participants by Condition, District, School and Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>District 1: Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District 2: Suburban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>District 3: Urban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District 4: Suburban</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom 17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

**SEL Program Descriptions and Frequencies by Condition and Setting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Student n</th>
<th>Program Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1: Urban</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>District personnel developed class sessions taught by the school psychologist with content based on a variety of resources and a focus on school expectations as well as sexual harassment. Classes met as an entire grade level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Suburban</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td>District personnel developed class sessions that were taught by a school psychologist and a social worker with content based on a variety of resources and a focus on mindfulness and other SEL competencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23*</td>
<td>Two classroom teachers reported using two strategies from the Responsive Classroom approach, specifically the greeting and share components of Morning Meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12*</td>
<td>One teacher reported using resources from an organization called Ben’s Bells.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3: Urban</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>The entire school implemented the Choose Love Enrichment Program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7*</td>
<td>One classroom teacher reported additionally using Second Step lessons delivered by a school social worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Suburban</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>One classroom teacher used Tribes Learning Communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Four Classroom teachers used Tribes Learning Communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>One classroom teacher used Second Step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47*</td>
<td>In addition to implementing Tribes Learning Communities, three teachers incorporated strategies from the Responsive Classroom approach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The total number of students is 215. Classroom teachers who reported using multiple approaches are denoted with an asterisk.
**Condition 1: SEL non-LDP**

There were two schools selected for Condition 1. Schools in Condition 1 were demographically matched as closely as possible to schools in Condition 2. After receiving permission from superintendents’ or assistant superintendents’ offices, the researcher contacted particular schools for building administrator level permissions.

School 1 was in an urban setting. Staff stated that students in regular education fourth grade classrooms met with the school psychologist as a whole grade level once every two weeks for 20 minutes for Character Education sessions, when time permitted. At the same school, one self-contained fifth grade special education teacher and one fifth grade classroom teacher stated that their students experienced grade level sessions on a weekly basis for 30 minutes, also delivered by the school psychologist. The building administrator stated that the school psychologist developed these sessions by pulling from a variety of resources and focused on that school’s particular character expectations in addition to sexual harassment.

School 2 was located in a suburban setting and staff stated that the social worker or school psychologist visited each classroom on a monthly basis for 45 minutes. Like School 1, the monthly sessions in School 2 were also pulled from a variety of resources, were developed by district staff members, and focused on mindfulness, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.

For Condition 1, a total of four fourth grade classrooms and four fifth grade classrooms, including one self-contained special education fifth grade classroom, participated in this study. Per ESSA (2015) requirements, all schools in Condition 1, SEL non-LDPs, were inclusive of SEL or positive school climate initiatives in some way, however they were not the same as those that met inclusion criteria for Condition 2, SEL LDPs. According to the definition of an SEL
non-LDP, schools included in Condition 1 met inclusion criteria, however it is important to note that schools in Condition 1 still implemented some type of SEL initiative as described in Table 5.

**Condition 2: SEL LDP**

There were three schools selected for Condition 2. Schools for Condition 2 were from a total of two districts. One school was located in an urban district and the other two schools were located in the same suburban district.

The selection of the first school for Condition 2, School 3, involved contacting the originator of the CLEP. School 3 was located in an urban setting. After the researcher shared inclusion criteria for this study, the CLEP originator introduced the researcher to School 3’s particular administrator via email. Staff at School 3 had piloted the CLEP program and implemented the CLEP at the whole school level for three years, including the pilot year. Teachers reported using the CLEP for 15-20 minutes 3-5 times per week. One fifth grade classroom teacher reported that in addition to the CLEP lessons, the school social worker visited 3-4 times monthly to implement a 30-minute Second Step lesson as described in Table 5.

School 4 and School 5 were located in the same, suburban district. The assistant superintendent’s office reported the districtwide use of a particular SEL LDP that met inclusion criteria for Condition 2 and added that use of the program may differ depending on the school and that the researcher would need to consult with specific building administrators for more details. The assistant superintendent stated that school personnel within the district were investigating and piloting other SEL curricula, initiatives, and programs, as well. Principals at both School 4 and School 5 confirmed that their school would meet inclusion criteria for Condition 2. The participating classroom teachers reported using Tribes Learning Communities as well. In addition to using Tribes Learning Communities, one classroom teacher reported also
using Second Step for 30 minutes per week (Second Step, 2019; Tribes Learning Community, 2019). There was a total of five fourth grade and four fifth grade classrooms included in Condition 2.

**Condition 0**

At the time of the researcher’s site visit for quantitative and qualitative data collection at School 4 and School 5, it became clear through the educator survey that some classrooms did not meet inclusion criteria for Condition 2 as originally anticipated. Educators from 11 classrooms across School 4 and School 5 reported that at this point in time, they were not using a sequenced K-5 SEL LDP. This information pertained to six fourth grade classrooms and six fifth grade classrooms. Due to the disclosure of this information, the classrooms no longer fit inclusion criteria for Condition 2. Surveys with students and interviews had already been conducted. Therefore, these data were ultimately not used. Table 6 illustrates the sample for these conditions, and Condition 0 will not be included in further discussion for the purposes of this study.

Table 6

**Sampling Participants by Condition: 0, 1, and 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 illustrates the sample for Conditions 1 and 2 only, which are the two conditions included in the analyses for this study.
Table 7

*Sampling Participants by Condition: 1 and 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Consent and Assent**

A total of 20 parents or guardians returned forms stating that they did not want their student to participate in this study. For those agreeing to participate, using an opt-out format, all students who were present on the date of data collection completed the assent form. From those who signed the assent form, a total of four students gave assent and began surveys but decided to discontinue. These individuals were not included in further analyses for this study.

**Description of Participants**

**Participants in the quantitative design.** A total of 215 students participated in the quantitative portion of this mixed methods study. Table 8 provides a description of demographic characteristics of the sample organized by condition.
Table 8

Self-identified Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic (^a)</th>
<th>SEL Non-LDP ((n = 87))</th>
<th>SEL LDP ((n = 128))</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African Am.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Am.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Demographical information was obtained from the CL survey (Delcourt et al., 2017). All data are reported as numeric values.

\(^a\)Demographical information is listed when it was disclosed. Some students chose not to respond to some demographical items.

Participants in the qualitative design. Based on the sampling procedures described above, a total of 25 students participated in the qualitative portion of this mixed methods study. There were 19 interview participants in Condition 1 and there were six interview participants in Condition 2. There were more participants for Condition 1 than Condition 2 because interviews with students in Condition 0 ultimately could not be included for the purposes of this study. Refer to Table 9 for an overview of demographical characteristics of interview participants.
Table 9

*Self-identified Demographic Characteristics of Interview Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jayla</td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrah</td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Multiracial: Arabic, Polish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillian</td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latina: Peruvian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libby</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lola</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latina: Dominican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latina: Ecuadorian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlin</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinn</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emanuel</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camila</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White: Italian, Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White: English, German, Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dakota</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* An asterisk denotes that the participant abstained from responding to that demographic item.
Research Design

Mixed Methods Design

The researcher used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design as indicated in Figure 3. In using this design, qualitative data built upon quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Figure 3. Explanatory sequential mixed methods research design.

**Quantitative design.** To address Research Question One, quantitative instrumentation was administered using a causal comparative design, which is exploratory in nature as shown in Table 10 (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 397).
Table 10

Causal Comparative Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(-C) SEL non-LDP</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C_1 Male, C_2 Female</td>
<td>Choose Love constructs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(C) SEL LDP</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C_1 Male, C_2 Female</td>
<td>Choose Love constructs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. C = Characteristic; O = Observation of achievement (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000, p. 397)

Condition was an independent variable defined by two levels, (a) student participation in a lesson-driven SEL program (represented by SEL LDP) with pre-specified sequenced K-5 lessons over a period of time, and (b) students who did not participate in a lesson-driven SEL program (represented by SEL non-LDP). The independent variable was coded as categorical data, where 1 represented SEL non-LDP and 2 represented SEL LDP. Student self-perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion as reported on the CL survey as a total mean score was the dependent variable.

There was one additional independent variable, also coded as categorical level data. Gender was the second independent variable with two levels, male and female (coded as 1 for male and 2 for female).

Descriptive data obtained from the student demographic survey were reported by age, grade level, gender, and race. Data obtained from the teacher survey were reported by grade level taught, total years of experience, and years of experience in current role. Quantitative data obtained from the CL survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics as well as an ANOVA.

Qualitative design. To address Research Questions Two and Three, a multiple case study design was employed, and cases were bound by condition (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). A qualitative multiple case study design was selected because the researcher sought to describe
processes by which students think about or learn about courage, relationships and situations which necessitate the enactment of courage, systems in which courage may or may not be explicit, and people in classroom contexts who demonstrate courage (Gall et al., 2003; Peshkin, 1993). Further, in exploring the nature of courage in classrooms, the researcher sought to elaborate upon existing conceptions of SEL and courage and provide insights that may change behavior, refine knowledge, or identify problems (Peshkin, 1993). By conducting a multiple case study situated in a mixed methods study, the themes that emerged within and across cases could more thoroughly describe and add to results from quantitative data. Further, the researcher was interested in “insight, discovery and interpretation” rather than hypothesis testing alone (Merriam, 2009, p. 42).

In this study, cases were bound by condition. Multiple case studies can be used when researchers want to study two or more subjects or settings based on the presence or absence of a certain characteristic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). In the present study, the researcher needed to examine multiple cases based on the presence or absence of an SEL LDP that met a set of specific inclusion criteria. Multiple students were interviewed at each school site because the researcher was interested in how (a) students in each respective school shared similar experiences in terms of exposure to an SEL LDP or exposure to an SEL non-LDP and (b) the use of interviews with multiple students at each site allowed for variation within each case as well as across the cases. The aims of the research were particularistic in focusing on the presence or absence of a particular type of program and what each case could reveal about that characteristic (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, the aims were exploratory in working to understand the nature of courage according to upper elementary aged students (Merriam, 2009). The researcher also hoped to discover new meaning and extend understanding of what is known regarding Research
Questions Two and Three (Merriam, 2009). Last, while the act of choosing a particular condition as the unit of analysis in this study is “an artificial act, for you break off a piece of the world that is normally integrated,” it is nonetheless necessary to make the research manageable, and the researcher has attempted to “choose a piece that is a naturally existing unit” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016, p. 57).

Because daily life in classrooms and schools is complex and multifaceted, a multiple case study design allowed the researcher to study courage, the phenomenon of interest, “in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (Gall et al., 2003, p. 436). Further, the selection of multiple cases allowed for a broader range of settings to be included, therefore possibly broadening the generalizability and diversity of the current study as determined by the reader (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016).

Data Collection Procedures

After receiving IRB approval in December 2018, the researcher first collected a signed district superintendent permission form and building principal permission form from all participating schools (Appendices G and H). Before moving forward with the study, the principal from the urban school in Condition 2, School 3, explained that an opt-out parent/guardian consent form was preferable to the opt-in form the researcher had originally created. This meant that rather than asking all student participants’ guardians to sign a form to opt-in and participate in the study, guardians would only sign and return the form if they did not consent to their child’s participation in the study. Therefore, a revised parent or guardian consent form was created and submitted as an amendment to the IRB application. The IRB approved the amended parent or guardian consent form in January 2019. The amended
parent/guardian consent form was then used for all schools in the process of recruiting participants for the study.

All email communications throughout the data collection process included scripted language in explaining an overview of the research for superintendents, principals, and teachers. Principal preferences were honored in procedures for contacting fourth and fifth grade classroom teachers. Principals from three settings allowed for the researcher to directly contact classroom teachers via email to explain the purpose of the study and recruit classroom participation. Principals from the other two settings preferred to explain the purpose of the research study and ask for voluntary participation on their own with their staff, collect the educator surveys, and schedule classroom visits for data collection. Follow up email reminders were sent as needed for completion of the educator consent and survey (Appendices D and I). Educator consents and surveys were collected prior to administering surveys or conducting interviews with students. It was made clear that participation was voluntary to all parties involved throughout the entirety of the data collection process and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

Principals and classroom teachers were provided with paper parent/guardian consent forms which were sent home with students directly prior to site visits, when data collection occurred (Appendices J-M).

During site visits for data collection, the researcher first spoke with each classroom teacher to assure consent. Any student whose guardian had not consented was given time for extra, free, independent reading by their classroom teacher. The researcher first introduced herself to the class and provided an overview of the study to each classroom she visited using a script. Then, the researcher administered surveys. All classroom teachers were present during student survey administration along with the researcher. All survey administration was
conducted in the students’ respective classrooms. Each student participant received a coded, stapled packet with a unique identification number on all pieces of paper in the packet. Each packet consisted of the following items: (a) assent form (Appendix N), (b) Choose Love survey (Appendix A), (c) student survey about courage (Appendix B). All packets were collected.

Following survey administration, teacher nominations for students to interview were corroborated with student CL survey scores on the courage subscale (Appendix A) and with open-ended responses on the student survey about courage (Appendix B) as explained in the Sampling Procedures section. Students were then invited to be individually interviewed directly outside of each student’s classroom immediately following survey administration and researcher corroboration. All students invited to be interviewed agreed to be interviewed. A script was used to explain the purpose of the interview to each student as well as the use of an audio-recorder, if being used. At School 3 from Condition 2, interviews were transcribed by hand because the building administrator was not comfortable with the audio-recording of student interviews. From the remaining four schools, all interviews were audio-recorded. The researcher and interview participant sat in chairs facing one another and all interviews took between 10-20 minutes to complete.

Upon completion of data collection, the researcher engaged in reflexive journaling within the same 24 hours as the site visit. Reflexivity refers to the influence of a researcher’s personal experience on the data collection process and because the researcher was indeed part of the process in interviewing, a field notes journal was kept with the purpose of interpreting the researcher’s own behavior (Krefting, 1991). Pertinent notes regarding the research setting, context, and any feelings experienced during the data collection period were recorded along with
questions or concerns in the data collection process. This practice supported the process of establishing trustworthiness for the proposed study.

All CL surveys were scored using the provided scoring guide (Delcourt et al., 2017). Demographic information and survey data were input in a spreadsheet file on a password-protected device. To maintain confidentiality, unique participant identification numbers, which had been assigned by the researcher on the printed student participant packets, were used in the spreadsheet file and all interview participants were assigned pseudonyms. Survey data were entered by demographic information, CL survey item scores, and total mean score.

All interview recordings were transcribed into Word documents on a password-protected device. The assigned pseudonyms were used on each transcript. Three transcripts needed to be translated into Spanish for the purposes of member checking, in order for participants’ guardians to access the transcripts for review. These three transcripts were translated by a person blind to the research study and there was no identifying information on the transcript. The person who translated three transcripts into Spanish holds a doctoral degree in Spanish and French, has worked as a professional translator, and teaches Spanish, among other languages, at the high school level. For the purposes of member checking, pseudonyms were removed from the transcript copy and sent with a member checking statement of agreement to both students and parents/guardians to classroom teachers directly via email in May-June 2019. Teachers printed these materials for each student and sent the materials home. Teachers also collected signed member checking statements of agreement and electronically sent these forms back to the researcher.
Instrumentation

Data were collected using four instruments: (a) the Choose Love (CL) survey (Delcourt et al., 2017), (b) a student survey about courage, (c) semi-structured interviews, and (d) a researcher-created educator survey.

Choose Love Surveys

The Choose Love surveys (Appendix A) are self-report rating scales differentiated by various grade level bands and were designed to measure student perceptions of social emotional learning (SEL) competencies related to the CLEP’s core units of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion (Delcourt et al., 2017). There are demographic items on the survey. For example, students can report information such as age, grade level, gender, and race/ethnicity. The subscales of these surveys each target student perceptions regarding how they apply these four aforementioned constructs in their lives. These surveys were developed to assess the scope of the CLEP, a free SEL curriculum designed to infuse essential competencies into PK-12 schools.

There are instruments appropriate for individuals aged PreK-18. There are 20 items for grades 3-5. For grades 3-5, a 4-point scale is used (4 = Almost always like me; 1 = Not at all like me). A sample item is: When no one is watching, I still try to do the right thing. A total mean can be calculated for this grade level band.

Directions may be read to an entire class of students in grades 3-5. The survey takes 10-20 minutes to complete. A student description survey that elicits demographic information such as the student’s name, name of school, grade level, gender, and cultural background comprises page 1, followed by directions, a practice item, and the scale items. There is also an administrator direction sheet included in all survey materials.
Validity and reliability of the Choose Love surveys. The CL surveys have established reliability for grades 3-5. The internal consistency alpha value was .91 for the total instrument (Delcourt et al., 2017). In order to determine content validity, the instrument was sent to 12 content experts in the field who matched items on subscales with the respective constructs and rated how certain they were that the subscale items matched a given construct (Delcourt et al., 2017).

Student Survey About Courage

In addition to the demographic information collected on the CL survey, a survey was designed to collect additional information from all student participants (Appendix B). The purpose of the survey was to inform participant selection for interviews. It was important to corroborate teacher nominations for interview participants with other data sources. The survey includes two open-ended items about a student’s definition of courage. One item asks students to define courage and the other item asks students to draw a picture of someone doing something courageous and describe their picture. This survey took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

Student Semi-Structured Interview

Interviewing was selected as a method for qualitative data collection principally because the goal of Research Questions Two and Three was to understand the lived experiences of students themselves regarding what their experiences in the classroom were like and what meaning they made from those experiences (Seidman, 2013). A researcher-created 12-item student interview protocol was used (Appendix C). One interview per student was conducted during the course of the study. Interview questions were designed to explore the phenomena of (a) ways children perceive courage in themselves, (b) how children perceive courage in others,
(c) prerequisites or necessary competencies for enacting courage, and (d) the nature of examples of courage in classrooms. Each interview ranged from 10-20 minutes in length. Interviews were either audio-recorded or notes were taken when the latter was requested by the school administrator. Interview questions are related to qualitative research questions in a matrix in Chapter Four, Table 25.

**Educator Survey**

The educator survey was developed to collect information regarding characteristics of each classroom teacher, the classroom context for each participating classroom of students, and information regarding the teacher’s implementation of an SEL program, if the latter is applicable (Appendix D). The survey consisted of 10 items. Items included educational background, number of years spent teaching, current role, number of years in current role, definition of SEL, definition of courage, and, if applicable, name of SEL program utilized, and amount of time spent on SEL instruction per week. The educator survey was useful in providing thick description of the research settings so that readers may make informed decisions on the transferability of the study (Krefting, 1991). Additionally, this information provided specific distinguishing qualities between cases (Gall et al., 2003; Krefting, 1991; Stake, 1995).

**Description of the Analyses**

To address each research question, the researcher conducted data analyses using the techniques that follow.

