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The Post-Pandemic Influence on Social Emotional Learning in the K-12 Music Classroom

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THE POST-PANDEMIC INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL
EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN THE
K–12 MUSIC CLASSROOM

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Coastal Carolina University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education
with a specialization in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of social emotional learning in music classrooms. This study addresses a vital need for an investigation into the current social emotional needs of students in music classes to then provide information on common practices for music teachers to utilize with their students to best meet these current needs in social emotional learning and communities of practice. The methodology utilized for this study was a qualitative narrative study approach, with focus groups serving as the main form of data collection. Results of the study showed that the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic include anxiety, immaturity, lack of motivation and engagement, and lack of structure. Because of these influences, students are in need of teacher flexibility, personal coping skills, increased maturity levels, greater structure and expectations, and increased motivation and engagement. This study provides the foundation for developing teacher common practices to best meet the current social emotional learning and community of practice needs, as well as future research into these areas.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, social emotional learning, communities of practice, teacher common practices

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives and social emotional experiences of every student at some point since March of 2020 (Hamilton et al., 2021). This time has been described as unprecedented, historic, and a crisis; these words have been overused to the point of exhaustion (Schwartz et al., 2021). The roughly 56.4 million children enrolled in K–12 schools were the most vulnerable to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns (Varghese & Natsuaki, 2021). Social activities ceased, students had uneven access to live instruction and hands-on learning, and students were cut off from access to teachers and other students (Hamilton et al., 2021). Access to peer groups and support were abruptly unavailable, and for many remained disrupted for an extended time (Schwartz et al., 2021).

Many students not only experienced disruptions to their educational structures but were also faced with impacts on their family's health and welfare (Hamilton et al., 2021). There were uncertainties for the near future resulting from this time staying at home. Accompanied with family and home life struggles, students were also left without a school community. Children lacked a physical space to share interests, hopes, thoughts, and emotions among peers. Schools provide a structured setting where children can learn social and emotional competencies (Colao et al., 2020). Due to these personal, home, and school challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, students displayed new mental health complications, or the exacerbation of existing mental health issues (Varghese & Natsuaki, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the normal educational structure also experienced a major upheaval, which included time spent in virtual and hybrid learning settings, along with time spent at home due to close contact quarantine periods. These various instructional

modalities provided many challenges and inconsistencies, especially to subject areas such as music education, where much of the learning requires hands-on, active participation (Li et al., 2020). According to Farrington et al. (2019), music education assists students in social emotional learning (SEL) areas such as innovation, perseverance, collaboration, critical thinking, relationship skills, self-reflection, and discipline. Music and the arts allow humans to express a joy for creation, while also providing benefits in the areas of physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development (Upitis, 2003). Yet because of the changes to instructional modalities, the hands-on and active participation aspects were taken away from music and arts classrooms, which impacted the SEL in these areas.

Active engagement and participation with others who have an equal amount of consideration for the same music activities bring about the most transformative learning (Wenger, 1998/2018). Within music classrooms, students develop competence not only through the personal knowledge development under their teacher's direction, but also through actions of these communities of practice, in which knowledge and social emotional skills are created and used (Virkkula, 2015). As students interact with others, observe their environments, and make sense of their experiences, they build not only their knowledge, but also a sense of understanding of themselves, others, and the world (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020).

Yet throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, students were left to learn from home, away from their teachers and other students, and through a variety of methods and resources. Music educators responded by utilizing social media, video conferencing, and other digital technology to deliver instruction (Sabol, 2021). These methods were previously used as supplemental components in music education (Li et al., 2020). Much of teaching and learning in music relies heavily on observation and hands-on participation in communities of practice, with little

technology usage. Music educators worked to use a combination of synchronous learning and performance projects, but often, one-on-one teaching and interaction became necessary due to the components and time involved in online teaching as well as sound, video, and other technology difficulties (Li et al., 2020). These adjustments to educational structures within music education resulted in the absence of active engagement and group participation.

With these disruptions to learning in schools and music classrooms, as well as struggles at home, students missed many social and emotional learning experiences and activities. Because it is important to build knowledge and social emotional skills within music education through communities of practice, the lack of these activities left some students feeling like they do not belong to a community, which also presents challenges for students to work together with others or to experience a sense of belonging (Peterson, 2022). For many years, music education has been seen as an ideal setting for building social emotional skills (Jacobi, 2012), but inconsistencies during the COVID-19 pandemic have brought about challenges in common practices in these areas.

With the COVID-19 pandemic inconsistencies and challenges to personal lives, home lives, and school lives, students have been left with new experiences, learning challenges, and needs. Music education classes specifically were impacted because of the nature of learning that occurs in these classrooms through communities of practice. Music supports the daily well-being of students, fosters a safe and welcoming learning environment, and encourages inclusivity (Swain, 2022). The lack of active participation in communities of practice and the general social and emotional impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic provoke investigation of the current social emotional needs of students in music classes.

Problem Statement

These social and emotional impacts and educational inconsistencies due to the COVID-19 pandemic show a need for an investigation into the current social emotional needs of students in music classes. Therefore, this study will aim to discuss the history of social emotional learning and its involvement in music, as well as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic instructional inconsistencies on the social and emotional lives of students, to then reveal the influence and relationship of the COVID-19 pandemic on the current social and emotional learning needs of secondary level music students. The findings of the study will be utilized to determine common practices for music education classrooms that can be used by teachers and schools to address the social emotional learning needs of these students. Making these adjustments to common practices may improve the students' learning and knowledge acquisition of not only musical skills, but social and emotional skills, ensuring the continued benefits of music education post-pandemic.

Making music helps students to better learn and communicate, while also working to develop skills beyond academic preparedness, such as refined listening and speaking, learning to ask questions, and making complex decisions (Diamond, 2022). Social emotional skills are embedded into music education and help students confront and navigate life's complexities long after they leave the music classroom (Donahue, 2021). However, many of these skills are developed through communities of practice, where groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). These regular interactions were lost during the educational inconsistencies of the COVID-19 pandemic, as access to peer groups, classroom instruction, teachers, and mentors was abruptly made unavailable (Schwartz et al., 2021). This

brings about the question as to what influence this loss of community interaction has had on social emotional learning and social emotional needs of music students.

By determining what has influenced the social emotional skills and learning of K–12 music students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, this study should then be able to determine the current needs of these students, as well as how to best assist teacher instructional practices regarding these student needs. The factors explored in this research study will be the COVID-19 pandemic and the current state of social emotional learning in secondary music classrooms. The purpose of this research study is to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of social emotional learning in music classrooms.

Nature of the Study

This study will be a qualitative study, with a narrative research approach. Narrative inquiry is a way to study experience (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). As a method, narrative research begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals. This method of research also works to then tell the stories of these individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative research allows for an in-depth study of individuals' experiences over time and in context. The purpose of this research study is to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of social emotional learning in music classrooms. Multiple focus groups will be conducted in which about 16 teachers who are also members of the South Carolina Music Educators Association (SCMEA) will be asked questions regarding learning experiences with students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in K–12 music classes. Themes from these focus groups will be coded to determine the state of SEL and communities of practice post-pandemic to help teachers build common practices for student needs.

Research questions guiding this study will be:

RQ1: What current SEL needs of students are teachers observing in music classrooms?

RQ2: What are common practices music teachers find helpful to utilize in assisting current SEL and communities of practice needs for students in their classrooms?

RQ3: What influence did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms from the teacher perspective?

The Theoretical Base

The importance of the relationship between the arts and social emotional learning along with the influence of educational inconsistencies resulting from COVID-19 can be understood through the lens of the social theory of learning, developed by Etienne Wenger in 1998. According to Wenger (1998/2018), the primary focus of this theory is on learning as social participation. Wenger explained humans are social beings, and knowing occurs as a matter of active engagement, while meaning is learned through the ability to experience things through this engagement. Wenger also described the importance of communities of practice, which are groups of people who share a concern or passion for things they do. He went on to say “the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership” in these communities (Wenger, 1998/2018, p. 222). Wenger’s research on communities of practice shows the connection between individual and social elements of learning. Within this sociocultural learning, competence is not only gained through the individual learner gaining knowledge under a teacher’s direction, but also through the action within these communities of practice, in which knowledge is created and used. To make learning possible, a learner must act at the potential level of development, which is not possible without community-based support (Virkkula, 2015).

Music education is a subject area where social emotional aspects are naturally part of daily activities. Music classes often require active participation through activities such as ensemble performance, creating, and designing. Many of these activities are done by members in a group or a community and are often a challenge to complete individually. Students in music education classes work and observe through their environment and interaction with others in this community of practice, and then use these experiences to build a better understanding of others, develop helpful habitual patterns of behaviors, and build closer relationships with those in this community, to design the best creations possible (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020).

Participation, engagement, and learning all relate to Wenger's focus on learning as social participation, as well as the idea of meaning coming from engagement within the process. For learning to occur within music classrooms, collaboration and engagement with a community of other students who have the same direct interests is necessary, and this is how learning can have the most transformative influence (Wenger, 1998/2018). A community of practice acts as a living curriculum, as it involves learning on the part of everyone (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). Instructional challenges arose during the COVID-19 pandemic when education became inconsistent, and students learned at home and away from one another. If collaboration and engagement with a community of other students is necessary for learning to occur within music education classrooms, then questions arise regarding the impact of a lack of community participation on social emotional development needs of students in these classrooms.

Operational Definitions

1. *Common Practices* – Practices that are teacher perceived rather than scientifically researched practices.

2. *Hybrid Learning* – Hybrid learning setup is a combination of face-to-face classroom activities and online practices. It is a type of a synchronous process that happens both physically and remotely. In this approach, teachers deliver live instructions simultaneously in the classroom and online. The remote sessions can include pre-recorded lectures, multimedia content, means for discussion, and self-teaching elements (Benova, 2021).

3. *Music Education* – Music education is a field of study associated with the teaching and learning of music (Definitions.net, 2022).

4. *Quarantine Periods* – Quarantine periods were a strategy used to prevent transmission of the COVID-19 disease, by keeping the person who was a close contact to someone with the disease away from others. Students were quarantined five or more days, depending upon their exposure extent and timeline (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

5. *Social Emotional Learning* – “Social emotional learning is the process through which all young people and adult acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2022c, para. 1).

6. *Virtual Learning* – Virtual learning is a learning experience that is enhanced through utilizing computers and/or the internet both outside and inside the facilities of an educational organization. The instruction most commonly takes place in an online environment. The teaching activities are carried out online whereby the teacher and learners are physically separated. The learning can be designed for self-paced, known as asynchronous, or live web-conferencing, known as synchronous, online teaching and tutoring (Racheva, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Assumptions

There are three assumptions to consider for this study. The first assumption is the focus group questions will be presented in an understandable format for respondents. It is also assumed that the given questions and items are not of a sensitive manner, will be collected anonymously, and will be answered honestly. Lastly, there is an assumption that members of the SCMEA will be willing to participate in the focus group sessions.

Limitations

During each of the focus groups, only a select number of teachers and SCMEA members from each division of band, choral, elementary, and orchestra were asked to participate. Multiple focus groups were conducted with a select number of SCMEA members participating in each group. Although the participation of multiple teachers from each division was solicited, it is possible the data from coding the themes may be skewed, as opinions of these teachers may or may not be the same as that of others in the organization and state. Data within this study was only collected from teachers who are members of SCMEA. Although many teachers in South Carolina do belong to this organization, there are some who do not. This could cause information from certain areas of the state to be excluded from data collection.

Scope

This study will focus on understanding the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the state of social emotional learning and communities of practice in music classrooms post-pandemic to improve teacher common practices. The study will target K–12 music teachers within South Carolina who taught during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants for focus groups will be selected from SCMEA. Only teachers who taught during and after the

COVID-19 pandemic will be included. One round of focus groups will be conducted for the study but will include four different sessions with four participants in each group. There are four divisions of SCMEA that will be utilized: band, choral, elementary, and orchestra. Four SCMEA teachers will be selected to participate from each division. The focus groups will be completed in late December 2022 through February 2023.

Delimitations

For the narrative study approach, four focus groups will be conducted with four participants in each group. To help ensure there is representation from various grade levels, teachers from the elementary, band, choral, and orchestra divisions of SCMEA will be included. The elementary division will provide representation of teachers from Grades K–5 and the band, choral, and orchestra divisions will provide representation of teachers from Grades 5–12. Also, teachers will be included from various parts of the state to ensure different regions and areas are represented in the focus groups. To maintain reliability, each group will be asked the same set of questions.

