Educational Change and Social and Emotional Learning: Understanding How Secondary English Teachers Have Engaged with BC's Core Competencies Framework

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We acknowledge and respect the lək^{w}əŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Schools across Canada have increased focus on social emotional learning (SEL) to facilitate students' development of vital intra- and interpersonal skills that contribute to their mental health, self-awareness, social and academic engagement. British Columbia was situated at the leading edge of curriculum-based SEL with the introduction of the core competencies framework in their wide-scale curriculum reforms initiated in 2015. The framework tasked educators with fostering students' growth in communication, collaboration, critical and reflective thinking, creative thinking, personal awareness and responsibility, social awareness and responsibility, and positive personal and cultural identity. However, educational change is a complex process in which teachers play a pivotal role. The broad and flexible scope of BC's reforms positioned educators as responsible for interpreting the framework with limited guidance for implementation. Developing an understanding of how teachers have conceptualized and approached the core competencies is essential to realizing lasting and meaningful change in this critical area. This multicase study examines how five secondary English teachers engaged with the framework, and their perspectives and experiences with implementation. Within-case and cross-case analysis involved triangulating data from qualitative questionnaires, individual interviews, and a group interview. Findings indicate that teachers perceived the framework as aligned with their beliefs and roles but had limited opportunity for shared meaning-making and professional learning. Teachers also viewed the core competencies as expanding the skills that are valued in the curriculum. In practice, teachers differed in their approach to implementation and in their beliefs about how learning occurs in these domains. Adopting the core competencies into class language and assessment was considered essential, as was contextualized and focused instruction. Discussion centered on the need for capacity building and shared sensemaking amongst teachers, as well as the need for additional clarity and guidance from the BC Ministry of Education.

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Dedication

For my mother, Catherine F. O'Brien Storey, who shared in every trial, twist, and triumph, and my father, Jamie M. Storey, whose love and encouragement kept the whole ship afloat.

1. Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Canadian schools have been increasing focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) to promote students' well-being and success in a rapidly evolving society (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2018, 2020; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020). SEL encompasses the everyday intra- and interpersonal skills developed continually over the course of one's lifespan including the ability "to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively" (Elias et al., 1997, p.2). School-based SEL has been found to contribute to youth mental health (BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, 2019; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2016), and has been linked to benefits for students such as improved social awareness and prosocial behaviour (Brackett, Rivers, et al., 2012; Duncan et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2016), personal and cultural awareness and critical thinking (Sun, 2017; Theron et al., 2017), and increased school engagement for students (Yang et al., 2018). British Columbia (BC) introduced large-scale educational reform between 2015 and 2019 and was at the leading edge of the curriculum based SEL movement in Canada with the inclusion of the core competencies "at the centre of the curriculum redesign" (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c, p.1). The core competencies framework and related reporting requirements (Student Progress Reporting Order, 2016) formalized teachers' roles in fostering social and emotional skills in the areas of critical and reflective thinking, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, personal awareness and responsibilities, social awareness and responsibility and positive personal and cultural identity (BC Ministry of Education, 2022a).

The addition of the core competencies to the curriculum motivated my decision to pursue doctoral studies in British Columbia. I first developed an awareness of the importance of SEL for students, parents, and educators as a novice English language arts (ELA) and social studies teacher. However, in one form or another, SEL also became the unexpected common denominator in my later work as a teacher, school counsellor, and lawyer/mediator. Across each professional domain, I saw the ubiquity of conflict and mental health issues often driven by poor communication and difficulties with self-regulation. Through graduate study in counselling and legal dispute resolution, I explored the impact of social and emotional factors on personal connections and the restorative properties of communication, critical thought, and reflection. My own experiential learning in both fields fundamentally shifted my understanding of the role of social and emotional dynamics in every aspect of life and transformed my approach to helping others navigate, negotiate, and feel empowered in the face of challenge.

I distinctly remember the day that led me to my current inquiry. In the middle of a family law mediation between two parties who struggled to communicate, it struck me that the parties' inability to listen, reflect, self-regulate, and think creatively was as much of a problem as the issues under discussion. I was prompted to consider how learning about active listening, perspective-taking, identifying interests, and reflective thinking over the course of my career had fundamentally shifted my self-concept and the way I approached personal and professional relationships. I reflected that honing these skills earlier in life could have saved my clients tremendous emotional, social, and even financial stress and that helping them to do so during mediation was too little, too late. As a secondary teacher and counsellor, I recognized that graduate level study was not required to understand and internalize these skills and that they could complement secondary school curricula and yield lifelong benefits for youth.

From that point, I began to explore the literature on social and emotional learning and the opportunities for incorporation into secondary curriculum. Through the converging lenses of teacher, counsellor, and lawyer, I began to investigate and become engaged in the exciting educational changes occurring in BC, including an emphasis on social and emotional core competencies across the curriculum in all grades and subjects (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, 2015). Thus, my research and professional interests led to doctoral study focused on finding out more about educators' experiences with the core competencies framework motivated by a desire to contribute and support the implementation of this SEL-based reform.

The development of the core competencies framework was grounded in a 30-year history in BC of increasing consideration of students' social and emotional skill development dating back to the School Act, 1989 goal of fostering "The Educated Citizen" (BC Ministry of Education, 2015e, 2022a) and earlier reforms such as the introduction in 2001 of the Social Responsibility Learning Standards (BC Ministry of Education, 2001). The mandate remains for schools to foster the Educated Citizen described as someone who exhibits critical thinking, communication, creativity, independent decision-making, and advocacy, who is self-motivated, cooperative, responsible, respectful of differences and understanding of culture, who is socially responsible, and has positive self-image, a sense of self-worth, and pursues physical well-being (School Act, 1989, p. D-88 - D-89). These goals informed the contemporary curriculum redesign and "are directly related to" the core competencies component of the reform (BC Ministry of Education, 2015e, para. 6) that serves as the guiding framework for supporting social and emotional learning in all grades and subjects (BC Ministry of Education, 2013a, 2015e, 2020b).

Furthermore, the BC Ministry of Education (MoE) renewed and enhanced their focus on SEL in the redesigned curriculum through the core competencies stating that, "along with

literacy and numeracy foundations, they are central to British Columbia's K-12 curriculum and assessment system" (BC Ministry of Education, 2022a, para 1). Positioning the core competencies on par with literacy and numeracy signified the significance of SEL and the extent to which the MoE envisioned that teachers would engage with the framework. This prioritizing of the core competencies is anchored in the rationale that schools need to develop "citizens who are competent thinkers and communicators, and who are personally and socially competent in all areas of their lives" (BC Ministry of Education, 2022b, para. 6). In addition, nurturing these "sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies" (BC Ministry of Education, 2022, para. 1) is a central tenet of the MoE's *Mental Health in School Strategy* (BC Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy specifically states that "each of the [core] competencies support social emotional learning and allow concepts related to mental wellness to be embedded in all subjects, at each grade level" (p. 10). The "priority" emphasis on this policy in BC schools (p. 3) and the rise of mental health challenges reported amongst Canadian youth (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2020, 2022) underscore the importance of focusing on the core competencies as a component of the renewed curriculum.

However, educational change is a long and complex process and the determination of whether a particular component of curricular reform is truly and meaningfully adopted within an education system depends on a multitude of factors (Fullan, 2016). Teachers are ultimately the most influential agents of change as they are primarily engaged in making sense of curriculum and in determining the ways and the extent of reform implementation (Biesta et al., 2015; Buchanan, 2015; Fullan, 2016; Jenkins, 2020). Developing an understanding of how BC teachers have conceptualized and implemented the core competencies is essential to achieving meaningful and lasting change in this critical component of educational change. Only in

understanding teachers' perspectives on this change initiative can ways be identified to support them in facilitating SEL.

This multicase study is an inquiry into teachers' engagement with the core competencies curricular reform. To frame my inquiry, I ground my study in Fullan's (2016) model for understanding teachers' engagement in educational change. As outlined in depth in Chapter 2, according to Fullan, the factors that contribute to lasting and meaningful reform include educators' engagement in individual and collective meaning-making and effecting change in practice along the three dimensions of resources, strategies, and pedagogic belief. However, teachers' experiences of educational change can vary greatly and are grounded in their individual teaching contexts (Fullan, 2016; Priestley, Biesta, et al., 2015b).

In selecting my cases for this study, I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) from a preliminary questionnaire to identify teachers whose professional contexts were most conducive to integrating SEL. English language arts (ELA) has been identified in SEL research as a subject area that teachers consider particularly compatible with SEL (e.g., Aidman & Price, 2018; Ee & Cheng 2013, Ee et al. 2014). For this study, I selected five teachers who identified ELA as a teaching area, which is also one of my own areas of specialization. In addition, I chose educators who described themselves as actively engaged in teaching the core competencies anticipating they would be more familiar with the framework and could offer more insight into their experiences with sensemaking and implementation compared to teachers who had not engaged with the framework or rejected the reform. Finally, I chose to focus on understanding the experience of teachers working at the secondary level based on the significant need for SEL in adolescence (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2016; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020) and evidence in the literature that both educational change (Fullan, 2016) and SEL may be

more challenging to incorporate in a secondary curriculum than in elementary grades (Sande et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2015).

In summary, in this multicase study I examine how five secondary English language arts teachers who describe themselves as actively engaged in teaching the core competencies have made sense of the framework within their professional contexts and how they have implemented corresponding changes in their practice. To provide context for my research the next section of this chapter is an overview of the core competency framework including the resources provided by the MoE to support implementation. I then situate the BC framework within the literature on SEL and in relation to similar policy reforms in other jurisdictions that have also adopted "free-standing SEL standards," which is the term used in the literature to refer to a specific, self-contained framework that defines the SEL skills and learning outcomes in the curriculum (Dusenbury, 2014, p. 2). Next, I describe the present gaps in the literature and elaborate on the rationale for focusing my inquiry on secondary English language arts educators. Finally, I outline the questions, as well as theoretical and conceptual frameworks that shaped my research and provide context regarding the way in which my process was influenced by COVID-19.

1.2. Context: BC's core competencies framework

Unlike many examples of educational change which focus on remediation and enacting changes to improve academic results (Priestley et al., 2021; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009), BC initiated curriculum transformation at a time when the province maintained a strong academic record (BC Ministry of Education, 2016a). BC's educational change was a proactive step to keep pace with the evolving needs of learners and help students "develop the intellectual, personal, social and emotional skills required to engage deeply in their learning and succeed in work, and in life" (BC Ministry of Education, 2016a, p. 4). The core competencies, previously named the

cross-curricular competencies (BC Ministry of Education, 2013), were a significant and defining component of the 'new' curriculum based on the rationale that schools have a responsibility to foster students' holistic development, as articulated by the design team:

> At the heart of the definition of the cross-curricular competencies is the principle that education should lead to the development of the whole child—intellectually, personally, and socially. In a world of growing diversity and challenge, schools must do more than help students master the sets of knowledge and skills acquired through the standard subject areas. They must prepare students fully for their lives as individuals and as members of society, with the capacity to achieve their goals, contribute to their communities and continue learning throughout their lives. (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3)

The framework was developed in line with MoE efforts to move away from a content-centric approach to learning and instead implement a "concept-based competency-driven" model (BC Ministry of Education, 2022b, para. 5). In the glossary of terms published during the design process, the MoE defined concept-based curriculum as "higher-order learning standards" rather than "a list of topics to cover in isolation from one another" (BC Ministry of Education, 2015e, p. 2). They defined competency-driven learning as focused on the "skills, processes, behaviours and habits of mind" that enable students to succeed in a particular discipline or area of learning and that competence involved demonstrating the ability to transfer learning to new contexts (p. 2). In the final curriculum design, teachers were to focus on curricular competencies (knowledge and skills specific to each discipline), and the core competencies (social and emotional concepts and skills fundamental in all grades and subjects) (BC Ministry of Education, 2016c, para. 5).

Subsequent changes to the curriculum centered on creating a design that "prescribes fewer but more important outcomes" and gave teachers "more flexibility and freedom to innovate to personalize learning in their classrooms" (BC Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 2). The MoE

purposefully refrained from an "implementation approach" of issuing top-down directives for particular models or strategies in any area of learning including providing limited guidance in how to approach teaching the core competencies (Sanford & Hopper, 2019, p. 25) situating educators as "curriculum and pedagogy creators" (Schnellert, 2020, para 7).

1.2.1. Situating the Core Competencies as A Free-Standing SEL Reform

Consistent with terminology used elsewhere in the literature, the BC core competencies framework is defined in this study as a reform establishing "free-standing SEL standards" because it is a specific framework including "concise statements and developmental benchmarks for what students should know and be able to do" to guide educators in implementing SEL (Dusenbury et al., 2014, p. 2). The core competencies framework is free-standing in the sense that it is self-contained, compared, for example, to only being embedded within the disciplinary learning goals of Physical Education as seen in other jurisdictions (Eklund et al., 2018). It is also characterized as a free-standing reform because it was developed as a distinct addition to the BC curriculum, separate from, but aligned with many other changes such as the increased emphasis on First Peoples Principles of Learning (BC Ministry of Education, 2016e).

SEL and core competencies share integral overlap and meaning as is evident in the framework categories, facets, and profiles defined by the MoE (BC Ministry of Education, 2022d). *Communication* and *collaboration*, for example, are skills that are inherently social including being an "engaged listener," who can "contribute purposefully to discussions and conversations" (p.1) and who collaborate to "work together," "interact supportively and effectively using inclusive practices," and "network" with others in a variety of contexts (p. 2). *Personal awareness and responsibility* describes a student who "regulates emotions and manages stress" and demonstrates "a sense of self-worth and a growing confidence," among other social and emotional proficiencies (p.5). *Social awareness and responsibility* enables students to "build

relationships," "show empathy, disagree respectfully, and create space for others to use their voices" and "contribute to their own well-being and to the well-being of their family, community, and society" (p.7). Having a *positive personal and cultural identity* means developing a "sense of self-worth," and "becom[ing] confident individuals who… contribute to their own well-being and to the well-being of their family, community, and society" (p.6). Finally, *critical and reflective thinking* invokes social and emotional skills in considering "perspective," questioning and navigating the "problematic situations in their studies, lives, and communities and in the media," being able to "give and receive feedback" (p.3) and *creative thinking* involves demonstrating resilience, an "open-minded" stance "comfortable with complexity" and being "willing to take risks" in extending their imagination and learning (p.4).

The connection between the core competencies framework and SEL is also emphasized in MoE publications including the preamble on the curriculum website and in the Mental Health in Schools Strategy described in Chapter 1 (BC Ministry of Education, 2022, 2020). The core competencies have also been interpreted as SEL by BC school districts (e.g., Burnaby School District 41, 2020; Langley School District, 2015; Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools, 2020; Richmond School District No. 38, 2021) and education researchers (Halbert & Kaser, 2015; Hymel et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2012; Thomson et al., 2018).

1.2.2. An Overview of the Core Competency Framework

The framework was introduced to schools in draft form from 2015 and, after further revisions, was finalized in 2019. In the interim, an update to the provincial reporting mandate in 2016 specified that "summative reporting" would be required on core competencies. The final version of the framework consisted of three overarching categories of competence: thinking,

communication, and personal and social, with seven sub-competencies summarized in Table 1 (*School Act* 1989, s. 79(3), 85(2)(j), 168(2)).

Table 1 Core competencies summary chart (BC Ministry of Education, 2022a)

Communication	**Communicating**	Connecting and engaging with others, focusing on intent and purpose, acquiring and presenting information
	Collaborating	Working collectively, supporting group interactions, determining common purpose
Thinking	**Creative thinking**	Creating and innovating, generating and incubating, evaluating and developing
	Critical & reflective thinking	Analyzing & critiquing, questioning and investigating, designing and developing, reflecting and assessing
Personal and social	**Personal awareness & responsibility**	Self-advocating, self-regulating, well-being
	Positive Personal & cultural identity	Understanding relationships and cultural contexts, recognizing personal values and choices, identifying personal strengths and abilities
	Social awareness & responsibility	Building relationships, contributing to community and caring for the environment, resolving problems, valuing diversity

Table 1 also lists the three or four "facets" associated with each sub-competency. Elaborated definitions for each facet are included on the MoE website, an example for the facets of personal awareness and responsibility is included in Table 2.

Table 2 Facets of Personal Awareness and Responsibility, (BC Ministry of Education, 2022)

Personal Awareness and Responsibility Facets
Self-advocating: Students who are personally aware and responsible have a sense of self-worth and a growing confidence in a variety of situations. They value themselves, their ideas, and their accomplishments. They are able to express their needs and seek help when needed, find purpose and motivation, act on decisions, and advocate for themselves.
Self-regulating: Students who are personally aware and responsible take ownership of their choices and actions. They set goals, monitor progress, and understand their emotions, using that understanding to regulate actions and reactions. They are aware that learning involves patience and time. They can persevere in difficult situations, and to understand how their actions affect themselves and others.
Well-being: Students who are personally aware and responsible recognize the factors that affect their holistic wellness and take increasing responsibility for caring for themselves. They keep themselves healthy and stay active, manage stress, and express a sense of personal well-being. They make choices that contribute to their safety in their communities, including their online communities and use of social media. They recognize their personal responsibility for their happiness and have strategies that help them find peace in challenging situations.

The sub- competencies are further defined by being divided into six incremental "profiles" with "I statements" representing the progression of students' growth in each area over time (BC Ministry of Education, 2017b, 2019c). The six profile levels and related "I statements" represent the learning goals to guide teachers' planning in relation to each sub-competency, however, the MoE maintains that profiles are not affiliated with specific grades, but rather reflective of growth over a student's lifetime (BC Ministry of Education, 2017a).

For example, Table 3 contains excerpts from two profiles for the sub-competencies of creative thinking as well as personal awareness and responsibility that indicate growth and increasing complexity of skills at two different stages of progression.

Table 3 Sample core competencies profiles and "I statements" (BC Ministry of Education, 2022a)

Creative Thinking	**Profile 2**	**Profile 5**
	• I can get new ideas to create new things or solve straightforward problems. • I can use my imagination to get new ideas of my own, or build on other's ideas, or combine other people's ideas in new ways. • I can usually make my ideas work within the constraints of a given form, problem, or materials if I keep playing with them.	• I can think "outside the box" to get innovative ideas and persevere to develop them. • I am willing to take significant risks in my thinking in order to generate lots of ideas. • I am willing to accept ambiguity, setbacks, and failure, and I use them to advance the development of my ideas.
Personal awareness & responsibility	**Profile 3**	**Profile 6**
	• I can take action toward meeting my own wants and needs and finding joy and satisfaction, and work toward a goal or solving a problem. • I can use strategies that increase my feeling of well-being and help me manage my feelings and emotions. • I can connect my actions with both positive and negative consequences and try to make adjustments.	• I can identify my strengths and limits, find internal motivation, and act on opportunities for self-growth. • I can advocate for myself in stressful situations. • I can take the initiative to inform myself about controversial issues and take ethical positions. • I recognize the implications of my choices and consult with others who may be affected.

Clarifying information in the form of very limited descriptions of connections between the core competencies was added to the Ministry of Education (MoE) website beginning in 2018 (e.g., "Students apply critical and reflective thinking to acquire and interpret information, and to make choices about how to communicate their ideas") (BC Ministry of Education, 2022a, para 7). The MoE also later added select illustrations consisting of brief examples submitted by BC teachers of real-world activities in which students demonstrated one or more sub-competency profiles (BC Ministry of Education, 2017c). For example, one illustration for the communicating sub-competency describes students working together to develop a "classroom constitution" linked to profile 5 "I statements" such as "I can facilitate group processes and encourage collective responsibility for our progress" (BC Ministry of Education, 2019b). These illustrations provide a limited sense of how the core competencies relate to learning. However,

"in the interest of flexibility" the MoE did not prescribe how the core competencies should be taught or self-assessed," but offer "suggestions" for how teachers may consider implementing them to support students (BC Ministry of Education, 2017c, para. 2).

In summary, the core competency framework is examined for the purposes of this study as a free-standing reform introduced among other significant changes to the BC curriculum. The core competency reform was developed to enhance students' social and emotional skill development in the curriculum in line with MoE priorities for supporting students' mental health and essential competencies for the future. The framework features three overarching competencies and seven sub-competencies that are each defined by a series of facets and six incremental learning profiles made up of "I statements" that reflect goals for learning and development in each area. With the launch of the redesigned curriculum, teachers were tasked with implementing this complex but clearly defined framework in all grades and subjects. In the section that follows, I outline the key issues identified in the literature related to educational change and SEL that shaped my inquiry.

1.3. Problem statement

The core competencies were introduced as a key curriculum reform to address the needs of 21st century learners (BC Ministry of Education, 2012, 2015b). Achieving such significant educational change is a complex process that takes time and careful consideration of multiple structural and human factors (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves et al., 2009; Priestley & Philippou, 2018). In particular, meaningful and lasting change depends on the degree to which educators understand, accept, and engage with the proposed reforms and incorporate them into their teaching practices (Fullan, 2016). To date, little is known about whether and how BC teachers have implemented the core competencies in the classroom. To be able to provide effective

support for teachers who are navigating this new framework and to facilitate meaningful change and an enhanced focus on students' social and emotional development, it is critical to understand how teachers have conceptualized this component of BC's redesigned curriculum and how they have undertaken the challenge of implementing change in their professional practice.

1.3.1. Teachers as Curriculum Designers for SEL

BC's intentionally broad curriculum design adds a layer of complexity to the core competencies reform because, with increased flexibility and autonomy (BC Ministry of Education, 2015e), teachers assume more responsibility as agents of change in order to interpret and implement the framework with their students (Priestley et al., 2015). According to the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), while teachers supported the proposed framework, they felt unprepared and concerned about the limited guidance provided by the MoE (BC Teachers' Federation, 2017; Gacoin, 2019). Surveys in 2017 and 2019 revealed that a sense of uncertainty continued to pervade educators' experiences with regards to teaching and assessing core competencies over the course of the gradual implementation phase (BC Teachers' Federation, 2017; Gacoin, 2019). As framed by one respondent, "My general impression is that there has been some really great thought put into it, but implementation of it has been vague, unclear and left us feeling unsupported" (Gacoin, 2019, p. 6). The BCTF requested "that collaboration time be made available for teachers to discuss the Core Competencies" (BCTF, 2017). While they generally agreed with the core competencies as a curricular priority, teachers wanted more guidance from the MoE and time to consider, plan, and prepare for implementing the framework within their professional communities. This problem was compounded as the core competencies framework was not finalized until 2019, after several adjustments in the interim years (Storey, 2017).

1.3.2. Professional grounding for SEL at the secondary level

The core competencies are especially complex as a component of curricular reform when compared to familiar disciplines such as English language arts (ELA), social studies, mathematics, or science that have long been embedded in school organization, teacher education, and professional development. This is particularly true at the secondary level where learning has traditionally been organized according to subjects (BC Ministry of Education, 2016b) and few teacher education programs provide a grounding in supporting SEL (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017) despite increasing need for social and emotional strategies for Canadian youth (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2016; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2020; Wiens et al., 2020) and the importance of inter- and intrapersonal skills to students' personal and professional future (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2018; Milton, 2015). This challenge is also compounded by the fact that educational change in secondary schools can take, on average, twice as long to take hold compared to elementary schools (Fullan, 2016, p. 31).