**Research Question One**

Research Question One was analyzed using a 2x2 ANOVA to examine mean differences between two independent variables and one dependent variable. The independent variables were: condition (SEL LDP/SEL non-LDP) and gender (male/female). The dependent variable
employed interval level data using the mean score on the CL survey, which included four related constructs of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion. These data were also compared to qualitative results in keeping with the explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

**Significance Level**

The .05 significance level is a typical significance level used in the social sciences and was used in this study.

**Research Questions Two and Three**

Research Questions Two and Three were explored using a multiple case study design where both research questions were examined per case. Interviews were conducted for analysis in addressing Research Questions Two and Three. The researcher reviewed the results from interviews to explore the phenomena of (a) ways children perceive courage in themselves, (b) how children perceive courage in others, (c) prerequisites or necessary competencies for enacting courage, and (d) the nature of examples of courage in classrooms.

Interview transcripts were analyzed by the researcher utilizing specific, cyclical coding procedures (Saldaña, 2016). The researcher sought to find patterns in consistencies, differences, frequencies, sequences, or relations in the data (Saldaña, 2016). Following the coding of the data, categories were identified to collapse and organize codes in order to build constructs and emergent themes which were then related specifically to Research Questions Two and Three (Gall et al., 2003; Merriam, 2009; Saldaña, 2016).

**Timeline**

The research study followed the general timeline below:

2. Following approval of the IRB, district superintendent, principal, and teacher consent letters (Appendices G-I) were signed, and parental consent forms (Appendices J-M) were distributed to potential participants’ families. Superintendent, principal, and teacher communication was conducted via email. Building principals and teachers sent the parental letters of consent home with students via paper copy – January-April 2019.

3. Educator surveys were collected either in advance of or at the start of the same session as student data collection (Appendix D). All visits were scheduled in advance as approved by the building principal and participating classroom teachers. During school visits to collect data from students, student assent forms (Appendix N), student surveys about courage (Appendix B) and CL surveys (Appendix A) were distributed, administered and collected. Student interviews were conducted at the same site visit, after survey administration – January-April 2019.

4. Journal entries were generated throughout the duration of the study.

5. The researcher transcribed all interviews, scored, and input all CL surveys, demographic surveys, and teacher surveys into spreadsheets – May-July 2019.

6. The researcher conducted member checking. The researcher enlisted the assistance of a qualified individual to translate student interviews into Spanish as needed for students to take home. Interview participants received a copy of their interview transcript, a copy of the member checking statement of agreement for parents and signed one member checking statement of agreement for the researcher (Appendices P-Q). All communication with the researcher was done via email through the classroom teacher – June 2019.
7. Quantitative data analysis – August 2019

8. Coding of interviews – November 2019

Statement of Ethics

The dissertation proposal was submitted to and reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Western Connecticut State University. Approval was granted in December 2018 and a revised amendment was approved in January 2019. All prospective participants were presented first with an overview of the study. Permission to participate in this study was sought from each participating school district superintendent and building administrator, as well as all teachers, parents, and students. Student assent forms were obtained. All participants voluntarily participated with a complete understanding that they were able to withdraw at any time without repercussion. In order to assure confidentiality, all districts, schools, teachers, and student participants and schools were assigned participant numbers and pseudonyms. The data were stored on a password protected electronic device and any data on paper was locked in a private, secure location by the researcher. Coded data were available to researchers related to the study only. The results were made available to respective school administrators, if requested.
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESULTS

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (a) to understand perceptions of SEL competencies between students who were involved in an SEL LDP and students who were involved in an SEL non-LDP and (b) to uncover patterns in students’ thoughts about courage. Three research questions related to students’ SEL competencies and perceptions of courage were addressed:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP?
   a. Is there a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP?
   b. Is there a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students?
   c. Is there a statistically significant interaction in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP?

Non-Directional Hypothesis: There will be a statistically significant difference in student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male
and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP.

a. There is a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP.

b. There is a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students.

c. There is a statistically significant interaction in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP.

2. What are children’s perceptions of courage in themselves and others and what does it take to enact courage?

3. What is the nature of courage in classrooms?

This chapter includes the following sections: (a) description of the data, (b) data screening process, (c) quantitative data analysis, (d) quantitative results, (e) qualitative participants description, (f) qualitative data coding and analysis procedures, (g) discussion of themes, and (h) chapter summary.
Research Question One: Quantitative

Description of the Data

Quantitative data were collected from the Choose Love survey (CL). The CL survey produced a total mean score based on four constructs: (a) courage, (b) gratitude, (c) forgiveness, and (d) compassion. The data from this instrument were collected for Research Question One. All student participants were asked to respond to a demographic survey with questions related to age, grade level, gender, and ethnicity.

For Research Question One, there were two independent variables. The first independent variable was condition, which had two levels: (a) non-participation in an SEL LDP and (b) participation in an SEL LDP. The second independent variable was gender, which also had two levels: (a) male and (b) female. The dependent variable was the total mean score of SEL competencies from the CL survey.

Quantitative Data Screening Process

In order to analyze the data, a screening process was necessary. This process involved coding, entry, cleaning, visual inspection, and identification of outliers (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006; Pallant, 2016).

Quantitative coding and entry. Every participant received a coded packet with a unique number to ensure confidentiality. Every page was coded with this unique number in the top righthand corner in case the pages were separated and to prevent mistakes during data entry. A spreadsheet was created to house all quantitative data for student participants. This spreadsheet included: (a) the participant’s code, (b) all items in the demographic survey, (c) codes for which classroom, school, and district each student attended, (d) whether the participant was in an SEL LDP or an SEL non-LDP, (e) scores for each individual item of the CL survey, (f)
and the participant’s total mean score. Formulas were embedded in the spreadsheet for calculating mean scores for each participant (Delcourt et al., 2017). This spreadsheet was transferred to SPSS for analysis. All variables were stored in a codebook. Demographic information was used to describe characteristics of the participants. The mean scores on the CL survey were used for statistical analysis for Research Question One. The two independent variables were also used for statistical analysis: (a) condition and (b) gender.

A separate spreadsheet was created for teacher survey information. Each teacher was assigned a unique participant identification number. All information on the teacher survey was included in this spreadsheet. The unique teacher participant number was also important for tracking which classroom student participants came from. Therefore, the teacher participant number was also included as a column on the student participant spreadsheet for quantitative data.

**Quantitative Data Cleansing**

**Missing demographic data.** Some student participants chose not to answer one or more of the demographic survey questions. There were 13 records of participants with missing data for racial/ethnic status. There were 6 records of participants with missing data for age. There were 3 participants with missing data for gender.

**Missing quantitative data.** Missing quantitative data was a concern. First, the researcher visually inspected data in a spreadsheet to determine where missing quantitative data existed. The researcher highlighted these cells in yellow. The researcher then totaled how many items each participant missed. Ethically, there could be a purposeful reason that a participant chose not to answer a question, as participants were explicitly informed on the assent form that
they may choose not to finish without any repercussion (Appendix N). This informed the researcher’s handling of missing data.

Next, the researcher eliminated records with missing data. There was an adequate sample size without these participants’ data. Therefore, the researcher excluded participants who submitted surveys with missing data. There were 22 records initially eliminated based on this decision. Also, because gender was an independent variable, the researcher also needed to eliminate the 3 records with missing data for gender, leaving 215 usable records.

**Research Question One Data Analysis and Results**

Research Question One addressed group differences in SEL competencies based on level of participation in SEL programming: Is there a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP? The non-directional hypothesis stated: There will be a statistically significant difference in student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP.

One 2x2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The analysis was a 2x2 because there were two independent variables, each with categorical level data. One independent variable was condition, with students in either the SEL LDP or SEL non-LDP condition. The other independent variable was gender, and data were coded as male or female. The dependent variable, comprised of interval level data, was total mean score on the CL survey (Gall et al., 2003; Meyers et al., 2006). Specific statistical assumptions needed to be met prior to conducting the ANOVA.
Statistical Assumptions

After screening data, dealing with missing data, the researcher addressed specific statistical assumptions in order to perform an ANOVA. Unequal sample sizes were a concern because initially, there were 87 participants in the SEL non-LDP condition and 128 participants in the SEL LDP condition (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003). Assumptions to be met included independence, normality, and homogeneity of variance (Hinkle, et al., 2003; Meyers et al., 2006).

Unequal sample sizes. When preparing to perform an ANOVA, Hinkle, Wiersma, and Jurs (2003) stated “if the sample sizes are equal, the effect of heterogeneity of variances on the Type I error is minimal . . . . ANOVA is robust with respect to the violations of the assumptions except in the case of unequal variances with unequal sample sizes” (p. 262). Of the 215 records, 87 were from the SEL non-LDP group and 128 were from the SEL LDP group. It was therefore necessary to draw a random sample from the existing data set to achieve equal sample sizes between the SEL LDP and SEL non-LDP groups in order to increase stability of the sample and decrease the likelihood of a Type I error (Meyers et al., 2006). A computer-generated random sample was selected from the 128 SEL non-LDP records in order to equate sample sizes across both groups and to achieve a robust analysis (Meyers et al., 2006). Means and ranges at this step in the analysis process are reported by condition in Table 11-12 by independent variable.

Table 11
Phase 1 Total Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range with Equal Sample Sizes for Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEL non-LDP</td>
<td>3.344</td>
<td>.383</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>3.209</td>
<td>.460</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12

*Phase 1 Total Mean, Standard Deviation, and Range with Equal Sample Sizes for Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.187</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.364</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outliers.** Once equal sample sizes for both groups (SEL non-LDP/SEL LDP) were achieved, the detection of outliers was important. Outliers needed to be addressed before proceeding with the statistical analysis, as they are cases with extreme values and are candidates for deletion (Meyers et al., 2006). Univariate outliers are cases with extreme values for a single variable (Meyers et al., 2006). Univariate outliers were assessed by examining histograms, box and whisker plots, and normality probability plots.

**Phase 1.** Figures 4-5 display the box and whisker plots of the CL survey score data examined during this phase of analysis.
Figure 4. Phase 1 box and whisker plot for condition.

SPSS identified five outliers for condition (SEL non-LDP/SEL LDP). Generally, there was overlap in the identification of outliers across independent variables.
Figure 5. Phase 1 box and whisker plot for gender.

SPSS identified nine outliers for gender (male/female). Of these, five were the same records identified as outliers for condition. There were an additional four records identified as outliers for gender, for a total of 10 records at this phase of analysis.

Tables 13-14 report preliminary results for normality. Skewness and kurtosis are reported in Table 13. The Kolomogrov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk preliminary test results are reported in Table 14. These tests will be discussed in further detail in later steps of analysis, as normality was not achieved with the inclusion of the 10 identified outliers in Phase 1.
Table 13

Phase 1 Skewness and Kurtosis for Condition and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Normality</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEL non-LDP</td>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>-.846</td>
<td>-1.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>.975</td>
<td>1.435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14

Phase 1 Kolomogrov-Smirnov and Shapiro Wilk Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL Survey</td>
<td>SEL non-LDP</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Mean</td>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Lilliefors Significance Correction

After examining box and whisker plots as well as normality tests, all 10 records were deleted from subsequent analyses.

**Phase 2.** Figures 6-7 display the box and whisker plots of the CL survey score data examined during Phase 2 of analysis.
Figure 6. Phase 2 box and whisker plot for condition.

SPSS identified two outliers for condition (SEL non-LDP/SEL LDP) in Phase 2.

Figure 7. Phase 2 box and whisker plot for gender.

SPSS identified three outliers for gender (male/female) in Phase 2, for a total of five records at this phase of analysis.
Tables 15-16 report results for normality for Phase 2. Skewness and kurtosis are reported in Table 15. The Kolomogrov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test results are reported in Table 16. These tests will be discussed in further detail in later steps of analysis, as normality was not achieved with the inclusion of the five identified outliers in Phase 2.

**Table 15**

*Phase 2 Skewness and Kurtosis for Condition and Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Normality</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEL non-LDP</td>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>-.249</td>
<td>-.619</td>
<td>-.280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-.648</td>
<td>.223</td>
<td>-.046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 16**

*Phase 2 Kolomogrov-Smirnov and Shapiro Wilk Tests of Normality*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov(^a)</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL Survey</td>
<td>SEL non-LDP</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Mean</td>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This is a lower bound of the true significance.
\(^a\) Lilliefors Significance Correction

After examining box and whisker plots as well as normality tests, all five records were deleted from subsequent analyses. After Phase 2, there were 160 usable records. Descriptives were run again with the 14 cases identified as outliers in Phases 1 and 2 deleted.

**Phase 3.** Box and whisker plots are shown in Figures 8-9 and labeled as Phase 3.
Figure 8. Phase 3 box and whisker plot for condition. SPSS identified one outlier for condition (SEL non-LDP/SEL LDP) in Phase 3.

Figure 9. Phase 3 box and whisker plot for gender. SPSS did not identify any outliers for gender (male/female) in Phase 3, for a total of one additional record as a candidate for deletion at this phase of analysis. Tables 17-18 report results.
for normality for Phase 3. Skewness and kurtosis are reported in Table 17. The Kolomogrov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test results are reported in Table 18. These tests will be discussed in further detail in the next step of analysis, as normality was not achieved with the inclusion of the one identified outlier in Phase 3.

Table 17

*Phase 3 Skewness and Kurtosis for Condition and Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Normality</th>
<th>SEL non-LDP</th>
<th>SEL LDP</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>SEL non-LDP</th>
<th>SEL LDP</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>-.222</td>
<td>-.311</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>-.372</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-.656</td>
<td>-.324</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-.647</td>
<td>-.078</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18

*Phase 3 Kolomogrov-Smirnov and Shapiro Wilk Tests of Normality*

| Groups      | Kolmogorov-Smirnov \(^a\) | Shapiro-Wilk | |
|-------------|---------------------------|--------------|
|             | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| CL Survey   | SEL non-LDP | .079 | 83 | .200* | .978 | 83 | .177 |
| Total Mean  | SEL LDP    | .066 | 77 | .200* | .978 | 77 | .190 |
| Male        |            | .061 | 80 | .200* | .984 | 80 | .439 |
| Female      |            | .064 | 80 | .200* | .979 | 80 | .211 |

\(^a\). Lilliefors Significance Correction

* This is a lower bound of the true significance.

After examining box and whisker plots as well as normality tests, one record was deleted from subsequent analyses. After Phase 3, there were 159 usable records. Descriptives were run again with the 15 cases identified as outliers in Phases 1-3 deleted.

**Phase 4.** Box and whisker plots are shown in Figures 10-11 and labeled as Phase 4. Phase 4 comprised the final data set used for subsequent analyses.
SPSS did not identify any outliers for either independent variable in Phase 4.

**Normality.** The normality of the dependent variable (mean score on CL survey) was examined in SPSS. It was assessed using graphical and statistical methods (Meyers et al., 2006).
The graphical methods used were frequency histograms. These plots were examined for the sample \( (n = 159) \) and for level of SEL competency as measured by the CL survey. Figures 12-15 display the frequency histograms of SEL competency as measured by mean CL survey scores for each independent variable. They imply that the dependent variable was fairly normally distributed in the sample.
Figure 12. Histogram of mean CL survey scores for SEL non-LDP condition.

Figure 13. Histogram of mean CL survey scores for SEL LDP condition.
Normality was further assessed statistically by analyzing the values of skewness and kurtosis (Meyers et al., 2006; Pallant, 2016). Skewness refers to the symmetry of the distribution.
and describes the location of the mean compared to the center of the distribution. In this study, the absolute values of skewness were less than one on the CL survey for all independent variables, suggesting adequately symmetrical distributions (Meyers et al., 2006). Kurtosis describes the peakedness of the distribution. The absolute values of kurtosis were also less than one, indicating that data meet the criteria for normal distribution (Meyers et al., 2006). Table 19 provides the values of skewness and kurtosis by CL survey and groups.

Table 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Normality</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>LDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>-.222</td>
<td>-.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-.656</td>
<td>-.554</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional statistical tests, the Kolomogrov-Smirnov test and the Shapiro-Wilk test, were used because they can further test for departures from normality (Meyers et al., 2006). Table 20 shows the results of the Kolomogrov-Smirnov test where \( p = .200 \). Also shown in Table 20 are the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, which indicate that the test was not significant at \( p = .177 \) for the SEL non-LDP group and at \( p = .094 \) for the SEL LDP group. For gender, the test was not significant for males at \( p = .145 \) nor for females at \( p = .211 \). Therefore, the assumption of normality was met.
Table 20

Kolomogrov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk Tests of Normality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Kolomogrov-Smirnov(^a)</th>
<th>Shapiro-Wilk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistic</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL Survey</td>
<td>SEL non-LDP</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^*\). This is a lower bound of the true significance.
\(^a\). Lilliefors Significance Correction

Independence. When using ANOVA, the participants that comprise each group must be independent of each other (Meyers et al., 2006). In this study, a participant would be involved in only one of the two levels for any of the independent variables (SEL LDP or SEL non-LDP; male or female). Therefore, this assumption was met.

Homogeneity of variance. This assumption is assessed using the Levene’s Test for Equality of Error variances for the dependent variable. The evaluation of mean score on the CL survey was not statistically significant \(F(3, 155)=1.982, p > .119\) as Table 21 demonstrates. It was determined that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met.

Table 21

Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>(F)</th>
<th>(df1)</th>
<th>(df2)</th>
<th>(p)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CL Mean Score</td>
<td>1.982</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>.119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Significance set at \(p < .05\) level.

Note. Design: Intercept + TwoGroupSELLDPNonLDP + Gender + TwoGroupSELLDPNonLDP

* Gender
The assumptions of independence, normality, and homogeneity were all met. Therefore, the researcher proceeded with the analyses for Research Question One.

**Data Analyses and Results**

A 2x2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to compare mean differences between condition (SEL LDP or SEL non-LDP) in SEL competencies as measured by the CL survey, and whether this differed when considering gender. One dependent variable was used: SEL competency as measured by mean score on the CL survey. Each independent variable had two levels. The independent variables were (a) condition (SEL non-LDP program or SEL LDP) and (b) gender (male or female). The purpose was to identify if either of these factors had a significant main effect on SEL competencies as measured by the CL survey scores and to determine whether there were any significant differences between the means. This statistic would also illustrate whether or not any significant interactions between the independent variables existed.