The study will also focus on teachers who taught during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This decision was made to ensure participants can adequately respond to the questions during the focus group regarding what they experienced with their classes and students during the pandemic, as well as what they have experienced after the pandemic.

The Significance of the Study

The topics of SEL and the COVID-19 pandemic have recently been at the forefront of education, but the influence that the pandemic has had on SEL and communities of practice in music education classrooms is a topic in which little research has been completed. During the pandemic, students had a disrupted sense of normalcy, which led to feelings of fear, isolation,

and anxiety for many. Research has revealed widespread impact on students' mental health, with likely 30 to 40 percent of students experiencing negative impacts (Hamilton et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the pandemic affected young people to different degrees in diverse ways (Hamilton et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic also brought about a larger realization that schools fulfil not only a place for knowledge acquisition but are also a place to satisfy social needs and are a physical space to share thoughts and emotions (Colao et al., 2020).

The greatest need for many students during the pandemic was social interaction, but these opportunities were limited (Cockerham et al., 2021). Students were left to learn in virtual and hybrid modalities and were also impacted by quarantine periods, resulting in periods of absenteeism from school. These educational inconsistencies of virtual and hybrid learning left students reliant on technology for instruction and communication, increasing screen time, distractibility, technology overload, and loneliness (Cockerham et al., 2021). Quarantine periods resulted in higher absenteeism rates for some students, which negatively impacted academic and social emotional outcomes (Santibanez & Guarino, 2021).

Music classrooms are some places where SEL occurs most naturally in a school (Jacobi, 2012), yet these classrooms were disrupted with the mentioned educational inconsistencies of the COVID-19 pandemic. Music students typically spend time learning through observation, with little technology usage, while also collaborating with one another. Time spent learning individually through these inconsistencies forced music teachers to embrace unfamiliar pedagogy. Music educators worked to use a combination of synchronous learning and performance projects, but often, one-on-one teaching and interaction became necessary due to the components and time involved in online teaching. The inconsistencies, along with necessary

changes to pedagogy, led to difficulty in covering course materials and needed SEL during class in the allotted time (Li et al., 2020).

Music classrooms have experienced many changes for students and teachers during the pandemic. These classrooms are typically places where students learn social-emotional skills simultaneously through the daily practices and activities of the music classroom (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020), but the challenges and inconsistencies of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a disruption. Music teachers continued to try to teach in familiar ways, but with changes to the mental state of students, teaching modalities, and the loss of needed SEL skills during the pandemic, the question arises as to how teachers can work to best help students in their current state. There has been little to no research done on the current state of SEL and communities of practice in music classrooms, as well as common practices for teachers to help students in these areas. This gap in research necessitates this study. The long-term impact of the pandemic will require greater research to understand the nature of the impacts in these areas (Sabol, 2021).

The results from the study will provide information on common practices for music teachers to utilize with their students to best meet the current needs in SEL and communities of practice. As music teachers are now working to teach post-pandemic, it is going to be crucial to understand what students need and how to best assist in these areas. These results will allow music teachers to study and learn from one another regarding what common practices are best for helping music students post-pandemic.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the purpose of this study, research questions, and an introduction to the theoretical framework and methodology that will be utilized. Chapter 2

will be a complex review of the literature to further understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the current state of social emotional learning in secondary music classrooms.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature and theoretical framework that serves as the foundation for this dissertation. The chapter begins with a history and overview of SEL in K–12 public education, as well as the background of the interweaving of music education and SEL. These overviews are followed by a description of the educational inconsistencies during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as what social and emotional influences these inconsistencies caused for K–12 students. Finally, the chapter concludes with a review on the current state of SEL in music classrooms and information on Wenger’s social theory of learning, which will serve as the theoretical framework for this study.

The literature review is organized in this manner to begin with overlying large themes that are important to understand the study. To understand ways in which the current state of SEL within music education may or may not be different due to COVID-19 pandemic teaching inconsistencies, information on the historical background of SEL, as well as the ways in which SEL has existed within music education over time, is imperative. It is also imperative that there is an understanding of what the educational inconsistencies during the COVID-19 pandemic consisted of, as well as how these inconsistencies influenced the social and emotional state of K–12 students. Without these four pieces of information, it would not be clear in the study as to what has changed or not changed regarding SEL in music classrooms currently as the study is completed. The theoretical framework description will serve as support to the study and these pieces of information as well.

Review of Research and Literature

History and Overview of SEL in K–12 Public Education

In academics, SEL is increasingly a priority in public education due to the recent events of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as current funding and legislation changes stemming from this pandemic. Although recent events have brought SEL to an educational forefront. Schools have always been where students are first exposed to people of diverse backgrounds, abilities, and beliefs. This has helped teach students to be more accepting and understanding of the differences of others (Becker et al., 2022). The roots of SEL date back to ancient Greece with Plato proposing a holistic curriculum that required a balance of training in the areas of the arts, math, science, physical education, character, and moral judgement (Lovenhill, 2019). Plato further explained citizens of good character will be produced by maintaining a sound system of upbringing and education (Jowett, 1943/375 BC).

SEL surfaced again in the 1960s when James Comer created the Comer School Development Program, which centered on the idea that experiences at home and at school can affect a child's psychosocial development, in turn impacting and shaping academic achievement (Edutopia, 2011). Comer felt a staff who managed their school building as a social system could best create a climate that facilitates learning among the largest number of students. He also explained behavior, attitude, and achievement levels reflect this school climate. The Comer program was strictly concerned with behavioral outcomes (Haynes et al., 1994). This program was first utilized in two poor, low-achieving elementary schools in New Haven, Connecticut, which had the worst attendance and lowest academic achievement in the city. Through this program, a collaborative management team composed of teachers, parents, the principal, and a mental health worker collaborated to make decisions on the schools' academic and social programs and to change school procedures that seemed to be causing behavior problems (Briggs, 2015).

By the 1980s, both schools demonstrated improvement in academic and behavior areas. Academic performance at both schools was exceeding the national average, and truancy and behavior problems had declined. These results provided momentum to the SEL movement (Briggs, 2015). Building on this work, Superintendent of New Haven Public Schools John Dow, Jr. called for a districtwide focus on social development. Between 1987 and 1992, a group of educators and researchers created the New Haven Social Development Program, which pioneered SEL strategies, based in behavioral areas, within K–12 classrooms (CASEL, 2022a).

The next milestone occurred in 1994 when a passionate group of researchers, educators, practitioners, and child advocates came together to develop a field in education that addressed social and emotional needs, or what they called the missing piece. This is when CASEL was created and the term SEL was defined by the group in 1997 (CASEL, 2022b). CASEL (2022c) defines SEL as:

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

CASEL founders felt too many children were finding themselves in pain, struggling, disengaged, and not discovering their purpose, and identified the need to develop a plan to incorporate social and emotional skills into classrooms (CASEL, 2019). This need was addressed through the creation of a managed way to establish, incorporate, and teach high-quality and evidence based SEL within preschool through high school classrooms (CASEL, 2022b). Because SEL refers to the skills and knowledge that students need to effectively communicate, interact

with peers, resolve conflicts, and manage social responses to stressful situations (Becker et al., 2022), it aids with behavior management, learning, and healing throughout the school day.

CASEL then deepened its definition of SEL through its framework of five competencies, which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These competencies are integrated into three settings, including schools, classrooms, and homes, meaning students can develop these competencies through school wide SEL practices, SEL curricula in the classroom, and family and community partnerships (Becker et al., 2022). These needed SEL competencies were included in education as far back as the days of the philosopher Plato and have continued through education to this day.

Since 2000, support for SEL initiatives has made SEL a priority (Humphrey et al., 2011). Recently, influences from the COVID-19 pandemic, variations on SEL program implementation, and various educational funding, legislation, and political issues have created an even greater need for more research and discussion on how to best implement SEL programs in a way that will best address the needs of all students in preschool through high school grades.

Music Education and Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Approaches to SEL vary in learning as some happen naturally, while others are taught through a systemic school program (Mahoney et al., 2021). Throughout history, music has been taught through a caring classroom community of positive relationships and group goals, as music education was founded on the idea that music is for every child (Varadi, 2022). In 1837, Lowell Mason launched the idea in Boston Public Schools that all children were capable of learning music. This is mirrored by the Music Educators National Conference, presently the National Association for Music Education, whose slogan is Music for Every Child. Music is a symbolic, time-bound, and artistic form of expression that moves on a preverbal level and is accessible to

everyone (Varadi, 2022). There may be no better classroom inside a school than the music classroom for SEL to flourish (Jacobi, 2012). Music education is uniquely positioned to naturally help students become more socially and emotionally competent, while also developing the necessary music skills needed (Varner, 2020).

It has been argued that music classes motivate children to learn and inspire social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. Music education evolved to make socially significant experiences memorable and enjoyable and to make otherwise unbearable experiences bearable, and therefore determined musical experiences are a necessary and natural part of the human condition (Upitis, 2003). Music education and social emotional learning complement each other through multiple properties, including the following: music can be used as an aesthetic experience, music can be for relaxation and imagination, music can be used as emotional stimulus, making music can be a form of self-expression, and making music can be a form of a group experience (Kupana, 2015). These experiences can occur through opportunistic or planned activities in music classrooms (Jacobi, 2012); they often occur naturally through the daily regimens of a music classroom.

The daily regimens and activities in music classrooms have social emotional aspects to them (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020). Activities such as ensemble playing or singing, improvisation, and defining emotions within the music are ways to develop social emotional learning skills within music education. These experiences contribute to the personal wellbeing and social integration of students (Karkou & Glasman, 2004). This occurs through the inclusion of action experiences such as tinkering, encountering, practicing, choosing, and contributing, as well as the inclusion of reflection experiences such as evaluating, connecting, describing, integrating, and envisioning, which all bring about social emotional growth (Upitis, 2003). These

experiences all occur within music classrooms and work to build emotional intelligence, which is linked to success in life and is what makes a person more fully human (Jacobi, 2012).

Music classrooms involve many simple learning activities such as: choosing a partner to imitate a rhythm with; moving together in time; echoing another group; listening to different types of music with an open mind; working together to compose a piece of music; or rehearsing and performing in an ensemble. These are all activities that require students to listen, cooperate, work together, share, and use other interpersonal skills (Jacobi, 2012). Students take music classes during preschool through high school grades, so these emotional learning growth activities occur throughout different ages and learning stages of brain development. The occurrences of these different skills and activities at different stages of development are crucial to the learning and development of social emotional competencies (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020).

The CASEL competencies, which include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, are all present in music education. Through music, self-awareness is raised through a greater understanding and recognition of emotions, as well as mood regulation. Self-management is increased as a result of structured musical experiences that help increase self-discipline, positive development in self-esteem, increased awareness, and increased learning motivation. In music classes, social awareness is heightened with greater empathy, positive effects on sociality, and increases in spontaneous help to others. Relationship skills are increased through participation in joint musical activities, which fosters trust and cooperation, as well as provides an effective way to use expressive communication and practice social control. Finally, responsible decision making

is heightened through this trust and cooperation, as well as an increase in self-esteem, which leads to increased self-efficacy (Varadi, 2022).

Music teachers build relationships and trust through the development of social emotional competencies in their students and are therefore in the perfect position to help students encounter tasks with more strength and skill. Music education allows SEL to be taught in a much more authentic way, because it can be taught through the music. SEL exists within music education, but it is imperative that music teachers make it consistent, structured, and explicit (Edgar, 2019). Music offers many creative and fun ways to help students expand their SEL (Peterson, 2022). Music education helps students to learn how to persevere, work together, and be dedicated and music teachers can help these skills to transfer to all subject areas and parts of life (Edgar, 2019). These naturally occurring aspects of music education could help schools with creative ways to impact students by using music and SEL as an empowerment technique to build community (Varner, 2019).

COVID-19 Pandemic Educational Inconsistencies

A variety of teaching modalities were utilized throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including virtual and hybrid learning. There were also periods where students possibly spent time learning at home due to close contact quarantine periods. These varied learning modalities created inconsistencies in learning, especially to subject areas such as arts education, where much of the learning requires hands-on, active group participation.

Virtual learning is typically a learning environment that is enhanced by using computers and/or the internet both outside and inside the school building. Instruction typically takes place in an online environment, and can be synchronous or asynchronous (Racheva, 2017). Hybrid learning is a combination of face-to-face classroom activities and online educational practices. It

is a synchronous process that happens both physically and remotely. Some sessions may be live simultaneously in the classroom and online, while other learning is done remotely through pre-recorded sessions and content in an asynchronous manner (Benova, 2021).