Since full mandatory implementation of the redesigned curriculum in 2019, little is known about how teachers have conceptualized the core competencies as a component of the reform, how (or whether) they have taken up the framework in their practice, or about teachers' experiences with the change process. Given the value of fostering SEL for secondary students and the MoE's emphasis that the core competencies are "at the heart" of educational reforms (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 3), it is critical to study how secondary teachers have conceptualized and implemented the framework to facilitate lasting and meaningful change so that curriculum policy makers and teachers themselves may take steps towards in this integral facet of student learning.

1.4. Purpose and Significance of the Study

1.4.1. Research at the Intersection of Educational Change and SEL

Over the last decade, SEL has been the focus of educational reform initiatives in countries around the world (e.g. Dusenbury, 2014 Freeman & Strong, 2017, Liem et al. 2017) creating a wave of complex change for educators. In Canada, the rising focus on SEL is evident in policy (Chamberlain et al., 2018; Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2018) as well as in the direct incorporation of social and emotional competencies into curricula across the country (Alberta Education, 2016a; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2017a; New Brunswick Department Education and Early Childhood Development, 2019; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Significant shifts have also occurred in the US where 27 states have introduced free-standing SEL standards in the curriculum and this numbers continue to grow (Dermody et al., 2022).

Research on the benefits for SEL for learners is ubiquitous (e.g. Corcoran et al., 2018; Domitrovich et al., 2017; Durlak et al, 2015; Mahoney et al, 2019). In fact, the preponderance of SEL research has emerged from the field of educational psychology and has focused on the rationale or "*why"* of teaching SEL. Such research provides invaluable insight into the positive impacts of SEL for learners and strategies or programs that can be used to support SEL in the classroom (e.g., Domitrovich et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2014; Portnow et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Thomson et al., 2017). However, there is a stark absence of contributions from the field of curriculum and instruction and scant research has considered how SEL is situated within the literature on teachers experiences of educational change. Curriculum research is essential to understanding "*how"* to teach SEL and how learning occurs in this domain with significant professional and pedagogical implications for teachers (Abry et al., 2017; Barnes &

McCallops, 2019; Roffey, 2017). To date, the body of literature on classroom implementation has largely centered on the use of pre-designed programs (e.g. Dowling & Barry, 2019; Duncan et al. 2017; Storey, 2019; Street, 2017;), consisting of SEL focused lessons or activities that, while potentially complementary to curriculum, are developed and tested by psychology researchers with little consideration of how classroom teachers can incorporate their own pedagogy and subject-area learning goals.

I aim to understand how BC teachers have conceptualized the core competencies as a component of BC's curriculum reform and to gain insight from secondary language arts educators about their experiences with planning and teaching for SEL. My research is situated at an important intersection of educational change and social and emotional learning research, an area of overlap that is underexplored in the literature on teachers' change experiences. Few studies have examined wide-scale educational change incorporating SEL across the curriculum from the first-hand perspective of educators (e.g., Dusenbury et al., 2014; Philippe, 2017; Youngblood, 2015) and none have examined SEL curriculum reform in Canada.

In addition, much educational change research has focused on reforms that target literacy, numeracy, or academic engagement and focus on *improving* student performance (Butler et al., 2015; Harris & Graham, 2018; Lockton et al., 2020; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). However, as previously noted, changes to the BC curriculum were made at a time when student performance was already strong and reform was instead motivated by efforts to foster essential skills for students' personal lives and future careers (BC Ministry of Education, 2016a; Sanford & Hopper, 2019). Studying curriculum reform for SEL as a proactive change rather than deficit solution has unique and potentially powerful implications for our understanding of how to support teachers as they engage in interpreting reforms and planning for the future needs of learners beyond traditional academic knowledge and skills.

1.4.2. A Critical Juncture for SEL in BC

Education in BC is at a critical juncture both in terms of addressing the growing need to support students' social and emotional development (BC Ministry of Education, 2020b; BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, 2019), and in achieving meaningful educational change within the five to ten year window of opportunity when reforms are either truly incorporated into the system or fall into disuse and fade to the periphery of practice (Fullan, 2016). Therefore, research is needed from the curriculum perspective to support teachers tasked with implementing the core competencies and to develop pedagogy for effectively supporting SEL in a way that complements learning in each discipline.

BC's core competency framework is broad and leaves wide scope for interpretation and implementation in schools positioning teachers as the primary agents of change (BC Ministry of Education, 2016). On the one hand, the open-ended possibilities offer educators full autonomy in construing and incorporating these skills within their existing teaching practices. On the other hand, it adds responsibility for teaching complex learning domains on already-overloaded teachers who likely have little formal preparation for SEL (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). This context provides an important and rare opportunity to learn from teachers' firsthand experiences as pivotal players in directing SEL curriculum. In this multicase study, I investigate how secondary English teachers actively engaging with core competencies framework have conceptualized the reform and implemented change in their teaching practice.

1.4.3. SEL in Secondary School Contexts

This study is also significant in that it focuses on secondary educators' engagement in SEL reform with adolescent learners. Adolescence is defined as age 10-19 (American Psychological Association, 2002; World Health Organization, 2019). In Canada, this age group typically

encompasses Grades 6-12 but with significant variability across the country in the subsequent divisions of elementary, middle, secondary, junior high, or high school (Alberta Education, 2019; BC Ministry of Education, 2016e; Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015). In this study, to align with existing research (Sande et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2015) as well as the targeted stage of development, I refer to K-5 as 'elementary school' and Grades 6-12 as 'secondary school' which encompasses middle and high school in the BC jurisdictions of the teacher-participants of this study.

There is a dominant emphasis in SEL research on elementary-aged learners (e.g. Antonio, 2018; Corcoran et al., 2018; Portnow et al., 2018; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015) and more research is needed to support teachers working with adolescents who are at a complex stage of social and emotional development (Durlak et al., 2011) and at a period of increased risk of mental health issues (Wiens et al., 2020; Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014). In particular, the need for social and emotional learning is growing amongst Canadian youth who report increasing challenges with self-confidence, anxiety, and feeling connected within their peer groups and communities (Statistics Canada, 2020). Student mental health and wellbeing has been established as a priority for BC schools (BC Ministry of Education, 2020) reinforcing the importance of understanding how secondary teachers have approached the core competencies and can continue to support social and emotional skill development.

1.4.4. English Language Arts as a Complementary Curriculum

Finally, this study has the potential to add insight into understanding the relationship between SEL and ELA. Upon initial consideration, there is an underlying tension between these two fields with respect to theoretical stance. SEL has largely been based in educational psychology which traditionally takes a positivistic stance and quantitative approach studying controlled interventions (e.g. Dowling et al., 2019, Durlak et al., 2015, Domitrovich et al, 2015),

program fidelity (e.g. Downer et al., 2013, Duncan et al., 2017) and measurable impact (e.g. Sande et al., 2019). By contrast, English language arts is typically grounded in qualitative paradigm and socio-cultural lens (Lapp & Fisher, 2018) with a growing pedagogic focus on dialogic learning (Pearson & Lopez, 2018; Parr & Wilkinson, 2016) and critical literacy (e.g. Fowler-Amato et al. 2018; Sinclair, 2018). In particularly, modern conceptions of curriculum and instruction in ELA in North America are increasingly concerned with the intersectionality of aspects of personal, cultural, and social experiences and issues of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in educational contexts (e.g. Baker-Bell, 2020; Dover, 2016; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016). This intersectional lens makes ELA is a fitting space within which to examine and explore core competencies in the curriculum and provides an ideal vantage point from which to investigate teachers experiences with SEL-based reform.

Furthermore, significant potential for overlap can be found in a review of both ELA and SEL literature with benefits in both domains. For example, researchers have identified the value of engaging in reading and literary analysis to develop skills such as empathy (Djikic et al., 2013; Jamieson, 2015), self- and social-awareness (Rignell & Banack, 2019; Venegas, 2019) and for critically reflecting on social issues and diverse perspectives (Dunn, 2018; Wiltse et al., 2014). Research also indicates that teachers perceive more opportunities for SEL in language arts compared to other subjects (Aidman & Price, 2018; Ee & Cheng, 2013) and this relationship bears further investigation as a possible entry point for effecting SEL-based educational change. Teachers working in a discipline perceived to have fewer barriers and more scope for SEL implementation may offer unique insights into the potential innovations and challenges encountered when engaging with the core competencies framework simultaneously with subject-focused curriculum. In this study, I examine the relationship between SEL and ELA by looking at teachers' lived experiences with implementing the core competencies.

In summary, my research centers on understanding how teachers have conceptualized and approached the core competencies reform with a focus on English language arts as a compatible subject area and focused on secondary school contexts due to the high need for SEL, the common constraints of learning organized by subject, and the limited research on school based SEL for this age group.

1.5. Theoretical Lens and Conceptual Framework

My study is situated at the intersection of educational change theory and social and emotional learning. Using a theoretical lens of educational change, the aim of this study has been to better understand the context for teachers' implementation of BC's core competencies reform. My theoretical lens is primarily grounded in the work of Canadian researcher Michael Fullan (2016) on teachers' change experiences in the context of large-scale educational reform. Fullan's model and application to this study is explained in depth in Chapter 2. In addition, my study is situated within the conceptual framework of social and emotional learning (e.g., CASEL, 2016) in which the BC core competencies are situated as a curricular reform. Also in Chapter 2, I draw on examples from the literature of SEL-implementation to frame my understanding of how teachers may approach core competencies reform.

1.6. Dissertation Format and Research Questions

1.6.1. Conducting Research During COVID-19

As a practicing teacher and novice researcher, my objective in this study was to explore what I conceived of broadly as "the current situation" for educators in taking up the core competencies as a free-standing component of the redesigned curriculum. I wanted to understand the interpretations, innovations, impacts, and perceived benefits and challenges of this significant curriculum shift for educators and develop insight into potential ways to support them in

implementing the core competencies reform. Thus, my original design included multicase study featuring interviews and classroom observations of a small number of secondary teachers actively engaged in incorporating core competencies in English language arts, a subject considered by many educators to be "fertile ground" for SEL (e.g., Aidman & Price, 2018; Ee & Cheng, 2013; Ee et al. 2014). My ethics and district approvals were finalized on March 6th, 2020, and on March 16th schools closed indefinitely and then shifted to emergency remote learning due to COVID-19. My research, along with the rest of the world, came to a sudden halt.

At this critical juncture, with the guidance and support of my supervisor, I had to pivot and adapt my research plan so that it could be conducted online. To garner a full picture of educators' experiences, I captured additional feedback through an online qualitative questionnaire to generate a big-picture understanding of how teachers had conceptualized the core competencies across subjects and grades and to allow participants to provide feedback in their own words with time for considering and shaping their written answers (Braun & Clark, 2020). In addition, questions were added to data collection methods to consider and distinguish teachers' experiences in the context of COVID-19 and remote teaching from their reflections on their experiences in their usual teaching contexts. The separate components of the data set related to their COVID-19 experiences and the questionnaire responses of the five participants were excluded from this multicase study for the purpose of this dissertation.

The rationale for the decision to exclude this aspect of the analysis from my dissertation was informed by several considerations and assumptions, as well as the advice of my supervisor. First, the goal of the study was to understand and give due attention to teachers' perceptions and experiences with the educational change that had been initiated in 2015 focused on the core competency framework. During the initial lock down and shift to emergency remote teaching, the Ministry specifically tasked educators with scaling down teaching to focus on "sufficient

learning… with particular emphasis on the development of a student's literacy, numeracy, and Core Competencies" (BC Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 23). This step was exceptional and reflected a departure from teachers "usual teaching context" including placing a particular emphasis on the core competencies that warranted separate analysis and examination. Therefore, I had to make discerning choices in adapting the design of this study based on an assumption that teachers could make temporal distinctions between their practices and perceptions before COVID-19, separate from their practices and perceptions during lock down and remote learning. I anticipated that asking about both contexts specifically would encourage participants to make the distinction and that data would contribute to understanding teachers' perceptions of the core competencies framework in each of the two contexts. The choice to focus my dissertation on the teachers' pre-COVID perceptions of the core competencies reform was reaffirmed during the data collection process where I confirmed that teachers were able to make these distinctions ("the before-COVID-times," participant 39) and saw the remote teaching as a temporary, exceptional circumstance ("while in this challenging situation," participant 40; "in these challenging times," participant 29; "to build preparedness for eventual return," participant 27). This confirmed for me that teachers' experiences of educational change were significantly and distinctly different from what they were going through during the first wave of COVID-19 and that conflating the two in this dissertation would overshadow teachers' experiences of curricular reform with their social and emotional experiences in a time of emergency remote teaching. I also considered that, given the magnitude of the potential future impact of COVID-19, the data that I had collected about teachers' experiences of the core competencies curriculum reform captured a specific period of reflection during the initial years of change. Understanding teachers' thinking and experiences in this particular period of transition specifically in relation to the core competencies

reform has important potential implications for future policy and practice in key aspects of the redesigned curriculum.

However, even with distinctions and mitigating steps that are outlined in depth in Chapter 3, the COVID-19 context in which teachers were living while participating in the study is assumed to have influenced teachers' accounts to some extent. Research continues to emerge on educators' experiences of remote teaching during the first wave of COVID-19, however, MacDonald & Hill (2021) found that teachers' experiences varied in the sense that some educators perceived teaching during lock down as less stressful and more fluid, whereas others found it more challenging and were frustrated with the physical disconnection from students. A national Canadian survey of teachers by Sokal et al. (2020) also identified that "teachers' cognitive and emotional attitudes toward change became more negative" during lockdown (para 2). While Sokal et al. focused on change in terms of potential future shifts to increased technology and hybrid learning, an increased negative attitude towards change may also extend to and shape the way in which teachers in the present study reflect on the curricular change they previously experienced. On the other hand, teachers may also have been more willing to participate in my study given the initial pause in learning and increased availability of most individuals during lockdown (BC Ministry of Education, 2020a). In addition, they may have been more interested in discussing social and emotional learning given the tone of the global crisis (MacDonald, 2021) and the emphasis on the core competencies by the Ministry upon the return to "sufficient learning" (BC Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 22).

Therefore, I acknowledge that, it is possible that teachers' experiences and responses during COVID-19 may have influenced their recollections or characterization of their past experiences. Steps to mitigate this influence including building rapport and prompting them to distinguish between past and present experiences are described more fully in Chapter 3.

1.6.2. Research Questions

This dissertation is focused on the introduction of the core competencies framework as a free-standing, SEL-based reform included as part of BC's comprehensive educational change design. Specifically, this study centers on understanding secondary ELA teachers' perceptions of the framework and experiences with implementation. My research was guided by two overarching questions:

1. *How have secondary ELA teachers conceptualized the core competencies reform and what factors influenced their meaning-making experiences?*
2. *How have the teachers implemented change in their teaching practice related to the core competencies and what factors influenced their approach?*

2. Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The following chapter provides a review of the relevant literature in the fields of social and emotional learning and educational change theory, with particular focus on the application to secondary ELA teaching. I begin the chapter by defining SEL and situating BC's core competency framework as an SEL-based reform. I describe the particular benefits and need for SEL for adolescent learners. Then, I break temporarily from my discussion of SEL at the secondary level to situate my research temporally in relation to Fullan's (2016) summary of the traditional phases of large-scale educational change and describe the pivotal considerations that Fullan outlines for teachers engaging with curriculum reform. Next, I summarize the salient research identifying how the four key factors of agency, identity, capacity, and beliefs influence teacher engagement with curricular reform and discuss how these factors have been explored in the literature in relation to the SEL curriculum. Finally, to develop an understanding of how the participants in this study may have approached the core competencies in practice, I return to the research on SEL at the secondary level to draw examples of how SEL has been implemented in secondary schools generally and specifically in connection with English language arts. Insight into existing research in these areas will provide the necessary context for understanding BC teachers' experiences with SEL-based educational change.

2.2. Social and Emotional Learning

This research is situated in the cross-disciplinary field of social emotional learning (SEL), an area based in education and psychology research that contributes to our understanding of the cognitive, affective, behavioural, and relational factors that influence interpersonal interactions

and intrapersonal awareness and well-being (Durlak et al., 2015). In this section, I define SEL and situate BC's core competencies within this conceptual framework.

The field of SEL coalesced in the early 1990's with the formation of the Collaborative of Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a collective of university researchers and community partners engaged in conducting and mobilizing empirical research and theoretical scholarship to contribute to the growth of SEL in schools (CASEL, 2022; Elias, 1997). The field was brought to public attention by Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence*, in 1995 (Goleman, 2006). Since that time, research on the important role of social and emotional development has prompted educators and policy makers to include social and emotional skills as necessary for 21st century learners (e.g., C21 Canada, 2012; National Education Association, 2010; National Research Council, 2012b; Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2009).

As with BC's framework, various SEL models for guiding curriculum and school-based initiatives have emerged nationally and globally to encompass personal and social skills developed through and beyond traditional academic subjects in school (e.g., Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2018; Dusenbury et al., 2014; Liem et al., 2017; Macfarlane et al., 2017). As described by Care (2018) in the introduction to *Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills*, an earlier edition of which was cited as informing BC's redesigned curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2016d), so many institutions have developed frameworks that identify the essential skills for 21st century learners that "there are more differences across ways of framing these than there are in identifying the actual skills themselves" (p. 4). Many models bear different names and vary to some extent in the number of competencies and key words designating the categories (e.g. self-awareness and responsible decision making vs personal awareness and responsibility) (Eklund et al., 2018) but they are united in the objective of promoting personal and social skills for youth that will support positive development, resilience,

and success in personal and professional lives (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2020; Frydenberg et al., 2017).

One of the most widely used and coherent SEL frameworks was developed by CASEL. The "Core SEL Competency Framework*"* parsed the range of social and emotional skills into five key categories to establish a common framework for educational contexts: Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2016). This model was specifically cited as having informed the BC design (BC Ministry of Education, 2016d, 2019c; Schonert-Reichl, 2012). However, the CASEL model is limited in that it does not consider SEL from a curricular perspective with any degree of specificity. The model defines and categorises social and emotional skills into five main areas, however, it does not provide guidance in the form of learning goals or standards for the developmental progression of skills across the life span that could be used to guide educators in a school setting. This drawback was also noted by Eklund et al. (2018) who conducted a review comparing SEL frameworks from school districts across all 50 US states. The authors found that 10 states had implemented SEL standards drawing on CASEL framework but that they varied in the number of competencies adopted from the framework and the grades to which they applied. Only 11 states were found to have "freestanding SEL standards" for K-12, with most examples focusing on implementing standards for elementary learners or only including SEL within the learning goals for Physical Education or Counselling. By contrast, the BC core competencies framework includes this additional structure of incremental "profiles" and "I statements" that can be used to guide implementation as described in Chapter 1 (BC Ministry of Education, 2017a).

2.2.1. Importance and Benefits of SEL at the Secondary Level

This multicase study specifically examines the experiences of secondary educators working with adolescent students who are at a critical time in their development with a growing need for adaptive social and emotional skills (Gadermann et al., 2021; Wiens et al., 2020) and who are underrepresented in SEL research (Durlak et al., 2015). In this section, I provide context for teachers' experiences through an examination of the literature outlining the unique educational and development context of adolescence and benefits for youth.

The experiences and challenges of enacting educational reform based on SEL merit discrete attention and focused investigation at the secondary level to understand implications for students and teachers. Fullan (2016) suggests that educational change takes up to twice as long to occur at the secondary level. The reluctance of teachers to engage with SEL reforms in secondary school has been attributed to factors including adherence to traditional subject areas and teacher beliefs about their subject, which can also be important to secondary teacher identity (Collie et al., 2015; Lasky, 2005). In their large-scale study of teacher beliefs about SEL Collie et al. (2015) analyzed online questionnaire responses from 1267 educators in Ontario and BC. Using quantitative data analysis, the authors identified that middle and high school teachers reported lower levels of comfort with teaching SEL and were less likely to perceive support for teaching SEL in their school culture compared to elementary educators. Collie et al. speculated that the challenges of a rotating academic schedule may limit teachers' opportunities to connect with students and that "pressure to cover academic content at these grades" may influence their ability to incorporate SEL in their teaching practice (p.156).

By contrast, Biesta et al. (2015), found that, despite secondary teachers' attachment to their subject area, participants in their study of teachers' experiences with Scottish education reform accepted the interdisciplinary emphasis of the new curriculum. The ethnographic study followed

six teachers from one primary and two secondary schools over two years of engagement with educational reform and is also discussed later in this chapter with respect to teacher beliefs. However, the particular finding that the secondary teachers' beliefs about their roles changed as they engaged with reforms "from that of a deliverer of knowledge to that of a facilitator of learning, and from a subject specialist to a teacher of children" is especially salient when considering how secondary teachers may experience and respond to educational change (p. 632). Together, Collie et al. (2015) and Biesta et al. (2015) offer insight into both the potential barriers for secondary teachers engaging with the core competencies as well as the potential mitigating influence of closely aligned teacher identity and beliefs about the reforms.

A review of the literature on the current social and emotional challenges adolescents face reveals a vital need to support core competency development during this pivotal period and underscores the importance of understanding how secondary teachers have approached this area of learning with their students. During adolescence, students undergo dynamic social and emotional changes that significantly impact their growth and development (Durlak et al., 2015; Oberle, 2018). In Canada, secondary students report struggling with developing healthy self-concept, relationships, and strong mental health (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020; Statistics Canada, 2020). More specifically, a recurring Canadian Public Health survey last collected in 2019 revealed that, on a declining trajectory from Grade 6 to Grade 10, youth are perceiving less support and kindness amongst peers, and report a decline in their perceptions of positive school climate and community support (Craig et al., 2020a). The study indicates a steady rise in feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, and nervousness reported by adolescent girls and a decline in confidence and life satisfaction from Grades 6 to 10. Boys in this age group also reported increased loneliness and nervousness during adolescence and students across all grades struggle with their body image (Craig et al., 2020a). These findings underscore the need to work

directly with young people to recognize and understand their experiences and to support teachers in empowering youth to develop resilience and social and emotional wellbeing.

Fortunately, these challenges can be mediated through social and emotional learning. For example, Zimmerman and Iwanski (2014) examined 1305 participants in age-groups from adolescence to adulthood using self-report questionnaires and identified that the ability to self-regulate is linked to the number of regulation strategies a child possesses, but that adolescents tend to have a limited number of strategies and are less likely to use them compared to older individuals. By contrast, participants in emerging adulthood showed improved support-seeking, emotional regulation, and more successful relationships (Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014). According to Zimmerman, as we progress into adulthood, we form emotional strategies based on experience (p. 192). These findings demonstrate the importance of supporting teachers in facilitating SEL and helping students to develop a broader range of adaptive strategies. Focused SEL has also been found to have a positive impact on other important factors for learners including positive identity development and well-being (Lewis et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017), relationships and connectedness (Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015; Rutledge et al., 2015; Shechtman & Yaman, 2012), and academic success (Bavarian et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2017). Therefore, understanding and supporting the ways in which secondary educators are helping students foster core competencies is critical to students' wellbeing, positive learning experience, and successful transition into adulthood.