Results indicated that there was no significant difference between condition on the CL survey, \( F(1,155) = 1.901, p = .170, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .012 \). There was no statistically significant difference between mean scores of students in SEL LDPs (\( M = 3.340 \)) and those in SEL non-LDPs (\( M = 3.393 \)). There was a significant difference between mean scores for gender, \( F(1,155) = 13.301, p = .000, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .079 \). Female students (\( M = 3.451 \)) had significantly higher mean scores than male students (\( M = 3.283 \)). There were no significant interactions. Means, standard deviations, and ranges are presented in Table 22. Ranges indicate that although means were high across condition and gender, there were some low scoring students. The results of the analysis of variance for condition and gender on CL survey scores are presented in Table 23.
Table 22

Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges by Condition and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEL non-LDP</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.327</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.467</td>
<td>.263</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.393</td>
<td>.316</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL L-D P</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.227</td>
<td>.296</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.435</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.340</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.283</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.451</td>
<td>.271</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.367</td>
<td>.310</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23

Summary Table for 2x2 Analysis of Variance for Condition and Gender on CL Survey Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>1.901</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1.193</td>
<td>1.193</td>
<td>13.301</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition x Gender</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.521</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. df = 1,155, significance at the p < .05 level

Conclusion for Research Question One

In summary, the results indicated that there was no significant main effect for condition, but there was for gender. The nondirectional hypothesis, that there would be a significant difference in perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion between students who have participated in an SEL LDP program and students who have not, was rejected. There were statistically significant effects for gender on CL survey mean scores. Girls had significantly higher scores than boys. The nondirectional hypothesis, that there would be a significant difference in perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion between
male and female students, was accepted. There was no statistically significant interaction. It
should be noted that all group means were above a value of 3 on a 4-point scale and the range
was 1.30. The range was higher prior to excluding outliers.

Non-Directional Hypothesis: There will be a statistically significant difference in total
mean scores for perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion
between male and female students who have who have participated in an SEL LDP
and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP.

Research Questions Two and Three: Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative Data Description

Qualitative data were collected through interviews with students. Over a period of three
months, 25 individual interviews were conducted to address Research Questions Two and Three.
Interviews were conducted in person. The qualitative portion of the study was designed as a
multiple case study, where cases where bound by condition. All interviews were audio-recorded
except three. One building administrator did not consent to audio-recording and therefore at that
site, interviews were transcribed at the time of the interview to the best of the researcher’s
ability. Each participant was interviewed in a shared public space just outside of the
participant’s classroom, such as in the hallway or in a shared classroom space. All interview
participants had already completed the CL survey, the demographic surveys, had secured the
appropriate consents, and had given assent. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and
are used when discussing participants.

An additional, separate spreadsheet was created for students who not only completed
quantitative surveys, but who were also interview participants. All quantitative data were copied
into this spreadsheet with the addition of two columns: assigned pseudonym and whether or not
the researcher had secured agreement in the member checking process. The member checking process was described in Chapter Three and statements of agreement can be found in Appendices P and Q.

**Participant Description**

All 25 participants in the qualitative portion of this study were students in fourth or fifth grade in public schools from a single state in the northeastern U.S. Detailed demographic information was summarized in Chapter Three, Table 9. Interview participants were between the ages of 9-11 years old. Selection of interview participants was also outlined in Chapter Three. A summary of student demographic information organized by case appears in Table 24. Participants were nominated by their teacher as students who they perceived as courageous and who had an understanding of courage, as outlined in Chapter Three. In order to corroborate teacher nominations, interview participants also completed the CL survey and have at least a mean score of 3 on the courage subscale, indicating that they saw themselves as courageous most of the time. However, one participant scored a mean of 2.4 on the courage subscale. This student was still interviewed on the basis of the student’s teacher recommendation and response on the student survey about courage, both of which indicated that the student had a conceptual understanding of courage. Participants were grouped by case, and cases were bound by condition. There were two cases in this study: (a) students in an SEL LDP and (b) students in an SEL non-LDP.
### Table 24

**Summary of Self-Identified Demographic Information for Student Interviewees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 5 9 10 11</td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>White Hispanic Af. Am. Multiracial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL LDP</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4 2 2 4</td>
<td>1 5</td>
<td>2 2 1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL non-LDP</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11 8 3 11</td>
<td>9 9</td>
<td>12 6 1</td>
<td>One student chose not to disclose their age and another student chose not to disclose gender.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Initial Coding Procedures**

At the conclusion of each interview, audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher. To ensure accuracy of transcriptions, the researcher reviewed all field notes taken before, during, and after interviews; read through each transcription and made edits when necessary; and then followed the member checking procedure outlined in Chapter Three to ensure both student participants as well as their parents/guardians had checked the transcriptions for accuracy and were comfortable with the use of their transcript.

**Qualitative Data Cleansing**

Any identifying information was taken out of the interview transcripts. Participant names were removed and replaced with pseudonyms. In one case, sensitive information was shared. After consulting with her advisor, the researcher decided to remove this information from the transcript due to the sensitivity of the content. For ethical reasons, the researcher did not want any information to be included in a transcript that could identify a participant in any way. The nature of the information shared in this particular interview transcript could potentially have been identifying due to the personal nature of the story the participant shared.

**Coding Methods**

HyperRESEARCH (2015), a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program was used to assist with coding. Each transcript was uploaded into HyperRESEARCH. First and Second Cycle coding methods as described by Saldaña (2016) were implemented. The researcher utilized several First Cycle coding methods. First, Attribute coding was used to easily capture all “essential participant information” and to give the data “addresses for easy location” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 55). A standard format was used for all Attribute coding. Then, Simultaneous coding was used in order to apply both Structural and
Descriptive codes to data. The Structural codes that were applied to data were content-based or conceptual in nature and all directly related to a specific interview protocol question, which were also mapped to Research Questions Two and Three. This was done so that it would be possible to easily sort and study how all participants, for example, responded to question one. Descriptive codes were also used and are described by Saldaña (2016) as a summary of “the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (p. 70).

As codes were generated, they were added to the code book stored in HyperRESEARCH so that as the researcher coded each individual transcript, she could search through all previously used codes first to decide whether an existing code fit a single datum or whether a new code needed to be created. Each transcript was coded in its entirety before moving to the next transcript. Additionally, all transcripts within one case were coded before moving to the next case. After reviewing all transcripts during First Cycle coding, 61 codes emerged.

The researcher next wrote all First Cycle codes on a separate sticky-note. The sticky-notes were physically placed on a wall and then sorted into groups with similar meaning in order to determine whether more accurate words or phrases emerged when initial codes were taken together (Saldaña, 2016). Some codes were collapsed because they were similar in meaning while others were no longer needed. Re-coding was necessary at this point to reflect these changes, which left 53 codes. The researcher then utilized Pattern coding in order for categories to be distilled from the codes, and thus to identify emergent themes or constructs (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Pattern codes are defined as “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of materials from First Cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 86). Four themes emerged from the initial codes and
categorizing process. A frequency table organized by theme illustrates the use of each code and can be found in Appendix R.

**Research Questions Two and Three: Qualitative Results**

In this section, the four themes that were revealed by the data are discussed by research question. Explanation and evidence are provided in the form of paraphrased statements, illustrative quotations, and researcher interpretation of the data from the interviews. Participants are only referred to by pseudonym to protect confidentiality. A summary of each theme and its connection to the research questions is provided. Table 25 displays a matrix to illustrate the relationship between research questions and interview questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Protocol Questions</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do you think the word courage means?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Please explain the picture you drew.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. When have you needed to act courageously? Please explain.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you see yourself as a courageous person? Why/why not?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Can you tell me about someone you think is courageous?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do you see courage as something that is important to you in your life? Why or why not?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you see courage as something that is important at school? If so, how? If not, why not?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What does it take for a person to be a courageous person?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Can you give an example of a time you saw someone else act courageously at school?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. At school, how do your classmates and teachers show courage?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. What do you think schools can do to help students grow as courageous individuals?</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question Two Results

Theme One: Characteristics of Integrity. Throughout the 25 interviews, it was evident that characteristics of integrity were central to students’ perceptions of courage in themselves and others. There were various principles that were revealed through data analysis in the stories and examples that students shared. In all, this theme, characteristics of integrity, includes the principles of (a) honesty, (b) altruism, (c) compassion in action, (d) forgiveness, and (e) authenticity.

Honesty. Honesty was a category that, for the purposes of this study, means telling the truth rather than lying, even when it is hard as well as doing the right thing when there is a choice, such as admitting to mistakes. Doing the right thing involved discussion with participants around exercising self-control when upset or angry rather than seeking revenge, making amends or reparations after a mistake, or being an upstander. Telling the truth even when it is hard also involved owning up to mistakes, such as when something is spilled, or you have a choice between lying and stating what really happened. Participants at times discussed doing the right thing and telling the truth in the context of getting in trouble.

SEL non-LDP. For example, John, from an SEL non-LDP, stated “kids on the bus curse and do bad things. There should be monitoring on the bus because right now kids get away with it because people don’t see. It would be easier to tell someone if we knew the kid would get in trouble.” Henry referred to honesty when he talked about his belief that if someone witnessed a peer “do something bad or not good,” they should stand up to that person and “not just let it go.” Henry’s statement refers to a certain kind of truth telling, that of doing the right thing when there is a choice between ignoring it and addressing it. Henry gave even another example that illustrates the concept of making an honest choice when it would be just as easy to do otherwise.
When asked who in his life is courageous, Henry named his father and said “one time, somebody dropped a dollar bill and he gave it back to them” when he could have kept the money for his own good. Another way in which students discussed honesty was in playing by the rules of a game, and upholding honest play, even when peers were not. Dakota explained that in soccer when people are questionably physical during a game, yet referees do not see, Dakota said it was necessary to “focus on what the game is and what I’m trying to do and just not get back to them. Because I know that is not allowed.” Students in SEL non-LDPs discussed honesty in the context of what they perceived as right versus wrong and drew upon examples involving honesty when they were explaining how they understand courage.

**SEL LDP.** While Farrah, from an SEL LDP stated that she tried to do her best work and be on her best behavior because she just wants to feel like she’s doing a good thing, even though some classmates around her are not doing so. Students were able to call upon real-life examples, usually in the context of school, where they chose to describe courageous acts in terms of witnessing or personally experiencing living into the value of honesty.

Making oneself or family members proud, owning and making up for mistakes or wrongdoings, and resisting peer pressure, were all important components of the ways in which participants across cases called upon honesty in doing the right thing or being truthful. They used the aforementioned examples to describe courageous acts.

**Altruism.** Three initial codes comprised the category of altruism. Altruism refers to selflessness or putting another’s wellbeing first. Some data were coded as altruism and other data were coded as upstanding and as ENcourage. All three codes were nested under the category of altruism because collectively, participants referenced the belief in putting others’ wellbeing before their own, regardless of emotions such as fear, constructs such as vulnerability,
or feelings such as discomfort. Many participants used the word encourage, which is comprised of the root word courage and translates to inspiring with courage, hope, and confidence, or help to another (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

**SEL non-LDP discussion of altruism and encouragement.** Mostly SEL non-LDP participants had data coded as altruism. Two participants in particular, John and Caitlin, explicitly spoke about altruism when they either defined courage or named who they thought was courageous. John stated “I think the word courage, what it means, is someone doing something really brave, but not just for the benefit of themselves—for the benefit of everybody” and he later stated that he did not particularly perceive himself as courageous because “I’ve never really done something really good to benefit other people. Like, sometimes I help people, but I still don’t see myself as a courageous person.” Another participant, Caitlin, named Harriet Tubman as her example of a courageous person and spoke altruistically about her in not only braving the Underground Railroad originally to seek her own freedom, but doing so multiple times to lead others to freedom.

Students in SEL non-LDPs also spoke about the act of encouraging others as a way to grow courage. Specifically, they stated that they believed themselves and their teachers to be encouraging. They used the word encourage as well as recounted stories of teachers saying, “you can do this” and used words like “needing a push.” Only students in the SEL non-LDPs explicitly used the word “encourage” during their interviews, with a total of eight instances of data coded as “ENcourage.”

**SEL LDP and encouragement.** Only one student from an SEL LDP, Ana, shared a story related to encouragement when she said that in chorus, she did a solo at a concert and it was really scary to sing by herself in front of parents and people in the audience, but “some of my
friends had faith in me, they said I could do it.” Encouragement, to inspire courage in others by giving them confidence, hope, and support, was an important topic in the interviews.

**SEL non-LDP and upstanding.** Upstanding, or behaving in a moral way rather than being a bystander in a situation where beliefs are violated, was a pervasive topic. Students usually used the words “stood up” to someone else when recounting these stories and examples. All of these stories took place at school, primarily on the bus or the playground, except for two, which took place outside of school hours. Students in SEL non-LDPs used the words bullied, bad, and mean when describing situations where they needed to be an upstander or where they witnessed someone else being an upstander. For example, in defining courage, Riley said “I think it means, like if your friend is being bullied by someone or something, you would stand up for them even though there might be consequences. Like, the bullies might bully you next.”

**SEL LDP and upstanding.** Four of the six interviewees from SEL LDPs discussed upstanding as an important act of courage. In describing who she found as courageous, Ana named her friend, and said “she’ll always stand up for herself. She’ll never be mean to you; she’ll just explain herself.” Jayla also shared a story of witnessing her friend stand up for another peer at school and saying “what are you doing? Can you stop? Obviously, she’s hurt. What’s the problem?” Elena spoke about upstanding, but in the context of being empathic, when she said, “some kids here probably get stressed out or upset and you can step up to help them.”

Jackson’s interview was anchored in the concept of upstanding, as his responses to six of the interview questions involved upstanding. When describing how he had been courageous, he explained:

*Jackson: To me, courage means like bravery like for example, someone’s getting bullied at school. Just stand up for them.*
Researcher: Have you seen that happen before?

Jackson: Yes.

Researcher: Can you tell me more about that?

Jackson: So, there’s a 5th grader who was picking on a 1st grader. So, my friend came up to him and the bully started yelling at him. So, I went over there and asked him to stop and the stranger walked right away.

Researcher: Oh really? It worked. What do you think it was that made that boy walk away once you said something?

Jackson: Courage.

Researcher: And what do you think he thought in his head?

Jackson: I shouldn’t be doing this.

Jackson went on to state that though he felt nervous before intervening in this situation, he also felt a boost of energy and has been an upstander every time he gets the opportunity to do so.

Altruism succinctly captured the initial codes of ENcourage and upstanding because both concepts involve stepping outside of oneself and putting others’ wellbeing before one’s own. Altruism is a characteristic of integrity, and the examples students shared communicate their understanding of the necessity to remain true to their values and do what they can to protect those values in the context of peers.

**Compassion in action.** Compassion in action as defined in Chapter One, is the “understanding of a problem or suffering of another and acting to solve the problem or alleviate the suffering” (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019, p. 13). This character strength was discussed frequently by participants, along with the word kindness. Compassion and kindness were the initial codes used that make up this category. Because compassion
requires first an empathic understanding of another and then action to attempt to make that person feel better, kindness and compassion together comprise compassion in action. Participants described compassion in action in both physical and emotional terms. In a physical sense, students described helping someone when they fell down or were hurt. Emotionally, most students talked about reaching out to classmates who appeared lonely, even if the person was someone they did not know.

SEL non-LDP. Most participants used the word “help” in their statements about compassion in action. Sophia summed this up when she said, “courage means like helping somebody, being with the other person being upset and lonely and no one to play with, you can be with them, and helping them to find their way.” Henry spoke to empathy as a prerequisite for courage and focused on compassion in action when he said “for growing it, you kinda need to feel like how people feel, empathy. That will help you know what to do in other situations that are bad.”

Across cases, helping others when they experienced sadness or anger or were physically hurt was something that was important to participants and some even defined courage in these terms. Also, regarding how students defined courage, kindness was a construct that four different students from SEL non-LDPs explicitly used in their definition of courage. For example, Nathan defined courage as “someone who is kind and brave” and Oliver said, “I think that courage means like if you’re just brave, respectful, kind, and just stuff like that.”

SEL LDP. Two students in SEL LDPs talked about kindness as a component of their definition of courage, as well. Lillian said, “I think it means being brave, saying what you think, and having kindness” while Jayla said courage means “that you’re brave, not scared of anything, not afraid to help people, that you’re kind.”
An excerpt from Elena’s interview is illustrative of the ways in which compassion in action intersected with courage during student interviews:

Researcher: Can you tell me about the picture that you drew?

Elena: There’s this guy who’s poor. He sees this normal guy, not a rich guy, just normal who sees the poor guy. He says, “take my money.” The homeless guy says, “really!?” The normal guy says “really.” The homeless guy says, “thanks so much.” Then, two years later, he sees the homeless guy with a little house of his own.

Researcher: How were his actions brave?

Elena: There’s a lot of people who don’t like to give money to homeless people, so he was brave enough to give what he did have to people that didn’t have.

Researcher: When have you needed to act courageously? Please explain.

Elena: So last year in the summer, I went to Peru for my summer vacation. It was like the story, except it was me. I asked my mom for three dollars—three soles—and I gave them to him.

Researcher: How did you feel in that moment—how come it took some courage or bravery?

Elena: I was scared. But he was talking about something sad, so I did it. I don’t remember what he said but I know it was sad.

In recounting the story of giving to a homeless person while in Peru, Elena exemplified empathic understanding when she responded to hearing the homeless man talk about something sad and seeing him begging for money. Then, she embodied compassion in action when she carried out a kind act to show that understanding and alleviate the suffering of this stranger. It was interesting that in Elena’s picture of courage, she envisioned that with the money this man
earned from generous strangers like her, he now would have his own little home. Elena selected this story as her primary example of courage. To summarize, compassion in action requires both empathy and kind action. Students felt that compassionate acts required courage. They felt so strongly about this that many students used the word kindness or helping others in their very definitions of courage.

**Forgiveness.** Forgiveness was a topic that four participants saw related to courage, two from each case. As defined by the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program (2019), forgiveness is “choosing to let go of anger or resentment toward yourself or someone else, to surrender thoughts of revenge, and to move forward with your personal power intact” (p. 13). Each of these four participants saw letting go of anger and not seeking revenge after being hurt as courageous.

**SEL non-LDP.** Dakota and Daniel were students in SEL non-LDPs and both shared perspectives on forgiveness as courageous. Particularly, Dakota saw refraining from seeking revenge as courageous. Dakota explained:

Dakota: So, overall, courage is a very important thing because as you get older, there are going to be a lot of annoying people. And, you’re just, you’re gonna have to make sure that you’re dealing with it in the right way.

Researcher: And when you say the right way, what do you mean by that?

Dakota: Don’t like—don’t go and try to like, hit them or attack them the way they attack you. Talk to them and tell them that it’s annoying and come to a compromise, maybe. Don’t try to get revenge on them or something because two wrongs don’t make a right.
Daniel, on the other hand, spoke more about letting pain and anger go as courageous. The ability to take on another’s perspective and perhaps even show compassion to a wrongdoer was evident in Daniel’s perception of others. Daniel shared:

Researcher: You drew a picture for me about what you think courage means. Can you tell me a little bit more about that picture?