The virtual and hybrid learning modalities caused a dramatic increase in time spent interacting with technology. The increase in screen time also caused increases in distractibility and sleep, while decreasing time completing physical activity and social interaction (Cockerham et al., 2021). Technology is a necessary learning tool, yet creativity and human input are still also needed to develop strategies and skills for building social bonds in an online environment. Like their students, teachers also experienced transitions and had to learn how to instruct and communicate with students, as well as provide them activities to help with practice and assessment. Students had to adapt to communicating through a variety of online means as well (Cockerham et al., 2021). Because of these transitions and adaptations, practices and approaches varied among teachers, as well as the level of participation in instruction, practice, and assessment among students (Wyse et al., 2020).

In addition to different learning modalities, there was also a period where students were quarantined due to close contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19. Quarantine periods were a strategy used to prevent transmission of the disease, by keeping the person who was a close contact away from others. Students were quarantined five or more days, depending upon their exposure extent and timeline (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Students could also be quarantined multiple times, depending upon a range of factors, leaving them to potentially miss many days of school over time. During this time, absenteeism hurt both academic and social-emotional outcomes of students. The greatest negative impact of

absenteeism on students has been on their social awareness, self-efficacy, and self-management (Santibanez & Guarino, 2021).

Music educators responded to these varied modalities and periods of absenteeism by utilizing social media, video conferencing, and other digital technology to deliver instruction (Sabol, 2021), methods which were only previously used as supplemental components in arts education (Li et al., 2020). Much of teaching and learning in music relies heavily on observation and hands-on participation, with little technology usage. Music educators worked to use a combination of synchronous learning and performance projects, but often, one-on-one teaching and interaction became necessary due to the components and time involved in online teaching as well as sound, video, and other technology difficulties (Li et al., 2020).

COVID-19 Pandemic and Social Emotional Influence in Schools

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the lives and social emotional experiences of every student, with virtually all social activities ceasing at one point (Hamilton et al., 2021). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, children everywhere also suffered from an upheaval to their educational structure. According to Colao et al. (2020), the closure of schools caused a psychological impact on students due to time staying at home with uncertain perspectives for the near future. Furthermore Colao et al. noted children lacked a consistent physical place to share thoughts, hopes, interests, and emotions with peers, all of which help in building empathy, self-confidence, respect, and responsibility (Colao et al., 2020). After school buildings closed and teaching modalities were altered, students reported a dramatic drop in the sense of belonging at school (Hamilton et al. 2021). These changes and inconsistencies left many children with either new mental health issues or exasperated existing challenges (Varghese & Natsuaki, 2021).

A significant portion of young people experienced negative impacts on their mental or social emotional health during the pandemic. In Hamilton et al.'s 2021 report, students specifically mentioned negative effects on their ability to concentrate, feel happy, and make decisions. According to Colao et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic exposed how schools fulfill not only knowledge acquisition, but also satisfy socialization needs of students. Colao et al. noted schools provide a structured setting where students can learn and develop social competencies, and the lack of this setting influenced the mental and physical well-being of students.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children nationwide suffered from disruptions to their educational structure, the medical impact of the virus, family financial implications, and social impacts of living in isolation (Varghese & Natsuaki, 2021). The disruptions to education included a variety of teaching modalities, including virtual and hybrid learning, as well as time periods where students spent time learning at home due to close contact quarantine periods. Absences from school are shown to have negative impacts on both academic and SEL outcomes (Santibanez & Guarino, 2021).

Many teachers were not prepared to teach online. This lack of preparation impacted the teaching ability of the staff, which also impacted student performance (Middleton, 2020). Teachers had to rush to completely redesign school and learning models (Huck & Zhang, 2021). Students fell behind due to this lack of ability and performance on the part of the teacher, as well as sometimes a lack of access to materials needed to learn. Although students may have felt supported by their teachers during the pandemic, many struggled with motivation and engagement (Hamilton et al., 2021). Often large percentages of students did not attend class

sessions due to this lack of motivation and engagement (Middleton, 2020). This added another layer of stress and anxiety on students (Middleton, 2020).

As the COVID-19 pandemic persisted, Hamilton et al. (2021) found the events were taking a greater toll on the well-being of students than in the first year of the pandemic. According to a 2022 report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 87% of public schools reported that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted student social emotional development during the 2021–2022 school year. The same NCES report found 84% of public schools also agreed students’ behavioral development has been negatively impacted by the pandemic closures. Students demonstrated increased misconduct, disrespect, and prohibited use of electronic devices (NCES, 2022). Much of this behavior stems from the worry and stress brought about from the COVID-19 pandemic years (Hamilton et al., 2021). Students thrive in a system where there is social, emotional, and behavioral support (Farrington et al., 2019), and for two to three years this support was interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Current State of SEL in K–12 Public Education

The current state of SEL in K–12 Public Education is being influenced by school-wide program variations, legislation, funding, and politics. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new funding opportunities and more focus on SEL, while also bringing more layers to the ways that SEL is brought into schools.

SEL School Program Variations

Research over the last 25 years in the field of SEL has prompted researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to advocate for the adoption of SEL programs for preK–12 students (Jagers et al., 2019). To be effective, SEL programs need to implement a set of high-quality, focused, research-based teaching strategies for developing SEL competencies and skills

(Jones et al., 2021). There are still gaps in understanding of whether, and in what ways, SEL programs can best advance academic, social, and emotional competence of students (Jager et al., 2019).

SEL programs are designed to build students' social and emotional skills. These skills are often built by teaching through direct instruction, improving school and classroom climate, and influencing student mindsets, including their perceptions of themselves, others, and school (Jones et al., 2021). However, all approaches to SEL are not equal (Mahoney et al., 2021). Some SEL programs are classroom based and some are schoolwide approaches. SEL classroom programs often include three components: explicit SEL instruction, integration of SEL into academic instruction, and a supportive classroom climate (CASEL, 2022d). Schoolwide approaches to SEL often focus on four main areas of activity: building foundational support and planning, strengthening adult SEL competencies and capacity, promoting SEL for students, and reflecting on data for continuous improvement (CASEL, 2022e).

Regardless of whether an SEL program is implemented as a classroom-based or schoolwide initiative, a study conducted by Jones et al. (2021) showed implementation plays a critical role on program impact and effectiveness. A recent shift in common practices for implementation occurred focusing more on equity and how SEL can support all students (Becker et al., 2022). This new approach is known as transformative SEL, which is a process where students build strong and respectful relationships that facilitate co-learning to examine causes of inequity, and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, societal, and community well-being (CASEL, 2022f). Transformative SEL is meant to be culturally affirming by allowing students to embrace their full humanity, and should not be transactional, hierarchal, or

disciplinary (Tawa, 2021). This approach to SEL works to apply an equitable lens by supporting all students and their diverse backgrounds.

Legislation and Funding

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic various legislative actions, including funding appropriation, were passed to assist schools with recovery. In March 2020, \$13.2 billion was allotted through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act for the Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Fund. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act was then passed in early 2021 and provided an additional \$54.3 billion in supplemental funding for the Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Fund. Lastly, in March 2021, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) provided another \$122 billion through the ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2022). Each act and set of funding differed slightly, but all were dedicated to funding items such as interventions to mitigate learning loss, technology needs, staff training, mental health and wellness, and other needed resources (South Carolina Department of Education, 2022).

In many states, a portion of this funding was dedicated to SEL programs, initiatives, and training. In a 2021 article, Duncombe notes the ARP requires states to reserve five percent, and local school districts to reserve twenty percent, of the allotted funding for addressing learning loss through the implementation of evidence-based interventions that respond to the academic and social and emotional needs of students. In the same article Duncombe explains although funding for learning loss was permitted with the initial Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Funds, there was not a dedicated amount specified for that purpose as there was with the ARP Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Funds.

Politics

Until recently, the idea of building social emotional skills was uncontroversial, but currently SEL has become debatable with politicians in some states. These challenges have caused local and state curriculums, as well as SEL programs, to be impacted. In 2022, the Florida Department of Education rejected dozens of math textbooks because they incorporated prohibited topics or unsolicited strategies (Gross, 2022). The topics and strategies being referenced were items such as SEL and critical race theory (CRT) (Gross, 2022). Many of the textbooks included SEL content within the math lessons to assess how students feel about a specific topic. According to an article by Goldstein and Saul (2022), some activists and politicians feel that the inclusion of SEL within other curriculums serve as a delivery mechanism for other controversial pedagogies such as CRT and gender deconstructivism. In the article, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis mentioned SEL was a distraction to learning math. He explained math should be about getting the right answer, and not how you feel about the problem. The authors also discussed a similar situation in the Canyons School District in Utah, where some parents, activists, and politicians created petitions and written reports pertaining to the removal of the SEL program titled Second Step. These stakeholders wanted the program removed because they believed CRT and comprehensive sex education were being taught under the guise of this SEL program. Committee for Children, the company that produced Second Step, argued their SEL program did not include either CRT or sex education.

Politicians and activists around the country have also expressed other concerns with SEL. Schools often use climate surveys to ask students about their beliefs, mindset, and attitudes, which raises concerns about SEL and student privacy (Goldstein & Saul, 2022). Max Eden, a research fellow for the American Enterprise Institute, explained another concern pertaining to the

idea that teachers are encouraged to act more like unlicensed therapists. As teachers address situations they are not trained or equipped to handle, they may cause more harm than good (Tietz, 2022). Lastly, some politicians have expressed concern over the amount of time in learning that was disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, saying schools should spend more time and money on academic learning loss, and not SEL (Goldstein & Saul, 2022).

Current State of SEL in Music Education

There are schoolwide SEL programs, and greater funding available for these programs due to COVID-19 funds, but standards-based instruction in SEL alone will not work in music education (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020). A clear set of standards provides educators and students with student-centered goals, but experiences and relationships play an essential role in human growth, development, and well-being (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020). Each activity or practice in a music classroom includes social-emotional components at the same time. These components become long-term social-emotional competencies (Farrington et al., 2019).

As students reconvene in a more traditional educational setting, they are attempting to acclimate to connecting to the same music again as a team, because if one person makes a mistake in a music ensemble, then everyone makes a mistake (Diamond, 2022). For many students, their only access to music education comes via public schools, and as closures occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students were left without access. But music can help students to now rediscover the skills and social emotional experiences that were lost during the COVID-19 pandemic (Diamond, 2022). Dr. Nina Kraus, director of the Auditory Neuroscience Lab at Northwestern University, explains there is biological evidence that music changes who people are and improves one's ability to learn and communicate (Kraus, 2021). Therefore, the arts are truly essential to the resocialization process post-pandemic.

To bring students back together into a strong community of practice, while also building a sense of teamwork and positive communication, music teachers also have to determine what works best to help students in these areas. Music teachers need to implement activities that meet the social and emotional needs of their students where they are and connect with them through music (O'Connor-Vince, 2022). Music educators realize students want and need music classes to express themselves and work through their feelings of stress and anxiety (Donahue, 2021). In a 2021 survey by the Save the Music Foundation, 86% of teachers and administrators responded that they included SEL tools and strategies into music instruction (Donahue, 2021). But due to the stress and anxiety students have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the instructional inconsistencies, music teachers need to know which tools and strategies will work best to assist students with SEL in their classes.

Hamilton et al. (2021) noted students need help regaining their mental health and well-being, as well as age-appropriate social emotional competencies. Therefore, it is important for teachers to determine how learning environments shaped the experiences of students during the pandemic, so they can implement the most effective supports and interventions. (Hamilton et al., 2021). Farrington and Shewfelt (2020) explain that music experiences offer social emotional experiences simultaneously, but music teachers can always learn more about how to adapt these aspects to the current needs of students.

Theoretical Framework

The connection between SEL and music education can be understood through the lens of the social theory of learning, developed by Etienne Wenger in 1998. This section of the literature review will discuss the theory and its connection to this study in greater detail.

Social Theory of Learning

The social theory of learning, developed by Etienne Wenger in 1998, focuses primarily on learning through social participation. Wenger explained four premises for this theory: people are social beings; knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued activities; knowing is a matter of participating in pursuit of such activities, meaning a person is actively engaged; and people's ability to experience the world and engage with it is ultimately what learning should produce, which is meaning. These four premises establish four main components of the theory. These components include practice, which is learning as doing; community, which is learning as belonging; meaning, which is learning as experience; and identity, which is learning as becoming (Wenger, 1998/2018). Through these four components, social theory of learning works not to separate learning from the becoming of the learner (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

Wenger also focuses on the importance of communities of practice, which are groups where people engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). According to Wenger (1998/2018) participation does not only refer to engagement in activities with certain people, but more importantly refers to learners being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities. Moreover, participation in communities of practice not only shapes what a learner does, but also who the learner is and how they interpret what they do. Within a community of practice, learning can be the reason the community comes together and/or an incidental outcome of the community members' actions (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). Wenger also made a point to explain that a community of practice is not just a group or team, but rather it is a social process of negotiating and gaining competence over time (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

Wenger presents three important characteristics that make up a community of practice: the domain, the community, and the practice. A domain has an identity that is defined by a shared interest and membership implies a commitment and a shared competence to this domain. While pursuing the interest of the domain, the members engage in joint activities, share information, and help each other, which builds the community. Yet a community of practice is not just a community of interest. Members of the community share resources, experiences, and stories, which builds a shared practice and builds practitioners (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). These three characteristics comprise a community of practice.