Adolescence is also a period when students are at particular risk of disengaging from school. In Canada, a foundational study by Willms, Friesen, & Milton (2009) examined engagement of nearly 65,000 students over three years. The authors found that disengagement began in Grade 6 and continued to decline until Grade 9 remaining low thereafter to the end of high school (p. 17). These findings align with those reported in the "Health Behaviour in

School-aged Children Study," a Canadian public health questionnaire that surveyed over 20,000 students from across all provinces and territories. Students in older grades (9-12) perceived aspects of school more negatively indicating, for example, less positive school climate, less perceived support from teachers, and increased academic pressure (Craig et al., 2020b).

However, personal and social competencies have been found to have a positive link with student academic achievement in middle and high school. For example, a study by Oberle et al. (2014) of 461 students found that high levels of social and emotional competence in adolescence were associated with strong literacy and numeracy skills. The authors used provincial assessments scores in grades 4 and 7, as well as student questionnaires and a teacher questionnaire to identify that students who performed well on reading and mathematics assessments in Grade 7 also reported higher levels of social and emotional competence across socio-economic lines. In addition, engaging in SEL contributes to student emotional engagement in school for secondary learners, including supporting positive relationships with teachers and peers (Fredrick & Jenkins, 2021). For example, Yang et al. (2018) examined student self-reports from quantitative surveys on school engagement, relationships, and SEL from 25,896 students in Delaware across elementary, middle, and high school levels. They found that for secondary students, who perceive themselves as more socially and emotionally independent from school and parents than elementary students, teaching social and emotional competencies and feeling support from their teachers had a particularly strong influence on school engagement.

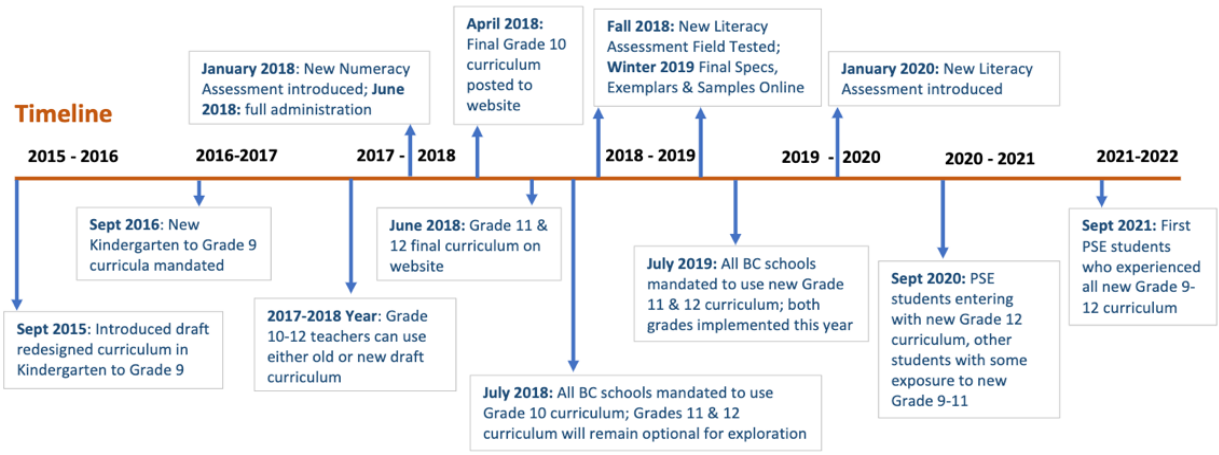
Taken together, the above research indicates the importance of understanding how teachers have engaged with the core competencies at the secondary level given the significant need and benefits for students. As students mature in their cognitive and affective capacity, they also transition to later grades and more complex academic content. Thus, it is also important to explore the ways in which teachers are incorporating SEL with subject-specific curriculum and

content for secondary learners. In the next section, I situate my study within the theoretical framework of educational change theory and establish context for understanding teachers' experiences of change including the individual factors of teacher agency, capacity, beliefs, and identity.

2.3. Situating the Research within BC's Educational Change Process

To situate this study temporally within the curriculum change process in BC, I draw on Fullan's (2016) summary of the three "I's" or "traditional" phases of the change process: 1) Initiation, the decision to adopt a particular reform; 2) Implementation, initial 2-3 years of trialing and incorporating the reforms; and 3) Institutionalization, when the reforms become ingrained into the system or eliminated through outright rejection or discontinued use (p. 83). In BC, the phases of change are somewhat challenging to delineate due to the gradual roll out of the reforms across grades K-9, 10, and 11-12 each with a period of voluntary implementation before being fully mandated. A summary of this timeline developed by Knaack (2017) is included as Figure 1.

Figure 1 BC K-12 New Curriculum: Roll Out Timeline (Knaack, 2017)



This timeline provides an overview of the change process for the entire redesigned curriculum that featured several areas of reform including curriculum changes in every subject

area and grade, changes to assessment policy, added foundations in First Peoples Principles of Learning, and the core competencies framework. This study is particularly focused on the core competencies framework which was defined earlier as a free-standing SEL standard. I refer to *the framework* or *the reform* to describe the core competencies model developed by MoE inclusive of the seven sub-competencies, graduated profiles, and "I statements" that make up the curricular framework specifically designed and refined for the purpose of facilitating the teaching and assessing of student social and emotional skill development (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, 2015).

Determining an initiation point for the core competencies reform proves particularly complex given that changes to the draft framework continued to occur throughout the transition period with the core competencies having only been finalized in 2019 after implementation and reporting was already made mandatory for all grades (BC Ministry of Education, 2019d). For the purpose of this study, I consider the initiation period occurring as of 2015 because the redesigned curriculum was formally introduced from K-9 that year (BC Ministry of Education, 2015e). At the same time, the core competencies were made widely available and included as part of the updated reporting order by the MoE (Student Progress Reporting Order, 2016).

This study is predominantly situated in the implementation phase of the core competency reform (Fullan, 2016). At the time of participant involvement in 2020, teachers were in the process of trialing and engaging with the core competencies framework which was introduced in draft form in 2015 and finalized in 2019 (BC Ministry of Education, 2019a; Knaack, 2017). They were continuing to develop their understanding by situating it in relation to their beliefs and making choices with respect to related resources, strategies, and curricular connections. In keeping with Fullan's definition, the third phase of institutionalization is yet to be seen because

rejection or acceptance of the core competencies is determined by ongoing experiences of teachers during the implementation period.

2.4. Educational Change

BC's core competencies framework is an integral component of the larger curriculum "transformation" and significant province-wide educational change (BC Ministry of Education, 2015e, p.1). Educational change scholars agree that achieving successful and lasting reform takes time and that change is a complex process influenced by multiple structural and human factors (Fixsen et al., 2013; Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves et al., 2009; Priestley & Philippou, 2018). For the purposes of this study, I rely primarily on the dimensions of educational change described by Fullan (2016) to examine teachers' experiences with reform. This model was selected owing to the basis of Fullan's extensive research in large-scale curriculum reform in Canadian contexts and because of the strong theoretical alignment between the present study and the "new pedagogies for deeper learning" that underpin Fullan's contemporary work described in detail later in this section (p. 184).

With respect to teachers' experiences with educational change, Fullan (2016) asserts that, whether self-initiated or imposed, reform is often accompanied by a sense of uncertainty underscoring the need to develop "infrastructures and processes that engage teachers in developing and applying new knowledge, skills, and understandings" as well as "deep meaning about new approaches to teaching and learning." (p. 43). To this end, the author explains that achieving lasting and meaningful change requires consideration of both the *subjective* and *objective* components of adopting the proposed reform.

The *subjective meaning* of change refers to the process of sensemaking teachers undertake individually and collectively to determine the value and potential role of the proposed reform

within their daily professional contexts (p.48). Ascribing subjective meaning to a reform is an ongoing, iterative exercise in which teachers evaluate the reforms against their professional identity and pedagogic orientation (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Lasky, 2005; März & Kelchtermans, 2013; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). This sense of meaning "is fundamentally related to whether teachers are likely to find the considerable energy required to transform the status quo" and whether they deem it worthwhile. (Fullan, 2016 p. 52). Fullan is consistent with other change scholars in emphasizing the importance of teachers engaging in sensemaking collectively and developing shared meaning with respect to the reforms if lasting, meaningful change is to occur (Butler et al., 2015; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Lockton & Fargason, 2019).

The *objective realities* of change, according to Fullan (2016), are the realities of how teachers actually implement "change in practice" (p. 42). Fullan refers to three dimensions in which change in practice can and should occur to substantively adopt a given reform: a) curriculum and resources, b) teaching strategies, and c) beliefs or pedagogical understandings that underlie teaching practice (p. 43). Fullan suggests that lasting, meaningful change requires shifts in all three dimensions with particular emphasis on the role of beliefs and the need for teachers to understand and adopt the pedagogic ideas underpinning the reforms to facilitate shared meaning amongst educators for effective long-term change (p. 49).

Fullan (2016) also distinguishes between "deep structure" and "surface" change in these dimensions suggesting that:

> …it is possible to change "on the surface" by endorsing certain goals, using specific materials, and even imitating the behavior *without specifically understanding* the principles and rationale of the change. Moreover, with reference to beliefs, it is possible to value and even be articulate about the goals of the change without understanding their implications for practice. (emphasis in original, p. 46)

The author suggests that a merely performative change in practice is insufficient for deep structure reform.

To illustrate the distinction between surface and deep level change, Fullan (2016) cites the example of Bussis et al. (1976) that, while dated, retains relevance because it provides a fuller understanding of the researcher's thinking in this respect. Bussis et al. conducted a phenomenological interview-based study of 60 US teachers' understanding of a proposed open learning curriculum. Fullan identifies that in this example some teachers "operated at the level of surface curriculum, focusing on materials and seeing that students were 'busy.' They tried to address open-education goals *literally*, but they did not comprehend the underlying purpose" (p. 44). This group of teachers focused on knowing "what exactly has to be covered" but had not developed their own sense of rationale or purpose for the changes that they were implementing (p. 45). On the other hand, some teachers engaged in deep structure change employing "reflectivity, purposefulness, and awareness" in their approach to teaching a concept and were able to both articulate their understanding of the goals of open education and describe "concrete activities that reflected them" (Fullan, 2016, p. 48).

Fullan (2016) also highlighted that, in the Bussis et al. example, teachers' assumptions about students and about learning varied. Some teachers thought about students as either able or unable to engage with the new teaching practice, while other teachers presumed that all students could connect with the new concepts if their interest was activated. Fullan notes that teachers were described by Bussis et al. in three ways: as strictly covering content without considering the rationale, as able to express the underlying learning goals to some extent, but "vague" in being able to connect those goals to their practices and activities (p, 49), and another group who introduced "rich materials *on the faith* that they will promote certain learning priorities" (Bussis et al. 1976, p. 76 as cited in Fullan, 2016, p. 49). Based on this description, Fullan (2016)

associates surface change with performative or superficial steps that are not informed by meaningful underlying purpose and with the concept of covering content but not considering the pedagogic rationale. For Fullan (2016) deep learning is reflexive. It is thoughtful and informed by engaging with the underlying ideas behind the reform.

Particularly relevant to the focus of this study, Fullan (2016) suggests that only in adopting a deep-structure approach to reform can schools foster the deep-learning outcomes of the "6 C's: character education, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking" (p. 48). Fullan focuses on these six competencies as "New Pedagogies for Deep Learning" referring to the type of skills that schools need to engage in modern society. The alignment between Fullan's 6 Cs and the BC core competencies established additional rationale for applying Fullan's model of educational change in the present study. The 6 Cs overlap directly with the core competencies in four areas (collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking). There is also strong alignment within the two remaining C's. Character education (including "grit, tenacity, perseverance, and resilience," p. 169, "self-responsibility and reliability," p. 171) is related to skills identified in the core competency of personal awareness and responsibility ("express their needs and seek help when needed, find purpose and motivation, act on decisions, and advocate for themselves… persevere in difficult situations" BC Ministry of Education, 2022b). Similarly, Fullan's description of citizenship ("thinking like global citizens… based on a deep understanding of diverse values and world views, and with a genuine interest and ability to solve ambiguous and complex real-world problems that impact human and environmental sustainability," p.169) complements the BC competency for social awareness and responsibility ("develop awareness of and take responsibility for social, physical, and natural environments by working independently and collaboratively for the benefit of others, communities, and the environment… aware of the impact of their decisions, actions, and

footprint… advocate for and act to bring about positive change," BC Ministry of Education 2022b). Fullan (2016) frames the 6 C's as "as twenty-first century learning skills" and "essential dispositions and qualities for twenty-first century living" that he describes as both "alterable (that is, you can produce more of them) and measurable" (p.168). The parallels between the 6C's and the BC core competencies demonstrate the considerable theoretical alignment between Fullan, the BC curriculum designers, and my own stance as a researcher with respect to underlying beliefs about the value and potential for educational change to support these essential social and emotional skills. This strong alignment contributed to my choice to use Fullan's model for understanding teachers' engagement with curriculum reform in the present study.

In this section, I have described Fullan's (2016) framework of educational change, the significant relevance of the framework to the present study, and the particular context of my study as the implementation phase of the core competencies reform. In the next section, I describe factors in the initiation phase of curricular reform that have been identified in the research as important for the success of a proposed change.

2.4.1. Change Factors Influencing the Initiation Phase

There are several measures that can be taken early on in the change process to improve the success of the proposed reforms. In this section, I briefly outline the recommendations in the literature for establishing a strong grounding for change in the initiation phase to provide context with respect to framework design process and how it was initially introduced to teachers. In particular, change scholars (i.e., Goodson, 2001, Hargreaves, 2005; Fullan, 2016) emphasize the value of engaging with stakeholders in the development process, designing a clear and coherent plan, allowing time for consideration, and incorporating meaningful measures of accountability.

Researchers have emphasized that engaging with stakeholders, especially teachers, throughout the initiation process is important to establish buy-in and to benefit from their professional expertise (Goodson, 2001; Hargreaves et al., 2009). Fullan (2016) suggests that mechanisms for trying out, considering, and questioning reform are important to weathering an initial period of uncertainty: "No matter how honorable the motives, each and every individual who is necessary for effective implementation will experience some concerns about the meaning of new practices, goals, beliefs, and means of implementation" (Fullan, 2016, p. 52). According to BC MoE publications, this was a central component of the design of the renewed curriculum with "formal and informal consultations with provincial partners, school district-hosted sessions with local stakeholders, provincial and regional conferences and meetings, conversations with international experts, and online dialogue" (BC Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 2). Specific feedback on the core competencies framework was described in draft documents from stakeholder groups consisting of teachers, community members, parents, students, and teacher-educators (BC Ministry of Education, 2013a). However, BCTF Director of Research Gacoin (2018) identified that the foundations for the redesigned curriculum were laid by the MoE from 2010-2013, and that this work occurred without the BCTF because of intense contract negotiation and job action in this period. According to Gacoin, teacher involvement increased after 2013 but there is little information about the degree to which teachers were specifically engaged in shaping the core competency framework.

Another step towards successful change is to ensure a clear and cohesive plan for reform. Fullan (2016) posits that for teachers and other stakeholders to generate a sense of shared meaning about the reforms that motivates and drives engagement, it is essential to establish "program coherence" (p. 51). Coherence is necessary whether the changes in question are

specific, targeted reforms addressing a particular subject or skill set, or large-scale cultural transformation such as in BC's curriculum "transformation" (BC Ministry of Education, 2016a, p.1). Beginning with a clear statement of the proposed reform, coherence is an iterative process of directing focus that evolves with increased familiarity and engagement with the given reforms (Fullan & Quinn, 2015).

The importance of clarity is also underscored by Fixsen et al. (2005) who identify that implementation involves adopting "a specified set of activities" with "known dimensions" of sufficient detail for an outside observer to "detect the presence and strength" of the reform (p.5). Fixsen's work on evidenced-based reform takes a somewhat positivistic approach focused on what the author terms the "implementation science" necessary for measuring the effectiveness of a proposed reform (Fixsen et al., 2019, p. 3). However, the underlying principle of clarity also applies to a structured curriculum framework such that, to understand the reform and establish a sense of meaning to underpin changes in teaching practice, the reforms must be clear and narrow enough for educators to engage (Fullan, 2016, p. 60). As previously described, the BC core competencies framework now includes specific sub-competency categories, facets, incremental profiles, and "I statements" setting the standards for student growth (BC Ministry of Education, 2019d). However, the circuitous steps and timeline for evolving the framework to arrive at the final version in 2019 may have blurred the sense of cohesion of the plan for implementation at the initiation phase. In addition, limited guidance with respect to strategies for implementation and assessment may raise issues with clarity (BCTF, 2017; Gacoin, 2019; Storey, 2017).

Finally, the issues of accountability and measurement of success are raised by change scholars as important in achieving true change, frequently with reference to the tensions created by the current "age of accountability" in education (Buchanan, 2015, p. 700; Schnellert et al., 2008, p. 725). Quinn & Fullan (2015) recommend a model based on building internal

accountability within schools and professional communities. They elaborate on the idea that measures of success should be related to teachers' intrinsic motivation and tools for measuring and developing their own practice, supported by a school culture that enables reflective practice. In line with this emphasis on teacher-driven measures of progress, there is a growing movement against models that shape accountability as "surveillance" (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019, p. 3) and in favour of collaborative models established at the school level that takes into consideration school needs and teaching context (Buchanan, 2015; Fixsen et al., 2013; Olivant, 2015). No formal measures for accountability are described by the BC MoE with respect to the core competencies. The only measure of students' core competency development is year-end summative reporting of student core competencies mandated in the 2016 update to the MoE reporting order (Student Progress Reporting Order, 2016). This measure was further clarified by the MoE as only requiring student year-end self-assessment of at least one competency area (BC Ministry of Education, 2017c). Individual districts, schools, and educators may develop internal measures of accountability for reform implementation as recommended by Quinn & Fullan (2015). Considering the ways in which participants measure success in relation to the core competencies is integral to understanding how they conceptualize the framework within their teaching roles.

In summary, situating the core competencies according to Fullan's (2016) phases of educational change, BC has *initiated* its redesigned curriculum. Understanding the foundations laid for reform at this initial stage provides key context for understanding BC teachers' experiences in the present *implementation* phase (BC Ministry of Education, 2022). Together, the three components of stakeholder engagement, a clear and coherent plan, and meaningful measures of accountability provide teachers with the foundation for reform. The design of the BC core competency framework included some consultation with educators and other

stakeholders, a degree of specificity in its final version, and limited guidelines for measuring success. In the next section, I outline individual factors that have been identified in the literature as influential in the way in which teachers conceptualize and engage with reform and how they approach implementing educational change.

2.4.2. Factors that Influence Teachers' Engagement with Reform

According to Fullan (2016), substantive and qualitative educational change is found at the point of intersection between the subjective meaning teachers ascribe to a given reform and the objective realities of implementation. These two aspects of the change process involve several complex but related concepts identified in educational change literature as underpinning teachers' sensemaking and practical engagement with the core competencies framework: teacher agency, teacher beliefs, teacher capacity, and professional identity. In the following section, I define these concepts and delve into the extant literature that examines the interaction between these factors and teachers' educational change experience in general and, more specifically, with respect to teaching SEL.

2.4.2.1. Teacher Agency. Fullan (2016) suggests that when reforms are introduced teachers decide which of the three dimensions of change in practice to adopt but that they may not necessarily take up all three. In the case of the core competencies, for example, educators may change only their teaching resources, selecting texts that are more directly linked with SEL themes, but may not investigate or be familiar with teaching strategies for optimal core competency development. Fullan's characterization relies on assumptions about teacher agency in the context of educational change that bear further discussion when considering BC's reforms.

Broadly defined, agency refers to the ability to make considered and intentional choices about one's actions or behaviours (Bandura, 2006). With respect to teacher-agency, Priestley,

Biesta, and Robinson (2016) propose an ecological model that conceptualizes teacher agency, not solely as an educator's autonomous choice to act, but as something that is achieved in a given context. In this model, agency is influenced by individual factors such as capacity and the social and contextual realities of their particular professional environment, as well as their past experiences, present realities, and future concerns (p.626). This model is helpful to shape our understanding of BC teachers' choices about how to approach the core competencies along Fullan's three dimensions as situated in their unique and complex experiences of large-scale change.

Making pedagogical decisions about curriculum and learning design is an inherent part of any teaching role, but teacher agency is guided by policy to varying degrees (Priestley, Biesta, et al., 2015; Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). In a three year longitudinal case study of 12 Australian high school home economics teachers, Jenkins (2020) found that, in the face of national curriculum change, teachers' agency took one of three forms: proactive, reactive, and passive (p. 172). Proactive agency occurred when teachers took up the curricular reform on their own accord, reactive agency occurred when teachers took up reforms under top-down influences such as administrators, and passive agency occurred when teachers opted not to take up reforms or modified them to suit their own goals. The author observed that teachers moved between the categories with the right support and emphasized the importance of teachers' sense of input and involvement, the need for sufficient professional development, time, and collaboration to understand the reforms and the need for effective and supportive leadership. This study demonstrates how varied teachers' response to change can be and underscores the influence of individual and contextual factors.

In BC, the redesigned curriculum is intentionally broad and flexible, positioning educators as key agents of change with considerable influence on directing curriculum (BC Ministry of

Education, 2012, p. 1). This format is in line with a growing policy trend identified in the literature in jurisdictions such as the UK, Norway, and Singapore where curriculum reform has been designed based on a "vision of teachers as active developers of curriculum" with significant agentic influence (Priestley, Biesta, Philippou, et al., 2016, p. 2). Research indicates that enhancing teacher agency can be empowering and contribute to achieving change, particularly when instilling a strong sense of trust in teachers' professional autonomy. Through focus groups with 143 teachers, Wilcox & Lawson (2018) examined their engagement with large-scale reform based on the "Race-to-the-Top" policy that was first initiated in the US in the early 2010s and aimed at improving students' numeracy and literacy scores comparing the experiences of teachers in schools that exceeded performance expectations and schools that continued to underperform (p.182). The authors found that teachers' sense of voice and agency was important to their willingness to engage with the reforms and influenced their sense of self-efficacy. Teachers in low performing schools perceived a lack of trust in their abilities whereas teachers in high performing schools experienced more autonomy in implementation. Collaboration and a sense of collective effort helped higher performing schools to overcome the emotional stress and fatigue of engaging in change, whereas teachers at low performing schools reported a sense of competition in successfully implementing reforms that was not experienced by teachers in higher performing schools. These findings offer insight into the potential benefits of a flexible curriculum and the importance of instilling a sense of trust in teachers' professional decision-making to support buy-in and ownership when it comes to implementing the core competencies in the classroom.