Daniel: It was basically about a kid, saying about like that he’s like the worst friend ever and the kid had the courage to ignore him and he understood that he said that, but he just let it go.

Researcher: Why do you think it’s courageous that the kid didn’t listen to the other kid that was saying mean things to him?

Daniel: Because it’s really courageous because most people just say things back or put them into themselves and it hurts like, them—because they keep on remembering it, but he had the courage to let it go and ignore it.

Researcher: Do you think it’s hard to do, to ignore that?

Daniel: Yeah, it’s really hard.

Researcher: What do you think the kid might have thought in his head to help him do that?

Daniel: That to not listen to him because maybe something bad happened to him, someone just did something to him that made him mad and upset to say that.

Daniel chose to draw a picture of a student forgiving a peer as his example of courage on the researcher-created student survey about courage. When he elaborated on this picture during the interview, his words reflected a belief in forgiveness as an act of courage. He talked about a conscious act of letting go and perspective taking towards a person who had been hurtful. Daniel
shared his reasoning that this was courageous because it showed a sense of strength and restraint in order to keep one’s integrity in tact rather and doing what “most people” would do, which he described as seeking revenge in some way.

_SEL LDP._ Ana and Jayla, both participants in SEL LDPs, weaved the concept of forgiveness into their responses to their belief that courage is important at both home and school. Ana spoke about how even when someone is mean, people should still respond with kindness. Similarly, Jayla explained that at school, a courageous response to a bully would be to walk away and not do something mean back. She also said, “I’m not saying that I always do that, but that’s right.”

/Authenticity./ The concept of authenticity surfaced in several interviews. In this study, authenticity refers to being genuine and real, sometimes in coming up against judgment or outside pressure.

_SEL non-LDP._ With one participant in particular from an SEL non-LDP, Dakota, staying true to one’s belief system was part of the very definition of courage. Dakota defined courage as mostly to be brave and to stand up for yourself and for what you believe in, not for what other people do.” Later in the interview, when nominating who Dakota viewed as courageous, Dakota said “my dad ‘cause he doesn’t care what other people believe about him. He has all these random shirts that say “science doesn’t care about what you believe in.” And he just, he’s never afraid to talk to people.” Dakota believed:

Courage is very important because as you grow older, you’re not going to have somebody there to do everything for you so you’re gonna have to make sure that you’re speaking up for yourself and being independent instead of having somebody else do it for you.
Dakota was the only student from an SEL non-LDP to discuss authenticity.

SEL LDP. Three students from SEL LDPs described authenticity in their responses to what courage means or in their examples of courageous acts. Ana defined courage as, in part, “saying what you think” while Lillian said, “I think the word courage means doing something brave or like outside the box, like unordinary.” Farrah also referred to living her truth, or being authentic, when she shared “I just want to feel like I’m doing a good thing, even though some people aren’t.” This was about staying true to her beliefs, even when feeling pressure from peers. Last, Lillian discussed authenticity when she talked about disregarding any disparaging remarks that people make and “pushing through.”

Authenticity, though only apparent in five participant interviews in total, is a helpful concept on which to end the discussion of this theme, because integrity indeed requires strength in principles. Authenticity, too, involves a sense of truthfulness in one’s sense of self and guiding beliefs.

**Summary of Theme 1: Characteristics of Integrity.** This theme illustrates the identification of multiple concepts central to perceptions about courage as well as the interconnectedness of characteristics of integrity when thinking about courage. Students’ definitions of courage, recounting of courageous acts they have witnessed or personally carried out, and their beliefs about growing courage were often described through these other, related characteristics. This theme relates to Research Question Two. By sharing perspectives about how honest, altruistic, compassionate, forgiving, and authentic people are courageous, students described how they understand courage in themselves and others, primarily in the school context.
Theme Two: Persistence. This theme emphasizes the presence of persistence, or sticking with something, someone, a goal, or a challenge. The following categories were collapsed to create this theme: (a) bravery, (b) the unknown, (c) pain, and (d) perseverance.

Bravery. According to the definition of key terms in Chapter One, bravery is part of the definition of courage. The word bravery implies facing danger or opposition (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As such, fear was a closely related construct that emerged across both cases in how students conceptualized courage and understood it functioning in their lives and in others’ lives.

SEL non-LDP. Seven of the 19 students from SEL non-LDPs used the term brave during their interview. Three students from SEL non-LDPs used the term brave in their definition of courage. They gave examples such as fear of the dark, performing on stage in a play, doing physical activities such as parachuting, zip lining or getting hurt in a sport. Caitlin was the only student to discuss bravery in the context of history. When asked to talk about someone she found to be courageous, Caitlin named Harriet Tubman and discussed the danger she faced when navigating the Underground Railroad. Daniel, on the other hand, discussed bravery in the context of feelings of uncertainty, such as in being a new student or starting school as a kindergartener for the first time. Multiple students from SEL non-LDPs used the term bravery, yet they described very different examples of bravery. What was common amongst these descriptions, however, were the implicit underlying feelings of fear or uncertainty.

SEL LDP. All students from SEL LDPS used the term brave in their definition of courage. The interviews evidenced that students from SEL LDPS understood the explicit link between courage and bravery. Farrah, from an SEL LDP, even named the emotion regret in this context, when she explained that courage is important “because a lot of people are scared of it
and if they don’t try it, then they might feel regret in a couple of months or a couple of years that they hadn’t tried it because they were scared to do it.” When explaining how students see courage in themselves as well as their perceptions of others, students cited examples where fear was a central component. Students from SEL LDPS believed that feeling fear, and doing something anyway, was a defining factor of courage, as evidenced by the high frequency of data initially coded with bravery or fear. For example, Elena spoke about fear in interacting with someone she did not yet know as well as when her brother was stuck in an elevator and her mother was not sure how or when he would be rescued. Farrah discussed fear in a different circumstance. She talked about feeling afraid to try a new sport like soccer when discussing the link between fear and courage.

In summary, the term fear and the naming of related emotions was evident in students’ perceptions of courage in themselves, in others, and in describing how courage shows up at school, particularly for students in SEL LDPS. Related emotions that were named in generating this category across both cases included scared, anxious, nervous, terrified, afraid, and stressed.

The unknown. Students expressed common perspectives that doing something new and taking risks, or facing the unknown, were ways in which people embody courage. This category was comprised mostly of examples of courageous acts that required coming up against the unknown. At school, this often meant being the new kid, making new friends, or even just talking to someone new. In this way, students expressed being vulnerable in the social context of school.

SEL non-LDP. Lola’s comments exemplified this vulnerability when she said “at first it took some courage because I thought that if I just try to act like a normal kid, and be friends with everybody, they’re just gonna think I’m like a total loser. Or if I try to make friends with them,
they’re just gonna maybe laugh at me.” Students also talked about trying new foods, auditioning for plays, talent shows, or singing, and trying to learn new academic concepts and skills.

The idea of moving outside of one’s comfort zone surfaced again and again. For example, Sara shared a story about going on a weeklong class field trip to an environmental education program:

Sara: It was a week-long, a school week-long. We came home on Friday. And then when I had to sleep with people that I’m only friends with and doing classes that I’m not really used to.

Researcher: Like what?

Sara: Like I signed up for one that was building a zombie survival fort in the forest.

Researcher: Sounds awesome. Do you see yourself overall as a courageous person?

Sara: I see myself as a courageous person because I’ve been trying to do more things that I wouldn’t normally do. So, like, I went to Nature’s Classroom. And do activities I wouldn’t normally do.

For Sara, a weeklong school field trip allowed for her to move outside of her comfort zone and came to her mind readily when she thought about ways in which she had enacted courage in her life.

*SEL LDP.* Students in SEL LDPs deemed doing something they’ve never done before, either in a social sense or physical sense or doing something alone courageous acts. Farrah, for example, shared about trying ziplining and said:

Farrah: My brain was telling me I don’t think you should do it. The rope might snap. I kept on thinking about it and thinking about it and I finally had the courage to do it.

Researcher: So, what helped you get past that thought about the rope snapping?
Farrah: I thought many people had been on it and the rope hadn’t snapped and they tested it many and many times so that made me have courage to do it.

In the school context, students in SEL LDPs explained that even the act of being interviewed was courageous in that the researcher was a “stranger,” someone they had never met before. They also cited auditioning, singing, or doing anything for the first time as actions that relate to the unknown which they saw as courageous.

Overall, students believed that exposing themselves to the unknown, or taking risks that required vulnerability on their part, were important. They saw the unknown and risk-taking as a way to grow as a student, friend, and person. Students concluded that no learning, friendships, or growth can take place if people don’t try new things and that all learning and relationships were new once.

**Pain.** Pain was a topic of discussion and refers to both physical pain as well as emotional pain, particularly in the presence of feelings of loss and in the experience of tragedy. Participants shared on the topic of pain primarily when they were explaining how they feel others are courageous and settings included both at school as well as with family outside of school.

**SEL non-LDP.** Two students recounted stories involving tragic loss of life. In these instances, students were explaining how they remember acts of courage in others. One student recounted the story of losing a friend and shared this story as support for why he sees himself as courageous. All three of these students were from SEL non-LDPs. Lucas connected the concepts of pain and courage when he shared that in a big storm, his friend’s mother died tragically. Lucas explained how this student came to school the next day and that he was really surprised by that. He shared “Usually people wouldn’t do that. And he was fine. He wasn’t
tearing up in the middle of the day. That probably just took a lot of courage.” Similarly, John referred the link between courage and pain when he referred to his father, who was an electrician, and stated that it is “a very dangerous job. He actually saw someone die. He saw somebody get electrocuted.” Both Lucas and John saw enduring a tragic loss of life as painful experiences that were courageous. Daniel also saw enduring pain as a courageous act, but he shared about this in the context of losing a friend when he told the following story:

Daniel: I think back in second grade, I had this friend. He was actually my best friend. I met him in second grade. And then we started to grow apart of each other, going with other friends. Then in third grade we separated [from] each other. I had to let go of one of my best friends.

Researcher: Why did you have to let go?

Daniel: He basically was hanging out with other kids and then when we went outdoors for recess, I always used to come over to him and try to say if he wants to play. Then he just sees me and runs away so I thought the option was to just not be friends anymore.

Physical pain was a prominent topic amongst participants across both cases. Eight students from SEL non-LDPs shared about physical pain. Sometimes, this was in regard to how students saw courage called upon at school. Stories included a common topic of falling and getting up again or being physically assaulted and a witnessing peer acting as an upstander in that situation. Whether figuratively or literally, muscling through pain was a part of how students perceive courage both in and out of school, as well as both in themselves and in those around them.

SEL LDP. Three of the six participants from SEL LDPs retold stories of physical pain when they explained who in their life they see as courageous, and all three stories involved
family members. For example, Jayla said “my mom was brave because we had a car accident and she was bleeding on her leg. My brother was crying and she told him it would be okay. She didn’t even cry and I know it hurt because it was all bruised.” When describing whether or not they saw themselves as courageous, all three of these students also said they did, and cited stories regarding physical pain. Examples included getting shots, learning to ride a bike and falling down over and over again, or taking a physical risk such as ziplining.

**Perseverance.** Perseverance was a major subject of conversation and is defined in this study as a set of subtopics such as failing and trying again, working hard, and remaining steadfast in the face of challenge. Students described failing and trying again in endeavors such as rehearsing for plays, learning new mathematics concepts, and in sports.

**SEL non-LDP.** John’s discussion of failing and trying again was illustrative of this subtopic:

John: I don’t know if this is really courageous or not, but I do a lot of plays and recitals and things like that. Sometimes I am practicing and I completely fail on what I’m doing. But then, I keep up the courage and still go on stage and do well.

Researcher: What do you think is hard about or courageous about having to work through that?

John: I started off thinking that I was gonna do great. Then I started thinking that I wasn’t gonna do great. Then I had to work through that and be brave to get onto the stage and actually try to do that.

Researcher: What is it that you think keeps you going when something feels hard like that rather than giving up, I guess?
John: Either it’s my parents and my family reassuring me or it’s me realizing that if I just keep practicing, I could probably do really well. A sentiment of pride in effort in trying challenging things again and again, even if met with failure, was evident.

Persevering or remaining steadfast in the face of challenge was another way in which students conceptualized courage. The discussion of perseverance was often marked by citing feelings of frustration. Students described the need to endure when frustrated rather than giving up. For instance, Noah talked about how in baseball when he strikes out, he decides to put that in the past and place his focus on the next time he is at bat.

Several students discussed persevering through academic challenges, particularly on tests, in mathematics, and on homework. Libby’s explanation of persevering through challenges presented an apt analogy to summarize this topic. She shared this thought when asked whether she believes courage is important:

Yes, because it helps you go through stuff. It’s like a mountain kind of. When you don’t have courage in yourself, you roll down and if you have courage, you hike up the mountain and you can get over.

Failing and trying again as well as persevering in the face of challenge also imply the presence of hard work, which is the last topic students discussed in this category. Students believed that people who are courageous work hard, particularly when they encounter things they perceive as difficult. Daniel explained this concept through his description of his mother when he said:

I think my mom is courageous because since when I was four or three, my mom had . . . triplets. Now they’re in kindergarten. She is courageous. Like every day she has to
wake us up, give us some cereal, take a bath—all three of them. I know that’s gotta be hard work, but she always keeps on doing it.

Also, when asked what it takes for someone to be a courageous person, Emanuel’s short yet powerful statement summarizes students’ beliefs about courage and perseverance: “a lot of work.”

SEL LDP. Two participants from SEL LDPs discussed perseverance. Jayla stated that it takes perseverance to be courageous and that people must “believe in themselves, work hard, and stay focused on the stuff you need to be.” She shared a story about learning to ride her bike and the need to get up again and again after falling in order to overcome the challenge of learning a new skill. Lillian also shared a story of perseverance when she nominated her brother as a person in her life she believes to be courageous. She said:

Sometimes he has problems with stress. He’s in middle school. So, he sometimes has big homework assignments that he gets nervous about but he turns them in and he usually gets good grades so I think that he is courageous.

Both Jayla and Lillian shared their thoughts that courage can be perceived as working relentlessly on challenges that are hard.

Summary of Theme Two: Persistence. The ability to work through challenges, face internal or external opposition, and endure pain bravely were common conceptions amongst interview participants in how they understood courage in themselves, in others, and especially at school. Persistence was characterized by the experience of strong, often unpleasant emotions yet continuing on anyway in order to reach a desired goal or to maintain integrity.
Theme Three: What it Takes to be Courageous. It was abundantly clear through interviews that all students believed not only that courage was important at school and in life, but that a person can grow courage. They also believed that there are certain prerequisites to be considered courageous, which are the focus of this theme. This theme emerged through first combing through transcripts for all participants’ responses to several particular interview questions, questions 8-10, which asked, “what does it take to be courageous?” and “can a person grow courage? If so, how? If not, why not?” and “how might someone develop courage?” (Appendix C). The following categories were then created that comprised this theme: (a) optimism, (b) examples and experiences, and (c) social support.

Optimism. As students described what they felt it takes to be a courageous person, they believed a key characteristic people must have was a strong sense of optimism. Based on data analysis, optimism is a sense of hopefulness and confidence about the future, about one’s own abilities, or about the abilities of others. Optimism was spoken about primarily in terms of an hopeful belief in self and in the consistent use of positive self-talk. Eleven of the 25 participants across cases spoke about needing to believe in themselves.

SEL non-LDP. Four students from the same school in an SEL non-LDP also used the word “faith” when discussing believing in themselves in order to be a courageous person. For example, when asked what it takes to be courageous, Sara explained:

Sara: They need to look on the bright side of things and not look too deeply and find the negative things.

Researcher: Why do you think that’s important? That’s interesting.

Sara: Because faith is about being hopeful and thinking about the good things. But you can lose faith by thinking about those things and it’s better not to.
Several students discussed adults in their life that they perceived as courageous and chose to describe them in their sense of optimism and belief in themselves and others. Libby and Lola talked about their mothers, and how they say things like “You can do this” and also “I can do it. I can pick myself up and do it.” Lola and Daniel also mentioned their teachers and said “even if teachers are tired, they always try to come to school and feel happy” or “what’s brave about that is that she likes to…you know, in her life it’s most like happiness, laughter, encouraging.” These statements suggest that students understand that adults experience life stressors, but that they are positive nonetheless and some students saw this as courageous.

Something students had in common regarding what it takes to be a courageous person was their conviction that the things we say to ourselves, our self-talk, matters. They shared many examples of the kinds of self-talk that they use in order to act courageously. Students gave examples such as when Dakota said “you have to be like I’m an independent person. I’m strong. And you’ve got to uplift yourself.” Students discussed the need to stay focused on a goal or on something positive, keep practicing, say “I CAN,” and again and again, believe in yourself.

SEL LDP. Three of the six students in SEL LDPs also shared the perspective that believing in oneself is a key element in being a courageous person. The words “believe in self” were used by these three participants when asked whether or not a person can grow courage. They shared the notion that people can grow courage and each of these three participants said that “believing in yourself” or “trust in yourself” was the way to grow courage.

Examples and experiences. In addition to maintaining a sense of optimism, students felt that growing into a courageous person requires learning by example and through experience.

SEL non-LDP. Henry believed that students should come to school already knowing “what to do right” and that “seeing other people doing it can make you feel like you want to do it
and make you feel better.” Famous historical changemakers such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Harriet Tubman were also named as exemplary individuals that inspire courage in others. Students also believed witnessing acts of courage at school inspire those around them to grow this strength. Oliver recounted a story of witnessing one student stand up to a bully and then commented that he felt “that I want to be like that person, just like help and tell people that you can’t do stuff like that and be a kind person.” Nine students in SEL non-LDPs named the presence of courageous role models and examples as important in growing courage.

**SEL LDP.** Four students in SEL LDPs shared the belief that people develop courage by watching others enact it. From SEL LDPs, Farrah stated:

They might grow courage out of other people, like your mom or dad or people around you showing courage and you are like “oh, I want to try that. It might make me a better person.” So, they try it and it makes them a better person.

Jackson also said “by watching other people, they can see how that person was courageous and stood up for someone. They can learn from it. Sometimes it comes naturally but a lot of times, you find it from other people.” Not only was the presence of figures who exemplify courage important in considering what it takes to be courageous, but the concept of experience as teacher was, as well. Lucas explained:

I think to grow courage, well the main thing to make it stronger and have more courage is having more experience with it. So, if something happened, like that took a lot of courage, at first it would be hard and then a lot of times it happened more. If that person had certain experiences like that, they could be very courageous.