Within education, the social theory of learning helps explain that the school should not be a self-contained world where students acquire knowledge, and the classroom should not be where the main learning event occurs. This theory implies that life itself is the main learning event. Schools and classrooms play a role in this, but they must serve as a part of that learning (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). Learning is part of an identity of the learner that occurs over space and time, as the learner participates in various experiences and social activities (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

Within music education, students work together in groups as ensembles that are considered communities of practice. The domain in this case is the music ensemble, as the students work together for a shared interest of musical abilities. Students also must show commitment and shared competence. As students in music classes work together for a common goal, they begin to find their creative strengths, have increased self-esteem, and have increased overall achievement (Karkou & Glasman, 2004). As students in these music classes work toward shared goals, they share in joint activities and help each other, which builds the community. Musicians typically learn through discussing, listening, observing, and imitating (Vikkula, 2015).

As students listen to various types of music, exhibit performance or rehearsal skills, cooperate to compose music, collectively play or sing, feel emotions through music, or improvise, they are collaborating to discuss, listen, observe, and imitate (Kupana, 2015). Lastly, because this community of practice is not just a community of interest, the students in music classes also share experiences and stories through musical activities and rehearsals, which then builds music practitioners. Learning comes from life itself, and within music classes students are provided opportunities to make connections to other areas of their lives as well, through these experiences and stories (Karkou & Glasman, 2004).

Methodology

The methodology being used for this study is a qualitative method with a narrative study approach. Qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding human beings' experiences in a humanistic, interpretive approach. Qualitative research begins with assumptions and theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a human or social problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of research also has different methods and types of studies to understand the changing nature of lived social realities (Jackson II et al., 2007). Qualitative researchers select one of these methods of inquiry to then collect data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under investigation. The data are then analyzed to establish patterns or themes. The final report of a qualitative study includes the voices of the participants, an interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to literature or change (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The narrative study approach explores the life of individuals and focuses on telling the stories of individual experiences. This type of qualitative approach works to understand the narrative as giving an account of an event or series of events that are chronologically connected.

As a method, this type of study begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals. The focus of this approach is not just to give credit to individuals and their experiences, but is also an exploration of social, familial, cultural, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals experiences were, and are, shaped and expressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative research has a strong collaborative feature as stories emerge through the interaction of the researcher and the various participants. These stories often contain turning points or transitions that are highlighted by the researcher in the telling of the story (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data is collected mainly through interviews and focus groups, but can also be collected through observations, documents, and pictures (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Although a narrative study approach to qualitative research has many strengths as it works to tell the stories of individual experiences, there are also challenges within this type of study. Researchers must work to collect extensive information about the participants to have the best understanding of the lived experiences. Power relations can also often arise between the researcher and the participants. Therefore, it is imperative to establish that the researcher has the responsibility to collect, analyze, and tell the stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Conclusion

The reviewed literature in this chapter serves to give a greater background and explanation to support the purpose and research questions of this study. Chapter 3 will provide greater detail into the methodology, research design, data collection, and data analysis.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will explain the research design, approach, and methodology applied within this study. This will include information on the role of the researcher, a summary of the research questions, a description of the setting population and sample, methods for data collection and instrumentation planning to be utilized, and plans for data analysis.

Research Design and Approach

The research approach utilized for this study was a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry. Qualitative research begins with assumptions and a theoretical framework that inform a study which addresses the meaning that individuals or groups assign to a social or human problem. This type of research is utilized because an issue needs to be explored, and this exploration is needed to study individuals or a group, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A narrative inquiry was applied to this study because of the need to study the experiences and stories of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative inquiry allows stories to be told through both research and literature (Savin-Baden & Nierkerk, 2007). Individuals can offer in-depth responses about how they have constructed and understood their experience, which provides more detail to the research and data (Jackson et al., 2007). Savin-Baden & Nierkerk (2007) explain this research method is the closest way others can have a shared experience with a group of people.

The purpose of this research study is to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms. The qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry focus was chosen because the data was informed in the study through music teachers telling stories of their lived experiences of teaching students during and after the

COVID-19 pandemic. These stories included information on SEL impacts, SEL needs of students, and the impact of the lack of a community of practice during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as what is being observed post-pandemic.

A pilot study on this topic was conducted on a smaller scale in Spring 2022. The pilot study was conducted as a mixed-methods study, with an exploratory approach. A brief review of literature was also conducted to set a background for the study. Individual interviews were conducted with three educators for the qualitative portion of the study. During the development phase, a survey was created for the quantitative portion of the study. This survey would then be sent out to a larger number of music educators. The results of the mixed-methods pilot study showed more research was needed regarding teachers' perceptions of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on SEL in music classrooms, what teachers identified as current SEL needs of music students post-pandemic, and how teachers can use this information to inform their common practices in the classroom post-pandemic. The need for greater research inspired this study, but with a qualitative approach so that more information and data could be gathered from teachers about their lived experiences and stories during and post-pandemic. According to Jackson et al. (2007), experience is key to qualitative inquiry, and the experiences of the music teachers will be key to gathering data to answer the research questions of this study.

Focus groups were conducted to gather data for this study and serve as the principal source of data. The primary advantage to conducting focus groups is the researcher can observe a large amount of interaction among multiple participants on topics in a limited amount of time (Jackson et al., 2007). The set of questions used in the focus groups focused on the purpose of the study and the research questions. As these questions were asked, participant responses provided detailed insight to each of the specific topics (Jackson et al., 2007). A total of four

focus groups were conducted, with four participants in each group. A total of 16 participants were requested from SCMEA. This included four members from each of the four divisions, which included band, choral, elementary, and orchestra. The 16 participants were also a mixture of elementary and secondary teachers from across the state of South Carolina. Two of the focus groups included two members each from the choral and elementary divisions, and the other two focus groups included two members each from the band and orchestra divisions. All four focus groups were asked the same set of questions. The focus group sessions were recorded, with participant permission.

After the focus groups were completed, the recordings of the sessions were transcribed and uploaded into a program where manual coding was completed to analyze the data for themes. Each focus group transcription was analyzed for themes individually, then the themes in each of the four groups were compared. The coding and themes are being presented as charts and graphs as well to better represent the qualitative data of the study.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study with a narrative approach is to guide the participants in sharing their experiences through a fluid inquiry. As a researcher with a chosen topic of study, the next step is to select individuals to participate in focus groups to tell their stories regarding the study topic. Focus groups are a collaboration between the research, researcher, and the participants. The researcher must collect the data from the focus groups using recordings and transcriptions of the conversations. The researcher will analyze data to organize and discover a collection of themes. Lastly, the researcher will present the findings and narrative in a written form (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this type of research, the researcher relies on the participants to provide in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experiences. Furthermore, a researcher must be aware of the personal role taken in the research, while approaching each study with objectivity and ethical diligence. This more personal role can lead to subjectivity, and therefore the researcher must have greater and more enhanced safeguards. This type of design truly tests trustworthiness of the researcher through this credibility and dependability (Jackson et al., 2007). The researcher must listen to participants, acknowledge the research relationship between themselves and the participants, and acknowledge that people are both living their stories and telling their stories as they reflect on life and explain their story to others (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007).

As the focus groups are conducted, the researcher is provided a time to observe a large amount of interaction among multiple participants on topics within a limited amount of time. As mentioned, the researcher must take on a somewhat personal role in this type of study, while also working to remain in more of a moderator role. The researcher cannot speak for the subjects or guide the conversation in a personal manner (Jackson et al., 2007). At the same time, the goal of narrative inquiries for a researcher is to fully explore the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which the participant's experiences were and are constituted. This allows for a greater understanding of the study within the data and results (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Because of the personal role that the researcher takes on in this study, trustworthiness is necessary to avoid any bias. Trustworthiness in a qualitative study includes credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). Within this study, research findings will be taken only from the participants' viewpoints and responses

within the focus groups, ensuring credibility. Because the 16 participants will be recruited from the SCMEA and include a wide range of elementary, middle, and high school teachers from across the state of South Carolina, the results will be transferable to other educators within the state. Including a larger number of participants in the focus groups who can evaluate the findings over time will also allow for dependability. The data from the focus groups will also be confirmed through multiple rounds of coding.

For reflexivity purposes, limitations and biases of the researcher can be included, but cannot influence responses. As a music teacher who has taught during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, my lens is not only that of a researcher, but also a music teacher. My role, experiences, and beliefs may impact my analysis, but through triangulation and member checking, any bias will be eliminated. There are various categories of reflexivity, including personal, relational, methodological, contextual, and disciplinary. Each of these types can impact the researcher's role in the research through the formation of the research topic and questions, data collection, research methods, context of the responses, and approaches to research (Humphreys et al., 2021). The researcher is the instrument and can shape the knowledge, therefore it is crucial to ensure there is no bias from my input as a researcher and a music teacher.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were designed to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the state of social emotional learning and communities of practice in music classrooms post-pandemic to improve teacher common practices. The research questions are:

RQ1: What current SEL needs of students are teachers observing in music classrooms?

RQ2: What are common practices music teachers find helpful to utilize in assisting current SEL and communities of practice needs for students in their classrooms?

RQ3: What influence did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms from the teacher perspective?

Setting Population and Sample

The participants in this study were a group of K–12 music educators in South Carolina who are members of the SCMEA, and taught during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. These educators were selected from the four main divisions of the SCMEA, which include: band, choral, elementary, and orchestra. There is an educator who is the leader of each of these divisions, and this person was asked for a list of recommended teachers who could then be asked to be a part of the focus groups. From each list provided by the division leader, four educators were asked to participate in the different focus groups. Sampling was purposeful and convenient as participants were purposefully selected from these lists to ensure representation from each geographic region of the state. Moreover, care was taken to ensure educators serving elementary, middle, and high school students were all represented. This provided 16 participants to be questioned within four focus groups. Two focus groups included two members from the choral division and two members from the elementary divisions; the other two focus groups included two members from the band division and two members from the orchestra division.

Conducting smaller focus groups where participants are separated by teaching and classroom similarities was advantageous to this study because the interaction among the participants yielded the best information through these shared similar experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The cooperation with a lower number of group members also helped in yielding best responses to the questions, whereas one-on-one interviews do not allow for as much

interaction and larger focus groups make discussions more challenging due to the amount of responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Data collection was completed through focus group sessions. Focus groups are group interviews that rely on the interaction within the group (Jackson et al., 2007). A set of questions was asked to address the purpose and research questions of the study (Appendix A). Questions were developed from the findings of the pilot study that required further research, through the literature review, and from information directly pertaining to the purpose and research questions. The questions asked by the researcher were utilized to provide insight into these specific topics (Jackson et al., 2007).

To collect the data in this study a total of 16 focus group participants were selected from the membership of the SCMEA, who also taught during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Four participants were selected from each of the four main divisions of the SCMEA, including band, choral, elementary, and orchestra. The elementary division includes teachers in Grades K–5, while the band, choral, and orchestra divisions include teachers in Grades 6–12. Four focus groups were conducted with four members in each group. Two groups were comprised of two elementary division members and two choral division members, and the other two groups were comprised of two band division members and two orchestra division members. The focus group division combinations were decided based upon similarities between the various groups. Elementary music and choral music classes both involve singing and performance, and band and orchestra music classes both involve instrumental performance. Each of the four focus groups were asked the same set of questions.

The focus groups lasted 45 minutes, were conducted virtually via Zoom or in person, and were recorded with consent from the participants. As the questions were asked of the group, the researcher had to take on a somewhat personal role in this type of study, while also working to remain in a moderator role to guide the session (Jackson et al., 2007). Question responses for each group varied depending on the teachers, their lived experiences, and the conversation amongst the participants. Recordings from the focus group sessions were transcribed using Otter.ai and decoded in the program Dedoose to evaluate for main themes. The transcriptions and recordings are being saved in a protected and locked file until all aspects of the study and dissertation are complete. After this, the files will be deleted for protection of the participants.