However, there is also evidence in the literature that putting too much pressure on teacher agency and autonomy in interpreting and implementing reform can have the opposite effect. For example, Mellegard and Pettersen (2016) examined the experiences of 20 primary and secondary

English teachers in the context of a large-scale curriculum shift in Norway moving from content-driven to learning-driven focus. Through focus group interviews, the researchers found that, when teachers were given significant autonomy and were made responsible for developing curricula in their own schools, they did not see this as "real freedom" but as additional burden and situated themselves as responding to policy rather than as agents of change (p. 187). The researchers summarize teachers' perceptions of increased autonomy as reflecting a sense of increased expectation:

> …the implications of extended freedom: decision-making, responsibility, anxiety about not doing things the right way, and pressure on certain areas of teaching such as assessment and documentation…the feeling that one's teaching practice is under attack and becoming more instrumental… (p.187)

Mellegard and Pettersen suggest that teachers' response could be attributed in part to a disconnect between the focus of policy makers on the theoretical and "ideal world" in designing the curriculum, and that of teachers who are primarily concerned with the pragmatic and everyday reality of implementation (p.189). The researchers observed that their participants "place themselves at a different point of curriculum development than that intended by the policy makers" which contributed to teachers' sense of burden and left a gap in continuity in curriculum reform efforts (p. 189).

As in the present study, Mellegard and Pettersen (2016) ground their research in Fullan's (2007/16) theory of educational change in practice. However, a limitation of the study is that the authors do not contextualize their findings relative to Fullan's temporal phases of the change process (initiation, implementation, and institutionalization). The data is described as having been collected three years after reform was initiated in Norway and can therefore be situated in the implementation phase (Fullan, 2016). This distinction is important for understanding whether

teachers' feedback is grounded in anticipation or in first-hand experience of implementing reform. Mellegard and Pettersen suggest that their findings highlight the need to bridge the gap between policy makers' focus on the theoretical goals of reform and teachers' focus on practical application. These findings have implications for initiating future policy change and in understanding how the scope of teachers' roles as curriculum designers shape the agency with which they effect implementation.

In line with the literature described above, some researchers question the efficacy of assigning such a high level of responsibility under the presumption that teachers are equipped to adopt, adapt, and develop curriculum and learning opportunities in line with the reforms (Biesta et al., 2015; Jenkins, 2020; Leite et al., 2018). Prominent UK change researchers Priestley et al. (2015) argue that policies that position teachers "as developers of curriculum at a school level" are problematic for construing teacher agency as strictly a "positive capacity" and ignores the potential pitfalls and risks (p. 193). The authors suggest that teachers may be ill equipped to exercise this form of agency, especially if they are coming from a system that has previously been driven by data and outcome-based policy and prescriptive curricula. Priestly et al. (2015) suggest that, without proper structural change, teachers lack the capacity to realize or adopt educational reform and "innovation is often mediated to fit with prior practice" (p. 193). The authors also suggest that "negative" agency can result from insufficient capacity building that leads to "resistance, conspiratorial mediation, and creative mediation" wherein teachers' choose to engage with proposed reforms on a performative or even subversive level in reaction to change, rather than a meaningful one (p.193).

Priestly et al. (2015) ground their thinking with reference to several primary research studies by the lead author. In one example, Priestley and Minty (2013) conducted case study research with 17 Scottish elementary and secondary teachers experiencing curriculum reform

that extended their roles as agents of change. The authors identified that, teachers limited professional knowledge and "socialisation associated with prior policy" limited their ability to "manoeuvre between repertoires in their practice" resulting in the tendency to "recycle old practices and ideas when addressing new curriculum development problematics" (p. 50). Priestly and Minty (2013) identified that most teachers responded positively and accepted the changes in theory ("first order engagement") but that engagement with the underpinning pedagogy and theories of knowledge and learning ("second order engagement") was far less evident (pp. 46-47).

Similar findings were reported by Gibson and Brooks (2012) who examined the experiences of Alberta teachers with reform of the K-9 social studies curriculum. Findings based on survey responses from 31 teachers and follow up interviews with 10 teachers from a range of grades indicated that openness to curriculum change was a critical factor for successful reform, but that perceptions of constant change and insufficient ProD contributed to teachers' resistance. One participant observed that colleagues who participated in the related ProD sessions fell into two categories, teachers who "were ready to hear something new" and those who "were going to continue to teach the way they've always taught it, and they would break down the curriculum to fit their teaching method" (p.16). Regarding resistant teachers, the participant opined "You can't force them to learn something especially when we were telling them that professionally they have to change how they do their job" and attribute their resistance to the sense of "constant change" and responsibility in the teaching profession (p. 17). Gibson and Brooks underscored the importance of beliefs and affective response to reform in shaping teachers' engagement with educational change.

The research summarized above offers another possible lens for understanding the experiences of BC teachers who are transitioning from a prescriptive content-based curriculum

to a broad and flexible one. The BC curriculum positions teachers as agents of change; however, they may perceive the framework to be an additional and significant responsibility, or even burden in relation to which they have little true agentic control. This tension in the literature over how teacher agency is best situated in the context of educational change underscores the need to find a balance between providing sufficient guidance and allowing enough flexible scope for teachers to take an active role in shaping reforms on a local level. This discussion is salient in the context of the core competencies as a new framework within BC's broad curriculum and necessitates a discussion about how to build the capacity that informs teachers as they exert agency in their practice.

The importance of understanding teachers' agency in the context of SEL is apparent in studies that describe how educators choose which elements of an SEL reform to emphasize and which learning strategies are most effective. For example, as part of a larger study of the introduction of a free-standing SEL reform in Singaporean curriculum, Ee and Cheng (2013) interviewed 19 elementary and secondary teachers about their perceptions and experiences with implementation. Participants described taking individualized approaches to the SEL model, and many chose to implement SEL more deeply in certain subject areas. In particular, ELA and character education were viewed as complementary for SEL and teachers described these areas as the focus of their implementation. The educators also identified focusing on some competencies that were easier to introduce, including self- and social awareness, compared to others like self-management. Similarly, Dyson et al. (2019) provide another example of how teachers enact agency in the context of educational reform in Aotearoa New Zealand. The author interviewed and observed 18 teachers from three primary schools in low or middle-income regions implementing SEL with an embedded focus on Indigenous principles of learning and restorative justice (p. 76). The authors found that teachers chose to focus on the components of

the framework and teaching strategies they perceived to be most valuable for students. Teachers emphasized certain skills, particularly "positive interdependences" such as cooperative problem solving, as well as self-management, empowerment, self-awareness, and restorative communication (p. 73). Teachers also made choices regarding teaching strategies, with a number of teachers stressing the importance of teaching language and vocabulary. As one participant explained, "some children have very good social skills and emotional awareness but maybe they don't talk about it because they don't have the language" to help them self-regulate and navigate conflict (p. 76).

Both studies offer examples of teacher agency in the context of state or district wide SEL reforms. The BC MoE has positioned teachers as the primary agents of change responsible for implementing the core competencies framework along with the other components of curricular change. As seen in these studies, teachers make agentic choices about where and how to engage with curriculum and facilitate students' SEL. Understanding the factors that influence the direction in which teachers exert agency is important to understanding how to support and balance guidance with professional judgement.

In summary, when reforms are introduced, teachers make choices as to how they exert agency and implement change in their practice. This agency is contextualized by the realities of their present circumstances including their existing professional knowledge related to the reform, their classroom dynamic and school culture, perceived degree of professional autonomy, pressure, or support, and their individual past and anticipated future experiences. Examining the factors that influence the agency of the teachers in this study may provide key insights into why and how they have engaged with the core competencies and understanding what additional supports could facilitate implementation. In the next section, I examine how teacher capacity has

been discussed in the literature on teachers' approach to educational change to provide a grounding for my case study analysis.

2.4.2.2. Teacher Capacity. Teacher capacity refers to educators' ability to enact reform including possessing the requisite professional knowledge and skills (Datnow & Hubbard, 2016) as well as the personal and emotional bandwidth to engage with and navigate change (Hargreaves, 2005a). For the sake of clarity in this examination of SEL-based reform, I refer to the former as *professional capacity* and the latter as *emotional capacity* in discussing the two distinct components under the umbrella of teacher capacity. In connection with Fullan's (2016) three dimensions of change in practice, professional capacity is discussed in the present study in terms of teachers' knowledge, skills, and preparedness to engage with the core competencies framework and SEL pedagogy and adopt changes in the dimensions of curriculum and resources, teaching strategies, and pedagogic assumptions. For example, professional capacity is related to how teachers understand the framework (i.e., familiarity with the various components such as the sub-competencies, profiles, "I statements," etc.) as well as their pedagogical understanding of how learning occurs with respect to SEL and teaching strategies that facilitate core competency development. BC teachers' knowledge and skills in these respects are important information for contextualizing and understanding the way in which they engaged with reforms. Teachers' emotional capacity including their own social and emotional competencies is discussed later in this section as a uniquely important component of teachers' ability to enact change related to SEL and support students' core competency development.

Fullan (2016) indicates that, in order to motivate and prepare teachers to enact reform, it is essential to "foster capacity building" which is a primary responsibility of government and school leadership (p. 228). As "a starting point" for reform, Fullan recommends that educational leaders begin from an assumption that "lack of capacity is the initial problem and then work on it

continuously" to ensure that sufficient measures are in place to build the requisite level of capacity for true implementation (p. 56). The author succinctly summarizes, "effective change processes shape and reshape good ideas, as they build capacity and ownership among participants" (p. 55). Such capacity building occurs initially with the introduction of reform and as an ongoing part of the change process within classrooms, schools, and districts.

Building professional capacity begins with the structure of the proposed reforms and the understanding derived from guidance within the reform itself (Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Luttenberg et al., 2013; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). Limited knowledge can be garnered about specific capacity building provided by the province or school districts as the BC MoE purposefully refrained from advising teachers on how curriculum should be taught or assessed "in the interest of flexibility" (BC Ministry of Education, 2017c, para. 2). No specific programs, guidelines, or recommendations were introduced to shape how teachers adapted their materials, strategies, or teaching practices to support students' core competency development. As described in Chapter 1, the main tools provided on the MoE website were limited illustrations consisting of brief examples submitted by BC teachers of possible sample activities that involve the core competencies to some degree (BC Ministry of Education, 2019b). For instance, one illustration entitled "Narrative Essay" simply states that "Students were provided with a variety of topics for narrative essays. All topics related to aspects of the students' lives" (BC Ministry of Education, 2022e, para 1). The example is a point-form essay outline based on the prompt "How We Know Who We Are" (para 1) describing the influence of family, friends, social challenges, and media on one student's self-perception. The illustration is indicated as accessing all of the core competencies, except collaboration, at the highest possible profile. Another illustration briefly describes that students engaged with professional poets in a district workshop "and learned how to use poetry as a medium to discover personal awareness" (BC Ministry of Education, 2022f,

para. 1). While no further context is provided for the lesson, the summary is accompanied by a video of a student presenting their poem focused on "lifelong challenge of being naturally thin and the trauma she has suffered to her self-image and in her relationships" (para. 1). This illustration is associated with personal awareness and responsibility (profile 6), communicating (profile five and six), and creative thinking (profile four). Without further detail or description of the materials and resources, strategies, lessons, or pedagogical ideas underlying the student products, these illustrations offer limited assistance for teachers. It is unclear, for example, whether the profiles indicated in each case reflect the level of competence demonstrated by student exemplars or the targeted profiles for all students who participate in the described activity. Furthermore, no explicit connections are drawn to grade level or subject-area curricula, and there is no sense of the pedagogical grounding or the teaching strategies employed to scaffold for core competency development in either case. These vague illustrations are in line with the criticism reported by the BC Teachers Federation that initial capacity building efforts were characterized by teachers as lacking clarity and offering insufficient professional resources to support teaching and assessing the core competencies (BC Teachers' Federation, 2017; Gacoin, 2019). Understanding participants experiences with this component of capacity building is essential to understanding how they have approached change in practice.

Teachers' challenges with feeling under-resourced for enacting change (Gacoin, 2019, p. 6) is also reflected in research by Schmidt & Datnow (2005), a foundational study frequently cited in the literature (e.g., Hargreaves et al., 2009; Lockton, 2019; Vähäsantanen, 2015; Zembylas & Chubbuck, 2014) as an example of the important connection between professional capacity building, teachers' emotional capacity, and their influence on teachers' implementation of reforms. The authors examined the influence of emotions on teachers' sense-making experience in five California and Florida schools undergoing reforms that varied in the degree of

cohesion and specific structure. More structured reforms invoked less emotional response and led to more cohesive understanding and increased trust and comfort with the reforms compared to less structured reforms. In addition, sense-making at a school level was a more cohesive experience than sense-making at a classroom level where teachers had dynamic emotional experiences, both positive and negative. For example, while trying to understand and implement reforms in their classroom with their students, teachers expressed strong positive feelings, such as finding satisfaction in updating their practice, but also experienced strong negative feelings, such as self-doubt, worry, and frustration. The authors underscore the need for policy makers to ensure that teachers are knowledgeable about the reforms, have tools for classroom implementation, and consider emotional dimensions of change experience so that teachers can "take reasonable risks" without fear of personal consequences. Without sufficient capacity building, the authors suggested that they would "expect to see very little change at the classroom level—where it inevitably matters the most" (p. 962). This study underscores the importance of providing initial guidance, clarity, and resources for teachers in capacity building, as well as the dynamic role that teachers' emotions play in their approach to curriculum reform offering potential insight into the experiences of study participants.

The province's hands-off model may also have particular implications for teachers' capacity to enact reform and engage the core competencies framework relative to other subject areas that have long been formally embedded in educational infrastructure. For example, while teachers facing educational change in traditional areas such as literacy (Butler et al., 2015; Jenkins, 2020; Sharratt & Fullan, 2012), numeracy (Louie, 2016; März & Kelchtermans, 2013) or other established subjects (Jenkins, 2020; Priestley, 2011) can leverage their undergraduate specialization, instructional methods courses in teacher education (Government of British Columbia, 2022; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017), and breadth of experience and professional

learning to navigate curricular change within their subject area (Fischer et al., 2018; Harris & Graham, 2018), this is not necessarily the case for teaching the core competencies. Educators are not required to undertake coursework related to SEL in Canada and few teacher education programs provide a grounding in SEL theory or teaching methods (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).

A lack of professional foundations may have a negative influence on teachers' sense of preparation and confidence when it comes to teaching SEL which may affect the depth of their engagement with the core competencies framework in the classroom (Domitrovich et al., 2019; Freeman & Strong, 2017). For example, in their analysis of survey responses from 1267 teachers from Ontario and British Columbia, Collie et al. (2015) found that, even when educators were highly committed to implementing SEL in their practice, their comfort level with teaching SEL and their perceptions of support within their school were closely connected to their beliefs about SEL and their satisfaction in their teaching roles. These findings indicate that developing teachers' comfort and confidence with the core competencies framework and pedagogy and providing support within the school environment contribute to a positive and constructive change experience.

In addition to reform guidelines and post-secondary specialization, capacity building in education also commonly occurs through professional development (ProD) when teachers engage in learning opportunities such as focused workshops or information sessions (Campbell et al., 2017). ProD opportunities related to the core competencies during the initiation and implementation phases of BC's curriculum reform may contribute to the way in which teachers conceptualize the framework and adapt their teaching practice. In particular, structured time for collaboration has been identified as effective for implementing reform (Datnow & Hubbard, 2016) and was specifically requested by the BCTF in relation to the core competencies framework during the curriculum implementation process (BC Teachers' Federation, 2016).

Building capacity through collaboration takes into account the importance of learning within educators own teaching context and developing shared ideas with colleagues in their professional environment (Butler et al., 2015; Butler & Schnellert, 2012) and is in line with Fullan's (2016) belief that "real value for student learning is when shared meaning is achieved across a group of people working in concert" (p. 49).

However, not all collaboration is created equal and factors such as group norms, the diversity of perspectives, and the level of experience represented within a group or professional learning community can influence teacher beliefs and capacity to engage with reforms (Hubers et al., 2018). For example, the impact of teachers' varied experiences with capacity building through ProD was explored by Lockton & Fargason (2019) who compared the experiences of 15 novice and 26 experienced teachers in the context of student-centered mathematics reforms in California that diverged from longstanding practices within the school. Beliefs about school structure and culture influenced teachers' approach to change, but above all participants prioritized relationships with colleagues and minimizing tensions. Some teachers in the study retained or, in the case of novice teachers, adopted traditional methods under pressure to maintain the status quo. Others chose to work individually due to differing beliefs from their colleague or out of fear of vulnerability and judgement about their teaching. A final group of participants worked with colleagues to adopt reforms and effect structural change within their schools. Among their findings are two key cautionary points 1) that "going it alone" was more difficult for both experienced and novice teachers, and 2) working in groups does not necessarily lead to clarity or efficacy, and lack of experience or misunderstanding the reforms may be passed on or reinforced (p. 489). This study demonstrates that, to build capacity, collaborative professional learning needs to be paired specifically with expert knowledge-holders and strategies to support deep engagement and contextualized learning which aligns with other

literature on professional development (Butler et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2016; Priestley & Drew, 2019). Understanding BC teachers' experiences with professional development may offer critical insight into their approach to the core competencies and how to support capacity building efforts in the future.

Another element of teachers' ability to enact change is the emotional capacity needed to engage with reforms. Fullan (2016) invokes Marris' (1975) theory that all change includes a certain amount of loss, anxiety, and discomfort and that every individual must reconcile the change to their own existing realities (p. 51). Fullan elaborates that "behaviours and emotions often change before beliefs" and suggests that teachers' emotional capacity to weather change influences whether they are able to successfully shift their practice and make the transition to a sense of accomplishment and growth that can accompany meaningful reform (p. 54). This thinking is also in line with research by Hargreaves (2005), another well-known Canadian educational change scholar, who identified that it is critical to understand the role of teachers' emotions in shaping reform in order to facilitate sustainable change. In particular, in individual interviews with 50 educators from across the country, Hargreaves found that teachers' emotional response to reform varies relative to their career stage and that "while young teachers might be more enthusiastic about and open to change than their older colleagues... they may be less competent and confident in implementing and even understanding it" (p. 982).

Hargreaves (2005) also identified that teachers' emotional experiences in times of change are closely linked to relationships with colleagues and students but that teachers may misconstrue the emotional responses of educators in different generational groups. The significance of such emotional appraisals was also described by Lockton & Fargason (2019) who found that teachers often compare themselves to their colleagues as examples of how they should engage with reform. The authors found that this comparison can be motivating and foster

collaboration or can sometimes create competition or isolation making teachers less willing to engage or give full consideration to the reforms. Therefore, it is important to consider teachers' affective experience in times of educational change and potential influence that emotions engaged in individual and social contexts may have on their approach to implementation.

In the specific context of SEL-based reform, teachers' sense of both their professional capacity and agency are closely linked to their emotional capacity. For example, Collie et al. (2012) conducted a survey of 664 teachers in BC and Ontario (ON) and found that teachers who felt more comfortable with SEL implementation reported higher teaching self-efficacy, and higher job satisfaction. However, educators who reported higher commitment to improving SEL teaching also reported higher levels of stress. Researchers attribute this finding, in part, to a growing emphasis on SEL in schools and wider society that may be seen by teachers as both an added layer of responsibility and yet another item added to their already-strenuous workload. The authors summarized teachers' experiences by stating "in the short-term, learning new skills for SEL appears to be stressful; however, in the long term—once teachers' confidence for implementing SEL increases—they are likely to experience less stress, greater teaching efficacy, and greater job satisfaction" (p.1198). These findings also align with research indicating that greater comfort and commitment to teaching SEL has been linked to longer-term sustainable implementation of reforms, particularly when reinforced by a sense of supportive school culture (Domitrovich et al., 2015; Rivers et al., 2012).

While one of the few Canadian examples in SEL literature, this study by Collie et al. (2012) is somewhat limited as a quantitative survey in the depth of understanding that can be derived about teachers' stressors, comfort, and implementation experiences. The authors gave few contextual details about the form of SEL in which teachers engaged describing only that ON and BC promoted SEL in school mandates and therefore had "potentially richer variety of SEL

experiences' than other provinces (p.1192). Contextual factors such as the type of SEL, professional learning, degree of teacher autonomy, and motivations for implementation are necessary to understand teachers' experiences with implementing SEL in their practice.

Research also indicates that teachers' own social emotional competence (Hanson-Peterson et al., 2016; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Zinsser & Curby, 2014) and social emotional experience in the workplace (Collie, 2017) have a reciprocal impact on their approach to SEL implementation and how they engaged students in SEL. This body of literature highlights the unique connection between teachers' professional capacity and teachers' emotional capacity in the context of SEL-based educational change. SEL reforms including the core competencies are predicated on the goal of supporting students in building *their* social and emotional capacity. Therefore, fostering teachers' *own* social and emotional competence is an important part of capacity building in both respects.

The significance of the connection between teachers' professional and emotional capacity and their approach to implementing SEL-based reforms is reiterated in research examining ProD specifically designed to build capacity for teaching SEL. For example, Dolev and Leshem (2017; 2016) studied the influence of a two-year SEL ProD program incorporating interactive workshops and coaching activities on teachers' emotional competence and teaching practices. Based on interviews with 21 educators, the authors identified that participants reported experiencing positive shifts in their pedagogy, their view of students, their interpretation of their role in SEL, their willingness and motivation to incorporate SEL in the classroom, and in their school community. Participants also reported positive effects on their own well-being, especially improvement in stress tolerance and assertiveness. The authors emphasized that teachers' perception of personal benefits and the personalized nature of the ProD contributed to motivation, engagement, and accountability, and supported their personal skill development.

These findings point to potential implications for the present study that participants' emotional capacity and participation in targeted professional development may play a significant role in how they conceptualize the core competencies framework and implement them in practice.

Overall, the literature on teacher capacity indicates that educators' professional knowledge and professional development experiences have a significant impact on the way in which they engage with SEL-based reforms. In addition, teachers' emotional capacity and response to the change process play a role in how they conceptualize and enact SEL-based reform. In the present study, BC teachers' change in practice may be bolstered or limited by the presence or absence of specific ProD completed in preparation for implementing the core competency framework as well as teachers' own social and emotional competence and comfort in this domain. The literature reviewed in this section demonstrating the central role of capacity in educational change also point to another interconnected and influential factor: Teachers' beliefs about the proposed reform. In the next section, I review the literature outlining the role of teacher beliefs in shaping their approach to educational change and also draw specific examples from SEL research to highlight how beliefs about social and emotional learning influence educators' experiences and teaching practice in that domain.