**Social support.** It was evident across both cases that often, situations which require a person to enact courage are social in nature. Thirteen of the 25 interviews focused on social
situations when discussing courage. Participants named situations where a person is performing on display in front of peers and adults, such as in a play, a recital, a concert, or some other type of whole school assembly, as situations that require courage. Another social environment often described in interviews was in the area of sports. Most commonly, though, students spoke about school, particularly more unstructured settings such as on the bus or at recess, as social situations that require courage. The social environment of the classroom itself came up only in the context of learning new things. All other situations described by participants involved discussion of relationships or social exchanges with peers. These situations included activities such as navigating conflict and upstanding, making new friends, or reaching out to a classmate who appears lonely.

**SEL non-LDP.** Five students from SEL non-LDPs added that in order to be courageous, feeling a sense of support from people who care about you is important. These students named teachers, parents, friends, and family in general. Libby said “my mom is very courageous. She always says “Libby, you can do this.” And she always says, “you can do stuff” and that helps me feel like, “okay, I can do this.”” Sara named her family as the reason she practices courage when she said, “I want to make my family proud and stuff, so that’s pretty much why.” Lola said: “sometimes friends help you go through courage, sometimes teachers help you go through courage, and sometimes work can go through courage because it’s like making you believe you can do it.”

**SEL LDP.** Three of the six students from SEL LDPs shared a belief that situationally, courage is required in social contexts. Some of the situations that students from SEL LDPs believed required courage included their time at recess, speaking or performing in front of peers,
speaking up to peers when something unkind is said, or talking to a new peer for the first time. These three participants only spoke of courage in social contexts throughout their interviews.

Evidence from the interviews suggests that it often takes both social situations as well as a sense of support to be courageous.

*Summary of Theme Three: What it Takes to be Courageous.* In summary, maintaining a sense of optimism was something participants felt was important in order to develop courage. Students also perceived that learning by example and experience and feeling supported by others were involved in being courageous. Last, the kinds of situations which require courage were often social in nature, many of which were school-related.

Research Question Two focused on students’ perceptions of courage in themselves and others. Students perceive courage as inextricably connected to various other characteristics, which suggests that fourth and fifth grade students understand courage as a multifaceted, layered, and complex construct. There was consensus amongst the students that courage has the capacity to be both explicitly and implicitly developed. Students thought maintaining a sense of optimism, bearing witness to examples of courage carried out by peers, friends, and family, and building a strong social support network were important in order to enact courage. They also shared the belief that the very experience of being at school and in social situations provided experiences and opportunities for developing courage.
Research Question Three: Results

**Theme Four: Cultivating Courage at School.** A discussion of ways in which courage may be cultivated at school took place at the end of each interview. The analysis of the data revealed that students had recommendations and advice for educators and for peers when it comes to developing courage at school.

**Models of courage at school.** Students across both cases discussed using models of courage at school as a primary way to cultivate courage in the school environment. Students were able to name models of courage in their classmates or teachers with ease. Their examples were plentiful and the particular details of the contexts and situations were varied. It was clear that having models of courage at school in both their teachers and their peers were important ways in which students were inspired to talk about courage. For example, Jackson, from an SEL LDP, remembered:

Jackson: So, my friend, he did something wrong and then the teacher blamed it on a different kid, so my friend went up and told the teacher that it was him.

Researcher: Oh wow. Then what happened?

Jackson: He got punished instead of the kid.

Researcher: So, he knew that that was probably going to happen. What do you think made him make that choice?

Jackson: Courage.

According to students, acts of courage were inspiring at school amongst both adults and peers alike. In Henry’s words, “just growing courage is seeing other people doing it can make you feel like you want to do it and make you feel better.” When asked about their ideas regarding
cultivating courage at school, students in non SEL LDPs often suggested discussing examples of courage at school would be helpful.

**Lesson driven strategies.** Only students in SEL LDPs named or described explicitly taught strategies they believed could be employed to muster courage. Nine students in SEL non-LDPs reported either that they do not focus on courage often at school.

*SEL non-LDP.* Noah, from an SEL non-LDP reflected the sentiments of some of his SEL non-LDP peers when he said that he would like to focus on courage more at school because “yeah it’s important in your life and school is just getting ready for life, so yes.” Some students in SEL non-LDPs added that they felt it is a student’s responsibility to already know about courage, and a family’s responsibility to teach about it. For instance, John said “I think schools should teach courage a little bit, but I also think families should teach courage, too. I think that there should be teaching courage at home and school.” Students in SEL LDPs spoke differently about courage and discussed focusing on it at school.

*SEL LDP.* In describing their recommendations for how schools might go about cultivating courage, students in SEL non-LDPs named more overarching instructional concepts, such as modeling, role-playing, or classroom based discussions. When it comes to cultivating courage at school, students in SEL LDPs used specific language such as the following:

Jayla: We’re doing a program—Choose Love. We talk about courageousness, forgiveness. We take brave breaths if someone makes you mad. Just don’t be angry at them, take a brave breath.

Researcher: How do you feel about that?

Jayla: It works.

Researcher: Do you use those strategies?
Jayla: Yes.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to share that I didn’t get a chance to ask you?

Jayla: It, Choose Love, has helped a lot with problems in my life, with my friends. Jayla noted that the Choose Love program was instrumental for herself and for her friends in learning strategies to embody courage.

Mindfulness breaths, such as the brave breath, are explicitly taught in some SEL LDPs as self-management strategies and strategies to employ in order to call upon character strengths such as courage. In the CLEP, particular focused awareness activities are included in each lesson (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019). The brave breath is a central focused awareness activity in the unit on courage. It is a guided, diaphragmatic breathing exercise with specific language and repeated opportunities to practice over the course of the unit. In addition to naming strategies such as the brave breath, Farrah named role-playing scenarios to practice enacting courage so that students can work on figuring out how to become courageous and Lillian suggested having people engage in reflection about what precisely they can do to become more courageous at school. Some of the students from the SEL LDP group who participated in the CLEP seemed to understand courage deeply enough that they were able to name strategies to use and when to use them in order to grow courage with intentionality.

**Summary of Theme 4: Cultivating Courage at School.** Overall, this theme identifies models of courage at school in both peers and adults as important ways students think about courage in themselves and others in response to Research Question Three. Further, this theme explicitly addresses the current nature of courage in classrooms in terms of instruction and
provided students’ insight about how schools might go about cultivating courage more extensively.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter Four presented analyses of quantitative and qualitative data. These data were gathered by administering the CL survey (Delcourt et al., 2017) and by conducting semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data analysis was used to determine whether participating students’ perceptions of their SEL competencies were impacted by their participation in an SEL LDP or an SEL non-LDP. Research Question One employed an ANOVA to determine if there was a significant difference in scores on the CL survey between students in SEL LDPs and students in SEL non-LDPs. Results indicated that there were no significant differences between the mean scores on the CL survey for students in an SEL non-LDP compared to students in an SEL LDP. Overall, girls scored significantly higher than boys.

Data analysis procedures, coding methods as described by Saldaña (2016), and theme development were shared. Four overarching themes emerged: (a) characteristics of integrity, (b) persistence, (c) what it takes to be courageous, and (d) cultivating courage at school. These themes were then connected to the research questions.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A summary of results and conclusions is provided in this chapter. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate the nature of courage according to upper elementary aged students as well as explore the impact of involvement in a social emotional learning program on the development of courage. The sections of this chapter include: (a) an overview of the research process, (b) a discussion of results organized by research question, (c) suggestions for future research, (d) implications for educators, (e) limitations of the study, and (f) a conclusion.

Overview of the Research Process

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed in this study. The information collected from surveys was used to determine quantitatively whether or not students in an SEL LDP differed in their perceptions of courage and related constructs from peers who were not in a particular SEL LDP. The information collected from semi-structured interviews was used to understand students’ perceptions about courage, factors that facilitated courage development amongst children, and qualities of classroom environments that may make courageous action more likely. The research questions that framed this study were:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP?

Non-Directional Hypothesis: There will be a statistically significant difference in student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male
and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have
participated in an SEL non-LDP.

2. What are children’s perceptions of courage in themselves and others and what does it
take to enact courage?

3. What is the nature of courage in classrooms?

A mixed methods design was utilized to measure differences between groups as well as
to gather student perspectives on courage (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This study
incorporated a causal comparative design with a posttest comparison using intact groups as well
as a multiple case study design. There were 159 student surveys analyzed to compare means
between groups across condition and gender. For the multiple case study design, in total, there
were two cases. Each case consisted of students either in an SEL LDP or students in an SEL
non-LDP. Individual interviews were conducted to understand student perceptions of courage
and all interviews were conducted in person.

The researcher utilized convenience and purposive sampling (Merriam, 2009). Convenience sampling was used in that public school settings needed to have been within a
commutable distance and school staff, families, and students needed to have been willing to
participate (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Gall et al., 2003). Purposive sampling was used in that
the researcher defined criteria for participation for inclusion in the study for both SEL LDPs and
SEL non-LDPs (Merriam, 2009).

Once data were collected, the researcher used a 2x2 ANOVA to analyze Research
Question One. For Research Question One, there were two independent variables. The
independent variables were condition (SEL LDP or SEL non-LDP) and gender (male or female).
There was one dependent variable, student self-perceptions of SEL competencies as reported on
the CL survey as a total mean score. The quantitative results as they related to Research Question One as well as research related to the results will be discussed in a section that follows.

After conducting semi-structured interviews, transcribing them, and checking them for accuracy, the researcher used cyclical coding methods as described by Saldaña (2016) to make meaning in order to address Research Questions Two and Three. Each transcript was uploaded to HyperRESEARCH (2015) and organized into one of two cases. The researcher coded each transcript in its entirety and each case in its entirety before moving to the next. After coding all 25 transcripts, 61 initial codes were revealed. These codes were collapsed through Pattern coding. Four themes emerged. The themes were as follows: (a) characteristics of integrity, (b) persistence, (c) what it takes to be courageous, and (d) cultivating courage at school. All themes and their related codes can be found in Appendix R. The four themes and their relation to the research questions will be discussed in a section that follows. Also, related research that pertains to the results will be shared.

**Research Question One**

Is there a statistically significant difference in total mean scores for student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP?

Non-Directional Hypothesis: There will be a statistically significant difference in student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness and compassion between male and female students who have participated in an SEL LDP and students who have participated in an SEL non-LDP.

**Discussion of Results**

To address Research Question One, A 2x2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to compare mean differences between condition (SEL LDP or SEL non-LDP) as measured by the
CL survey (Delcourt et al., 2017), and whether this differed when considering gender. The purpose was to identify if there were significant differences in either condition or gender and to determine if there was an interaction with respect to the CL survey scores. Results indicated that there was no significant difference between condition on the CL survey, \( F(1,155) = 1.901, p = .170, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .012 \). It is notable that overall, both groups of students rated themselves considerably high on a 4-point scale, where a rating of 1 = not at all, 2 = not much like me, 3 = somewhat like me, and 4 = almost always like me, with a total range of 1.30 for condition and scores ranging from 2.70-4.00. Both groups had overall means greater than 3.

One possible explanation regarding the finding of no statistically significant difference between condition could lie in the ESSA (2015) requirement that all schools must have a plan for bullying and promoting positive school climate. As Table 5 demonstrated, all schools included in the present study were implementing some type of initiative related SEL. Therefore, groups may have been more similar than originally anticipated, as some type of SEL programming was occurring and apparently had an impact.

It is possible that all students in an SEL program experienced practice with and discussion about the constructs included in the CL survey. Therefore, students in SEL LDPs may uniquely understand the strength that courage and other SEL constructs require and as a result, may rate themselves lower compared to students who are not involved in an SEL LDP, thus limiting the range of scores between the two groups. The range of scores for students in SEL LDPs was 1.30, with scores ranging from 2.70-4.00. Similarly, the range of scores from students in Non-LDPs was 1.15, with scores ranging from 2.75-3.90. A particular cognitive bias, the Dunning-Kruger Effect, is helpful in explaining this finding (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). According to this psychological phenomenon, individuals who are novices assess their own
abilities inaccurately and with overconfidence compared to those who have more expertise in a
given area. Dunning and Kruger (1999) hold that those who have more experience and
competence in an area also possess the metacognitive awareness to more accurately self-assess.
Further, a certain “burden of expertise” comes along with competence, in that highly competent
individuals in a skill area tend to underestimate their performance, just as novice individuals tend
to overestimate their performance (p. 1132). Therefore, in the present study, it could be that
students in an SEL LDP embodied the phenomenon of “the more you know, the more you realize
you don’t know” while students in a SEL non-LDP may have similarly embodied the idea that
“you don’t know what you don’t know.” The lack of a significant difference between mean
scores across conditions could potentially be attributed to the Dunning-Kruger effect.
Specifically, it could be that students in an SEL non-LDP exhibited the Dunning-Kruger effect in
demonstrating perceived overconfidence in their SEL competencies as demonstrated by their
relatively high mean scores on the CL survey. Also, students in SEL LDPs may have exhibited
what Dunning and Kruger (1999) coined the “burden of expertise” in that perhaps they
underestimated their SEL competencies as demonstrated by rating themselves lower on the CL
survey than they would have if they had not had experiences at school with the CL constructs.
Thus, according to the Dunning-Kruger effect, the mean scores for the two groups could have
been similar for the aforementioned reasons.

There was a significant difference between mean scores for gender, $F(1,155) = 13.301, p
= .000$, partial $\eta^2 = .079$). Female students ($M = 3.45$) had significantly higher mean scores than
male students ($M = 3.28$). The researcher examined interview transcripts to determine whether
she could identify any qualitative differences between gender to explain these results but found
no particular differences between gender in interview responses. There were two studies
included in the review of related literature with similar results on gender and self-perceptions. In Rimm-Kaufmann and Chiu’s (2007) examination of the use of the RC approach on academic and social competencies, they found that girls outperformed boys across conditions according to teacher perceptions. Also, in Holsen et al.’s (2008) study regarding the effectiveness of the Second Step intervention on social competence, only girls in seventh grade showed an increase in social competence compared to boys. Results regarding gender and SEL outcomes are mixed, though, in that the two aforementioned studies were the only two studies reviewed with similar results as the present study.

Implications for Education and Future Areas of Research for Research Question One. The CL survey (Decourt et al., 2017) in this study was used to measure student perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion in action for students in specific SEL LDPs and students in SEL non-LDPs as well as to study differences between gender. The use of this instrument led to specific implications for education as well as suggestions for future research, which are summarized in Table 26 and will be discussed in the section that follows.
Table 26

**Results, Implications and Areas for Future Research for Research Question One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Implications for Education</th>
<th>Suggestions for Future Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There was no significant difference between students’ scores on SEL</td>
<td>Because both groups participated in some SEL activities, both groups’ mean scores on the CL survey were relatively high. Therefore, if schools focus explicitly on cultivating SEL competencies systematically then student perceptions of SEL competencies are more likely to be positive.</td>
<td>How does participation in an SEL LDP affect students’ perceptions of SEL competencies over time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competencies for students involved in an SEL non-LDP compared to students who were involved in an SEL LDP ( F(1,155) = 1.901, p = .170, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .012 ).</td>
<td>Since there was some focus on SEL in all schools across conditions in the present study, it seems that students are benefitting from instruction in this area.</td>
<td>Is there a significant difference in student perceptions of SEL competencies for students in different types of SEL programs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The range of scores for students in the sample used for analysis from an SEL LDP was 1.15, Minimum = 2.75, Maximum = 3.90 and the range of scores for students in an SEL non-LDP was 1.30, Minimum = 2.70, Maximum = 4.00.</td>
<td>If students score low on self-rating scales such as the CL survey, then school personnel should design specific interventions to support students’ sense of self-efficacy and SEL skill competence.</td>
<td>What are effective strategies for students with low self-perceptions in the area of SEL competencies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The range of scores from Phase 1, before outliers were eliminated for students from an SEL LDP was 2.35, Minimum = 1.55, Maximum = 3.90 and the range of scores for students in an SEL non-LDP was 1.90, Minimum = 2.10, Maximum = 4.00, indicating that there were some low scoring students.</td>
<td>(continued)</td>
<td>(continued)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 26

Results, Implications and Areas for Future Research for Research Question One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Implications for Education</th>
<th>Suggestions for Future Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There was a significant difference between mean scores for gender, ( F(1,155) = 13.301, p = .000, ) partial ( \eta^2 = .079 ). Female students (( M = 3.451, ) Range = 1.20, Minimum = 2.80, Maximum = 4.00) had significantly higher mean scores than male students (( M = 3.283, ) Range = 1.30, Minimum = 2.70, Maximum = 4.00).</td>
<td>If female students have higher mean scores regarding their perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion than males, then male students may need additional opportunities to engage in activities related to these areas.</td>
<td>Is there a difference between males and females in the ways they develop SEL competencies? How do females’ and males’ perceptions of SEL competencies differ?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, there was no significant difference between students’ scores on SEL competencies for students involved in an SEL non-LDP compared to students who were involved in an SEL LDP (\( F(1,155) = 1.901, p = .170, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .012 \)). Students in SEL LDPs and students in SEL non-LDPs both had mean scores above 3 on a 4-point scale. Since there was some focus on SEL in all schools across conditions in the present study, it seems that students are benefitting from instruction in this area, as evidenced by the lack of significant difference between conditions on the CL survey as well as relatively high mean scores across conditions. One implication that emerged from this finding is, if schools focus explicitly on cultivating SEL competencies systemically, then student perceptions of SEL competencies will likely be positive.

The current study did not allow for the possibility of measurement of growth in SEL competencies over time. As suggested in the discussion of results for Research Question One, it is plausible that participants from each group experienced the Dunning-Kruger effect (1999). An area for future research, then, would be to measure how participation in an SEL LDP affects...
students’ perceptions of SEL competencies over time. If students in an SEL LDP potentially experienced a “burden of expertise” while students in an SEL non-LDP exhibited potential overconfidence due to limited experience with the constructs from the CL survey, then designing a study with pre and posttests across conditions may yield different results. Such a design would allow for adequate time between initiating participation in a program and perhaps extinguish this cognitive bias.

The current study used convenience and purposive sampling and intact groups. Although specific selection criteria were applied, it was not possible for the purposes of the present study to measure implementation fidelity of SEL programming outside of the use of selection criteria, though adherence to strict fidelity of implementation practices are recommended for effective SEL programming (Domitrovich & Durlak, 2015; Durlak, 2016, 2017). Because there was no significant difference in student perceptions of SEL competencies across conditions in the present study, it would be important to study whether there is a significant difference in student perceptions of SEL competencies for students in different types of SEL programs. The specific SEL programs included in future research should ensure fidelity of implementation with clearly defined criteria, such as the criteria created by CASEL for reviewing SEL programs (CASEL, 2013). Rich description of the SEL programs included in the study would be critical for follow-up research to determine if there is a significant difference in SEL competencies between students in different types of SEL programs.