Data Analysis

The interview recordings and data from the four focus groups were transcribed using the online program Otter.ai. The transcriptions were then imported into the program Dedoose. Dedoose is a computer program that is used for qualitative and mixed-methods research. The program allows for data management and storage, excerpting and coding, and analysis (Dedoose, 2022a). Each set of focus group transcripts were evaluated for themes discovered in the responses. To evaluate for these themes, an initial round of manual coding was completed to look for a set of foundational codes. These foundational codes were created and developed through the theoretical framework and the three characteristics of a community of practice, which include domain, community, and practice (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). The foundational codes include group and ensemble participation (domain), collaboration and teamwork (community), and common teacher practices (practice).

The findings from this first run of foundational codes were compared across the four focus groups to evaluate for any similarities and/or differences. Sub codes were then established

to evaluate the data on a deeper level. From these initial evaluations, a second coding evaluation was completed with the sub codes developed and discovered from the initial run of the foundational codes. Each set of transcriptions from the focus groups were re-coded with the addition of these developed sub codes. After the codes and themes are discovered through coding from each of the four focus groups, the themes were then compared to discover main and sub themes across all four groups. Charts and graphs from Dedoose were utilized, including frequency tables, code weight, frequency charts, and bar charts. These charts are all linked to the underlying qualitative data (Dedoose, 2022c).

Once the coding process was complete, the data also needed to be validated. A researcher must check the accuracy of the qualitative data to ensure validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, validity relates to whether the findings of the study are true and certain (Guion, 2002). Being true means that the findings of the study accurately reflect the real situation and being certain means that the findings can be backed by evidence (Guion, 2002). Validation for this study took place through evaluations of trustworthiness, member checking, and triangulation.

Member checking is a method of returning a transcript of a focus group or analyzed data to participants to ensure that all responses are correct (Birt et al., 2016). Allowing participants to review their responses enhances the accuracy of the data (Birt et al., 2016). Participants would only check the accuracy of their own statements to ensure that there are no adjustments made to the responses of other participants in the focus group. Triangulation involves considering how different data sources can be used together in planning and completing the study. Evidence from different resources is used to bring light to a theme or perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Environmental triangulation will be utilized for this study. This type of triangulation involves

evaluating if findings are the same as environmental factors change (Guion, 2002). During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, environments and settings of schools and classrooms changed. Many of the questions being asked within the study are about how the COVID-19 pandemic and the instructional inconsistencies influenced SEL in music classrooms post-pandemic. In order to understand this, changes in the environment from during and after the pandemic must be evaluated for similarities or differences during these two periods.

Protection of Participants

Multiple layers of protection were incorporated to reduce risk and protect participants of this study. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) request was completed and approved by the Coastal Carolina University IRB Board prior to data collection. As part of this process, participants completed an Informed Consent for Human Subject Research Participation form and a Photography, Video, or Audio Recording Authorization form. The IRB request and these documents serve as one level of protection for participants.

Participants were also informed of protective measures taken regarding their privacy and confidentiality. Privacy in research refers to the control that the participants have in the research study (Anderson, 2019). Participants had the ability to choose whether to participate in the study or not and also had the option to stop participating at any time. Settings and questions were limited to what is essential and purposeful to the study also. Confidentiality refers to protecting personally identifiable data of the participants (Anderson, 2019). Personal identities and information were not disclosed in the study or findings. Pseudonyms will be assigned to participants to protect personally-identifying information while allowing accurate presentation of data and effective discussion of findings. Participants were notified of the process of data collection in advance through the IRB paperwork and consents that were completed.

Conclusion

The chapter describes the methodology of the study, which led to the data collection and analysis. The qualitative method, with a narrative inquiry approach, works to tell the stories and lived experiences of the participants, to then provide answers the research questions. These responses will guide the findings and next steps of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this research study was to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of social emotional learning in music classrooms. By determining what factors have influenced the social emotional skills and learning of K–12 music students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, this study has determined some of the current needs of these students, as well as how to best assist teacher instructional practices regarding these student needs. Three research questions were utilized to guide the study:

RQ1: What current SEL needs of students are teachers observing in music classrooms?

RQ2: What are common practices music teachers find helpful to utilize in assisting current SEL and communities of practice needs for students in their classrooms?

RQ3: What influence did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms from the teacher perspective?

This section presents focus group procedures, tools utilized for research, and data analysis regarding how the focus group responses apply to the purpose and research questions.

Analysis Procedure

Procedures and Tools

Focus groups served as the primary data collection method for this study. Teachers who are also members of the SCMEA were recruited to participate in focus groups and answer questions regarding learning experiences with students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in K–12 music classes. A combination of band, choral, elementary, and orchestra teachers were included to gather data from various age levels, types of music classes, and geographical locations within the state. The study ended up having three focus group sessions, with a total of

nine participants across the three sessions. Two sessions were conducted virtually via Zoom and one session was conducted in-person. Each session lasted approximately forty-five minutes. The virtual sessions were recorded in Zoom and the recordings were then uploaded in the Otter.ai program for transcription purposes. The in-person session was recorded with the Otter.ai phone application for transcription purposes.

Focus Group One was comprised of four participants, including a middle school band teacher (Teacher One), high school band teacher (Teacher Two), middle school orchestra teacher (Teacher Three), and high school orchestra teacher (Teacher Four). *Focus Group Two* was comprised of three participants, including two elementary music teachers (Teachers Five and Six) and one high school choral teacher (Teacher Seven). *Focus Group Three* was comprised of two participants, including one high school band teacher (Teacher Eight) and one high school orchestra teacher (Teacher Nine) (see Table 1). All teachers who participated met the initial criteria, including being members of SCMEA; teaching during and after the COVID-19 pandemic; and teaching either band, chorus, elementary music, or orchestra. The participants were also from a variety of geographical areas within the state of South Carolina.

Table 1

Teacher	Teacher Information
Teacher One	Middle School Band Teacher Teacher for 17 years
Teacher Two	High School Band Teacher Teacher for 25 years
Teacher Three	Middle School Orchestra Teacher Teacher for six years
Teacher Four	High School Orchestra Teacher Teacher for 15 years
Teacher Five	High School Chorus Teacher Teacher for 19 years
Teacher Six	Elementary Music Teacher Teacher for 16 years

Teacher Seven	Elementary Music Teacher Teacher for 28 years
Teacher Eight	High School Band Teacher Teacher for 30 years
Teacher Nine	High School Orchestra Teacher Teacher for 18 years

Once the transcriptions were completed in the Otter.ai program, the transcriptions were then downloaded into Microsoft Word for coding and thematic development purposes. To evaluate for these codes and themes, an initial round of manual coding was completed to look for a set of foundational codes. These foundational codes were created and developed through the theoretical framework and the three characteristics of a community of practice, which include domain, community, and practice (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). The foundational codes included group and ensemble participation (domain), collaboration and teamwork (community), and common teacher practices (practice).

The three foundational codes were used on the first round of coding for each focus group. These themes were then used to develop subcodes for each of the three foundational codes. The subcodes from each focus group were compared to discover what would then become the main themes within the data across all three focus groups. Coding was then manually run again to determine the occurrences of each of these main themes. Coding was completed with highlighting tools within Microsoft Word. The main themes that were identified and developed through the coding process were: *social behaviors* (including anxiety and defiance), *maturity*, *accountability and expectations*, *coping skills*, *planning and pacing*, *flexibility*, *community*, and *engagement*.

Adjustments and Revisions

Some adjustments and revisions were made to the original focus group plans for various reasons such as low participant response rates and more accurate options for coding procedures. Lower numbers of participants resulted in three focus groups with nine total participants due to lack of responses from multiple emails and calls sent to many music teachers across the state. The band, elementary, and orchestra leaders within each division of SCMEA shared six to eight recommendations of teachers to recruit within the state, but from each of these lists, only three to four responded. The choral leader never responded after multiple contacts, so therefore other choral teachers across the state were contacted and only one was available and willing to participate.

For coding, the initial plan was to utilize the program Dedoose to scan for foundational codes and sub codes. After beginning the process, it was discovered that transcription files could be directly downloaded from the Otter.ai program into Microsoft Word, which made for an easier process that was more accurate. Microsoft Word was then used to run multiple coding scans with the highlighter tool and different color markings for each theme and code.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this research study was to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of social emotional learning in music classrooms. By determining what factors have influenced the social emotional skills and learning of K–12 music students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, this study s to determine current needs of these students, while best assisting common teacher instructional practices. Through the focus group coding and thematic development process, the main themes identified were *social behaviors* (including anxiety and defiance), *maturity, accountability and expectations, coping skills,*

planning and pacing, flexibility, community, and engagement. These themes that emerged have been identified and will be explained in Chapters Four and Five.

Social Behaviors (Anxiety and Defiance)

Various changes in social behaviors are part of the social and emotional influence teachers are noticing post-pandemic due to the inconsistencies of the COVID-19 pandemic. Anxiety was mentioned as one of the main influences on students from the COVID-19 pandemic. The feelings of anxiety caused challenges during the virtual and hybrid periods of the COVID-19 pandemic and were observed to have caused challenges to behaviors in the classroom post-pandemic. Students have also been showing defiant behaviors in respect to completing tasks and requests asked of them by their teachers.

Anxiety

A large increase in anxiety is manifesting in students currently due to the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was explained that the anxiety is being shown in the form of tantrums, panic attacks, meltdowns, and shutdowns. This “uptick in anxiety was incredibly noticeable” (Teacher Three) and some students have been hospitalized or have threatened to hurt themselves due to the amounts of anxiety being experienced (Teacher Two). Students are incredibly self-conscious and then have trouble playing in front of others because of this level of anxiety. As teachers provide musical feedback to a student’s performance or role in the ensemble, some students are having trouble receiving and accepting this feedback and take it as an insult or that “they are not good enough” or “do not measure up in some way” (Teacher Nine). This reaction from the student then disrupts their participation in the ensemble throughout the rest of class. Students often immediately feel that a task of trying a new musical instrument or skill is now too challenging, “quit before even trying” (Teacher Six), shut down, and even

have meltdowns or tantrums. These outbursts in behavior are then disruptive to class time and the entire ensemble as well. Because of these feelings of anxiety, students seem to need instant gratification, therefore when something is hard, mental “shut-down” may occur.

Virtual and Hybrid Attendance. Many participants also explained that during the educational inconsistencies of the COVID-19 pandemic, including virtual and hybrid teaching, many students would not check in or show up for virtual meetings. Teachers would email students and check in on them because after the first few weeks, many of them would be absent without excuse. Teachers also explained that they shared with their students that this was not because of grading, but to purely check in and find out “whether they were ok or not” (Teacher One). Attendance to virtual meetings dropped as time went on, because many students “did not want to be on camera” because of self-image (Teacher Four) or did not want to show up due to anxiety reasons. These absences have had negative impacts on students post-pandemic, as this anxiety has caused some students to avoid working together or performing in front of each other. In addition, these absences have been a destructive force on intrinsic motivation and student’s sense of belonging to their peer group. Santibanez and Guarino (2021) explained that absences from school show negative impacts on SEL outcomes, just as these teachers are witnessing in their students currently.

Defiance

Students have also been showing a higher level of defiance in reference to tasks being asked of them during class, whether playing tests, assignments, or rehearsal procedures. Teachers explained that the students may even respond with verbal phrases such as “just chill out” (Teacher Four), which is showing that the students feel that they can talk to the teacher in a defiant and disrespectful manner. Students are also showing an “air of defiance” (Teacher Three)

and these actions of defiance are not only being shown through disrespect, lack of work ethic, and comments toward peers and teachers, but are also showing through body language. Students often sit in class and look uninterested in participating, where body language of this type did not exhibit as much before the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of this behavior of defiance relates back to the anxiety and stress that students have felt over the COVID-19 pandemic years (Hamilton et al., 2021).

Social Behavior Overview

These changes in social behaviors due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted the current state of SEL in music classrooms. The behaviors being expressed, such as meltdowns, defiance, tantrums, and lack of interest, are impacting how class can be structured in the post-pandemic world. Due to these behaviors, additional time must be taken during class to address concerns, which can disrupt the pacing and flow of the lesson. These social behaviors also impact how students are reacting to other students and working with others. Students in music ensembles must work together for a common goal as a community of practice, but as anxiety and defiance appear through various behaviors, this disrupts the function of the community.