2.4.2.3. Teacher Beliefs. Teacher beliefs encompass the attitudes, perceptions, and pedagogic understanding that "influence classroom-decision making" including the degree and depth to which teachers engage with reform (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 628). Fullan's (2016) model of educational change invokes the concept of teacher beliefs as important both in the process of establishing the subjective meaning of a reform and as a fundamental dimension of change in practice in which educators shift the underlying pedagogic assumptions that guide their teaching practice. In the current study, teacher beliefs about the core competencies are considered with respect to the meaning teachers ascribe to reform (i.e., significance as part of the curriculum) and

their pedagogic beliefs (how they conceptualize teaching and learning in relation to the core competencies).

Beliefs play an important role in how teachers choose to engage with educational reforms. Biesta et al. (2015) studied the influence of beliefs on teacher agency in relation to curricular reform introduced in Scotland, *The Curriculum for Excellence* (CFE). As in BC, Scotland's CFE introduced broader language and shifted emphasis from content knowledge to competence and skills and "explicitly positioned [teachers] as agents of change" responsible for interpreting the curriculum (p.625). The study focused on ethnographic stories based on multiple sets of interviews with six primary and secondary teachers and examined how the choices they made were shaped by their belief about the new curriculum, about student learning, and about teaching and education. The authors found that, while the participants drew on language and concepts directly from CFE, there were significant differences in the teachers' interpretations of the curriculum. The authors described that a lack professional discourse and opportunities for sense-making meant that teachers beliefs about the curriculum varied and they did not have a deep understanding of the purposes, or goals of the reforms:

> The teachers tended to articulate aims that are vague in nature: phrases such as 'reaching their potential' and 'finding themselves'… There is talk of developing teamwork skills, and thinking skills, but no systematic evidence in the data of sense-making to further unpack what these mean, and little articulation of the fine detail. (p. 632)

Biesta et al (2015) observed that teachers were primarily driven by short-term goals, promoting student responsibility, "fixing perceived deficits" for struggling students (p. 630), and optimizing efficiency rather than efficacy. The authors found that teacher beliefs or superficial understandings of the curriculum limited their ability to exert agency and make choices to align

with the reforms and they emphasized the need for opportunities for professional discourse in periods of change.

Examining teachers' engagement with the same CFE Scottish curricular reforms, Wallace and Priestly (2017) found that, even when teachers welcomed curricular reform, they may exert agency in planning curriculum in a way that diverges from the enacted curriculum if they have not engaged deeply with the principles underlying the policy (p. 325). The authors conducted a phenomenological study of seven Scottish secondary science teachers' approach to curriculum reform that transitioned from a content-focus to a contextualized skills-focus. Through individual interviews and classroom observations, the authors identified that meaningful reform required that teachers accept key "cognitive commitments" including analyzing and identifying the most significant underlying principles of the reform, curriculum mapping for each grade within the subject area, and recognizing the change in "the epistemological frame" for student learning and creating opportunities for student learning within the new frame (p. 327). Taken together, both Biesta et al.'s (2015) and Wallace and Priestley's (2017) studies provide insight into the important role of teacher beliefs in shaping pedagogic choices in a context comparable to BC where curricular reforms provided broad, flexible scope for teacher interpretation.

Research indicates that teachers' beliefs about the value of SEL for students and about how SEL fits within their teaching orientation influences their willingness to engage in related reforms in the classroom (Zinsser et al. 2014). Lewis (2020) examined the perceptions of ten Alberta educators in the context of enhanced focus on incorporating SEL in local schools. Based on individual interviews, participants agreed on the value of SEL for students but diverged in their understanding and definition of SEL, and in their beliefs about their role in facilitation. Lewis found that educators defined SEL to "fit their teaching practices" (p. 77) and fell into two broad categories: teachers who believed SEL was already informally embedded in their job, or

that it was an additional, undue burden for which they felt ill-prepared. In both camps, Lewis' participants viewed teaching SEL as requiring personal connection with students. However, educators reported varying levels of comfort with this relationship and indicated that a teacher's own social and emotional competence was key to navigating facilitation. Some educators saw adding SEL to their workload "as a near impossibility" (p. 77) and cited a need for larger systemic changes before SEL could be effectively implemented. This study of a neighbouring jurisdiction offers an important perspective for understanding the BC context. Potential confusion, mixed interpretations, and diverging beliefs about teachers' roles in facilitating SEL underscores the importance of generating shared meaning of the core competencies framework. Furthermore, participants in Lewis' study raised concerns similar to those expressed by BC teachers and the BCTF (2017; 2019) about limited time, preparation, and lack of resources as potential barriers to successful implementation. Lewis (2020) observed that "while educators try to protect themselves from the potential burden of SEL, they also acknowledge that SEL is integral to their work as educators" (p. 92). This dissonance between teachers' beliefs about the value of SEL and their anxiety about taking on additional responsibility underscores the need for clarity about the framework, the expectations for teachers with respect to implementation, and reiterates the influence of teacher beliefs and teacher capacity to take on the challenge in their willingness to engage with reform.

However, Lewis' (2020) study is limited as a graduate thesis that casts a wide net in selecting the 10 educators recruited for participation. Administrators, educational assistants (EAs), and teachers of varying grades and school levels were represented in the study. As described above, teachers' experiences with reform are contextual and shape their understanding and engagement with reform (Priestley et al, 2015). Beliefs about how SEL fits within a teacher's role could vary greatly from the point of view of administrators and EAs, compared to

a teacher who is primarily responsible for learning design, teaching, and assessment. Lewis makes little distinction between the different professional groups in reporting the findings of the study. Given the influence of teachers' subjective meaning-making and decision-making in implementing reform, particular attention must be paid to teachers' unique and contextualized beliefs and experiences. In the present study, administrators were excluded from the pool of potential cases and participant selection was narrowed to teachers who had engaged with the core competency framework to better understand their particular perspectives and experiences.

2.4.2.4. Teacher Identity. The concept of teacher beliefs is distinguished from but connected to that of teacher identity which encompasses the way teachers view themselves and seek to portray themselves to others in a professional capacity (Lasky, 2005). Teacher identity is multifaceted and dynamic (Rashidi and Meihami, 2019), changing across one's career (Hargreaves, 2005b), and in response to personal and professional experiences and contexts (Lasky, 2005; O'Connor, 2008; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). It is related to and influenced by personal identity but distinguished such that it specifically relates to how teachers view themselves within their professional role (O'Connor, 2008). Teacher identity shapes the way that educators navigate "'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand' their work and their place in society" (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). In the context of this study, I refer to teacher identity with respect to how teachers view the core competencies framework as aligned or misaligned with the type of teacher they strive to be and how they understand the framework to be situated within their teaching role.

A study by Buchanan (2015) demonstrated that the degree of alignment between teachers' identity and the proposed reforms is a significant factor influencing their decisions to adopt change. The author conducted interviews with nine California educators exploring their experiences in the context of educational change that included increasing measures of teacher

accountability. Teachers' identity was closely tied to their school culture and to their agency in "how the school conditions, policies, and discourse of reform were understood and taken up" (p. 714). The perceived alignment between the proposed changes and freedom to act according to the "kind of teacher they wanted to be" was key to teachers' willingness to engage deeply with the reforms. Similar findings were described by O'Connor (2008) who also identified that teacher agency is guided by their identity in making decisions about their teaching and relationships with students. The author interviewed three secondary teachers in Sydney, Australia and found that "teachers use their identities to guide and shape their professional and emotional decisions" (p. 125). According to O'Connor, these identities were primarily relational and often focused on what is best for their students. Together, these studies emphasize that it is necessary to consider how teachers conceptualize reforms in relation to their professional identities to understand their experiences and decision making in the context of change.

At the time of writing, I was unable to locate research specifically examining the relationship between teacher identity and SEL-based reform. However, some insight can be garnered from research in the area of identity-oriented pedagogy which refers to an approach to learning design that considers the socio-cultural context and ongoing identity negotiation of teachers and learners in the classroom (Meihami, 2019). Identity-oriented pedagogy has been a particular focus in the field of English language learning where teachers and learners often have a rich array of cultural, ethnic, and political and social identities. The link between teacher identity and SEL are implicit in the findings of Meihami and Salite (2019) in their study of students' perceptions of teachers' skills in negotiating cultural identity, their own and their students', after participating in focused ProD on cultural literacy and cultural identity. The authors found that the Iranian students perceived their English language teachers as more willing to engage in conversations about cultural issues and to consider students' emotions after

participating in the Pro D workshops. These findings provide insight into how teachers' experiences with negotiating identity in the classroom and with focused capacity building may inform their approach to reform.

The above findings also align with research results by Day & Maye (2012) who identified the importance of teachers developing a clear sense of their own identities in order to be able to practice pedagogy that is culturally-relevant for their students. The authors examined the cases of two white teachers working in schools with diverse racial and ethnic populations in low-income urban and rural secondary schools through interview and classroom observation. They found that teachers' self-awareness and acknowledgement of differences in cultural identity were more important than matching their students, particularly when it comes to engagement and understanding power dynamics. Awareness of their own identities helped the teachers to adopt practices that affirmed and respected the values and beliefs of diverse student population and helped them to engage and connect with students (p. 24). Particularly salient in the case of the core competencies of personal and social awareness and positive personal and cultural identity, these findings underscore the potential importance of identity in how teachers choose to implement SEL.

Some additional insight can be garnered from research by Holliday (2015) who shed light on the influence of SEL on teacher identity and teaching practice by examining the perspectives of four educators who had completed counselling degrees but continued to work as classroom teachers. Based on creative inquiry using two sets of narrative-style individual interviews and participant image-generation of four participants, Holliday found that teachers perceived that counselling education facilitated a beneficial shift in their professional identities by growing their own social and emotional awareness, facilitating a shift in their beliefs about students, and their interactions with students. The teachers reported increased comfort and confidence engaging

with students about social and emotional skills and an increased personal sense of well-being. Holliday also reported that some participants found that their shifting understanding sometimes led to a "culture clash" with other members of the school community (p.6). While counsellor education is beyond the scope of professional development for most teachers, the findings indicate potential benefits for teachers and for student/teacher relationships of some related ProD. Holliday's study provides one example of how teacher identity and teaching practice may be connected to or influenced by engaging in social and emotional learning, albeit at a more extensive level than typical professional development would entail. In the present study, I consider how participants' identities may be shaped by their professional development experiences and the implications for their teaching practice and engagement with the core competency reform.

Finally, the potential for teacher identity to influence engagement with SEL reform can also be inferred from a more nuanced view of the literature previously outlined on teacher beliefs. For example, in the earlier-referenced study of Alberta teachers by Lewis (2020), the author noted that some educators conceptualized SEL as an area that teachers were temperamentally or personally disposed to incorporate SEL, but that it was not for everyone. This finding relates, not just to teachers' beliefs about how to teach SEL or where it fits within their subject area, but about whether it fits with how they see themselves as educators. Drawing a distinction between pedagogic beliefs and teacher identity may provide additional insight into understanding factors that shape teachers' approach to curriculum reform.

The research summarized in this section underlines that each of the four factors of teacher agency, capacity, beliefs, and identity are deeply interconnected and have been found to influence teachers' engagement with curricular reform. Within Fullan's (2016) conception of teachers' change in practice, for example, participants may derive the motivation to engage with

the core competency framework from alignment with their teacher identity. They may exert agency in deciding on the dimensions of change to adopt in their practice. These choices would likely be guided by their beliefs about the core competencies and predicated on their professional capacity to engage in effective learning design for SEL and having the emotional endurance to follow through. In the complex process of educational change, BC teachers are navigating each of these factors in reconciling how the core competency framework is situated within their existing practice, and they are equally important in understanding teachers' experience and approach to implementation. In the next section, to understand how teachers might approach implementation, I review the literature to identify different formats and strategies that have been employed to facilitate SEL with a particular focus on secondary learners and activities that complement English language arts curriculum.

2.5. Models for Incorporating SEL with Curriculum at the Secondary Level

In order to understand how teachers may have approached the core competencies reform, in this section I conduct a review of the literature of ways in which SEL can be implemented in the classroom. First, I describe the limited options available for SEL at the secondary level including pre-prepared programs, adapted programs, and teacher-developed materials. Then I examine examples from the literature of how SEL can be incorporated into ELA specifically, drawing on research that makes overt connections between SEL and ELA, as well as language and literacy research that connects ELA with particular social and emotional skills.

2.5.1. SEL Programs

Studies of the benefits for students participating in SEL are ubiquitous. In particular, copious research on SEL implementation has emanated from the development and testing of prescribed programs designed for classroom use, with a heavy focus on younger learners. For

example, Duncan et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal cluster-randomized study of students participating in the *Positive Action* SEL program from Grades 3 to 8 in 14 Chicago schools. According to student self-reports, participants experienced improved pro-social behaviour and social awareness across all demographic groups.

An example of a program that has risen in popularity in BC is the research based MindUP program, established and funded by the Goldie Hawn Foundation (2008) which has focused on promoting youth mental health research and initiatives since 2003. The MindUp program is designed specifically to promote strategies for mindfulness and self-regulation in the classroom and has had positive results for elementary students (The Goldie Hawn Foundation, 2022). Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) conducted a study in a large city in western Canada with four classes of Grades 4/5 students (99 students total), in which two teachers taught the MindUp program and two teachers taught their usual curriculum on social responsibility over 12 lessons in a four-month period. Students who participated in the MindUp program experienced many benefits compared to the control group including better ability to regulate emotions and stress response, greater empathy, perspective-taking, optimism, more peer acceptance and perception by their peers as pro-social. Measures included computer-based behaviour assessments, saliva analysis, student self-reports, peer reports, and year-end grades from the school. In addition to this study being conducted by researchers involved in the design and promotion of the program itself, the study may have benefited from data collected from teachers, parents, or researcher observation given the age group involved. This is one example of a program that, while popular for younger students up to Grade 7 (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010), has not been developed for older secondary students.

Another program that has arisen frequently in SEL research (e.g., Domitrovich et al., 2019; Honess & Hunter, 2014; Humphrey et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2015) is the Promoting Alternative

Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program developed in the UK (Kusché, 2012). The program draws more specifically on connections between SEL and literacy learning through a series of stand-alone lessons and student workbooks. The program has begun to be developed for middle school, known as the Emozi Program, and considerations for high school implementation are underway (PATHS Program LLC, 2019) but they have not yet been examined empirically for older populations. As described in the next section, the focus on young students in the field of SEL leaves secondary teachers with limited options of evidence-based programs or strategies to adapt for their own practice and subject areas, increasing the burden of developing their own materials with limited guidance or support for effective learning design for SEL.

2.5.2. Fewer Options for Secondary Learners

Teachers' choices for programming are limited at the secondary level as programs are frequently designed for younger learners. The dearth of secondary-focused SEL programs is underscored in the CASEL *Handbook on Social and Emotional Learning* (Durlak et al., 2015). The authors of the chapter devoted to describing best practices for SEL in high schools described that they "were not able to include a 'What Works' section of programs" because they were unable to find any that met their criteria of having been found to have positive effects by three or more trials (Williamson et al., 2015, p. 182). Instead, they provide examples of types of approaches that are "promising" and "feasible" at the high school level including positive behaviour interventions and supports (PBIS), education on drugs and violence, and on teenage health (p. 190).

In a more recent systematic review of the literature for SEL programs designed for secondary students, Sande et al. (2019) identified some programs intended for early adolescence from ages 10-13 but that few considered students over the age of 14. They identified only one

study conducted in Canada, a study by Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010) of the MindUp curriculum focused on students in Grades 4-7. In their meta-analysis, Sande et al. (2019) found that studies that had considered the impact of SEL programs on secondary learners indicated more positive results in certain skills: "SEL programs for secondary school students are able to influence self-and social awareness to a larger extent than more action-focused competencies, that is, self-management and relationship skills" (p. 1560). The positive results related to self and social awareness lend support to continued efforts to support core competency framework at the secondary level given the aforementioned rising challenges for Canadian youth (Craig, 2020).

The findings of both Williamson et al (2015) and Sande et al (2019) point to a need for increased research for SEL at the secondary level. However, in both studies the authors focused on identifying empirical evaluations of pre-formatted SEL programs and therefore limited their search in a way that ignores the full range of options for embedding SEL in the classroom. In fact, some research suggests that prescribed programs are less effective for adolescents aged 14-17 as they are often perceived as developmentally inappropriate for older students. For example, in a meta-analysis by Yeager at al. (2015) of 19 studies of SEL programs aimed at reducing bullying behaviours the authors identified a complete drop off in the effectiveness of programs after Grade 7. Programs that yielded positive results up to Grade 7 had no positive impact and sometimes negative impacts on students in Grade 8 or older. The authors also note that their findings are mirrored by national US data (2014) from student surveys indicating that while "elementary-aged children exposed to high-quality bullying programs reported significantly reduced bullying…adolescents in high school showed a non-significant trend in the direction of *increased* bullying when exposed to a high-quality program" (p. 46). While this meta-analysis conducted in the US is not directly applicable to the Canadian context and focuses on a narrow

version of SEL programming, it draws a clear distinction between elementary and secondary school with respect to effective teaching methods and underscores the importance of understanding how teachers are approaching the core competencies with older students.

Furthermore, Abry et al. (2017) describe that their study of the Responsive Classroom SEL program is the first and only study to examine the efficacy of particular components of a prescribed SEL curriculum to determine the "active ingredients that can inform intervention optimization and teacher professional development" (p.193). Two program elements, Morning Meeting and Academic Choice, were particularly associated with a higher number of emotionally supportive engagements between teachers and students in the sample of 143 elementary classrooms. Abry et al. advocate that more research is needed to identify which particular aspects or strategies for learning contribute to specific social and emotional skills. This is also true with respect to secondary programs where, given the limited options for empirically evaluated SEL programs, breaking down the specific strategies within the few scrutinized models could provide additional insight into how educators could personalize SEL within their subject areas. As described in the following section, a review of the research reveals several examples of the ways in which educators or schools may independently develop strategies for teaching SEL or adapt lessons from prepared programs to align with their specific practice and student population.

2.5.3. Other SEL Models for Secondary Learners

When preformatted SEL programs are introduced as the basis of classroom reforms, teachers may choose to adapt existing programs or excerpt suitable aspects specifically for their own teaching orientation, learning goals, and particular student needs. Aidman and Price (2018) provide an example of SEL program implementation at the middle school level that underscores

the potential for educational change when capacity, beliefs, and agency are aligned. The authors examined the case of school-wide implementation of the Second Step program in one middle school in the Southwestern United States. The school was involved in a wider initiative by CASEL who partnered with schools with the goals of adopting the Core SEL Competencies framework and implementing the Second Step program on a school-wide basis. The program consisted of 13-15, 50-minute lessons per grade level which included: (1) a video related to the targeted skills, (2) small and large group discussions, (3) relevant worksheets and homework. The school implemented significant structural support for program implementation piloting the project with three teachers before initiating it with the entire staff. Also, they appointed a campus facilitator who both created specific professional learning groups and dedicated advisory time every other week to implement the program. Findings at the six-year mark of program implementation in the middle school identified that teachers generally opted to adapt the program to suit their particular teaching practice. The researchers found that both students and staff reported that the most valuable lessons were those adapted or created by teachers to meet student needs, incorporated topics of importance to their students, and that fit within their teaching context. The culture shift in the school towards SEL was so significant that it was built into pivotal staffing and scheduling decision-making. This study highlights how commitment to SEL within a school facilitated by a cohesive plan for implementation achieved lasting and meaningful change.

Teachers may also engage in learning design for SEL from scratch. This was the case for the 19 elementary and secondary educators-participants in a study by Ee & Cheng (2013) who examined the perspectives about engaging with Singapore's free-standing SEL framework developed based on the CASEL (2016) model (Liem et al., 2017b). As in BC, Singaporean teachers had limited guidance with respect to how to implement the framework in their teaching.

Together with findings about teachers' perceptions about SEL, the study offered some insight into the ways in which teachers "infused" SEL into their practice (Ee & Cheng, 2013, p. 59). Based on questionnaires and individual interviews, teachers differed as to whether they infused SEL directly with content, whether they felt it should be infused indirectly, or whether it should only be incorporated with compatible subjects. For example, one participant identified that SEL implementation was most compatible with ELA and character education because, "the units come in story form, and they have values about characters so they are easy to infuse" (p. 65). Ee and Cheng identified that "questioning" was the most frequently cited strategy for implementing SEL but that other methods included using newspaper articles, discussion, role-play, short stories, storyboards, scenario-writing, acronyms, analogies, worksheets, graphs, debates, case studies, video clips and animation, pictures, and research activities (p. 65). However, little elaboration was provided for the specific ways in which teachers employed these strategies in facilitating SEL. There is no understanding of the learning strategies implemented or adapted with the classroom or any sense of the professional learning for Singapore teachers relative to their SEL framework. This information is important for contextualizing teachers' experiences, particularly in interpreting the challenges that Ee & Cheng describe that teachers encountered in trying to implement SEL on their own. Consistent with examples found elsewhere in SEL literature, participants highlighted challenges with linking course content and resources to SEL (Ee et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2014; Hamedani & Darling-Hammond, 2015) and expressed the need for more training and systemic support to engage in SEL learning design (Kimber et al., 2013; Lewis, 2020) . This example of teachers' educational change experience with SEL lends insight into the experiences and challenges that BC teachers may encounter in a similar circumstance of curricular reform. However, the limited descriptions of teachers' contexts and related practices in this study provides only a narrow sense of their approach and the barriers to

implementing SEL-based reform in a context where no particular programs or guidelines were available.

Hamedani and Darling-Hammond (2015) offer an examination of the benefits of broader, wholistic approaches to SEL as an alternative to "program-based interventions" in a case study of three US high schools (p.11). Each school in the study was selected for having implemented whole-school strategies to create a supportive culture focused on student SEL development where:

> …curricular design and instructional practices integrate social emotional learning and social justice education with academics and foster the application of social emotional and social justice skills across subjects and situations. Course topics and assignments are designed to be relevant and engaging, while instructional practices foster student reflection, resilience, a growth mindset, agency, and empowerment. (p. 9)

The authors collected data through observations, document analysis, interviews and focus groups with staff, students, parents and community partners, as well as surveys of a total of 363 students and examination of school records. Compared to data from a national youth survey, the authors identified that students in each of the three schools reported feeling resilient, more positive and engaged in school, hopeful for the future, they perceived a caring school climate, and were more likely to value contributing to community and society. Unfortunately, the authors include little detail of how the lessons occurred, what topics and activities were conducted, and what SEL looked like on a curriculum level. The authors did not discuss or compare any illustrating examples from the classroom but rather focused on the wider school ethos of educating the whole child, naming few examples of how SEL was integrated into the schools such as through advisory classes focused on SEL and restorative disciplinary practices. The vague descriptions of the big picture practices and the lack of reference to specific policy,

curriculum, or other sources of guidance for the schools offer little by way of practical classroom insight.