While the range of scores for students in the sample used for analysis from an SEL LDP was 1.15 and for students from an SEL non-LDP was 1.30, it is notable that the range of scores from Phase 1 before outliers were eliminated was wider. The range of scores from Phase 1 for an SEL LDP was 2.35, with scores ranging from 1.55-3.90 and for students from an SEL non-
LDP, the range was 1.90, with scores ranging from 2.10-4.00. Similarly, from Phase 1, the range of scores for males was 2.45 with scores from 1.55-4.00 and for females was 2.35 with scores ranging from 2.25-4.00. Though group means were used in the present study, as an educator in the classroom, individual means matter and have real implications for working with students. If students score low on self-rating scales such as the CL survey, then school personnel should be responsive in designing specific interventions to support students’ SEL skill competence and sense of self-efficacy. The CL survey yields specific information about how students see themselves and would also be important to share with families in the process of working with all students, but particularly with students who initially scored low. A related area for future research would be identifying effective strategies for students with low self-perceptions in the area of SEL competencies. This way, when students rate themselves poorly, specific and effective interventions will be available for use and school personnel can be confident in implementing strategies if they know empirically, the strategies have been supported.

There was a significant difference between mean scores for gender, \( F(1,155) = 13.301, p = .000, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .079 \). Female students \(( M = 3.451, \) Range = 1.20, Minimum = 2.80, Maximum = 4.00) had significantly higher mean scores than male students \(( M = 3.283, \) Range = 1.30, Minimum = 2.70, Maximum = 4.00). Similar results have been reported in some other studies \( \text{Holsen et al., 2008; Rimm-Kaufmann & Chiu, 2007} \). An implication from this finding is, if female students have higher mean scores regarding their perceptions of courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion than males, then male students may need additional opportunities to engage in activities related to these areas. Future research should seek to confirm this finding before planning for extended opportunities for practice of SEL competencies. Therefore, a future investigation could examine whether or not there is a difference between males and
females in the ways they develop SEL competencies and if so, how females’ and males’ perceptions of SEL competencies differ.

**Research Questions Two and Three**

2. What are children’s perceptions of courage in themselves and others and what does it take to enact courage?

3. What is the nature of courage in classrooms?

**Discussion of Results**

To address Research Questions Two and Three, a multiple case study design was employed and interview transcripts were analyzed. While a multi-case approach was used, qualitative results were consistent with quantitative results in that there were minimal discernible differences between the cases. Participants from both SEL non-LDPs as well as from SEL LDPs offered perspectives that resulted in the making of meaning for both qualitative research questions. Four themes emerged across the two research questions: (a) characteristics of integrity, (b) persistence, (c) what it takes to be courageous, and (d) cultivating courage at school.

Within the first theme of characteristics of integrity, values such as honesty, altruism, compassion in action, forgiveness and authenticity were apparent in acts that students perceived as courageous as well as more overarching qualities that students saw as necessary in order to consider someone a courageous person. These characteristics of integrity were also central to the examples that students gave when describing what courage looks like at school. The second theme, persistence, involved the concepts of (a) bravery, (b) the unknown, (c) pain, and (d) perseverance. The term fear and persisting in the presence of pain or when results of an endeavor are unknown was evident in students’ perceptions of courage in themselves, in others,
and in describing how courage shows up at school. In writing theme three, what it takes to be courageous, the researcher found that students believed (a) optimism, (b) examples and experiences, and (c) social support were critical components. Themes one, two, and three were important in addressing Research Question Two, or in conceptualizing courage according to student participants.

Theme four was important in addressing Research Question Three, or in capturing students’ perceptions about what school staff members can potentially do to cultivate courage amongst students in classrooms. Theme four captured what students believed that staff members do in order to cultivate courage at school and also described whether or not courage was an explicit focus at their school. Students shared that seeing models of courage at school in peers and adults was important to them. Also, students from SEL LDPs named or described explicitly taught strategies they believed could be employed to muster courage. Research Questions Two and Three will be discussed in relation to relevant existing literature.

**Research Question Two.** The emergent themes of characteristics of integrity, persistence, and what it takes to be courageous addressed Research Question Two. Students perceived characteristics of integrity as inextricably connected to courage. They often used characteristics of integrity to define courage or cited characteristics of integrity as their evidence for why they believed someone else to be courageous. For instance, altruism, enacted through behaviors such as being an upstander, was described by participants. Upstanding has been defined also as the tendency to be a moral rebel, or to act on moral values in social situations when those values are violated, even when it is not popular among peers to do so (Sonnentag & Barnett, 2016). Students who are morally courageous are more likely to be moral rebels than students who do not perceive themselves as morally courageous, which was apparent in the
present study in the ways in which students described altruistic and upstanding behaviors in themselves and in their peers at school. A strong sense of integrity appears to be a necessary prerequisite for enacting courage.

Persistence was a theme characterized largely by the presence of fear, opposition, or pain and was discussed during interviews as a way in which students perceived of courage in themselves and others. Children see facing fear as an important, related concept to courage (Muris, 2009). Fear was not the only emotion cited by students, but it was inherent in their explanations of bravery. However, fear and courage have been established as separate constructs in that fear is not necessarily present in situations where courage is required (Muris, 2009). In the present study, this was true as well, in that while fear was a component of the theme of persistence, there were other components, too. In other words, fear and courage were not synonymous, nor was fear a prerequisite for being courageous. The unknown, or trying something new, was also an emergent perspective when students described their perceptions about courage. Muris et al. (2010) noted that physical risk-taking is associated with students’ understanding of courage. In the present study, enacting courage while doing something physically risky was not the only related facet of risk-taking. The unknown included discussions of taking risks mentally, socially and emotionally. While higher levels of courage have been previously associated with higher levels of sensation seeking (Muris, 2009), a connection between displaying a courageous act and sensation seeking was not noted by the current study participants.

Participants cited being inspired by a strong sense of optimism modeled by familial figures such as parents. They explained that in order to be courageous, people need to witness courageous acts and have examples to follow. Because participants overwhelmingly described
social situations as contexts that require courage as opposed to situations where one is alone, it follows that reliance on a social support system was important in order to enact courage. Additionally, social situations may have been described as contexts that require courage because people may experience social pressure to follow what others are doing when it may not fit with an individual’s beliefs or be the best decision to make.

Aware parenting is a particular parenting style characterized by warmth, responsiveness, encouragement, and guidance in working through emotions and has been associated with the development of moral courage (Bronstein et al., 2007). Relationships marked by factors such as those described in the aware parenting style align with the qualities student participants described as necessary in social support systems in order to develop courage. Similar to Bronstein and colleagues’ (2007) results on aware parenting, students in the current study stated that encouragement and the desire to make loved ones proud were helpful and motivating in enacting courage. Students also shared that positive self-talk, maintaining faith in abilities, and overall belief in self were necessary in order to be courageous. Muris and colleagues (2010) found, similarly, that a sense of enthusiasm and self-confidence were empirically linked to courage.

**Implications for education and suggestions for future research for Research Question Two.** Three themes emerged in the study to address Research Question Two. Table 27 summarizes the relationship between results, implications for education, and suggestions for future research.
Table 27

Results, Implications and Areas for Future Research for Research Question Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Implications for Education</th>
<th>Suggestions for Future Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme One: Characteristics of Integrity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued as (a) honesty, (b) altruism, (c) compassion in action, (d) forgiveness, and (e) authenticity were apparent in acts that students perceived as courageous. These characteristics of integrity were also central to the examples provided by students when describing what courage looked like at school.</td>
<td>If students can provide examples of values related to integrity by describing acts of courage, then these concepts can be taught in an explicit manner during instruction.</td>
<td>How do characteristics of integrity develop in students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme Two: Persistence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This theme involved the concepts of (a) bravery, (b) the unknown, (c) pain, and (d) perseverance. The term fear and persisting in the presence of pain or when results of an endeavor are unknown was evident in students’ perceptions of courage in themselves, in others, and in describing how courage shows up at school.</td>
<td>If students believe persistence is critical to be courageous, then students may benefit from explicit focus at school on trying new things, coping with unpleasant emotions such as fear, and persevering even when the results of an experience are unknown.</td>
<td>How do students cope with fear and other unpleasant emotions to enact courage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What motivates students to be courageous, perseverant, brave?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 27

**Results, Implications and Areas for Future Research for Research Question Two**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Implications for Education</th>
<th>Suggestions for Future Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme Three: What It Takes to Be Courageous</td>
<td>If students learn about courage through examples and experiences and require social support systems, then educators can ensure they are spotlighting examples of courage both in content areas and in the social context of peers at school.</td>
<td>What kinds of experiences promote the development of courage at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students believed (a) optimism, (b) examples and experiences, and (c) social support were critical components.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When it comes to courage, supporting students in the following areas are important: (a) making use of positive self-talk, (b) following social models that uphold characteristics of integrity, and (c) making sure students are well connected to supportive peers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students perceptions of courage as summarized by Theme One include the notion that courage is a complex, multifaceted construct that is understood best in describing its relationship with other characteristics of integrity such as honesty, altruism, compassion in action, forgiveness, and authenticity. The aforementioned characteristics were important in how students saw courage in themselves as well as others. When students described their definitions of courage, they did often so by providing examples of values related to integrity. An implication is, if students can provide examples of values related to integrity by describing acts of courage, then these concepts can be taught in an explicit manner during instruction. Examples could be elicited from students as well as offered to students and instructional activities could be
designed that guide students in unpacking, discussing, and constructing meaning from examples of courage. Areas of future research related specifically to the results of Theme One include investigating the development of characteristics of integrity mentioned in this study in students. Due to CASEL’s (2019) prominence in the area of SEL and their existing framework, it would be essential to explore how characteristics of integrity correspond with the five SEL competencies that CASEL has identified. Last, in order to be included in the present study, only students who were nominated by their teachers, showed understanding of courage, and rated highly on courage subscale were selected. There are many other students, such as students who do not see themselves as particularly courageous for example, who were not invited to be interviewed. It would be meaningful to understand how other students understand courage, not just students who met inclusion criteria for an interview in the current study.

Not only did students explain courage in terms of related characteristics of integrity as outlined by Theme One, but students also saw persistence as central to their understanding of courage. The term fear and persisting in the presence of pain or when results of an endeavor are unknown was evident in students’ perceptions of courage in themselves, in others, and in describing how courage shows up at school. An implication related to this finding is, if students believe persistence is critical to be courageous, then students may benefit from explicit focus at school on trying new things, coping with unpleasant emotions such as fear, and persevering even when the results of an experience are unknown. Activities and experiences designed specifically to foster persistence can support students in developing courage. Areas of future research related to results from Theme Two include seeking to understand how students cope with fear and other unpleasant emotions in order to enact courage as well as what exactly motivates students to be courageous, perseverance, and brave.
The results from Theme Three, what it takes to be courageous, can be summarized by students’ shared belief that optimism, examples and experiences, and social support were critical components to have in place in order for someone to enact courage. Two related implications emerged. First, if students learn about courage through examples and experiences and require social support systems, then educators can ensure they are spotlighting examples of courage both in content areas and in the social context of peers at school. Second, if students are to enact courage, then supporting students in the following areas are important: (a) making use of positive self-talk, (b) following social models that uphold characteristics of integrity, and (c) making sure students are well connected to supportive peers. A future investigation could involve a goal of characterizing the kinds of experiences that promote the development of courage at school.

**Research Question Three.** The researcher sought to understand the nature of courage in classrooms, especially whether or not courage is a concept that is explicitly focused on at school and if so, in what capacity. During their interviews, students in SEL non-LDPs reported that they did not focus on courage often or at all at school, while students in SEL LDPs did discuss focusing on it at school. Students in SEL LDPs named some strategies they were explicitly taught for cultivating courage, such as the brave breath, a mindfulness-based practice included in the CLEP (Jesse Lewis Choose Love Enrichment Program, 2019). Participants across cases believed having role models at school was important in developing courage. The existence of role models and learning by example as well as applying explicitly taught strategies in a situation that requires courageous action can be explained through the lens of self-efficacy, which will be explored in the section that follows.

Though a multiple case study design was used such that qualitative data were analyzed by case and results were organized by case, there were not many differences between cases.
According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), qualitative data build on quantitative data in the explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Quantitatively, there was no significant difference between conditions in the current study. It follows, then, that major differences between cases were also not discernible in analyzing qualitative data.

**Implications for education and suggestions for future research for Research Question Three.** Theme Four, cultivating courage at school, addressed Research Question Three. Table 28 summarizes the relationship between results, implications for education, and suggestions for future research.

Table 28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Implications for Education</th>
<th>Suggestions for Future Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme Four: Cultivating Courage at School Students shared that seeing models of courage at school in peers and adults was important to them. Also, students from SEL LDPS named or described explicitly taught strategies they believed could be employed to muster courage.</td>
<td>If students who explicitly study courage can name actionable strategies such as mindfulness-based practices to use in their own lives, then they will be better able to cultivate courage with intentionality.</td>
<td>Does explicit focus on courage make a difference in terms of courageous acts at school? Is there a difference in SEL outcomes between schools that explicitly focus on courage and schools that do not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question Three was developed to understand the nature of courage at school, and students stated mostly that witnessing and having experiences with models of courage at school in both their classmates and educators was how they understood courage to be evident at in the school setting. Unique to the students in SEL LDPS was that at school, courage functioned as a construct that was explicitly taught in some cases and could be intentionally cultivated through the use of strategies offered by educators. An implication that arose from the results for
Research Question Three is, if students who explicitly study courage can name actionable strategies such as mindfulness-based practices to use in their own lives, then they will be better able to cultivate courage with intentionality. Related areas for future research include studying whether explicit focus on courage makes a difference in terms of courageous acts at school and whether or not a difference in SEL outcomes exists between schools that explicitly focus on courage and schools that do not.

**Discussion of Theoretical Framework with Respect to Results**

**Relation of Results to Ecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) emphasizes both context and perception in human development. People develop within and across complex systems. Because perception is so central to development, student self-perceptions of courage were examined in the present study. Table 29 illustrates how each of the four themes that emerged relate to Bronfenbrenner’s systems (1979).
Table 29

**Results Related to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Microsystem</td>
<td>Theme 1: Characteristics of Integrity</td>
<td>Results from each theme relate to the immediate settings of school and home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2: Persistence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 3: What it Takes to Be Courageous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 4: Cultivating Courage at School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesosystem</td>
<td>Theme 2: Persistence</td>
<td>Themes were related in making connections between related microsystems of home and school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 3: What it Takes to Be Courageous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exosystem</td>
<td>Theme 4: Cultivating Courage at School</td>
<td>Decisions regarding SEL programming and initiatives at school can be mapped to the exosystem, or systemic structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macrosystem</td>
<td>Theme 4: Cultivating Courage at School</td>
<td>The macrosystem is concerned with broad cultural characteristics. The existence of school climate initiatives in American public schools was apparent through participants’ comments on what schools are or could be doing to grow courage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronosystem</td>
<td>Not directly related to this study</td>
<td>The chronosystem is concerned with the role time plays in human development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the five systems in Bronfenbrenner’s model, the microsystem was most immediately relevant because participants reflected on their personal experiences from school, an environment in which they were direct participants. Some students also reflected on other immediate settings in which they were direct participants, such as at home or on sports teams. Because the mesosystem is comprised of more than one related microsystem of which the
developing child is an active participant, such as home and school, themes were related to the mesosystem when participants’ made connections between microsystems in their comments. For example, in the theme of persistence, the mesosystem was apparent when participants cited a family member as a courageous person or spoke about tragic loss of life of family members; these ideas crossed between the related microsystems of home and school. Theme three, what it takes to be courageous, can be interpreted through the lens of the mesosystem in that students discussed learning by example and requiring social support across the microsystems of home and school.

Theme four, cultivating courage at school, was the only theme related to the exosystem, as the exosystem involves settings that do not directly involve the developing person but that affect the developing person. Theme four focused on what schools are doing or can do to cultivate courage according to students, and some students in SEL LDPs named strategies explicitly taught as a result of districtwide decisions regarding the teaching of SEL. Decisions regarding focus on SEL and courage may be made at the school or district level, thus representing an exosystem. Similarly, only theme four appeared directly related to the macrosystem, as the macrosystem refers to broad cultural characteristics. In this case, the existence of school climate initiatives in American public schools was apparent through participants’ comments on what schools are or could be doing to grow courage.

When Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory is applied to the results of the present study, it is clear that the microsystems of home and school are influential in the development of courage amongst children. In discussing examples of courage in themselves and others and people who they saw as courageous, students spoke primarily of the immediate settings of home and school. In students’ discussions about what schools can do to cultivate courage, both
exosystems such as district or schoolwide programming and practices related to climate were identifiable. Further, broad cultural constructs such as bullying or SEL LDPs that students discussed were evidence of the macrosystem of culture in U.S. public schools, in particular the regulations that support the development of a positive school climate and culture (ESSA, 2015).

While the chronosystem was not readily apparent in the themes that emerged in this study due to the fact that data were collected at only one point in time, the chronosystem is certainly related to the topic of the development of courage and SEL competencies. Since development occurs in social contexts, the developing person experiences events over time that include their observations of others who make decisions about enacting courage as well as their own decision-making about whether or not to enact courage. These events can shape the development of courage. The developing person’s synthesis of the four previous systems over time as they relate to courage collectively comprise the chronosystem related to this topic.

**Relation of Results to Self-Efficacy Theory**

The four sources of influence on self-efficacy, (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences provided by social models, (c) level of positive appraisal through social feedback, and (d) physiological and emotional state, can be related to quantitative and thematic results.

In relation to the quantitative results, perhaps the fact that all students participated in some type of SEL activity at least once every 2-3 weeks gave them a focused understanding of the difficulties inherent in enacting courage, forgiveness, gratitude, and compassion in action, which was reflected in their ratings of their competencies in these areas, at least at the point in time in which the CL survey was administered. In addition, it may be that fourth and fifth grade male students are still very much developing their understanding of courage and related constructs. Therefore, they may not yet have enough experiences to have an accurate sense of
self-efficacy in the areas measured by the CL survey as compared to their female counterparts. As described by Kruger and Dunning (1999), novices may lack the metacognition necessary for self-appraisal.

Maintaining a strong sense of self-efficacy specifically in relation to values was evident in theme one, characteristics of integrity. Strong self-efficacy is marked by a sustained approach through difficulty, goal commitment, and intrinsic motivation (Bandura, 1986, 1994). Students’ discussion of various principles involved an acknowledgement of the difficulty inherent in staying true to their values, yet a commitment and belief that it is necessary to do so in a variety of situations, mostly in the school setting, which Bandura (1986, 1994) acknowledged as the primary setting for cultivating self-efficacy in childhood. The second theme that emerged, persistence, is highly related to self-efficacy theory. A major tenet of self-efficacy is perseverant effort, which students saw as a critical component of courage when faced with difficulty, fear, pain, or new experiences. In discussing persistence, students held efficacious beliefs that growth cannot occur without persistence in the face of challenges, failure, or setbacks.