Maturity

Another current SEL student need post-pandemic due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic are increased maturity levels. Students are more immature post-pandemic, not only in behavior, but academically as well. Many students no longer have the sense of personal responsibility regarding due dates. When an activity or assignment is due, it needs to be “turned in at that certain time” (Teacher One). Students are also struggling with the understanding of how to be respectful to other peers and adults, as well as the “inability to empathize” (Teacher

Three). Having two to three years of educational inconsistencies, it has been revealed that students have “lost at least two grades of knowledge” socially and academically (Teacher Six). Research has noted that because students lacked a consistent physical place to learn with peers during the COVID-19 pandemic, their skills in building empathy, respect, self-confidence, and responsibility were impacted (Colao et al., 2020). This level of immaturity is now influencing the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms, as teachers work to teach students the necessary social behaviors that they missed. It is a challenge to work in a community of practice such as the musical ensemble, without the necessary social skills of that age group.

Accountability and Expectations

Throughout the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, students often had a lowered understanding and feeling of accountability due to the lessening of expectations from teachers and schools. Students lost a large amount of structure in their school lives during the educational inconsistencies of the COVID-19 pandemic, which lowered accountability levels coming back into the classroom post-pandemic. Students are often accomplishing whatever is just “good enough” (Teacher One) and are not ashamed if they do not know something. During the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, students caught on and realized that grades did not matter as much and would say that they were not doing anything “because they would just get passed anyways” (Teacher Two). Because of these lowered expectations, students did not always show up to virtual meetings and began to realize that their “teachers were not allowed to mark them as absent” (Teacher Nine) during this time. Coming back post-pandemic, students are starting to get back into a productive routine that has structure and purpose. Simultaneously, this lack of accountability and lowered levels of expectations for some during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to students needing greater time to get used to structure while progressing forward in a post-

pandemic world. Students who have not gotten back into the post-pandemic “swing of things are unfortunately not meeting the standard and are getting squished” from the lack of structure (Teacher Eight). The return of this structure and accountability has in turn caused some of the social behaviors, such as anxiety and defiance, over more pressure in assignments and grading.

Coping Skills

A major SEL need of music students right now are coping skills. As students are working through feelings of anxiety, they do not seem to have the coping skills to handle these emotions. Students have an “extreme lack of coping skills” and “when they get hit with something, they don’t have a process to overcome that obstacle, they don’t figure it out, they just break down” (Teacher Two). Because students are lacking coping skills, teachers feel that they are having to make it a common practice to review basic classroom norms and procedures for student functionality. Students do not have the same coping mechanisms that they did before, and they need constant reassurance, “reinforcement, and one-on-one attention” (Teacher Seven) from teachers. The lack of coping mechanisms has created a challenge for students regarding overcoming past feelings of judgement from other students compared to pre COVID-19 times. Teachers feel that they must play “more of parental and counselor role now” (Teacher Eight) than they ever did before and are have to work to include how to cope with various social and emotional situations within their common practices in their classrooms. Students that do not learn these needed coping skills will have difficulty acclimating to the classroom resulting in an educational experience that is negatively impacted through these social behaviors and outbursts.

Planning and Pacing

Pacing is behind in music classrooms and ensembles due to the years of inconsistencies and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher common practices changed during virtual

and hybrid periods because much of the ensemble rehearsal practice could not occur in these settings but are now also changing due to the current SEL needs of students. “What we teach is especially difficult, you know, to do from a distance” (Teacher Seven) and caused many things to have to be simplified. These changes caused students to be behind from where they should be at this point, due to the slower pace of instruction. Many teachers share in the worry that their students will go on to the next grade and participate in new musical ensembles but will be behind on the musical skills and content knowledge that they should have (Teacher Six).

Due to the educational inconsistencies of the pandemic, changes in how musical ensembles had to operate during the pandemic were necessary and teachers spent a great deal of extra time planning. Hours of extra work went in to creating new lessons (Teacher Three) and teachers had to make changes to long range plans due to the pandemic restrictions. Because music teachers often could not allow students to touch or share instruments during the COVID-19 pandemic, some teachers had to travel to each academic teacher’s classroom on a cart. This created planning challenges due to lack of space, amount of noise disruption within the school, and less musical resources (Teacher Five). In addition, not being able to use instruments or having the ability to sing, created the need for instructional activities requiring technology. Therefore, teachers had to utilize reflection and written assignments at a much higher rate during virtual and hybrid instruction. Many music teachers worked with programs such as PowerPoint, to provide more detailed instruction, or musical programs such as SmartMusic. These are activities that music teachers explained they would “never do” (Teacher Eight) as part of their normal everyday music instruction.

On the opposite side of these challenges, teachers also explained how they were able to focus on standards, skills, and student enjoyment that they normally did not have the time to

focus on. Focus could be placed on some musical standards, such as music evaluation, composition, and world music, creating new opportunities teachers normally did not have the time to address due to the normal ensemble demands. Many musical competitions and events were canceled during the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore the competition preparation stress was removed. Teachers shared that they could actually “focus on what would keep kids happy and in musical ensembles enjoying themselves” and “not worry about all the pressure stuff” (Teacher Two). The normal music ensemble demands were scaled back, which allowed time for teachers to really invest in children and making music more fun and enjoyable. Teachers had “more time on music and getting to connect” (Teacher Four) with students. This helped in removing some pressure and anxiety on all stakeholders.

Because of these changes that had to occur within musical ensembles due to the educational inconsistencies of the COVID-19, causing pacing to be slower, teachers have been working with their students to catch up on the skills that they “normally would have already known at this point” (Teacher One). Teachers are having to teach things now that the students normally would already know and understand at this point. Being a few years behind has caused the challenge of how to plan for performances this year, as well as how to plan for long term goals. Some students are individually “not progressing at all, while some are flying” (Teacher Two), which has presented a challenge to plan for the music ensemble as a whole.

Flexibility

When the participants in the focus group sessions were asked whether they felt music teachers needed to change what they are doing to address the current SEL needs of their students, the “first word that came to mind was flexibility” (Teacher Nine). A necessary common practice that teachers found helpful in addressing the current post-pandemic needs of students was to be

flexible and be able to monitor and adjust to student needs. Music teachers have to change and adjust to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, or the communities of practice will face challenges. Many of the skills music educators teach should remain the same, but it will also be necessary for educators to be flexible and adapt with the changes from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as educational and political changes. Teachers have already had to change and will have to continue to monitor and adjust to the current SEL needs of students. Teachers must change, because “if we refuse to, we’re not going to get anything done” (Teacher Six). Experienced teachers take time to “reflect on the outcomes” of their lessons and classes and then are flexible and “constantly make changes” (Teacher Eight). “There are things that are evolving, and teachers are going to have to adapt and change as well” (Teacher Three). An example of this would include flexibility in common practices to help assist the current post-pandemic SEL needs of students.

Community

Students in music education classes work together and observe through their environment and interaction with others in communities of practice, and then use these experiences to build a better understanding of others, develop helpful habitual patterns of behaviors, and build closer relationships with those in their community, to design the best creations possible (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020). Because of the educational inconsistencies of the COVID-19 pandemic, these community experiences were interrupted and were lacking, which left some students feeling like they did not belong (Peterson, 2022). Students felt like they “had no purpose” (Teacher Nine). A community is created among students and teachers in musical ensembles and had to be created in a different manner during the COVID-19 pandemic. But these adjustments in the creation of the communities have impacted the communities of practice as we move forward post-pandemic.

During the virtual meetings of the COVID-19 pandemic, many music teachers purely focused on checking in with the students, having fun, and reminding them that these musical ensembles “are where their people are” (Teacher One). Because the students had been online and then had to be spread apart when they came back in person, students “did not know how to connect and make friends” (Teacher Five), showing what impact the lack of these communities truly had. Even though the students were unsure how to connect, some still wanted to be with others because they had been separated for so long. Other students are now wanting to work alone more often than before, because of the familiarity of completing work individually for such a long period of time.

Many music educators work diligently in their classroom to create a space where all students feel safe and where there is no criticism. This is a space “where even though students make mistakes, true learning occurs because of this safe space” (Teacher Eight). Along these same lines, in these classroom environments, these teachers work to motivate students through working together in a group to get better, while providing autonomy. This helps to “show the students that they have a purpose and are being taken care of” (Teacher Nine). This theme in responses shows that music teachers and music ensembles create a community for students to be a part of. Teachers explained that creating a renewed sense of community is a common practice that students need as they return to school in this post-pandemic time due to their current social and emotional needs. When students came back, the “teachers have worked to create an even more supportive environment for the students to feel safe and not judged” (Teacher Nine).

Engagement

During the COVID-19 pandemic, engaging students was often a challenge, and therefore students are now showing a continued lack of engagement. There was a “high level of

disengagement” (Teacher Two) during the various teaching modalities of the COVID-19 pandemic. Music classrooms were forced to operate in different ways during the virtual and hybrid teaching, creating a scenario where students were “bored a lot” (Teacher Nine). The attention span of students lessened and was “like the length of a TikTok video” (Teacher Five). As time went on, students were on virtual meetings and either had the camera off or were “laying in their bed” (Teacher Nine) and not paying attention. Students were very unmotivated as well, and this has continued post-pandemic. As students have returned to school post-pandemic, it is often challenging to “tell whether they are engaged or not because of current body language” (Teacher One) or social behaviors being exhibited. The lack of engagement from students often then led to lack of motivation. Therefore, a current SEL need of students is a need for teachers to help encourage more engagement and motivation, which can be done through updated common teacher practices and activities.

Conclusion

Through the coding and thematic development process, eight main themes were discovered from the three focus groups and nine participants. These main ideas included: *social behaviors* (including anxiety and defiance), *maturity, accountability and expectations, coping skills, planning and pacing, flexibility, community, and engagement*. The data analysis has shown many influences that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms from the teacher perspective. The pandemic has impacted student anxiety levels, maturity levels, understanding of expectations, accountability levels, coping skills, pacing, feelings of community with the ensemble, and engagement. Because of these influences, the data analysis has shown that the current SEL needs of students that teachers are observing in music classrooms are coping mechanisms, to help deal with various social behaviors including

anxiety; help with advancing maturity levels back to where they should be at this time, instead of two to three years behind; and greater engagement and motivation levels. These needs have helped teachers realize new common practices such as coping skills within lessons and making changes and adjustments to lessons that allow for greater student engagement and motivation. The next chapter will discuss a greater interpretation of the findings, implications for actions and future studies, and a reflection on the data.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this research study was to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of social emotional learning in music classrooms. The social and emotional impacts and educational inconsistencies, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, showed a need for an investigation into the current social emotional needs of students in music classes. By determining what has influenced the social emotional skills and learning of K–12 music students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the current SEL needs were then evaluated. The findings of this study will be utilized to determine common practices for music education classrooms that can be used by teachers and schools to address the social emotional learning needs of these students. This study began by discussing the need for this information and the research questions that would be guiding the study. A detailed review of literature on the history and overview of SEL in K–12 public education, music education and SEL, COVID-19 pandemic educational inconsistencies, COVID-19 pandemic and social emotional influence in schools, and the current state of SEL in K–12 public education was then given. Following the review of the literature, a description of the methodology being used for the study was described. After the methodology section, the data analysis and findings were explained. This chapter includes a listing of each research question and a discussion of the answer for each research question based on the findings from the focus group analysis. The chapter continues with a discussion on the implication of this study for music educators, as well as implications for further study. The chapter then concludes with a reflection on the study experience.

Research Questions and Findings

This section discusses the results and findings as they relate to the study's problem statement, literature review, and theoretical framework.

Discussion of Findings

RQ1: What current SEL needs of students are teachers observing in music classrooms?

To answer research question one, responses and themes from the focus groups and their participants were analyzed. The main SEL need that was described many times by various focus group participants was that of coping skills. As we progress in a post-pandemic world, students are showing high levels of anxiety but are exhibiting a huge lack of coping skills. When the students are acquiring new musical concepts, data suggests that these concepts become too hard or challenging, resulting in student panic attacks and meltdowns, because they do not know how to cope with their anxiety. Participants shared that students are having these anxiety attacks much more often than they did before the COVID-19 pandemic. In musical ensembles, students must work together in a community of practice. Students in music education classes work and observe through their environment and interaction with others in this community of practice, and then use these experiences to build a better understanding of others (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020). This interaction, however, with others is interrupted when students in the community do not know how to control their emotions. Participants explained that students are showing the greatest need in how to cope with the feelings of anxiety that they are experiencing from the pandemic.

The lack of coping skills is also relative to the lack of social and academic maturity. Due to the two to three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, many students are several years behind in

their maturity level. For example, a fifth-grade student could be exhibiting social and academic behaviors as that of a second or third grade student. This lack of maturity impacts the students and how they can or cannot handle certain experiences. Many of the focus group participants explained that students need assistance in bringing maturity levels to an age-appropriate level. Students in musical ensembles must work together for a common goal, typically their social awareness is heightened with greater empathy and increased relationship skills (Varadi, 2022). To make learning possible, a learner must act at the potential level of development, which is not possible without community-based support (Virkkula, 2015). Yet post-pandemic, the social awareness and relationships skills of students have been negatively impacted by anxiety and immaturity, showing a need for teachers to teach and help students with how to cope and how to become more mature.