In summary, in SEL literature there is no unified approach for teaching core competencies. Rather, researchers continue to investigate the different forms in which SEL can occur and the efficacy of different classroom options. There are many ways in which teachers may choose to implement SEL, but there are fewer known and tested options for ready-made resources at the secondary level. The literature reviewed in this section offers important contextualizing information for understanding teachers' possible motivations and choices for implementing the core competencies. In the following section, I describe my rationale for narrowing the scope of my exploration in the second phase of my study to focus on the experiences of ELA teachers. I also offer a review of existing literature indicating ELA is a complementary domain for SEL drawing on examples to illustrate ways in which teachers may approach change in ELA teaching practice.

2.6. Opportunities for SEL in ELA

There is some evidence in the literature that teachers perceive ELA as a particularly complementary subject for SEL implementation (e.g., Aidman & Price, 2018; Coleman, 2021; Ee & Cheng, 2013a). Therefore, this study focused on teachers who shared ELA as a common teaching area based on the belief that the scope of incorporating the core competencies with curriculum would lead to rich discussion of teachers' beliefs and practices in line with the reform. In this section, I begin by describing the ELA curriculum in BC and highlighting possible connections that teachers may identify in planning for the core competencies. In addition, I review literature to garner insight into some of the potential ways in which teachers may draw connections between the core competencies and ELA curriculum.

2.6.1. BC's ELA Curriculum and Scope for the Core Competencies.

The introduction to English language arts on the BC MoE website describes that ELA "is designed to empower students by providing them with strong communication skills, an understanding and appreciation of language and literature, and the capacity to engage fully as literate and responsible citizens in a digital age" (BC Ministry of Education, 2018). The redesigned ELA curriculum centers on six interwoven elements of language arts: "reading, listening, viewing, writing, speaking, and representing" (BC Ministry of Education, 2022c, para. 2). These elements are incorporated across each of the 27 subject curricula for ELA from Grades 7-12 including a common ELA curriculum for Grades 7-9, and more narrowly focused courses in Grades 10-12 such as Composition, Creative Writing, Literary Studies, New Media, Spoken Language, and English First Peoples (BC Ministry of Education, 2022c).

The curriculum for each course includes three main types of learning goals: overarching *big ideas* that students are expected to understand, a series of *curricular competencies* that represent the skills that students are expected to be able to do (e.g. "Evaluate the relevance, accuracy, and reliability of texts") and several *content* components that represent the more technical aspects that students are expected to know such as "literary devices," "multi-paragraphing", and "conventions." With respect to the core competencies, the three overarching categories (communicating, thinking, personal and social) and hyperlinks to the framework are included on all online curriculum documents, though they are missing from downloadable Word and PDF copies (BC Ministry of Education, 2022).

Examining the learning goals for each ELA course reveals significant overlap in the curricular language across courses and from Grade 10-12. In line with BC's overall curriculum design described in Chapter 1, the ELA curricula are intended to be broad, flexible and personalizable (BC Ministry of Education, 2022). In many cases, learning goals are similar

within certain grade groupings. For example, the big idea that "Texts are socially, culturally, geographically, and historically constructed," is repeated verbatim across all ELA curricula for Grades 10-12. The differences in curricular competencies and content between grades and different ELA courses are often nuanced. This design choice is described by the MoE as reflecting "the reality that general categories and key criteria in most learning areas do not change dramatically from one grade to another" (BC Ministry of Education, 2015a, p. 4).

Apart from hyperlinks to the three core competency categories, no other explicit connections are made to the sub-competencies, facets, profiles, or "I statements" within the ELA curriculum. However, key words related to the core competencies are embedded in the components of various ELA curricula. A review of the language used to describe the big ideas, curricular competencies, and content language in Grade 9 English Language Arts, for example, provides some insight into how teachers might draw connections to the core competencies (BC Ministry of Education, 2015d).

Connections to the communicating category of the core competencies is perhaps the most straightforward to identify within the big ideas, curricular competencies, and content in Grade 9 ELA. For example, the curricular competency to "Express an opinion and support it with credible evidence" suggests communicating one's point of view. Similarly, "Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking" might be interpreted as collaboration given the interaction that is implicit in an exchange. The only other connection to collaboration in the ELA 9 curriculum is in the catch-all introductory statement that precedes the list of curricular competencies in smaller font that students are "expected individually and collaboratively to be able to…" demonstrate the curricular competencies.

Searching for keywords related to personal awareness and responsibility, the key word "personal" appears in goals such as "Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways" and

"Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world." However, this wording does not necessarily invoke the facets of personal awareness and responsibility outlined in Table 2 as self-advocacy, self-regulation, and well-being. In addition, when considering the curricular competencies and content, the wording can emphasize the language arts learning component rather than the core competency skill set. For example, a curricular competency such as "Transform ideas and information to create original texts" could be interpreted as invoking critical and/or creative thinking. The active words are to "transform" and "create" something original. A related core competency might be creative thinking profile 3:

> I generate new ideas as I pursue my interests. I deliberately learn a lot about something by doing research, talking to others, or practicing, so that I can generate new ideas about it… I build the skills I need to make my ideas work, and I usually succeed, even if it takes a few tries. (BC Ministry of Education, 2022)

In the core competency statements, the active verbs of "generating", "pursuing" interests, "build the skills", "making it work" are deliberate and focused on ideas of creation, perseverance, purpose, and resilience. Therefore, to say that the curricular competency touches on the core competency is valid, but to equate learning in one area to qualitatively learning in the other is a matter of learning design.

The lack of direct connection to the core competencies within the curricular competencies and content is particularly evident when compared to other aspects of BC's curricular reforms. For example, another major reform to the ELA curriculum was the addition of specific big ideas, curricular competencies, and content areas to enhance focus on Indigenous worldviews that were entirely absent or, at the very least, woefully underemphasized in the previous curriculum (such as the curricular competencies to "Develop an awareness of the diversity within and across First Peoples societies represented in texts", "Recognize the influence of place in First Peoples and

other Canadian texts", BC Ministry of Education, 2022). With this illustrating example, I do not equate the quality or importance of the core competencies framework and First Peoples Principles of learning, but rather seek to highlight critical differences in the approaches to specificity in incorporating these two major elements of reform in the redesigned curriculum. If teachers engage in a close reading of the ELA curriculum, there are many potential opportunities to draw connections to the core competencies. However, at first glance, these connections are not made overt, and teachers must exercise considerable agency in examining the framework, identifying the most applicable core competency learning goals, and situating them in relation to the ELA curriculum.

2.6.2. Insight from the Literature on Incorporating SEL in ELA

This study also focuses on the experiences of educators who share English language arts as a common teaching area, anticipating based on the literature that this would generate fruitful discussion about implementing the core competencies in the classroom. This prediction was based on research that indicates ELA is perceived by teachers as a complementary subject for SEL as identified in two studies also discussed earlier in this chapter. Aidman and Price (2018) explored feedback from students and teachers following the school-wide implementation of SEL programming at an urban middle school in the south-western United States. Both groups identified English language arts and social studies as "the most fertile ground" of integrating SEL into existing curriculum (p. 33). Similarly, Ee & Cheng (2013) found that in their study of teacher perceptions of a nation-wide SEL framework adopted in Singapore, a majority of the 19 primary and secondary educators interviewed identified English as the easiest subject for incorporating SEL. In a related study, Ee et al. (2014) also identified through classroom observations that 29 primary and secondary teachers found it easier to incorporate SEL into

English and character education than mathematics and science. Considering Fullan's (2016) dimensions of change, this section outlines examples from the literature that offers insight into the potential ways in which teachers might implement reform in ELA teaching to incorporate the core competencies framework.

In considering how educators may effect changes in their practice with respect to resources and teaching strategies, there are few empirical examples in education research that make direct connection between ELA and SEL, particularly at the secondary level. One of the only examples currently available is a mixed-methods survey by Kim and Hong (2019) of 70 language and literacy teachers (41 secondary teachers) examining perceptions and practices for implementing SEL in South Korea and the United States. South Korean teachers were less familiar with SEL and instead taught in the area of character education, whereas US teachers were much more aware of the field. Educators in both countries indicated using academic and non-academic strategies to support SEL, however, little elaboration is provided on the nature or format of these strategies. The authors summarized that Korean teachers had students "share feelings and thoughts in reading and writing practices" and practice communication skills by engaging with peers in group activities and class discussions (p. 9). They described that American practices involved group work or projects where students "participate in text-based discussions, understand others' emotions and thoughts to build compassion, carry outgroup projects, or experience multicultural activities" (p. 10). This study indicates that secondary ELA teachers describe use of writing, reading, discussion and group-based activities to support students SEL but the absence of further qualitative description leaves little opportunity to examine the particular strategies of their impact on students.

Another example of ELA-SEL integrated teaching is described by Jamieson (2015) who used the classic novel, *Oliver Twist*, to explore empathy, relationships, and perspectives with

Grade 11 students. Emphasizing themes of social justice and interpersonal relationships while engaging in deep reading and analysis facilitated student engagement with social and emotional concepts and skills. Teaching strategies included asking students to connect with characters through close reading strategies for nuanced understanding of their personalities and engaging in group work dissecting examples of scenes that invoked empathy in the novel and reflecting on how the author engaged readers' emotions. Jamieson offers a clear example of the overlap between social and emotional learning and character study and the potential for teachers to draw on SEL within ELA resources and curriculum; however, the pedagogic focus of the unit was on supporting students' skills in literary analysis by considering how the author invoked empathy and the choices reflecting specific strategies to develop students own understanding or expression of empathy are less clear. The study is an example of how teachers might enhance core competency concepts in their teaching resources and curriculum but also illustrates the difference in pedagogic focus.

Models of ELA learning design focused more specifically on fostering students' social and emotional skills can also be found in the literature. However, unlike the large range of SEL programs examined in educational psychology, there are few empirical research examples focused on incorporating SEL in ELA from the perspective of teachers, pedagogy and curriculum. The examples of SEL in the ELA classroom often take the form of teacher accounts or examples in professional development publications without a methodological or analytic component. Literature in ELA that does draw empirical connections to SEL often refer to specific subsets or individual social and emotional skills that may not be identified as SEL (e.g., empathy, perspective, social justice).

One example of incorporating SEL in ELA is provided by a primary account from school administrator Beland (2007) observations of one teacher's approach to enhancing SEL in ELA

using the study of *Romeo and Juliet* to evoke self-awareness and reflection with a class of Grade 9 students. In this case, the teacher asked students to complete a stress focused questionnaire from both their personal perspective and then from the perspective of the main characters. Through reflective questions, students compared themselves with Romeo and Juliet and with one another. They considered the origins of their stress, the physical and emotional toll stress takes, and an examination of what contributes to their happiness. In this example, the strategies for developing students' self-awareness are more overt and the author describes the learning activities through a narrative account situated within the Grade 9 classroom. However, Beland offers little methodological context to support their observations with respect to the efficacy of the design or impact on learners.

Engaging with diverse texts including fiction and non-fiction, prose, poetry and new media is an integral component of secondary language arts pedagogy (Kavanagh & Rainey, 2017; Kosnik et al., 2017). A review of research from education and other complementary fields offers some examples of embedding social and emotional learning in reading and literary analysis. For example, Canadian library researcher Howard (2013) identified that youth are primed to engage in personal exploration and competency development through fiction reading, often finding stress-relief, escape, and emotional validation in novels.

In particular, the genre of Young Adult Literature (YAL) has been identified in psychology research as having particular potential for facilitating the development of positive self-concept (Ivey & Johnston, 2013), empathy, identity (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Nikolajeva, 2014), and facilitating perspective-taking (Małecki et al., 2016). This was found to be the case in an experimental design study by Tijms et al. (2018) involving 100 at-risk Grade 9 students from low socio-economic backgrounds participating in a co-curricular book club. The researchers found that participants benefited from engaging with books that contained themes specifically

matched with challenges of the individual participants. Students were able to draw connections between the story and their own lives and discuss these links with peers. Results revealed a positive impact on reading attitude, comprehension, and social emotional competence compared to control group that participated in typical book clubs. This research illustrates opportunities for teachers to enhance social and emotional learning through their choice of texts and teaching activities and shows that secondary students may respond to purposeful and personalized SEL-based learning design.

While not explicitly identified as SEL, relevant examples can be found in critical literacy education which aims to encourage students to question and dissect the assumptions underlying text "enabling young people to read both the word and the world in relation to power, identity, difference and access to knowledge, skills, tools and resources" (Janks, 2013, p. 227). Teacher-researcher Hayik (2016), for example, describes engaging ten Grade 9 Arab-Muslim students in a six week English course that involved questioning gender bias and stereotypes. Students read representations of Cinderella stories, including versions that countered stereotypical ideas about women and gender roles, and responded by writing letters to the authors and in oral discussion. The author found that students expressed fewer negative attitudes and more questioned stereotypes, particularly female students. While drawn from the wider body of language and literacy research, this study is an example of the connection between SEL and ELA identified through a different theoretical lens.

Written and oral expression of ideas has also been employed as a conduit for SEL in the ELA classroom, whether in conjunction with textual exploration or as a discrete activity. For example, many researchers have examined the positive impacts of *Expressive Writing* interventions for school-based SEL. Originally conceptualized as a therapeutic model (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986), Expressive Writing involves writing one's

emotional response to challenging life stressors such as peer conflict or personal challenges for short intervals (20-30 minutes) a few times a week. Researchers who adapted this intervention for the secondary students found positive impact on development of emotional regulation (Kliewer et al., 2011) coping strategies (Giannotta et al., 2009) peer relationships and social adjustment (Travagin et al., 2016) and mental wellbeing (Doucet et al., 2018).

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to fully gauge the ways in which teachers may draw SEL into the language arts classroom owing to the diverse range of possibilities available to them. For example, different aspects of SEL have been introduced through drama or role-play (Heyward, 2010; Joronen et al., 2011), storytelling (Baldasaro et al., 2014; Hibbin, 2016; MacMath & Hall, 2018; Railton, 2015), movement and physical activity (Lu & Buchanan, 2014) and other visual, musical, interpretive, and creative approaches (Chong & Kim, 2010; Gooding, 2011). Additional research is needed in curriculum and instruction to understand how teachers are effectively incorporating SEL in ELA including elaboration of specific strategies and lesson formats. Some of the options for educators seeking to implement core competencies within their ELA teaching practices are examined here.

Teachers may see ELA as particularly compatible with SEL for several reasons (e.g. Aidman & Price, 2018; Ee & Cheng, 2013, Ee et al, 2014). From the above examples within and outside of the classroom context, it is evident that ELA provides opportunities for implementing SEL and the core competencies framework in terms of complementary resources and teaching strategies. Another important consideration is that learning design falls along a continuum in terms of the pedagogic focus when teachers plan to incorporate these two learning domains. On one end of the continuum, teachers may draw on social and emotional themes when planning ELA units but focus more heavily on supporting strategies to develop ELA curricular competencies. On the other end, teachers may focus more specifically on planning for social and

emotional learning opportunities and place less emphasis on the academic outcomes in a particular lesson. Without specific guidance in the curriculum, these are important considerations in developing an understanding of how BC ELA teachers have approached the framework in their practice and how they have balanced core competencies with curricular competencies and content.

2.7. Summary

The literature outlined in this chapter provides important context for understanding how participants in this study have made sense of the core competency framework within their teaching context and how they have approached implementation in their teaching practice (Fullan, 2016). When changes are introduced, teachers are asked to engage in a complex and ongoing process of understanding the proposed reforms and the pedagogical implications for learners, situating them within their identity as educators (Buchanan, 2015; Lasky, 2005), and exercise agency to find ways to adapt their existing teaching practice to incorporate change (Jenkins, 2020). Teachers' beliefs about the reforms and the direction in which they take up the challenge of change is influenced by many individual factors including the level of preparedness and sense of comfort instilled through professional capacity building (Biesta et al., 2015; Lockton & Fargason, 2019; Priestley et al, 2015a) as well as their emotional experience of the change process (Collie, 2017; Dolev & Leshem, 2017; Hargreaves, 2005a).

Particularly in the context of SEL-based reforms, teachers' sense of comfort and preparedness influence their experiences with implementation (Collie, 2015; Domitrovich et al., 2019; Freeman & Strong, 2017) and shape the decisions that they make including the extent to which they effect change and which aspects of SEL framework to emphasize (Dyson et al., 2019). While BC provided little guidance with respect to how teachers should approach

implementation (BC Ministry of Education, 2017; BCTF, 2017; Gacoin, 2019), examples in the literature indicate that teachers might engage with one of the few pre-prepared SEL programs designed for secondary students (e.g., Maloney, 2016), may choose to personalize select lessons from such programs to suit their students and their existing teaching practice (Aidman & Price, 2018), or may create their own resources and strategies from scratch (Beland, 2007; Jamieson, 2015).

Change can be especially slow to occur in secondary schools and efforts to incorporate SEL can be complicated by a more academically structured environment and pressure to focus on traditional subjects (Collie et al, 2015; Fullan, 2016; Lasky, 2005). However, there is a mounting need to foster social and emotional learning in adolescence both to support their wellbeing and mental health (Craig, et al. 2020, Zimmerman & Iwanski, 2014), and to set them up for success in their future personal lives and careers (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2020; Frydenberg et al., 2017). There is some evidence in the literature indicating that teachers perceive English Language Arts as the compatible subject area and entry point for SEL implementation at the secondary level (Aidman & Price, 2018; Ee & Cheng, 2014). This potential connection is supported by examples in the research of teachers drawing on social and emotional concepts and themes with students in English class (Jamieson, 2015) and sometimes incorporating specific opportunities for social and emotional skill development through many forms of texts (Beland, 2007; Johnson, 2013; Vogel, 2008) writing and other forms of self-expression (Doucet et al., 2018; Yost et al., 2014), and other learning methods commonly employed in the language arts classroom (e.g. Geres, 2016; Lu & Buchanan, 2014).

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides the foundation for my inquiry into the experiences of five secondary ELAs teachers and shapes my understanding of how they may have conceptualized and implemented the core competencies framework within their teaching

practice. In the next chapter, I describe the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological parameters in which I grounded my research design and data collection, as well as the contextual and personal factors that shaped my engagement with participants and interpretation of the findings.

3. Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

Consistent with qualitative research design, this study has been a fluid and flexible process responsive to the changing conditions of the context (Creswell, 2013) taking into account the global pandemic. In Chapter 1, I described the evolution of my research design and how the pandemic precipitated a necessary pivot in how I collected and conceptualized my data. I also described how I became interested in the field of social and emotional learning and positioned myself as a proponent of curriculum-based SEL. In the first section of this chapter, I situate myself and my study within the qualitative paradigm and interpretive framework that shaped my design, data collection, and analysis. I outline the ways in which my professional background and experiences influenced my stance as a researcher and some assumptions underlying my approach to data collection and analysis. Finally, I describe the methods used for collecting data during the COVID-19 lockdown including an online computerized self-administered questionnaire, individual and group interviews via Zoom video conference.

3.2. Interpretive Framework

My study is situated in a social constructivist framework (Vygotsky, 1978). I ascribe to a relativist ontology in which reality is subjective, individually constructed, and different from person to person because individuals construct meaning in different ways (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In the context of my study, this means that I understand that reality is co-constructed by me and the participants, and I endeavour to honour participants' descriptions and first-hand accounts as the basis for describing their experiences with teaching the core competencies.

I ascribe to a subjectivist epistemology in which I see meaning as constructed through interaction with the world as well as individual contexts (Creswell, 2014). For my study, this

meant gaining insight into participants' meaning-making processes through a close examination of their unique interpretations of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This included individual and subjective perceptions of their teacher-identity, their relationships with students and colleagues, their understanding of their students, their interpretation of the core competencies, and the reality of their own efforts to implement them in the classroom. This epistemological stance is particularly relevant in a study which seeks to explore the highly personal and subjective domain of social and emotional learning and to understand the professional experiences of teachers in the context of large-scale educational change. In each case, I focused on interpreting the subjective experiences of teacher-participants and how each understood, perceived, and interpreted their world (Creswell, 2014).

My ontological and epistemological lenses also align with my theoretical framework as Fullan (2016) places particular emphasis on the importance of understanding each teacher's contextualized experience with subjective meaning-making experience that can occur through both individual and collaborative engagement with the reform. As a researcher, I seek to understand each teacher's unique journey in engaging with the reform and the factors, personal and social, that contributed to meaning they derived from the core competencies framework. I examine how that meaning can be understood in relation to their professional contexts and how it shaped their choices for implementing change in their own practice. I also recognize that, as a researcher, my own subjective interpretation of participants' accounts contribute to shaping and co-creating reality.

To this end, I sought to apply a naturalist methodology to immerse myself in their real-world contexts as far as practicable during the COVID-19 lockdown. While COVID-19 prevented direct classroom observations and in-person discussions that were originally planned, I sought to understand as much as possible about the context in which the teachers were situated.

This included establishing an understanding of the professional context of teacher-participants on a general level by developing a thorough knowledge of the MoE resources about the core competencies. Also on an individual level, this involved questions that helped capture the unique contextual factors for each teacher such as school culture, teaching assignment and teacher orientation, student population, and professional learning experiences. Questionnaire and interview questions were designed to invite teachers to describe their unique experiences and educational contexts in their own words including illustrative examples. The online questionnaire featured open ended questions that prompted teachers to describe their beliefs and practices to provide insight into their individual contexts. The subsequent elements of the case study were designed to allow me, as the researcher, to explore many aspects of the issue from multiple angles and gain a deeper understanding of how the five participants' individual views were constructed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I endeavoured to attend to verbal and non-verbal cues during zoom interviews and featured written and verbal quotes from participants to reflect their unique perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Finally, within my social constructivist framework, I seek to exhibit a balanced axiology acknowledging the impact of my own values and report findings in a balanced way (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). I recognize that my own experience, knowledge, and values influence the interpretation of the data. In this instance, as a teacher in the same region, it is important to acknowledge that my own experiences are separate from those of my participants but also influence my approach and interpretation of their stories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While in some ways my experience helps me to understand the context of the stories and descriptions that participants shared, each individual teacher had their own journey in relation to the core competencies. Again, this is of particular importance to acknowledge given the complexity and subjectivity of SEL learning as a learning domain. As described in the following section,

qualitative design also allows me to acknowledge and reflect on the inherent influence my own assumptions and subjective understandings have on my design, data collection and analysis, and the reporting of my findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.3. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is characterized as primary, inductive research focused on generating a rich description of participants' understanding or meaning-making process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I selected this framework as the most appropriate format for prioritizing teachers' voices and generating an understanding of their lived experiences teaching curriculum-based social and emotional learning. A qualitative paradigm encourages researchers to adopt an empathetic stance and explore participant perspectives by gathering information from multiple standpoints and establishing an insider's view (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). I endeavoured to put myself 'in the shoes' of my participants to generate a rich, thick understanding of their experiences with the core competency mandate and capture their evolving beliefs over the course of the first phase of the pandemic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This was essential to a study in which I sought to comprehend the experiences of my colleagues, establishing an understanding of their everyday interactions and the meaning that they drew from those experiences separate from my own (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I maintained an open and reflective stance during my interactions with participants and worked to find a balance in interviews between prompting and encouraging participants to guide me in the direction they wanted to follow (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative design also allowed for flexibility in adapting my approach to the evolving context and my developing understanding of each teacher's interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Throughout the research process I maintained a research notebook of the thoughts, questions, and decisions that shaped my direction and created an audit trail of the reasoning that influenced my design, analysis, and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Aside from the

aforementioned adaptations in the face of COVID-19, I was able to build on my growing understanding of teachers' perspectives from their online questionnaire responses to frame my individual interview questions, which, in turn, influenced the focus group discussion.