Students believed in general that courage is something that can be grown. There were parallels between how students believed a person can grow courage and self-efficacy. Students spoke about the need to be immersed in situations which require courage, like mastery experiences. Students also spoke of being inspired by peer examples at school, which corresponds with vicarious experiences provided by social models. Students stated that a sense of optimism in the form of self-talk, positive appraisal from others, and reliance on people who care about them for social support were necessary in order to grow courage, therefore, identifying verbal feedback as helpful in developing courage. Maintaining optimism, particularly through the use of self-talk, also speaks to students’ identification of responding to
their physiological and emotional state. The four main sources of influence on self-efficacy were emergent through the themes generated in this study.

**Limitations of the Quantitative Design**

The quantitative limitations to this study include both internal and external threats. Internal validity refers to the extent to which extraneous variables have been controlled for, while external validity refers to the applicability of research results beyond the individuals and settings included in a study (Gall et al., 2003).

**Internal Threats to Validity**

Internal concerns for causal-comparative designs include (a) differential selection, (b) instrumentation, and (d) mortality (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

**Differential selection.** Selection is a threat to this study because by nature of the causal-comparative design participants could not be randomly assigned to groups. The independent variable, level of participation in an SEL LDP, was impossible to alter prior to or during the course of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Because of this use of intact groups, for example, it is possible that students in one classroom are different from students in another classroom in some relevant way, as students come to classrooms with different attitudes, backgrounds, and life experiences.

To address this threat, the demographic surveys for both students and teachers were important in characterizing the participants as thoroughly as possible in order to capture the context of the respective groups. Homogenous groups in terms of level of participation in an SEL LDP and demographics were sought to the best of the researcher’s ability in order to compare demographically similar groups (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The researcher contacted school administrators to arrange for an appropriate time to administer surveys and conduct
student interviews that both administrators and teachers endorsed. Schools were matched
demographically as outlined in Chapter Three. Also, multiple classrooms from each group were
included in the study.

**Instrumentation.** Threats to instrumentation occur when the nature of an instrument is
changed, if characteristics of the data collector affect data obtained, or if the data collector
unconsciously distorts data in some way (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). To address instrument
decay, standardization of survey administration was achieved through use of an administration
guide (Delcourt et al., 2017; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The same researcher collected all data
to minimize the threat of data-collector characteristics interfering with instrumentation (Fraenkel
& Wallen, 2009). Data collector bias was addressed through the use of a script when the
researcher introduced herself to participants, utilizing the aforementioned script provided by the
creators of the CL survey during survey administration, and making use of the included scoring
guide for standardization of survey scoring (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). There was a difference
in location for survey administration due to the fact that surveys were administered to entire,
individual classrooms of students.

**Mortality.** The threat of mortality was relatively low due to the fact that quantitative
data were only collected during a single site visit (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). However, it was
only feasible for the researcher to arrange for site visits at certain, specified times for data
collection due to a variety of factors. For example, the building principals needed to approve the
date of the site visit along with each individual classroom teacher and the data collection within
each classroom could not take place during instructional time.
External Threats to Validity

External validity refers to the generalizability of results beyond the study settings (Gall et al., 2003). External threats will be described and include (a) population and (b) ecological validity (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Gall et al., 2003).

**Population validity.** Population validity is a threat to the study because the results cannot be generalized to a larger population, but rather students’ perceptions of courage were limited to students participating in this study (Gall et al., 2003). The researcher provided as much information as possible in the form of study context and description in order for readers to make decisions for themselves regarding the applicability of results to their own, respective settings (Gall et al. 2003). In addition, convenience and purposive sampling were used. To accommodate for this sampling process, the researcher attempted to select a sufficiently large sample of participants from demographically varied settings.

**Ecological validity.** Ecological validity refers to the extent to which results may be generalized to environments that differ from those in which the study took place (Gall et al., 2003). The use of standardized survey administration tools allowed for a sufficiently explicit description of instrumentation (Delcourt et al., 2017). The Hawthorne effect refers to a situation when results are confounded by special treatment of the participants that could change their behavior. This threat was accommodated for through minimizing special attention given to the participants in the strict use of scripts during site visits for data collection (Gall et al., 2003). The experimenter effect was controlled for by having one researcher collect all data. Schools and participants were described in enough detail to enable readers in deciding whether or not the results of this study apply to similar settings.
Limitation to Qualitative Results

In selecting interview participants for the qualitative portion of the study, the same criteria were applied for both cases for several purposes as outlined in Chapter Three. The researcher sought to understand student perspectives about courage and therefore gathered teacher nominations, in addition to corroborating nominations with CL survey scores on the courage subscale as well as student responses on the survey about courage. The researcher sought to interview participants who had an understanding of courage according to these triangulated sources of information, however it is possible that important differences were missed amongst students regarding their perspectives about courage. For example, students who were not nominated by their teachers as potential interview candidates may have shared insights that were not captured in this study given the interview participant selection procedure.

Trustworthiness

Strategies for achieving qualitative rigor within this study were employed. The credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this study were addressed (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truth value of study results and the accurate representation of participants’ reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher sought to represent participants’ realities as adequately as possible, such that participants’ perspectives were accurately represented. Member checking was utilized to ensure credibility (Appendices P-Q). Interview participants were given the opportunity to review, revise, and edit the transcript. The interview participants and their guardians received a copy of the transcript and member checking statement of agreement to keep. The member checking process helped to ensure that participants felt
comfortable with the transcript and that their perspectives were represented the way they intended.

Also, during data collection, a semi-structured interview protocol was used to capture the essence of the phenomenon of interest. This strategy was particularly important due to the researcher’s limited time spent in each respective research setting. During the interview process, the researcher was aware that the reframing, rephrasing, and repeating of questions was helpful in establishing credibility (Krefting, 1991). Reflexivity was addressed through the use of a field journal, which contained scheduling information as well as the logistics of the process, along with personal thoughts and feelings (Krefting, 1991). This journal was also important in creating an audit trail to develop a chain of evidence in documenting the research process (Yin, 1994).

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to applicability of study results beyond the context in which the study was conducted (Krefting, 1991). The researcher strove to provide thick description about the study context, participants, setting, and results to allow for readers to decide whether or not the results are transferable to other groups (Krefting, 1991). In addition to dense description, the researcher utilized specific criteria in the recruitment and identification of participants for interviews. Last, demographic information was collected and displayed in detailed tables for readers.

**Dependability**

Dependability considers consistency, or whether the results would be similar if the study were to be conducted in another setting (Krefting, 1991). The researcher recognized that dense description was important not only in establishing credibility, but also for dependability. Particularly, the researcher provided a detailed account of exact data collection methods and
procedures in the analysis and interpretation of data such that sound methodological practices and consistency in interpreting data were used. The use of data-triangulation also increased the dependability of the study.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results are free from bias and are thus neutral (Krefting, 1991). Based upon the researcher’s background, the researcher was familiar and involved with the research topic and therefore, in qualitative research where this is often the case, measures must be taken to reflect critically on the self as the instrument for data collection (Merriam, 2009). Researcher bias was addressed through the inclusion of a researcher biography so that any information regarding the researcher’s experiences and familiarity with the study topic was disclosed to the reader.

To establish reflexivity for confirmability, the researcher kept a detailed journal regarding experiences and thoughts during and after data collection (Krefting, 1991). In being forthcoming with thoughts and feelings that arose during this process, the researcher sought to provide transparency such that readers can “better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009, p. 219).

**Conclusion**

This study was designed to understand perceptions of SEL competencies between students who were involved in an SEL LDP and students who were not and to uncover patterns in students’ perceptions about courage, particularly in the school context. Through a mixed methods design which incorporated a causal comparative and multiple case study design, mean differences between students’ SEL competencies from SEL LDPs and SEL non-LDPs were analyzed, and student perspectives were collected and reviewed. The experiences shared by
students were illustrated in the four themes that emerged from the data. Through the student perspectives shared, my hope is that this study serves as a contribution to the scarcity of research surrounding courage in classrooms. The inclusion of explicit focus on courage in classrooms could support student SEL competencies and, to echo the words of Noah, an interview participant, “it’s important in your life and school is just getting ready for life.”
References


https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/upload/David%20Sluyter%20bio_0.pdf


https://www.starr.org/training/youth/aboutcircleofcourage

State Department of Education (2019). Strategic School Profile Reports. Retrieved from
http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do

development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-


Tribes Learning Community. (2019). TRIBES learning community: A new way of learning and
being together. Retrieved from https://tribes.com/

from https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/index.html

United States Department of Education. (2014). School climate transformation grant: Local
educational agency grants. Retrieved from
https://www2.ed.gov/programs/schoolclimatelea/index.html

United States Department of Education: Office of Safe and Healthy Students. (2019). Safe and
healthy students. In *Title IV, Part A, SSAE Program*. Retrieved from
https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/safe-and-healthy-students

voor Kinderen, ABVK, en de Korte Amsterdamse Biografische Vragenlijst voor
Kinderen, KABVK. Amsterdam: F. van Rossen.
W. T. Grant Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence (1992). Drug
and alcohol prevention curriculum. In J.D. Hawkins, et al. (Eds), Communities that


Plains, NY: Longman.

Psychologist, 986-987.

development project. Social and Emotional Learning, 54(8), 37-39.

Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. (2019). RULER. Retrieved from
http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/ruler-overview/

Appendix A: Choose Love Survey
Choose Love Student Survey Grades 3-5©

Delcourt, Lewis, & Bierman, 2016, Version 1.4 Grades 3-5 Survey ©

Student Description Survey (Grades 3-5)

Directions: Please complete the following survey about yourself. This information will be used to describe the students who participate in this project. Your response to individual items is optional and your name will never be reported in any description of the program.

1. Student (Print) First and Last Name:

2. Name of School:

3. Name of Town or City, State:

4. Classroom or Homeroom Teacher:

5. Age:

6. Grade level (circle one):

   3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

7. Gender (check): a. [ ] female
b. [ ] male

8. Please check one of the following: a. [ ] African American
   b. [ ] Asian/Pacific Islander
   c. [ ] Hawaiian
   d. [ ] Hispanic
   e. [ ] Native American
   f. [ ] White
   g. [ ] Multi-racial (Describe) __________________________
Preparation: A teacher or classroom aide should administer the survey to an entire classroom of students or smaller groups. Use all items from the survey. Copy the survey onto 2 separate pages so students do not forget to turn the page over. Each child should have a copy of the survey and a pencil or pen to circle the response that best reflects the way he or she feels about each statement. The teacher or aide should read all directions aloud and monitor the students to be sure that the form is being completed correctly. Please encourage children to do their own work. Be sure students complete the items on both pages. If students need your assistance, you can read each sentence aloud and ask them to respond by circling a response.

Directions to be read aloud: This survey asks you to think about some of the things you do in or outside of school. You need to read each sentence and circle the response that best describes you. The possible answers are Almost Always Like Me, Somewhat Like Me, Not Much Like Me, or Not At All Like Me. Other children
may have a different answer than yours. Do the best you can. There are no right or wrong answers. Read all of the directions.

For example, the first sentence is, “I like ice cream.”

Listen carefully to what you should do next.

If you like to eat ice cream for dessert most of the time, you should circle the word “Almost Always Like Me.”

If you usually like to eat ice cream, but might not choose to eat it all of the time, you should circle “Somewhat Like Me.”

If you do not eat ice cream very often, you should circle “Not Much Like Me.” If you don’t like ice cream, you should circle “Not At All Like Me.”

Read each sentence carefully and circle the answer that is most like you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I like ice cream.</th>
<th>Almost Always Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>Not Much Like Me</th>
<th>Not At All Like Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Print Your First and Last Name_________________________ Date _____
School __________________________ Grade Level ________________________

Directions: This survey asks you to think about some of the things you do in school.
You need to read each sentence and circle the word that best describes what you do. The possible answers are Almost Always Like Me, Somewhat Like Me, Not Much Like Me, or Not Like Me at all. Other children may have a different answer than yours. Do the best you can. There are no right or wrong answers. Read all of the directions.

For example, the first sentence is, "I like ice cream."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I like ice cream.</th>
<th>Almost Always Like Me</th>
<th>Somewhat Like Me</th>
<th>Not Much Like Me</th>
<th>Not At All Like Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If you like to eat ice cream for dessert most of the time, you should circle "Almost Always Like Me."

If you usually like to eat ice cream, but might not choose to eat it all of the time, you should circle "Somewhat Like Me."

If you do not eat ice cream very often, you should circle "Not Much Like Me." If you don't like ice cream, you should circle "Not At All Like Me."

Read each sentence carefully and circle the answer that is most like you.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Almost Always</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not Much</th>
<th>Not At All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I try to share what I have when somebody needs something.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
<td>Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. When I am angry with someone, I know how to calm down.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Almost Always</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not Much</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I try to tell the truth even when it is hard.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Almost Always</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not Much</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I let people know that I appreciate their help.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Almost Always</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not Much</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I try to help when someone is in need.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Almost Always</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not Much</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I do kind things for others, even when I don't get any reward.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Almost Always</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not Much</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. When someone says something mean to me, I know how to stop being upset.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Almost Always</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not Much</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. When no one is watching, I still try to do the right thing.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Almost Always</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Not Much</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I forgive someone I feel better.</td>
<td>Almost Always Like Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Like Me</td>
<td>Not Much Like Me</td>
<td>Not At All Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I try to do my best even when something is hard to do.</td>
<td>Almost Always Like Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Like Me</td>
<td>Not Much Like Me</td>
<td>Not At All Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I am thankful for the friends I have.</td>
<td>Almost Always Like Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Like Me</td>
<td>Not Much Like Me</td>
<td>Not At All Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>When somebody hurts my feelings, I can still get along with them.</td>
<td>Almost Always Like Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Like Me</td>
<td>Not Much Like Me</td>
<td>Not At All Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>When things aren't going well, I try to find something to be grateful for.</td>
<td>Almost Always Like Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Like Me</td>
<td>Not Much Like Me</td>
<td>Not At All Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I keep trying even when something is difficult for me.</td>
<td>Almost Always Like Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Like Me</td>
<td>Not Much Like Me</td>
<td>Not At All Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I try to understand how someone else feels.</td>
<td>Almost Always Like Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Like Me</td>
<td>Not Much Like Me</td>
<td>Not At All Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I try to make good choices, even when others don't.</td>
<td>Almost Always Like Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Like Me</td>
<td>Not Much Like Me</td>
<td>Not At All Like Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Almost Always Like Me</td>
<td>Somewhat Like Me</td>
<td>Not Much Like Me</td>
<td>Not At All Like Me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. When someone is mean to me, I try to get back at that person.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I feel sad when someone else is upset.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. When someone hurts my feelings, I try to let it go.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I think there are many things to be thankful for.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you!
Appendix B: Student Survey About Courage
Student Survey About Courage

1. What do you think the word courage means?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

2. Draw a picture of a courageous person. What are they doing?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Student Interview Protocol
Semi-Structured Student Interview Protocol

1. What do you think the word courage means?

2. Please explain the picture you drew.

3. When have you needed to act courageously? Please explain.

4. Do you see yourself as a courageous person? Why/why not?

5. Can you tell me about someone you think is courageous?

6. Do you see courage as something that is important to you in your life? Why or why not?

7. Do you see courage as something that is important at school? If so, how? If not, why not?

8. What does it take for a person to be a courageous person?

9. Can a person grow courage? If so, how? If not, why not?

10. How might someone develop courage?

11. Can you give an example of a time you saw someone else act courageously at school?

12. At school, how do your classmates and teachers show courage?

13. What do you think schools can do to help students grow as courageous individuals?
Appendix D: Educator Survey
Educator Survey

Directions: Please complete the following survey to the best of your ability. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Thank you.

1. Name: ______________________________________________________

2. Current role: ______________________________________________

3. Number of years in education total: ____________

4. Number of years in current role: ______________

5. If you implement a social-emotional learning program, please name it:
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   a. How much instructional time per week is devoted to this SEL program and how long is each session? _____________________________________________________________

6. How do you define social-emotional learning?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

7. What do you believe about meeting the social-emotional needs of students in your classroom?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

8. What is courage?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

9. What is a courageous child like?
   ________________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________
10. Please recommend 3-5 students in your class who you perceive as courageous or who you believe have a good understanding of courage and explain why.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Reason(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

216
Appendix E: Permission for Use of *Figure 1*
PERMISSION LICENSE: EDUCATIONAL ELECTRONIC USE

Request ID/Invoice Number: ERI808644628-1

Date: October 30, 2019

To: Erin M. Birden
Western Connecticut State University
181 White Street
Danbury
CT 06810
United States
"Licensee"

McGraw Hill Material

Author: Santrock
Title: A Topical Approach to Life-Span Development
ISBN: 9781259708787
Edition: 10
Description of material: Figure 16 on page 26 (1 Figure ONLY)

Fee: “Waived” – To be used in a dissertation/thesis for educational purposes.

Purpose of Reproduction

Course: ED 884 and ED 885
School: Western Connecticut State University
Professor: Dr. Marcy Declourt
Number of Copies: 4
Semester: Fall 2019-Spring 2020
Format: Electronic (Internet). To be used in an access restricted website/platform only
Distribution: One-time educational use in above-referenced course only for one academic year.

McGraw-Hill Global Education Holdings, LLC (herein after known as "McGraw Hill") grants permission for the use described above under the following terms and conditions:

1. McGraw Hill hereby grants Licensee the non-exclusive right to use the McGraw Hill Material as outlined and to reproduce and distribute the McGraw Hill Material as outlined on condition that the related textbook is the required text for the course identified above. The McGraw Hill Material may be used only as outlined. All use of the McGraw Hill Material is subject to the terms and conditions of this Agreement. This
PERMISSION LICENSE: EDUCATIONAL ELECTRONIC USE

Request ID/Invoice Number: ERI808644628-1

Date: October 30, 2019

To: Erin M. Birden
Western Connecticut State University
181 White Street
Danbury
CT 06810
United States
"Licensee"

McGraw Hill Material

Author: Santrock
Title: A Topical Approach to Life-Span Development
ISBN: 9781259708787
Edition: 10
Description of material: Figure 16 on page 26 (1 Figure ONLY)

Fee: “Waived” – To be used in a dissertation/thesis for educational purposes.

Purpose of Reproduction

Course: ED 884 and ED 885
School: Western Connecticut State University
Professor: Dr. Marcy Declourt
Number of Copies: 4
Semester: Fall 2019-Spring 2020
Format: Electronic (Internet). To be used in an access restricted website/platform only
Distribution: One-time educational use in above-referenced course only for one academic year.