Another student need post-pandemic is more acquired knowledge and development on how to work together within a community. According to Colao et al. (2020), schools satisfy socialization needs of students and provide a structured setting where students can learn and develop social competencies. As participants mentioned, because students were away from each other during virtual and hybrid learning and had to stay six feet apart when returning to school, many students still do not know how to make friends, work together, and many prefer to work alone. On the opposite side of this, some students try too hard to constantly work in groups. Students have a lack of understanding how to work together as a team, and this is a need they are showing in music classes because most of what is done is through ensemble and community work.

RQ2: What are common practices music teachers find helpful to utilize in assisting current SEL and communities of practice needs for students in their classrooms?

The current SEL and communities of practice needs for students have shown to be assistance with coping skills and increased maturity levels, while also working on how to better work together in a community. To assist in these areas, the participants almost all mentioned that being flexible is a necessary common practice. Music teachers must be able to monitor and adjust to the current needs of their students. Students and teachers went through two to three years of educational inconsistencies, that caused a loss of the same amount of time in social skills, maturity levels, and academic knowledge. Participants explained that although there are some common practices that we need to keep the same, such as high standards and expectations and pushing students to be the best they can be. Yet within this, participants explained that it is more important now than ever before because of the COVID-19 pandemic influences, that music teachers must be able to be flexible in adjusting to where students are currently and changing plans and lessons to accommodate for current student needs. If this flexibility is absent from the classroom, one participant explained that music educators will not be able to meet learning goals. Because of the changes from the pandemic, music educators cannot expect that they can do things the way that they always have and have the same outcomes.

Within being flexible, music educators also need to include activities within lessons that work to teach and build coping skills, as well as activities that increase engagement. The main influence that participants mentioned COVID-19 has had on student post-pandemic is major anxiety, yet participants explained that students have been left without coping skills for this anxiety. When asked, most participants shared that their schools have some type of schoolwide SEL program that occurs some time each day or week outside of music class, but clearly the need for coping skills still needs to be addressed. The lack of coping skills causes students to have outbursts, which then impacts group work, ensemble rehearsals, and interactions with peers

and teachers. Music teachers will need to be flexible and adjust their lessons to include activities that teach music standards but also teach coping skills. Teachers may even need to take time to teach coping skills only, because without these, the music activities needed in a community of practice will not be possible because students will have difficulty working together.

Music teachers also may need to adjust activities and lessons to provide a higher level of engagement and motivation during this post-pandemic time. As several participants mentioned, students were disengaged, bored, and unmotivated during much of the virtual and hybrid learning periods because of the drastic change in the delivery of music curriculum. Students could not play instruments or sing, could not work together, and spent a great deal of time using technology instead of participating in the hands-on learning that traditionally occurs in music classrooms. Many participants mentioned that as students returned to school they were placed under COVID-19 restrictions. Performances could occur again but many of the competition demands were removed, and teachers could focus more on simply making music and having fun with their students without pressure. These are ideas suggested to music teachers post-pandemic as well. While structure and expectations are necessary, music teachers can adjust and include check-ins, games, and music choice, to encourage greater student engagement and motivation.

Within these variety of activities, students need greater structure and expectations than they had during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants mentioned how during the pandemic, students realized they did not always have to turn in work or show up to virtual meetings and would still pass the class or grade level. Students are now struggling post-pandemic with the expectations returning to those of the pre-pandemic time. A common practice that music teachers can continue to use is to keep classroom structure and classroom expectations so that students are aware that these are non-negotiable. Within communities of practice,

students develop helpful habitual patterns of behavior (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020), because they must work together in an ensemble to learn and have the best outcomes. Much of this structure, which builds behavior patterns, was lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, creating a need for music teachers need to bring this structure back. This can be accomplished by keeping a daily structure in class each day (warm-up, rehearsal, debrief) and by keeping set classroom expectations that all students must follow.

As music teachers focus their common practices in these areas, the area of community and team building should also improve. All these student needs impact the ensemble, but as teachers work to include a focus on building coping skills, raising engagement and motivation, and increasing structure and expectations, students should then start to have a greater sense of how to work together and build a positive classroom community.

RQ3: What influence did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms from the teacher perspective?

The participants mentioned many influences that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms. The biggest influence that all participants mentioned was students now have much higher levels of anxiety. Students struggle with feedback, challenging tasks, and higher levels of expectations in ways that they could previously, and in return they are having panic attacks and meltdowns, are shutting down in class, and are acting with defiance toward peers and teachers. Research has shown widespread impact on students' mental health, with a high percentage of students experiencing negative impacts (Hamilton et al., 2021). The anxiety is showing negative impacts in music classrooms, as it is the cause for classroom disruptions, trouble working together as a community, and a lack of self-efficacy. Music classes often require active participation through activities such as ensemble

performance, creating, and designing (Farrington & Shewfelt, 2020). Many of these skills are negatively impacted when such a large percentage of students are being impacted by anxiety. Within this, students also have a lack of coping skills about how to handle this anxiety.

Participants of the focus groups also mentioned that students are showing large amounts of immaturity post-pandemic, socially and academically. Because students were away from each other and experienced educational inconsistencies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some students are behaving as they are two to three years younger than they are. This lack of maturity is showing impacts in social skills and academic knowledge. Students became accustomed to being alone or separated in distance from others, that many students have now exhibited struggles when having to work together with peers. Participants explained that students regularly have trouble musically performing in front of others, receiving feedback, and trying new musical tasks that are challenging. Because students missed two to three years of social experiences and have been dealing with anxiety, their maturity levels are not where they should be, causing labor with various social interactions post-pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants explained that many schools lowered expectations and levels of accountability for students because of the educational inconsistencies. Participants shared how many schools did not require heavy grading of assignments and did not keep track of absences on virtual meetings. Because of these lowered expectations, as students have returned post-pandemic, many are assuming that expectations are still lowered. In addition, students do not understand the level of accountability now needed, also due to anxiety and lower maturity levels. Participants also explained that students are not embarrassed or let down when they do not know certain musical skills, and just assume that they will pass whether they try to give their best effort or not. Most schools have gone back to the expectations from prior to the

COVID-19 pandemic and students are having trouble adjusting to this change post-pandemic. If students have not been able to adjust to these changes in expectations, participants explained that the students are getting left to fall farther behind.

Limitations

Although this study was designed to include a thoughtful qualitative study process, as well as validation procedures, there are still limitations present in the study. The primary limitation of this study pertains to the sample size of participants within the focus groups. A sample size should be large enough to sufficiently describe the data within the study. At the same time, a large sample size risks having repetitive data (Shetty, 2023). The sample size of nine participants provided a large amount of information in reference to the purpose, problem statement, and research questions of the study, but a slightly larger sample size, such as the original plan of having 16 participants, would have returned an even larger amount of data.

Another limitation of this study includes only being able to include one choral teacher as one of the nine participants. The band, elementary, and orchestra divisions each had two to three included participants, which provided more even representation from these groups. The band and orchestra participants also had representation from middle and high school, whereas the choral division only had a high school representative. This limited the data from the area of choral teachers in relation to the areas of other music ensembles and age levels across the state.

Implications

The purpose of this research study is to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of social emotional learning in music classrooms. Through analysis and study of data collected and review of scholarly literature, a variety of implications for actions and further study have been developed and will be explained in this section.

Implications for Actions

Once the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of social emotional learning in music classrooms was discovered through focus group sessions, another main implication for action of this study was to develop ideas on common practices for music educators moving forward post-pandemic that will assist with these current SEL needs of students. Findings from the study showed that teachers will need to be flexible and monitor and adjust their practices according to the current SEL needs of students post-pandemic. The findings also showed that students need greater assistance from teachers with coping skills, engagement and motivation, structure and expectations, and community building within musical ensembles. Below are explanations of how teachers can take action in their common practices to address these current student SEL needs.

Flexibility

A much-needed common practice of teachers to assist students with current SEL needs post-pandemic is to show flexibility daily, while working to easily monitor and adjust lessons, activities, and pacing. Because of all the changes and educational inconsistencies during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial that teachers can make changes during this post-pandemic time as well. As some of the participants mentioned, if music educators do not make changes, then it will be a challenge to get much of anything accomplished in the classroom. Students are two to three years behind in some social and academic skills, and adjustments will have to be made to the normal ensemble rehearsal plans. Each year over the next few years will prove to differ as well, meaning one year cannot be compared to another. Teachers will need to implement activities that meet the social and emotional needs of their students where they are (O'Connor-Vince, 2022).

Teachers will continue to create daily lesson plans for their musical groups, but as various weaknesses in skillsets are discovered, plans may have to be adjusted. Due to anxiety and behaviors stemming from this anxiety, there may be days where students have outbursts, cause disruptions to the class resulting in an altered plan for the day. Students have needs in coping management, engagement, and structure, and therefore lessons may need to be adjusted to add in new and different resources and activities. The current daily SEL needs of students may change over time as well, and therefore, teachers will have to continue to welcome flexibility. This ability to adapt and change is truly in the hand of the teacher but can be a major adjustment to teacher common practices that can assist current SEL needs of music students. As teachers exhibit flexibility, this will also help students to feel more accommodated within their needs and will help to create a more welcoming environment. This common practice will hopefully also help students to be more flexible. Students excel in a system where there is social, emotional, and behavioral support (Farrington et al., 2019) from teachers and their learning environments.

Coping Skills

As students are struggling with much higher levels of anxiety, due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are showing a need for coping skills to deal with this anxiety. Music teachers can purposely incorporate small SEL lessons on coping skills within their daily common musical practices. Music education is a subject area that naturally helps students become more socially and emotionally equipped, while also developing the necessary music skills needed (Varner, 2020). Through the power of music, teachers have not only the ability to address “these debilitating conditions with students, but to teach students how to reflect on their social-emotional state, and to use music as an outlet and a power vehicle towards healing” (O’Connor-Vince, 2022). The reflection and emotion that is involved in music can be a way that teachers

can focus common practices on learning coping skills through music. Flexibility in lesson creation allows for some activities such as music listening reflection discussions or journals, where students can share their feelings and emotions with one another and learn that it is normal to feel different emotions (O-Connor-Vince, 2022). The insights that students share can then help guide the teacher in future discussion, lessons, and music selections, while also helping the teacher to learn more about their students and their ongoing needs. Music educators realize students want and need music classes to express themselves and work through their feelings of stress and anxiety (Donahue, 2021), but the teachers need to use this want and need of the students to teach the necessary coping skills as well.

Engagement and Motivation

The educational inconsistencies of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a decrease in engagement and motivation from students. Music classes had to operate differently during virtual and hybrid sessions, leaving students bored and disengaged. Distractions at home also contributed to a lack of engagement as well. Large numbers of students did not attend these types of class sessions due to this lack of motivation and engagement (Middleton, 2020). As students are returning post-pandemic, a challenge for teachers is now regaining higher levels of engagement, and in turn, motivation. As a common practice, music teachers will need to adapt lessons, activities, and resources to allow for a higher level of student engagement. This may mean executing plans differently than teachers always have in the past and will require strategic planning. Music offers many creative ways to help students expand their SEL (Peterson, 2022), while also meeting standards at the same time.

Teachers will need to create enrichment activities that incorporate real-world learning, while also facilitating and supporting student-led opportunities for social and emotional learning.

It will be important that these activities are also fun, inclusive, and flexible (Next Generation Coalition, 2021). One common practice to help create these types of activities is to use different tools, activities, and facilitation strategies, because each student learns differently and is experiencing different needs post-pandemic (Next Generation Coalition, 2021). Teachers can still teach the same necessary musical skills such as rehearsing and performing in an ensemble, composing, rhythm counting, listening, learning new singing or instrumental techniques while incorporating new strategies. These are all activities that require students to use various interpersonal skills (Jacobi, 2012), while learning musical skills and working on higher levels of engagement and motivation at the same time.

Another common practice that teachers can utilize to assist with greater engagement and motivation is allowing student autonomy. Some participants of the focus groups mentioned how allowing more choice in their classroom post-pandemic has helped students to play a more personal role in their learning, which is helping the students to be more invested in their learning as well. As students become more invested, and see the real-world applications of activities, while also having fun and being included, their levels of engagement and motivation should increase also.