3.4. Researcher's Stance

A challenge of conducting qualitative research is the risk that I, as the researcher, will look for trends in the data to affirm my own assumptions about the phenomenon or participants under study (Stake, 2010, p. 164). In seeking to learn from the unique experiences of participant-teachers, it is important to acknowledge and seek to minimize subjectivities in my own understanding, learning, and beliefs about SEL as an educator, counsellor, and researcher (Stake, 2006). In Chapter 1, I situated myself as a secondary ELA and social studies teacher and counsellor which means that I have personal experience with the redesigned curriculum and educational change experience. In working with the five participants in this study, I ensured that "participants [were] alert to those biases" (Stake, 2010, p. 164) by being transparent about my own role as a teacher and counsellor.

Given the professional background and beliefs outlined above, I was predisposed to assumptions about the participants and their experiences with the core competencies. I became aware of some assumptions during the research process that were disrupted over the incremental phases of data collection. For example, following the collection of the questionnaire and selecting case participants, I realized I was assuming that participants who identified themselves as "actively engaged in teaching the core competencies" would be fairly familiar with the components of the framework and use these to guide the changes that they implemented in their ELA teaching practice. In using a process of "progressive focusing" (Stake, 2010, p.129), described more thoroughly in this chapter, I engaged in refining and clarifying participant

perspectives across each of the phases of data collection. I was able to adapt my questions and processes. For example, during the interviews, I was purposeful about allowing participants to give full answers and not to prompt or lead beyond the guiding questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This was also true in the group interview when I engaged only a limited amount with guiding topics but allowed the conversation to focus on their professional dialogue.

In addition, to mitigate and question my assumptions I was also highly purposeful and reflexive in my interpretation and analysis of the data coding over multiple sessions, emphasizing in vivo language from participants, and ensuring a process of triangulation by "look[ing] again and again, several times" for multiple points of evidence to support my themes (Stake, 2010, p. 123). I followed the data in reshaping questions and endeavoured to show "commitment to gradualness" to mitigate assumptions and develop a strong confluence of evidence for each theme (Stake, 2010, p. 132).

3.5. Multicase Study Design

3.5.1. Rationale for Multicase Study Design

The qualitative multicase study design offered an in-depth look at multiple cases of secondary ELA teachers purposefully implementing SEL in their classrooms as a sample of a greater phenomenon within the larger population of teachers implementing SEL reform across BC (Stake, 2006). This approach of "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world," allows valuable insight into understanding teachers' experiences with SEL-based reform in the context of significant educational change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 4). This study is grounded in the work of Stake (2006) and Merriam & Tisdale (2016) which align with a constructivist interpretivist framework in which "The researcher's perceptions and interpretations become part

of the research and as a result, a subjective and interpretive orientation flows throughout the inquiry" (Harrison et al, 2017, s. 3.3).

Case study is an appropriate format in answering questions of "how" and "why" in situations where participant behaviour is not manipulated and when context is considered important and interconnected with the phenomenon under examination (Harrison et al., 2017). In case study, data is typically collected from small numbers of participants with unique perspectives and experiences and analyzed through thorough reflection on the relationships between participants' unique experiences and particular theoretical frameworks to create a "rich, thick description" of their experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 192).

Multicase study is the comparison of the same phenomenon ("quintain") across diverse cases to understand the differences and similarities between them in relation to the phenomenon being studied (Stake, 2006). The rationale for wanting to study more than one case arose from the nature of the flexible and personalizable BC curriculum design which provided wide scope for teacher interpretation. Therefore, five cases are explored to provide a richer understanding of how teachers approached the core competencies reform. Multicase study design offered a methodology that would provide in-depth and holistic insight into the teachers' perspective in their given context.

3.5.2. Recruitment

Participants for this case study were recruited based on responding to an anonymous online qualitative questionnaire and volunteering to participate in the additional case study component. The online questionnaire was distributed in two main ways. First, after receiving approval from each of the three public school district superintendents, email requests were sent out to school administrators at 31 middle and high schools containing an introduction and embedded link to

the questionnaire for teachers. I also sent requests to the three independent schools that fall within the same geographic territory of the three public school districts on Vancouver Island. In cases where administrators consented to send the link on to their staff, teachers could access the questionnaire directly and anonymously through their district emails. This form of recruitment is supported by research that indicates that disseminating the questionnaire through official channels can support survey response (Fan & Yan, 2010) as does including the direct link to the questionnaire in the email itself (Manzo & Burke, 2012). Follow up emails were sent to administrators who did not reply or confirm that they would send the survey to staff. Second, I posted the questionnaire on social media groups specifically directed at teachers in the geographic region. Using my personal Facebook account, I was able to obtain permission from group administrators to post in three Facebook Groups reaching up to 1400 teachers with some possibility of overlap between them.

3.5.3. Case Study Participants

This case study focused on establishing an in-depth picture of the experiences of educators making a concerted effort to engage with SEL in the classroom. Participants were selected based on purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 265) using three main delimiting factors: a) being a secondary teacher (Grade 7-12), b) having ELA as a current teaching area, and c) describing themselves as actively working to incorporate the core competencies their teaching practice.

While my reasoning for selecting the latter two criteria was previously described in the literature review, to provide a quick summary here, there is a dearth of research focused on supporting school-based SEL at the secondary level. I sought to contribute to our understanding of secondary teachers' experiences with implementing SEL-based reform at this level. In

addition, ELA has been identified by teachers and researchers as a fruitful subject for incorporating the core competencies. It was anticipated that this scope would yield fruitful discussion about implementation and that a common subject area would support discussion amongst teachers in the focus group. The third criteria was chosen based on the rationale that, while all teachers are expected to implement the core competencies under BC's educational reform (BC Ministry of Education, 2017c) teachers choose the extent to which they engage with reform and some teachers may be more willing to engage than others (Fullan, 2016, Jenkins, 2020). In this study, the objective was to learn about the teachers' experiences in the change process. Therefore, I reasoned that selecting participants who had expressed a minimum degree of engagement with the core competencies framework would lend greater insight than those who did not self-identify as actively implementing SEL.

A total of 18 questionnaire respondents volunteered to participate in the case study process. This list was culled based on participants' questionnaire responses (e.g. elementary teachers, no ELA). Eight volunteers were contacted by phone and I verified that they met the criteria including perceiving themselves as actively engaged with the core competencies. Remaining participants were eliminated based on having recently retired, being an administrator in addition to teaching responsibilities, and due to non-response. The five remaining participants met the criteria and agreed to participate in the process.

The selection of five cases is in line with Stake's (2006) recommendation of between two and ten cases to achieve sufficient "interactivity" in a multicase study (p. 52). In addition, selected participants met Stake's recommendation for ensuring sufficient "diversity across context" in the selection of participants (p. 52). Participants represented a range of grades, schools, school districts, and years of teaching experience. Participants were not selected based on other personal or socioeconomic factors but rather based on diversity of teaching context.

Table 4 below provides a summary of the demographic factors reported by the five selected participants in their questionnaire response as well as case numbers and pseudonyms.

Table 4 Participant summary

Case	Pseudonym	Years teaching	Current subjects	Grades	Other experience or education
1	Jane	24	● ELA	9-12	Nursing
2	Amy	9	● Career Education ● ELA ● Français Langue Second ● Mathematics ● Science ● Physical Education	7	Teaching in the UK
3	Sarah	23	● ELA ● Drama ● Musical Theatre	9-12	Masters of Education Psychology
4	Wendy	9	● ELA ● Core French ● Social Studies	7	Social Work
5	Anne	23	● ELA ● Mathematics ● Social Studies ● Science	8	Masters of Education

3.5.4. Data Collection

Data were collected over a five-month period between March and July 2020 during the final semester of the school year. In this multicase study, triangulation was established from multiple data sources to "clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case is being seen" (Stake, 2006, p.64) and to establish a "rich, thick" understanding of each teacher's experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.192). For each case, I collected data from three sources: 1) teachers' written responses to the online questionnaire, 2) individual interview transcripts, and 3) transcripts from a focus group interview with all five teachers.

3.5.5. Online Qualitative Questionnaire Design

One data source for this case study is derived from an online questionnaire (Appendix D) that was developed to both comply with the COVID-19 research restrictions of the institution and school districts and gather insight into diverse experiences of a broad range of teachers on Vancouver Island (Fielding et al., 2016). The findings of the larger questionnaire will be reported

separately from this dissertation as a self-contained analysis. The questionnaire also served as the main recruitment tool for the multicase study as teachers volunteered to participate in the final section of the survey.

The questionnaire was developed with an emphasis on qualitative data to collect teacher feedback and "capture what is important to participants and access their language and terminology" (Braun et al., 2020). This qualitative measure was designed to offer contextual information and generate insight into individual teachers in their own unique contexts.

The benefits of online questionnaires as qualitative tools, as described by Braun et al. (Braun et al., 2020), aligned closely with my overall framework and research questions. Qualitative questionnaires provide "both a 'wide-angle lens' and the potential for rich and focused data" and are useful to "capture a diversity of perspectives, experiences, or sense-making" (p. 3). This aligns with my objective to understand the perspectives and sense-making process of a variety of BC teachers in the context of enacting curriculum reform. Braun et al. also note that qualitative questionnaires treat the respondents as individuals rather than spokespeople for the wider population and can make the study more accessible to participants by offering a level of comfort and perceived distance (Braun et al., 2020, p. 4). This distance also helped to limit my influence as a researcher and gave respondents greater control over planning, editing, and expressing their thoughts (Braun et al., 2020, p. 6). As also noted by Braun et al. (2020), the questionnaire served as a basis for me to follow up on the data with participants who volunteered to waive their anonymity from me.

I limited the number of questions in the questionnaire, grouping them by topic, breaking them up into distinct sections (Braun et al., 2020), beginning with questions that were quicker to answer (i.e. multiple choice), capping the number of long-format of questions (Liu & Wronski,

2018), interspersing bipolar item-scale questions (Wolf et al., 2016), and offering guidance for some questions for the sake of quality and completeness (Braun et al., 2020; Couper et al., 2011).

Questions were developed based on the research questions and a review of several studies examining teacher perspectives (Wyse et al., 2017). For example, Schultz et al. (2010) explicitly described the development of a questionnaire used in assessing teacher attitudes and support of SEL together with open-ended interview questions to explain their thinking. Ee and Cheng (2013) also explored teacher's perceptions of students' SEL and "infusing" SEL into their teaching practices following a curriculum mandate in Singapore (p. 59). These example questionnaire and interview questions contributed valuable insight for framing my own questionnaire. Most influential on my questionnaire design was the approach employed by Brackett et al. (2012) for developing their questionnaire of teacher beliefs about SEL. The researchers included questions in four categories including "(a) comfort level with delivering SEL instruction, (b) commitment to learning about and teaching SEL, (c) beliefs that student learning and success will benefit from SEL, and (d) opinions about how much the culture of the school would support SEL programming" (p. 222).

Also, in line with Bracket et al. (2012), I sought to establish a common understanding of SEL and the core competencies at the outset of the questionnaire. Following the implied consent form detailing the goals, framework, and parameters of participation, the questionnaire began with an overview of the core competencies to establish common definitions based on Ministry documents previously included in Chapter 1 as Table 1 (BC Ministry of Education, 2019d) (BC Ministry of Education, 2019d). This table was included again at the top of each section of the questionnaire. Part one (Q1-5) consisted of demographic questions, four limited-response items related to respondent's teaching context (district, grades, subjects, years of experience) and one open response inquiring about other professional background or learning of the respondent. This

is consistent with Bracket et al. (2012) who included questions about educators' teaching practices, experience, and professional learning relating to SEL. The demographic questions were intentionally limited: in part, because the questionnaire was not meant to represent a statistical data set (Braun et al., 2020). Part two (Q6-14) focused on experience prior to COVID-19. Teachers were directly prompted to answer these questions based on their "teaching experience in the first half of this year, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic" and in their "usual teaching context" (p. 4). This section included six open response and three (Q7, Q8, Q11) item-scaled questions ranking the level of agreement with a given statement. Part three (Q15- 18) focused on experiences during the first COVID-19 lockdown and shift to remote teaching. These questions were excluded from the present analysis and will be reported separately in a self-contained analysis.

As recommended by Braun (2017), I piloted the questionnaire with three colleagues. I also consulted a faculty member with specific expertise in questionnaire design who provided invaluable feedback. Together, my colleagues' requests for clarifying details lead me to reword some questions. For example, I added a list of examples in questions 10 (challenges), 13 (assessments), and 14 (supports). I also redistributed short-answer questions within the survey and eliminated two long answer questions due to the time required to complete the questionnaire.

3.5.6. Individual Interviews

Each teacher participated in an individual semi-structured interview (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 1042) on Zoom video conferencing. Four of the individual interviews were conducted during school closures and the remote learning period necessitated by the first wave of COVID-19, one interview was conducted in the first week of June within the first two days of BC's part-time return to in-person instruction. As with the qualitative questionnaire, participants were

specifically told at the outset at the interview that questions would first ask them to focus on their pre-COVID-19 experiences in their "usual teaching context" and that specific questions in the later part of the interview would relate to their experiences during lockdown and remote teaching. This temporal distinction was made in order to prompt teachers to focus on their perceptions of the reform in their typical professional context and their overall experiences of this educational change. Teachers' perceptions of the core competencies in the context COVID-19 were excluded from the scope of this dissertation to be investigated as part of a separate, focused analysis and report.

The interviews focused on the teacher's own perspectives: the context, perspective, goals, experiences, or insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) towards integrating core competencies in language arts. As described by Patton (2015), interviews are valuable when researchers want to understand "what is in and on someone else's mind" and want to "enter another person's perspective" (p.426). Interviews were semi-structured "obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 6). To this end, I used open-ended questions focused on the participants' context, perceptions, and experiences. I developed a list of eight specific interview questions to guide each conversation (Appendix B). Based on the participants' self-identification as actively engaged in incorporating the core competencies to varying degrees, questions focused on understanding each participant's interpretation and approach to the core competencies, as well as their observations and feedback about their unique experiences. For example, participants were asked to reflect on their planning process (Can you describe your approach to planning for incorporating core competencies in your teaching?) and were asked to delve into specific examples (Describe a lesson or activity in which you incorporate core competencies). In many cases participants also provided unprompted examples of strategies in the course of their

responses to other interview questions and were encouraged to elaborate or clarify these ideas in many cases. Teachers were also prompted to reflect on their observations (How do you perceive the impact of incorporating core competencies on your students?) and feedback about their experiences (How would you like to be supported in incorporating the core competencies?). In addition to general guiding questions, teacher-participants were also asked to clarify or elaborate on selected responses in their online questionnaire which helped me to identify emerging patterns and allowed participants to elaborate on earlier statements. These questions were personalized to each teacher based on their unique responses and described in greater detail in the following section .

Overall, this design created a dialogue and allowed for teacher-participants to "spill beyond the structure" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) and contribute to the direction of the dialogue, focusing on areas that they deem relevant (p. 1043). Consistent with a balanced axiology, this design also allowed me to acknowledge my contributions as a teacher and researcher "becoming visible" in shaping the process and constructing-knowledge with the participant through dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 1044). For example, I was transparent with participants about my own role as an English teacher and was able to ask them to expand on their ideas using professional terminology and asking them to describe lessons and experiences in a detailed way (e.g. So when you say you use formative assessment, what does that look like for you?). Interviews were video recorded using Zoom and transcribed for analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.5.7. Focus Group Interview

According to Casey and Ashbury (2012), the purpose of a focus group interview is to "is to collect rich, detailed data" (p.15) in a context where participants can use a "common language" to describe their experience (p. 16). Focus groups are generally intended to "capitalize on the

interaction among the group members to enhance the collection of deep, strongly held beliefs and perspectives" (p. 16). The focus deepened my understanding of the teachers' perspectives in the context of shared professional conversation and reflection, yielding additional insight to the questionnaires and individual interviews. The focus group interview on Zoom took place at the end of the school year in June and after all individual interviews had taken place. Participants consented to waiving anonymity within this specific group of teachers in the consent forms completed prior to conducting individual interviews and this consent was reaffirmed with participants at the end of each interview.

Questions for the focus group were designed based on the same principles as individual interview questions, creating open-ended questions that would allow participants to share in their own words according to what they deemed important (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). I endeavoured to make participants as comfortable as possible and "monitor individuals who may dominate the conversation" by asking follow-up questions or observing body language of quieter participants who might not interject (Creswell, 2018, p. 278).

Again, based on teachers' self-identifying as actively engaged with the core competencies to varying degrees in their teaching practice, focus group questions were designed to promote professional conversation and reflection among colleagues about their experiences with this process (e.g. What do you think is working about how you are approaching core competencies and how you gauge the impact on your students?). In the preamble to the interview, participants introduced one another and learned that, among other subjects, they all taught ELA as part of their teaching assignment and they were also reminded that I was an English teacher. This shared understanding was incorporated into the conversation as participants were prompted to reflect on incorporating the core competencies in English language arts compared to other subjects (e.g.

How would you compare opportunities to incorporate the core competencies in English to the ways in which they can be incorporated in other subjects?).

The nature of the focus group allowed the interview to be largely participant-led allowing me to "act receptively" to limit my influence on their responses as they engaged actively with one another and build upon each others' ideas (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 52). However, I also played a role in shaping the conversation both as a fellow English teacher and in my guiding and probing questions during the conversation to "dig deeper" and access a more complete picture of the reflection or experienced being described (Seidman, 2019). I encouraged elaboration and reflection as teachers shared what they deemed important to their accounts (e.g. Can you elaborate on what you mean by that?). While I did not share anecdotally from my own teaching practice, I contributed to the conversation through questioning, using particular terminology (such as formative and summative assessment), and probing which focused in on particular line of inquiry shaping the direction of the dialogue. I also offered verbal encouragement and non-verbal cues and facilitated the discussion by interrupting with new questions or calling upon particular individuals to elaborate on their ideas.

In summary, the five participants in the case study were recruited based on information gathered from an online questionnaire related to their reported engagement in core competency implementation and willingness to participate in the case study. Data from each of the five participants were collected during three distinct phases of data collection: the qualitative questionnaire, the individual interview, and a focus group interview. In the following section, I describe the data analysis including how I used these multiple data sources "interactively" to examine the single phenomenon of how teachers have conceptualized and implemented the core competencies reform in their practice (Stake, 2010, p. 123).

3.6. Data Analysis

Analysis for this qualitative multicase study was conducted based primarily on the work of Stake (2006) and Merriam & Tisdell (2016). Within-case analysis focused on generating rich descriptions of individual participants in their unique professional contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview data were transcribed for analysis from audio recordings and lightly edited for clarity limiting verbal spacers such as “um”,” like”, and “and.”

The data analysis process began simultaneously with data collection as the three phrases unfolded sequentially over five months. I used a process of “progressive focusing” (Stake, 2010, p.129), refining and clarifying participant perspectives across each phase of data collection using interviews to clarify questionnaire comments and using the focus group interview to ask teachers to elaborate on particular topics. Upon collecting participants’ questionnaire responses, I looked for emerging themes in each survey in order to probe more deeply into participants’ perspectives and experiences. Based on an examination of participants’ questionnaires prior to individual interviews, I generated one or two individualized follow up questions specific to each participant. For example, in Amy’s questionnaire, I identified a sense of tension or frustration that I wanted to understand further (“very mixed-success”, “Everything I have tried has been invented out of thin air and trialed on the go”). In her interview, I re-read the question and original response back to her and asked her if she would be able to explain further. In another example, Anne indicated that she found all core competencies easy to incorporate except for positive identity and culture. Again, I reviewed the question with the participant and asked her to elaborate.

Similarly, all individual interviews were conducted prior to the group interview which also allowed me to hone in on topics and questions that arose across individual discussions with the group. For example, I identified a pattern of language in how participants described their

preparation and approach to the core competencies (“naturally”, “teachable moments”, “explicit”, “a lot of planning”) and I developed a question to generate discussion about this specific phenomenon (Can you speak more about the difference between directly planning for the core competencies in your lessons, compared to teaching them in the moment when occasions arise?). This question led to within- and cross-analysis findings related to “contextual and focused instruction.” By using the process of progressive focusing in this way, I was able to make the most of the sequence of data collection from questionnaire to individual interviews to focus group interview. Taking time to reflect after each step helped me to delve deeper and ask for elaboration or clarification from teachers about their experiences with the core competencies.

3.6.1. Within-case analysis

In generating case descriptions (Stake, 2006), I sought to develop an understanding of each teacher’s unique contextualized experience in relation to the core competencies reform. After immersing myself in the data, within-case analysis was framed to establish an understanding of participants’ teaching context, beliefs about the core competencies, approach to implementation, perceived impact on students, and professional learning experiences and needs.

After an initial review of the full data set, each case was considered individually and coded using broad categories of teaching context, perception of the core competencies, approach to the core competencies, perceived impact on students, and professional learning (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Then, data were used to generate case descriptions capturing insights into each teacher’s accounts on five aspects of their experience and provide context for understanding their individual responses. Finally, I focused on identifying how teachers made sense of the framework and implemented changes in their practice along Fullan’s (2016) three dimensions of resources, strategies, and pedagogic beliefs.

3.6.2. Cross-case analysis

After the process of generating within case descriptions, I coded for cross-case comparisons (Merriam, 2009). Data were coded using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) to identify potential patterns framed within the two key considerations of educational change described by Fullan (2016): meaning-making and change in practice. Themes in cross-case analysis were developed through inductive coding triangulated across the five cases and helped to identify commonalities and differences in thinking and experiences among teacher-participants (Stake, 2010). Codes included semantic codes (e.g. “not a content-teacher”) and latent codes (e.g. “core competencies as student independence”) to identify broad patterns of meaning. Codes were refined and revised into more complex and descriptive labels (e.g. “core vs curricular competencies in competition”) (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Examples of the process of generating themes in directed and inductive coding are included in Table 5.