McGraw-Hill Global Education Holdings, LLC (herein after known as "McGraw Hill") grants permission for the use described above under the following terms and conditions:

1. McGraw Hill hereby grants Licensee the non-exclusive right to use the McGraw Hill Material as outlined and to reproduce and distribute the McGraw Hill Material as outlined on condition that the related textbook is the required text for the course identified above. The McGraw Hill Material may be used only as outlined. All use of the McGraw Hill Material is subject to the terms and conditions of this Agreement. This
Appendix F: Permission for Use of Figure 2
Affiliation (Organization, district, or school) *
Western Connecticut State University

Position/Title
Doctoral Candidate

City or State *
Danbury, CT

Reason for Contact *
Copyright Permission

CASEL frequently receives requests to use and reproduce resources and graphics. We are pleased so many find value in our work and seek to incorporate our learnings and research into their own efforts. Permission is not required to link to any graphic, handout, article, or page on our website. We just ask that you credit CASEL, include our copyright, and link to www.casel.org when appropriate. Permission must be requested to alter or translate any CASEL material. To request permission, please select the appropriate option below and send us a message with the specific request.

I am requesting permission to:
☐ Alter CASEL material
☐ Translate CASEL material
☐ None
Appendix G: Superintendent Permission Form
Dear <Superintendent’s Name>,

My name is Erin Birden and I am currently enrolled in the doctoral program for Instructional Leadership at Western Connecticut State University. This program requires that I design and implement a dissertation research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of courage according to upper elementary aged students as well as the impact of involvement in school programs on the development of courage.

Each educator participant will be asked to complete a short survey providing information about the classroom context and their perspectives of social-emotional learning. The educator survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Student participants will complete two short surveys. One survey is two-items and asks students to define courage. This will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Another quantitative instrument, the Choose Love Survey, will be used in the study. This survey is designed to measure student perceptions of social-emotional learning competencies related to courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion (Delcourt, Lewis & Bierman, 2017). The survey contains Likert-type items and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and will be administered during non-instructional time. The researcher will be present during administration and will collect and score all of the surveys. Some students will then be invited to be interviewed one time for 20-30 minutes during non-instructional time.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the WCSU Institutional Review Board. If you have questions concerning the rights of the subjects involved in research studies please contact the WCSU Assurances Administrator at irb@wcsu.edu and mention Protocol Number 1819-99. This study is valid until 12/14/19. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Educators and students who agree to participate will submit all information to the researcher. Privacy will be protected. Participant names will be numerically coded and schools will not be identified. All identities will be maintained in a secure location to protect confidentiality. A description of the final project will be available to all school personnel.

I wish to thank you for considering participation in this study. Hopefully, results of this investigation will enable educators to better understand outcomes related to courage as a component of social-emotional learning curricula. Feedback will also be provided to the originator of the Choose Love Enrichment Program. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Erin M. Birden
Doctoral Candidate
Western Connecticut State University

Marcia Delcourt, PhD
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305
Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, CT
delcourtm@wcsu.edu

I give my permission for data to be collected from this school district.

Please Print Name __________________________________ Signature __________________________ Date ______________
Appendix H: Building Administrator Permission Form
<Date>

Dear <Administrator’s Name>,

My name is Erin Birden and I am currently enrolled in the doctoral program for Instructional Leadership at Western Connecticut State University. This program requires that I design and implement a dissertation research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of courage according to upper elementary aged students as well as the impact of involvement in school programs on the development of courage.

Each educator participant will be asked to complete a short survey providing information about the classroom context and their perspectives of social-emotional learning. The educator survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Student participants will complete two short surveys. One survey is two-items and asks students to define courage. This will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Another quantitative instrument, the Choose Love Survey, will be used in the study. This survey is designed to measure student perceptions of social-emotional learning competencies related to courage, gratitude, forgiveness, and compassion (Delcourt, Lewis & Bierman, 2017). The survey contains Likert-type items and takes approximately 10 minutes to complete and will be administered during non-instructional time. The researcher will be present during administration and will collect and score all of the surveys. Some students will then be invited to be interviewed one time for 20-30 minutes during non-instructional time.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the WCSU Institutional Review Board. If you have questions concerning the rights of the subjects involved in research studies please contact the WCSU Assurances Administrator at irb@wcsu.edu and mention Protocol Number 1819-99. This study is valid until 12/14/19. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Educators and students who agree to participate will submit all information to the researcher. Privacy will be protected. Participant names will be numerically coded and schools will not be identified. All identities will be maintained in a secure location to protect confidentiality. A description of the final project will be available to all school personnel.

I wish to thank you for considering participation in this study. Hopefully, results of this investigation will enable educators to better understand outcomes related to courage as a component of social-emotional learning curricula. Feedback will also be provided to the originator of the Choose Love Enrichment Program. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Erin M. Birden
Doctoral Candidate
Western Connecticut State University

Marcia Delcourt, PhD
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305
Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, CT
delcourtmc@wcsu.edu

I give my permission for data to be collected from this school.

Please Print Name ___________________________________________________ Signature ___________________________ Date ___________
Appendix I: Educator Consent Form
<Date>

Dear <Educator’s Name Here>:

My name is Erin Birden, and I am a student in the doctoral program for Instructional Leadership at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury, Connecticut. For my dissertation, I am examining the nature of courage according to upper elementary aged students as well as the impact of involvement in school programs on the development of courage.

To gain a better understanding of student perceptions of courage, it is also important for me to understand the classroom context as it relates to this area. I am seeking teacher participation in a short demographic survey for the study. The survey will take you approximately 10 minutes to complete. Questions on the survey target your educational background, whether or not social-emotional learning curricula is implemented in your classroom or school, and your perceptions of courage as well as your perceptions of courage in students. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and individuals may withdraw at any time, or they may select not to participate in any aspect of the study. All information gathered during this study will be kept confidential.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University’s Institutional Review Board. If you have questions concerning the rights of the participants involved in research studies please email Western Connecticut State University’s Assurances Administrator at irb@wcsu.edu and mention Protocol Number [to be filled in after approved]. This study is valid until [fill in 1 year date from approved date].

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at birden005@connect.wcsu.edu. If you would like to participate in the study explained above, please sign the form below and return it in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Erin M. Birden
Doctoral Candidate
Western Connecticut State University

Marcia Delcourt, PhD
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305
Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, CT
delcourtmm@wcsu.edu

I consent to participate in this study. My signature below also verifies that I am over the age of 18.

Please Print Name    Signature    Date
Appendix J: Parent Cover Letter and Consent Form for Quantitative Data Collection
Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Erin Birden, and I am a student in the doctoral program for Instructional Leadership at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury, Connecticut. For my dissertation, I am interested in examining the nature of courage according to upper elementary aged students.

Each participant will be asked to complete two short surveys that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete in total. The researcher will administer the survey during non-instructional time. The survey is designed to measure student perceptions about how activities they do at school affect their feelings and thoughts. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and individuals may withdraw at any time, or they may select not to participate in any aspect of the study. All information gathered during this study will be kept confidential.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University’s Institutional Review Board. If you have questions concerning the rights of the participants involved in research studies please email Western Connecticut State University’s Assurances Administrator at irb@wcsu.edu and mention Protocol Number 1819-99. This study is valid until 12/14/2019.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at birden005@connect.wcsu.edu. **If you would like your child to participate, no further action is required on your part. If you would not like your child to participate in the above, please sign the attached form and return it in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible. Thank you.**

Sincerely,

Erin M. Birden
Doctoral Candidate
Western Connecticut State University

Marcia Delcourt, PhD
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305
Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, CT
delcourtm@wcsu.edu

I do not want my child to participate in this study.

Please Print Name ____________________________ Signature ____________________________ Date __________

Please Print Your Child’s Name ____________________________ Name of Your Child’s School ____________________________
Appendix K: Parent Cover Letter and Consent Form for Qualitative Data Collection
Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Erin Birden, and I am a student in the doctoral program for Instructional Leadership at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury, Connecticut. For my dissertation, I am interested in examining the nature of courage according to upper elementary aged students.

Each participant will be interviewed during non-instructional time. Questions will address students’ feelings and thoughts about courage. The interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and individuals may withdraw at any time, or they may select not to participate in any aspect of the study. Interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription purposes. Recordings will then be deleted. All information gathered during this study will be kept confidential.

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Connecticut State University’s Institutional Review Board. If you have questions concerning the rights of the participants involved in research studies please email Western Connecticut State University’s Assurances Administrator at irb@wcsu.edu and mention Protocol Number 1819-99. This study is valid until 12/14/2019.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at birden005@connect.wcsu.edu. **If you would like your child to participate, no further action is required on your part. If you would not like your child to participate in the above, please sign the attached form and return it in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible. Thank you.**

Sincerely,

Erin M. Birden  
Doctoral Candidate  
Western Connecticut State University

Marcia Delcourt, PhD  
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305  
Western Connecticut State University  
Danbury, CT  
delcourtm@wcsu.edu

I do not want my child to participate in this study.

Please Print Name: ____________________________ Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________

Please Print Your Child’s Name: ____________________________ Name of Your Child’s School: ____________________________
Appendix L: Parent Consent Form for Quantitative Data Collection in Spanish
Estimado Padre/Guardian,

Me llamo Erin Birden, y soy estudiante en el programa de doctorado para el Liderazgo de Instrucción en la (Universidad Estatal de Connecticut Occidental) Western Connecticut State University en Danbury, Connecticut. Para mi disertación, me interesa examinar la naturaleza del coraje de acuerdo con los estudiantes de la escuela primaria superior.

Se le pedirá a cada participante que complete dos breves encuestas que tomará aproximadamente 20 minutos para completar. El investigador administra la encuesta durante el tiempo sin instrucción. La encuesta está diseñada para medir las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre cómo las actividades que realizan en la escuela afectan sus sentimientos y pensamientos. La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria y los individuales pueden retirarse en cualquier momento, o puede negar su participación en ningún aspecto del estudio.

Toda la información recopilada durante este estudio se mantendrá confidencial.

Este estudio de investigación ha sido revisado y aprobado por la Junta de Revisión Institucional de WCSU (la Universidad Estatal de Connecticut Occidental). Si tiene preguntas sobre los derechos de los participantes involucrados en los estudios de investigación, envíe un correo electrónico al Administrador de Assurances de WCSU a irbi@wcsu.edu y mencione el número de protocolo 1819-99. Este estudio es válido hasta 12/14/2019.

Si tiene alguna pregunta, síntase libre de contacto conmigo en birden005@connect.wcsu.edu. Si te gustaría que su hijo participe, no se requiere ninguna otra acción por su parte. Si no desea que su hijo participe en lo anterior, firme el formulario adjunto y devuélvalo lo antes posible. Gracias.

Sinceramente,

Erin M. Birden
Doctoral Candidate
Western Connecticut State University

Marcia Delcourt, PhD
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305
Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, CT
delcourtm@wcsu.edu

No quiero que mi hijo participe en este estudio.

____________________________  __________________   ______________
Por favor escribe su nombre       Firma          Fecha

Por favor escriba el nombre de su hijo ______________________________
Nombre de la escuela de su hijo ______________________________
Appendix M: Parent Consent Form for Qualitative Data Collection in Spanish
Estimado Padre/Guardian,

Me llamo Erin Birden, y soy estudiante en el programa de doctorado para el Liderazgo de Instrucción en la (Universidad Estatal de Connecticut Occidental) Western Connecticut State University en Danbury, Connecticut. Para mi disertación, me interesa examinar la naturaleza del coraje de acuerdo con los estudiantes de la escuela primaria superior.

Cada participante será entrevistado durante horas no instructivas. Las preguntas se dirigirán a los estudiantes. La entrevista tomará aproximadamente 20-30 minutos para completar. La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria, y los individuos pueden retirarse en cualquiera momento o pueden elegir no participar en cualquiera aspecto del estudio. Las entrevistas serán grabadas en audio para fines de transcripción posterior. Todas las grabaciones serán eliminadas. Toda la información recopilada durante este estudio se mantendrá confidencial.

Este estudio de investigación ha sido revisado y aprobado por la Junta de Revisión Institucional de WCSU (la Universidad Estatal de Connecticut Occidental). Si tiene preguntas sobre los derechos de los participantes involucrados en los estudios de investigación, envíe un correo electrónico al Administrador de Assurances de WCSU a irb@wcsu.edu y mencione el número de protocolo 1819-99. Este estudio es válido hasta 12/14/2019.

Si tiene alguna pregunta, síntaselibre de contacto conmigo en birden005@connect.wcsu.edu. Si te gustaría que tu hijo participe, no se requiere ninguna otra acción por su parte. Si no deseas que tu hijo participe en lo anterior, firma el formulario adjunto y devuélvalo en el sobre adjunto lo antes posible. Gracias.

Sinceramente,

Erin M. Birden  
Doctoral Candidate  
Western Connecticut State University

Marcia Delcourt, PhD  
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305  
Western Connecticut State University  
Danbury, CT  
delcourtm@wcsu.edu

No quiero que mi hijo participe en este estudio.

Por favor escribe su nombre

Firma

Fecha

Por favor escriba el nombre de su hijo

Nombre de la escuela de su hijo
Appendix N: Student Assent Form
Student Information Form to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Student,

I am doing a study to learn about how different types of activities affect your feelings and thoughts about what you do in school.

If you agree to be in our study, I am going to ask you some questions about your feelings about school and your classmates.

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time not to finish, you can ask me to stop.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in the study. If you don’t want to be in the study, don’t sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don’t sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

If you would like to be in my study, please print and sign your name below:

___________________________________________________
Print name

___________________________________________________ Date:______________
Student signature

Thank you!

Erin M. Birden
Doctoral Candidate
Western Connecticut State University

Marcia Delcourt, PhD
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305
Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, CT
delcourtm@wcsu.edu
Appendix O: IRB Approval
From: Carol O'Connor  
Sent: Friday, December 14, 2018 2:22:58 PM  
To: Erin Birden  
Cc: WCSU IRB; Marcia Delcourt  
Subject: IRB approval

Hello Erin Birden,

I am pleased to inform you that your I.R.B. protocol number 1819-99 has been approved by full review. This email is documentation of your official approval to start your research. If you need a copy of this official approval for funding purposes, please let me know econtact@wcsu.edu. The WCSU I.R.B. wishes you the best with your research.

You have 1 year from the date of this email to complete your research; if you are still conducting that date, you will need to fill out a renewal application. When you are finished with your study please fill out and return via email a Termination/Completion Report (available here: http://wcsu.edu/irb/forms.asp) so we know your study is complete.

Finally – and most importantly! – we have recently learned that current BOR technology policies do not guarantee privacy of any info stored on work computers physically, remotely, or otherwise (i.e., laptop, Dropbox, etc.). As such, to maintain the truth of any anonymity or confidentiality promises you make to participants (consent form, for example), you will need to store all electronic data obtained from those human subjects on a system/computer file not connected to any CSU system. It is your responsibility as the primary researcher to make sure personal data of participants remains securely private – something not guaranteed in the currently existing CSU system. Rest assured, (because it’s ridiculous to expect faculty to store work-related research on non-work-related systems and/or to conduct research where participants are not guaranteed anonymity/confidentiality), we are working to gain an exception for research purposes to this policy. But until then, it’s technically and legally possible for anyone in the system office to access your participants’ data at any time – without your consent or knowledge before doing so... which makes any guarantees made on research documents (e.g., consent form) deceptive unless info is stored elsewhere.

Thanks,
Jessica Eckstein, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Western Connecticut State University
www.wcsu.edu/irb
Appendix P: Member Checking: Statement of Agreement for Students
Dear Student,

Please review the transcript from our interview to make sure you are in agreement. Please indicate your agreement with the transcript by printing and signing your name below. Please return this statement of agreement as soon as possible to your classroom teacher. The researcher will collect these forms from the classroom teacher.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Erin M. Birden
Doctoral Candidate
Western Connecticut State University
birden005@connect.wcsu.edu
203-648-2310

Marcia Delcourt, PhD
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305
Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, CT
delcourtm@wcsu.edu
203-837-9121

I approve that this transcript is an accurate representation of our discussion.

________________________________________________________________________
Student Name (Print)                               Student Signature

241
Appendix Q: Member Checking Statements of Agreement for Parents/Guardians
Dear Parent/Guardian,

I visited your student’s school over the past few months to collect data for my dissertation study, in which I am seeking to understand the nature of courage according to upper elementary students. Attached you will find a copy of the transcript from the interview about courage conducted with your student from my visit to your student’s school. Your student has reviewed this transcript, too. This copy is yours to keep. If you are in agreement with the transcript, no further action is required on your part. If you have any changes or comments, please mark those changes on this copy and send it back to your student’s classroom teacher no later than Wednesday, May 29, 2019.

Thank you!
Sincerely,

Erin M. Birden
Doctoral Candidate
Western Connecticut State University

Marcia Delcourt, PhD
181 White Street, Westside Campus, Room 305
Western Connecticut State University
Danbury, CT

delcourtm@wcsu.edu
Appendix R: Code List
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Initial Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Doing the right thing</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>Doing the right thing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tell the truth even when it’s hard</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tell the truth even when it’s hard</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>ENcourage</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Upstanding</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion in Action</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Living your truth</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Theme Two: Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Initial Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bravery</td>
<td>Non-LDP Fear</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP Bravery</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Unknown</td>
<td>Non-LDP Risk-taking</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP Unknown/New</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>Non-LDP Physical</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP Loss and tragedy</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>Non-LDP Fail and try again</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP Persevere in the face of challenge</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP Work hard</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>151</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Initial Code</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>Belief in self</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Self-talk</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples and experiences</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Learn by example</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Experience as teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Social situations require it</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>117</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Initial Code</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models of courage at school</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>(Interview question 12) Courageous classmates or teacher</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>Teacher showing courage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Example of courage at school</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson driven strategies</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>CLEP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>Explicitly taught strategies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Question 13</td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td>Cultivating courage at school (IQ13)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td>Level of discussion about courage at school</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EdD in Instructional Leadership  
Department of Education and Educational Psychology  
Dissertation Registration Form

Student: Erin M. Birden  
Date: April 15, 2020

Dissertation Title: Courage in the Classroom: The Impact of Social Emotional Learning on Student Perceptions of Courage

Dissertation Committee Members: See attached Dissertation Approval Page

For Office Use Only.

Marcia A. B. Delcourt, Ph.D.  
Chair  
Signature  
Date  
April 16, 2020

Jody S. Piro, Ed.D.  
Interim Program Coordinator  
Signature  
Date  
April 17, 2020

Joan S. Palladino, Ed.D. 
Interim Dean, School of Professional Studies  
Signature  
Date  
May 11, 2020

Christopher Shankle, Ed.D.  
Associate Director, Division of Graduate Studies  
Signature  
Date  
May 11, 2020