Structure and Expectations

During the COVID-19 pandemic because of the educational inconsistencies and unknown factors facing schools, the normal school structure was impacted, and expectations were lowered, as more grace was provided. According to Colao et al. (2020), schools provide a structured setting where students can learn, and the lack of this structure influenced the mental and physical well-being of students. As participants mentioned, students began to realize during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic that with the lack of structure came lowered expectations. Grades did

not matter as much to pass to the next level and absences from virtual meetings were not counted very strictly. As students have returned to a more normal structured school setting post-pandemic, there is a struggle getting used to a rigorous structure with high expectations again. Students are showing defiance toward teachers, are not completing assignments on time, and do not understand the importance of expectations.

A common teacher practice for music educators can be to constantly implement structure and expectations within their community of practice. To build a strong sense of community in a musical classroom or ensemble, it is important that members of the community come together to build a shared practice. To achieve this, members of the community must have a shared sense of identity that is defined by a shared commitment to the practice (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). Before this can ever occur, music educators must set the foundation for this shared practice through a structured environment with set expectations. As a teacher common practice, music educators can share and post classroom expectations, while also sticking to these expectations daily. The lack of structure and expectations during the COVID-19 pandemic is what has caused some anxiety and disengagement, thus, showing the need for structure now more than ever. Teachers can also have their students play a role in the creation of classroom expectations, providing more autonomy for students. When students take a personal role in their environment, they sometimes then have a better understanding of what is being asked of them. As students enter the classroom each day, there can be a somewhat set structure of class, such as a warm-up, rehearsal/lesson, and closing activity. Although there can be flexibility within this as needed, students are aware of their overall structure and expectations every day, with no inconsistencies.

Community Building

After school buildings closed and teaching modalities were altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students reported a dramatic drop in the sense of belonging at school (Hamilton et al. 2021) over that time period. As participants mentioned, students felt more alone because they were not with their community of practice to work with. In the social theory of learning, Wenger made a point to explain that a community of practice is not just a group, but rather it is a social process of gaining competence over time (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Because students were left to learn away from each other during the virtual and hybrid periods, the students are lacking in the skills to work together socially and musically as they are returning post-pandemic.

A common teacher practice post-pandemic will be to work on community and team building strategies within lessons. A community of practice comes somewhat naturally in music classrooms and ensembles when students are together, but because of the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic, this is showing to be more of a challenge. As teachers work to be more flexible, while also working on coping skills, motivation and engagement, and structure and expectations, this will only help in bringing a greater sense of community back for students. As students in these music classes work toward shared goals and share in joint activities, they will naturally build a community of practice (Vikkula, 2015). Yet, it will be important for music educators to purposefully include some new or extra community building activities into the daily structure. This could be done with a community building game or exercise, through sharing in musical reflections and emotions, through friendly musical competitions, or through small group rehearsals and activity groupings.

Activities that allow students and teachers to build better relationships and get to know each other better will help with this community building as well. Participants mentioned that students in musical classes and ensembles know that this is where their shared group of people

are, but this is only because of relationships that are built between the shared members of the community. Some participants mentioned completing emotion check-in activities, reflection activities, or funny games to break the ice and build relationships in the community. When students know they belong to a community, participants mentioned that this creates an environment where students feel safe and not judged, helping to strengthen the community. These are all things that music educators can include as common practices into their daily routine to assist in increased levels of community building.

Implications for Further Study

The results of this study have brought about implications for possible further studies in the future. The purpose of this section is to offer recommendations for this future research.

- 1. Expand the study to add a quantitative survey to gain more data from more teachers.**

Through completion of this qualitative study, main themes were discovered referencing the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the current SEL needs of music students post-pandemic. Due to the type of study and types of data collection used, only a small number of participants were needed. In the future, these themes could be used to develop a survey where a few specific questions are asked regarding each of these main themes. The survey could also be sent to all members of the SCMEA organization, which includes approximately 1400 members who teach various musical ensembles across the state of South Carolina. Expanding on each theme, as well as including a much greater number of participants, would allow for greater data collection and would provide more specific ideas on each discovered theme. In addition, this would result in a more generalizable study that many music educators could utilize.

2. Expand the study on specific regions or musical ensemble types (band, chorus, elementary, or orchestra) to dig deeper into data and results.

Information was gathered to keep track of demographic data for each participant from the focus groups. This information included the school the participant teaches at and its location within the state, the specific music classes taught, and the number of years of teaching. This data could be analyzed to look for any trends either by area of the state or musical ensemble taught (band, chorus, elementary, or orchestra). These trends could be regarding specific influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, types of educational inconsistencies of the COVID-19 pandemic, or current SEL needs of students post-pandemic. A future study could then be focus on a specific area of the state or a specific musical ensemble type to dig deeper into the discovered trends.

3. Expand the study to other states and areas.

This study was only completed in the state of South Carolina, but could be expanded in future research to other states and areas. The results could then be compared between these areas to see if the data is similar or different, as well as what factors may be causing these similarities or differences. This would assist in making the study more generalizable as well.

4. Further studies on specific research-based teacher practices to assist the current SEL needs of students in music classrooms.

This study worked to understand the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on music students, as well as the current SEL needs of these students post-pandemic to assist with teacher common practices in how to best meet these current needs. Common practices are those that are teacher perceived rather than scientifically researched practices. Teachers often know what is best for their personal students and classroom environment, but these practices may be broader

or focused to a specific teacher, grade, or space. Further research could be done on research-based practices to assist with these current SEL needs, especially as greater research is completed on the influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on students. Research-based practices would come with more proven outcomes and could be more applicable among a greater number of teachers.

5. Further studies on common practices to assist administrators, curriculum coaches, and district personnel in reference to how to best support the current SEL needs of music education students and their teachers.

For music teachers to be able to successfully implement common practices to assist students with post-pandemic SEL needs, there must also be support from administrators, curriculum coaches, and district personnel as well. To obtain this support, this group of stakeholders will need to be made aware of the current needs and common practices that can assist music education students. At the same time, for these stakeholders to be made aware, it will be necessary to research their understanding of current SEL impacts and needs in music education classrooms. Further studies involving research on the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic SEL needs of music education students from the perspective of administrators, curriculum coaches, and district personnel will assist in information on how these stakeholders can best support music teachers and their students. These further studies can also lead to the discovery of the best ways and methods to instruct this group of stakeholders on the needed practices and supports of music education students and teachers.

Reflection

A qualitative study, with a narrative research approach, begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals. This method of research also works to tell the

stories of these individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a fellow music educator, who is a member of SCMEA and who taught during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a challenge to keep my own personal stories and experiences removed from the focus group sessions and collected data. Because of the personal role that the researcher takes on in this study, trustworthiness is necessary to avoid any bias. Within this study, research findings were only taken from the participants' viewpoints and responses within the focus groups, ensuring credibility. As the researcher and moderator of the focus groups, it was crucial to input very little personal information into the conversation, so that data was not skewed. As the transcription files were coded, the few comments from the moderator role were not included in thematic development to avoid any extra information or bias that should not be present. For reflexivity purposes, limitations and biases may have been included, but were not allowed to influence responses. Triangulation and member checking also worked to eliminate any bias that may have been present within the responses. Without these validity and credibility measures, it would have been very easy for responses from the participants to be influenced by my role as a fellow music educator.

In response to this qualitative narrative study, my role as a researcher could not be that of a participant, even though these were lived experiences that we all shared in. This changed my thinking in response to the study. The role of the researcher truly could only be that, and not that of a researcher and a participant. This is very challenging when the study is something that is so personally relative. Yet for the study to remain valid and credible, it was crucial that the researcher remain neutral. The more the focus groups went on, the easier this challenge became, but it was certainly a learning process. Even when being cautious, it is important to include

measures such as triangulation and member checking, to completely verify that no bias is included in the study.

Conclusion

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students went through a two-to-three-year period of educational inconsistencies, as well as uncertainties in their personal and home lives. The COVID-19 pandemic and SEL have both been topics at the forefront of educational and political discussions, yet little research has been done regarding the post-pandemic SEL needs of students, especially in music classrooms. Because of these periods of inconsistency and unknowns, early research has revealed widespread negative impacts on students' mental health (Hamilton et al., 2021), but the specific influence that the pandemic has had on SEL and communities of practice in music education classrooms has not been shown much attention.

This study was the first step in discovering and understanding the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms. Through focus group sessions, participants explained that the inconsistencies and uncertainties of the pandemic have led students to feel greater amounts of anxiety, show higher levels of defiance, interact with lower levels of maturity, have lower accountability levels, and be much less engaged in their learning. Because of these influences, music students are showing current needs in acquiring coping skills, increasing maturity socially and academically, and working together as a community of practice.

This study was driven by a desire to discover common practices for music teachers to utilize with their students to best meet the current SEL and communities of practice needs post-pandemic. Music teachers need to study and learn from one another regarding what common practices are best for helping music students post-pandemic and how the results from this study

can assist teachers with this task. The results from the study will provide information on common practices for music teachers to utilize with their students to best meet the current needs in SEL and communities of practice. As music teachers are now working to teach post-pandemic, it is critical to understand what students need and how to best assist in these areas.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this study lies in the implications for action. The responses regarding the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms has provided information on teacher common practices to assist students moving forward. Teachers will need to show flexibility and utilize a “monitor and adjust” approach to the changing needs of their students. It will also be important for teachers to incorporate lessons on coping skills to help students handle the feelings of anxiety and defiance that they are experiencing. Lessons and activities will need to be more engaging and greater levels of structure and expectations will need to be set forth by the teacher. All these adjustments to common practices will assist in community building in the musical classrooms and ensembles.

This study has wider implications for future research as well. This study could be expanded to add a quantitative survey to gather greater data on each main themes of the study from a higher number of teachers within the state. Greater research could also be done on specific musical ensembles (band, chorus, elementary, or orchestra) or areas of the state to dig deeper into any data and research trends. The study could also be completed in other states or areas to make the study more generalizable as well. Further study could also be done on research-based teacher practices to assist the post-pandemic needs of students, in place of common practices. This would again help the results and data to become more generalizable among all music subject areas, ages, and grades.

This study has the potential to serve as a catalyst for more research into the influence that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the SEL and community of practice needs of music students post-pandemic, and how teachers can continue to assist students with these needs. Student needs will most likely change as time goes on, therefore continued research in these areas will be needed. There are many factors influencing SEL in schools today, including SEL program variations, legislation, funding, and politics, all of which can influence student needs and teacher common practices. The influences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the current SEL needs of music students are still being discovered as we move through post-pandemic times and the long-term impacts will still require greater research (Sabol, 2021).

Music education can naturally help students become more socially and emotionally competent (Varner, 2020). Music ensembles evolved to make socially significant experiences memorable and enjoyable and to make otherwise unbearable experiences bearable (Upitis, 2003). The years of the COVID-19 pandemic were some that were unbearable for students, teachers, and schools, causing major influences on the SEL needs of students. Through research into the influence that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the post-pandemic state of SEL in music classrooms, teacher common practices can be developed and expanded to best assist students in their SEL and community of practice needs. The power of music and communities of practice can help students to rediscover the skills and social emotional experiences that were lost during the COVID-19 pandemic (Diamond, 2022). Music changes who people are and improves one's ability to learn and communicate (Kraus, 2021). Therefore, it is important for music teachers to determine how to use this power of music as a catalyst to implement the most effective common teacher practices, supports, and interventions

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Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1. Intro Question: Could you each please tell us your name, how many years you have been teaching, the school you work at, grade levels you teach, and your roles and responsibilities of your position?
2. What does SEL look like in your classroom? (Follow up question: What are some methods/strategies that you used to teach and/or practice social emotional skills in your classroom within your everyday music activities?)
3. In what ways did you find that SEL occurred in your classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic? This includes naturally and intentionally.
4. What changes did you notice your students having socially and emotionally during the COVID-19 pandemic? (Follow up: In what ways did these changes and experiences impact teaching and learning in your classroom during this time?)
5. How did your teaching practices change during the instructional inconsistencies (virtual, hybrid, quarantine periods) of the COVID-19 pandemic? This can include due to the instructional changes and/or due to the changes in the students' social and emotional experiences.
 - a. Inquire about technology – access/equity
6. What are the current SEL needs of your students that you are noticing post-pandemic in your classrooms?
7. How do you think the changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic (social, emotional, and educational) influenced these current SEL needs of your students?

8. How are the current SEL needs of your students impacting classroom activities, lessons, and learning in your classrooms post-pandemic?
9. Do you feel that your instructional practices need to be adjusted in your classroom to accommodate for these current needs and past changes? (Follow up: If yes, how could they be adjusted or how could teachers work to help one another? If no, why do you feel that the same practices will continue to work?)
10. Are there any other thoughts or ideas that you would like to share regarding these topics?