Table 5 Example of coding and theme generation from cross-case analysis process

Sub-Theme	Tentative themes	Codes	Data item
Core competencies as embracing the value of discomfort	CC allows for valuable mistakes	Permission to fail	now the happy little surprises in there that I love to build into their teaching, um, I am now by ministry decree required to have you feel what failure feels like. I like that one that might be my favorite, um, that you will learn through failure, uh, is fun (Anne, interview)
		Valuable mistakes	The learning that happens through these processes with the power in the students' hands leads to more sustained attention and deeper learning. The risks are that this is a long process that detracts from the content. Too often it has happened that students make valuable mistakes, but we can't follow up with them and close the deal on the topic. (Amy, questionnaire)
	CC embracing growth from discomfort	CC as embracing "Informative stress"	I do think the stress of being in a group of 30 kids is a very like informative stress and very, and I think the core competencies kind of like try and embrace that and, um, turn that into positive and give us tools to really make the most of that. Um, and turn that, like that stress into skills and like coping skills (Amy, interview)
		CC as growing from struggle	I think this new curriculum is really giving us this opportunity to actually push those kids farther than they've been pushed before. And I don't mean pushing a bad way. Maybe, maybe stretch or grow is, is a better thing to think about. (Jane, interview)
			Sometimes students experience discomfort when they come face to face with the demands of learning through core competencies. This is a benefit as it usually indicates that students are on the cusp of growth. (Jane, questionnaire)

Ultimately, eight themes were identified. Three themes related to the first research question about how teachers made sense of the core competencies reform included: 1) Accepting the core competencies, 2) Meaning-making and capacity building, and 3) Expanding curricular values which included two sub-themes, a) Embracing the value of discomfort and b) Recognizing a broader spectrum of ability. Five themes were identified relating to the second research question focused on understanding participants perceptions and experiences related to effecting change in their teaching practice to implement the framework including: 4) Situating the core competencies

pedagogically, 5) Examining core competencies through contextual and focused teaching strategies; 6) Situating core competencies in relation to curricular competencies, 7) Establishing core competencies as a common language; and 8) Developing meaningful core competencies assessment.

Overall, findings reflected that teachers were engaged at different points along the continuum of each of the two key aspects of the change process identified by Fullan (2016), meaning-making and enacting change in practice. Findings are divided into two broad categories and eight themes summarized in Table 6 in the following chapter.

3.7. Ethics & Trustworthiness

A researcher, I have an ethical obligation to maintain rigor and validity or "trustworthiness" in my design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My design incorporated several of the validation strategies described by Creswell & Poth (2018). In the present study, trustworthiness was bolstered by triangulation of data from multiple sources in the qualitative online questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus group interview to create a "confluence of evidence" (Eisner, 1991, p. 110). Transferability between researcher and participants and confirmability of the data are enhanced by including in-depth, "thick" descriptions of each case and by engaging in data collection immersed in the case context over an extended period of time**.** Further, I generated dependability and confirmability through systematic and consistent research protocols and recording my process activities in a research journal which provided an audit trail of the research process and tracking my decision making in developing codes and adjusting my protocols (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Approval was given from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board (Appendix E), as well as the school districts, administrators, and teacher-participants. In this process, I followed the guidelines of the National Research Council (2003) including 1) gaining

informed consent and notifying participants of any possible risks of involvement; 2) using pseudonyms to protect participant identities; 3) storing data in a secure and password protected location; and 4) avoiding undue burden or benefit through equitable participant selection.

In summary, data were collected in three phases beginning with an online qualitative questionnaire about teachers' perspectives and experiences. Five case study participants were selected from teachers who volunteered to participate in interviews at the end of the questionnaire. Case study participants were selected based on teaching English language arts as one of their subject areas, teaching at the secondary level from Grades 7-12, and indicating that they were engaged in teaching the core competencies framework. Each of the five educators participated in individual Zoom interviews, and one focus group interview. Within case analysis was done for each case based on the participants' questionnaire, interview, and contributions to the focus group discussion. Cross-case analysis was based on analysis of a total of 11 data sets collected from participants.

In the next chapter, I describe the findings of my analysis including case descriptions for each participant within their unique professional context and a cross-case analysis that generated overarching themes about how teachers conceptualized and implemented the core competencies in their teaching practice.

4. Chapter 4: Findings

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of the within-case and cross-case analysis grounded in the theoretical framework of the educational change process proposed by Fullan (2016) in answering the questions: *1) How have secondary ELA teachers conceptualized the core competencies reform and what factors influenced their meaning-making experiences?* and, *2) How have they implemented change in their teaching practice related to the core competencies and what factors influenced their approach?* First, I provide a rich description of each of the five cases to understand teachers' individual contexts, perspectives, and experiences. Then, I introduce themes identified amongst the five cases identified through cross-case analysis to garner insight into the differences and similarities of their experiences with the change process involved in implementing the core competencies reform.

4.2. Case descriptions

Case profiles provide details about each participant's teaching context, beliefs about the core competencies, materials and strategies used in implementation, perceived impact of the reform on students, and experiences and desires regarding professional learning. Analysis is situated within the context of teachers engaged in an ongoing and iterative process of sense-making and decision making with respect to implementing the core competencies in their practice (Fullan, 2016). Conversations were conducted in a spirit of sharing experiences among teachers who were currently in this process and, in many cases, framed by teachers as "work-in-progress" with ample room for growth. Data analysis was conducted with the aim of understanding and contextualizing teachers' perceptions and experiences in the process of implementing SEL-based reform.

4.2.1. Case 1: Jane

Jane was a veteran teacher with 24 years of experience and was teaching ELA for Grades 9-12. Earlier in her career, she also taught mathematics, science, and social studies from Grades 7-12 in independent and public schools in two different Canadian provinces. Prior to teaching, Jane also trained and worked as a registered nurse. Jane attributed her extensive experience as an educator and background as a medical professional with shaping her teaching orientation and her values with respect to the knowledge and skills she perceived to be most valuable for students.

Jane was enthusiastic about the core competencies reform describing herself as a "proponent" of SEL "long before" it was introduced in the curriculum. Her tone was excited and her ideas flowed quickly in describing her passion for SEL. However, her beliefs were not always well-received by her colleagues:

> I'm happy to see that it's formalized and I'm happy to see that it's something that we can have now sort of legitimately as a conversation from educator to educator, because I certainly had experiences in the past where — you have to be a bit kind of quiet about when you're bringing in some of those things. 'Cause it wasn't specifically the content…

Jane found the lack of consensus amongst staff in her school regarding the core competencies to be challenging. However, she viewed her colleagues' reluctance as a systemic problem — a sense of responsibility to get students "content prepared" in a school that was "invested" in its identity as a university preparatory school. Jane felt that her long experience as a teacher and nurse helped her to not to feel "daunted" by the "strong push" towards content and to hold firm in doing what she felt was important work. However, Jane found a small community of like-minded co-workers with whom to collaborate and share resources which helped to truly implement the reforms in her practice.

Jane positioned the core competencies framework as being at the center of her curriculum focus: “I really use content to help as a vehicle, I think, to teach the core competencies.” She explained that “planning explicitly” was key to implementing changes in her teaching strategies to align with the framework and offered several examples of her resources and strategies.

One unit focused on the topics of identity and culture drawing connections between African-American civil rights history in the US and the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada. She selected related mentor texts including films, poetry, and informational documents including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, paired with literacy activities such as reflective free-writing; reading and unpacking complex texts in pairs, individually, and in small groups; and informal visual and oral presentations to co-create understanding.

Similarly, in our focus group discussion, Jane shared that she incorporates the core competencies within a novel study of *Indian Horse* (Wagamese, 2012) in Grade 11 New Media by “having the kids notice those competencies come through in a protagonist” and asking students to “track” the character’s core competencies. She found that “they were making the connections between the fictional characters and seeing these skills and qualities that they may need to work on themselves.” Jane linked this unit to “Big picture – identity and how identity impacts your experience” and underscored the value of reflective thinking about one’s own identity, the identity of others, and how these aspects of self-influence your life on a larger scale.

Jane also described using class routines as a strategy for teaching core competencies and described teaching the strategy of mindfulness in connection with reflective thinking. She began most blocks with daily “mindful exercises” including mindful breath, movement, visualization, sketching, and group wellness check-ins. These activities were then linked to ELA each day transitioning into independent reading, and free or prompted writing. At this time, Jane

conducted individual conferencing and stressed the importance of modeling and facilitating the development of the critical and reflective thinking sub-competency during these sessions:

> … they're reflecting on their experience as a reader and that's an important part of the core competencies…when they speak to me out loud—if they're not giving me what I need to know, what's going on in their head — I will prompt them with questions and then I will show them, how "Do you see how, when I asked this question, it gets you to think about this?", "So this is a question that you can adopt as part of your self-reflection, right?" So we have those back and forth, and then I can get a sense of also where they're at as self-reflectors.

According to Jane, one of the most influential changes she made to align with the reform were in her assessment practices. She felt that the core competencies facilitated a move away from numeric grading and ranking, towards descriptive feedback that emphasized "real world skills." Together with her close group of colleagues, Jane co-developed "competency charts" for English, mathematics, and science in which "the core competencies, the content are all blended together." The charts formed the basis for her cumulative assessment and were used collaboratively with students who could contribute examples of their progress to an online document.

Jane illustrated the use of charts with an example of a creative project that included writing an artist's statement prompting students to be "thinking deeply about what they've created" to reflect on their choices, errors, and process. Jane connected this activity with the section on her chart for metacognitive skills and explained that it was just one of many opportunities to demonstrate progress over the course of the term. She described that students were initially resistant to her charts and continued "asking for numbers," but they eventually began to focus on descriptive feedback and growing their competence rather than "regurgitating" knowledge.

However, Jane observed that her academic "high-flyers" were slower to shift their thinking, indicating that they found it easier to demonstrate retention than describe their thought processes or growth:

> I'm thinking about students who maybe are resistive to resistant to reflecting or resistant to doing something in a way that they perhaps perceive as "fluffy" or "creative" and they don't necessarily see the bigger picture. They would prefer to go home and memorize the list… I think this new curriculum is really giving us this opportunity to actually push those kids farther than they've been pushed before.

By contrast, Jane noted that students who experienced less academic success transition more readily to her core competency-centered approach:

> …I think struggling learners are used to the pain of the wheels going around. They know, they just understand what that's like. Now, obviously, they don't get to experience the same kind of success that the highflyers have experienced in the system that we're working in, but they get what it is to have to really think hard about, and sometimes not be able to figure out why they don't get something. So lots to be learned from those kids, I think. And I think lots to be learned from peer interaction between those kids.

While she felt that her strategies were now well-established, she commented that it took significant time and effort on her part to have it "run pretty smoothly," but she felt like this was inherent in her role as a teacher ("all good teaching takes lots of planning. Right?"). She also noted that, over time, she observed that students entering her class were increasingly familiar with core competencies' language and that less time was required to teach the basic concepts. She attributed this "generational" shift to the growing number of educators introducing the core competencies across their school experience. However, Jane did not recall any particular professional development experiences related to the core competencies. Her only memory was of

a district Pro D with other English teachers discussing the overall curriculum changes as a whole.

4.2.2. Case 2: Amy

Amy was a mid-career teacher with 9 years of experience. Her Grade 7 position in a French Immersion program included responsibility for teaching career education, English language arts, mathematics, science, Français langue seconde, and physical education. Amy had experience teaching in rural and urban settings, at public and independent schools, and also teaching abroad in the UK.

Amy described her "urban" school as having a diverse, energetic, and collaborative staff that was "proactive" about "building bridges" within their diverse student population encompassing a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Amy indicated that the staff had a shared sense of the importance of promoting core competencies and that they were "trialing" school-wide initiatives to fit with the needs of their population. Her teaching context was also shaped by her interaction with parents, who sometimes made her feel pressured to focus on more traditional academic criteria. She cited one "very hands-on" parent inquiry about the exact parameters required to get her child top marks. Amy felt as though this parent was "not getting, like, we've got different priorities now," and indicated that this type of thinking sometimes limited a student's independent core competency growth.

Amy regarded the core competencies as valuable for her students but described that she was "transitioning" between curricula. She felt as though "the lid is off" with the new BC curriculum leaving teachers to plan their own approach. She felt the weight of responsibility of engaging in learning design that effectively adapted her practice in line with the new direction. In her view, the core competencies reform indicated shifting priorities in education

deemphasizing content ("solar system, electricity, whatever") in favour of greater focus on "communication skills" and "self-direction."

She defined the core competencies as "disposition for citizens," which was related to the idea of supporting students' ability to be "prosocial," better at "self-selecting," and "internally driven," moving from reliance on classroom supports to being independent learners out in "the general public." Amy framed her approach to teaching the core competencies in terms of promoting students' responsibility, "self-agency," and ownership over their own learning. The recurring phrase "the ball is in their court" underscored the connection between core competencies and students' increased responsibility as well as the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation: "…the ball's in their court, like you lead them to water, but then they gotta do the drinking… it's training disposition so they need to be like eventually internally driven."

For Amy, taking up the core competency mandate meant creating opportunities for growth by giving students more independence by letting them problem-solve and learn from experience. Adopting a core competency lens involved learning from everyday personal and social dynamics:

> I do think the stress of being in a group of 30 kids is a very informative stress and very—and I think the core competencies kind of try and embrace that and turn that into a positive and give us tools to really make the most of that and turn that stress into skills and coping skills.

She saw the value of "authentic learning" from natural consequences in situations appropriate to students' age and capacity, so that they develop strategies to overcome challenges, and recognize their capabilities. In her view, she provided clear guidance with the onus on students to follow through:

> …here's the criteria that I made it really plain for you, if you're not keeping that criteria in mind as you work and you're not referencing it before you hand it in,… then these are your consequences.

She felt this growth was a necessary progression in moving to higher grades.

Amy took a nuanced approach to implementing the core competencies in her teaching strategies. She saw her primary role as a facilitator was "making it explicit" by providing "guiding-feedback" to students, largely one-to-one or in small groups over the course of the day. In line with this frame of explicit, guiding feedback, Amy described teaching the core competencies as supporting "guided practice" of social and emotional skills in the same way that she helps her students' problem-solve with curricular content and competencies. She illustrated her thinking in an analogy likening teaching collaboration skills to teaching mathematics:

> …when you're collaborating, like "Here's a root sentence that you can be using to get everybody's ideas", "If you're too frustrated to come up with something productive to say, take a step back and then choose a real sentence and then start there," I'm trying to do explicit teaching of those things rather than sitting with the discomfort — just like in math when you're kind of like, "Oh, I don't know what to do and I can't move forward," and you're kind of stuck, I think, socially that happens as well when you're stuck and not able to progress as far as your creative thinking or how to communicate what you're feeling. And so in the same way that math has a long history of making steps, the developmental stages kind of bring you from A to B and bridge those skills. I think the core competencies are ways to kind of, they're kind of starting to flesh out developmental steps towards being able to creatively think and collaborate and communicate. Um, whereas I think, previously it's kind of more sink or swim and how trial and error on a personal basis of your own capacity and dispositions and less guided practice and guided growth in those skills.

Amy described additional strategies for teaching core competencies including using the classroom walls as a "second teacher" to prompt students, with particular reference to "one all about the Zones of Regulation that the school is really into." In addition to this SEL program (Kuypers, 2011) implemented as a school initiative, Amy aimed to provide students with visual cues ("sentence starters for when you're feeling frustrated, and you really are dysregulated and what you could do?") to "self-monitor" and facilitate independence.

When it came to learning design, Amy started with the curricular competencies and "subject areas for content," and then looked for opportunities to incorporate the core competencies in her lessons. She indicated that she taught communication explicitly in language arts, incorporated personal awareness and responsibility in social studies, and that she had begun to focus on incorporating thinking competencies through "creating more open-ended projects where students can plan and pursue their own topics."

This idea of fostering core competencies through "open-ended" activities framed much of Amy's description of her practice. Specifically, she perceived both that students had most occasion to demonstrate and develop their core competencies through self-directed projects or tasks, and that her opportunities to offer guiding feedback to individuals or small groups occurred mainly when the rest of her students worked independently.

For instance, Amy described a language arts unit connected with a school-wide experiential learning initiative about local aquaculture. Her unit first involved students gathering background knowledge from a variety of texts (newspapers, magazines, poetry). Then students worked in groups to format their own project with full autonomy and then share what they learned with the class. Amy described the main opportunities to teach collaborative skills explicitly while students worked independently on the projects:

> So then they started researching and I started teaching collaborative skills more explicitly. Then, doing those group membership grids and things that to figure out what everybody brings to the table, and what everybody wants to investigate. And then after that, they had to work together to create a written piece or a product… So it's kind of three phases and yeah, using that language arts curriculum, because it's all researching, responding to text, accessing different types of texts and different genres and then communicating… the new information.

Her thinking about facilitating core competencies in this case meant supporting small groups in sharing ideas, considering all voices, and helping them to work together to communicate their learning.

This example touches on another recurring idea about "space" for core competencies within specific subject areas. Elsewhere in the data, Amy described using language arts curriculum as "the basis" for teaching the core competencies "because communicating, collaborating are the most explicit in that curriculum" but that, by contrast, socials and science were "more difficult to be open-ended with, because they do have a lot of content area." This comment is an example of Amy's tendency to frame core competencies in contrast to or in competition with curricular competencies (or "content"). She elaborated on this idea in her interview explaining that she sometimes wanted to establish a grounding in subject knowledge before focusing on core competencies:

> I feel like there's so much background knowledge that I wanted them to get before being creative…I thought at the end to do some kind of applied projects…and then the ball would be in their court to make that connection…

While Amy felt supported by her school community, she also felt isolated when it came to implementing reform. In a disheartened tone, she described having "mixed-success," being

frustrated by insufficient resources, and that everything she designed was “invented out of thin air and trialed on the go.” Amy wished that the core competencies were more directly “lined up” with subject curriculum stating that, “if they were more explicitly linked too, that would make our jobs a lot easier.”

In particular, while she believed core competencies could be assessed, she expressed uncertainty about how to guide students or establish criteria for assessment:

> ...as a teacher, how do you put that on the timeline that I need? And how do you get in there and nitpick and move those ideas around or kind of say, “Oh, that’s not creative enough.” or, “Oh, that’s not the outcome I was looking for so you get a D” or, “Oh, you’re most creative cause you came up with the same outcome as me, fantastic!” That’s not—that’s all oxymorons.

Amy expressed that when it came to guiding students in core competencies self-assessment “teaching about them is sometimes an unnecessary learning curve towards teaching them.” She suggests that time spent learning the concepts and terminology in order to facilitate self-assessment, could be used to develop the core competencies themselves.

Amy also identified reservations about the ethical implications of assessing areas such as personal and cultural identity:

> …when it comes to assessment and the—all the social implications of, “Oh, well my teacher says this.” I don’t like that responsibility for that kind of personal things. And yeah, again, how do you assess that? How can you say, “Oh, the job well done? Like you you’re very diverse” or, how do you say, “Oh, you’re still ignorant. So you get a D”, that’s not, I don’t know. “Or your—I could tell you’re parroting stuff that your dad says, and it’s really offensive so you fail,” but, that’s your parents, not you. And, I don’t know. I feel, while it’s valuable learning, there’s some parts of it that are inappropriate to be in a school. And I’m

> like, yes, promote diversity for sure, but then when it comes to honing in and managing, and feedback, and assessing, and steering that type of learning, there should be boundaries there.

These qualms provide insight into Amy's misgivings about the efficacy of the current reporting requirements, questioning the value of reporting through student self-assessment once a year.

Amy indicated that she would like more support with the core competencies, but she explained "I am a little jaded of training to use strategies that rely on resources that we don't have, buy-in that is precarious, and skills beyond what our students can muster in the school setting." She emphasized the need for flexible and personalized strategies and resources that can be adapted to the needs of the school and student population. In discussing desired support she also specified that "planning time needs to be interwoven and reflexive and continuing, in order to, for it to matter." Amy welcomed the idea of support, in the right format, and under the realistic conditions.

4.2.3. Case 3: Sarah

Sarah was an experienced high school teacher with 23 years in the classroom. At the time of the study, she was teaching Grades 9-12 in the areas of English language arts and arts education (musical theatre and drama). She was particularly passionate about teaching theatre because she felt she had greater autonomy in this role and enjoyed collaborating with other fine-arts educators. Sarah also held a Master's degree in Educational Psychology. In general, she believed that core competencies were valuable for her students, and they made their "world a little bit bigger." However, her experience with implementing reform was starkly different in her drama and English programs.

In her school context, Sarah felt there was general agreement on the value of the core competencies but that it was "every teacher for herself" in deciding how (or whether) to implement them and that "high school teachers get kind of stuck in their ways." She described that her colleagues were "aware of the changes that are made. But also just… I don't know that high school has embraced the core competencies like elementary school has."

Within her subject areas, she described that her fine arts department had taken a collaborative, active approach which made her feel supported and energized to take up the torch as part of this "huge community coming together for one goal." By contrast, her English department did not take a unified approach ("we're all supposed to just do our, our own thing") and used traditional assessment practices including common exams and a long-standing grading system that Sarah felt needed to be updated "to fit what's happening in this day and age, but there's either no time or nobody wants to really take it on." This disconnect in ELA left Sarah feeling limited in her ability to embed core competencies in language arts, particularly, creative thinking, critical and reflective thinking, and personal awareness and responsibility.

In her drama class, Sarah confidently felt she could easily "involve all competencies into the mix" and talked about them as essential to her teaching and assessment strategies which involved collaboration, responsibility, and ownership as a matter of course. She also noted that, as electives, "Students have to 'buy in' to [the] program," and that some students were primed to lead, reflect, and generally engage with core competencies owing to their interest and passion for drama. In addition, Sarah felt the emphasis on project-based-learning in drama made teaching them "relatively more comfortable than in [her] English classes where the range of abilities in reading and writing comprehension calls for different assessment."

This quotation also illustrates Sarah's thinking about the challenge of focusing on core competencies in classes with a high proportion of students with learning difficulties. She

explained that more than half of her senior English students were on Individualized Learning Plans and were generally disengaged. She felt that it was challenging, and perhaps even counterproductive, to ask students about how their core competencies were progressing when "it's a win, if they come to class." She also described sometimes being disheartened by students' disengagement due to her own strong sense of independence and self-sufficiency. Her choice of terms ("soul defeating", "man do I ever struggle with that") conveyed her dismay. Particularly when compared to the eager and energetic way in which she discussed her drama lessons, her tone of voice and frequent sighing when describing implementing core competencies in her ELA lessons left a distinct impression of dissatisfaction and dejection.

In describing strategies for implementing the core competencies, Sarah highlighted that she taught core competencies "explicitly" in drama classes grounded in assessment. She described providing students with a "checklist" of learning goals for a unit based on core competencies language. Sarah illustrated the compatibility of the core competencies language in drama learning:

> …all of the things within the core competencies, even the subgroups and all those, they really play into the creative aspect. And so you can say to a student, "Your social responsibility is to work within your group, to build a scene, to be responsible for learning your lines, to meet your other teammates at their level, to understand step back and critique yourself and someone else, and still come together and have an outcome." So with the project-based courses… it fits so much easier, this type of, um, I guess in high school core competencies. Because in drama assessment, you can actually say, "yes, you have been able to meet all of these important levels in drama."

She described observing students demonstrating core competency growth in drama while crafting a scene using prompts, emphasizing their use of thinking and communicating competencies:

> I guess it would fit under the intellectual development, seeing how all five groups in the class came up with something completely and utterly different…And then what they had to do is navigate without hurting somebody's feelings. Like, "Oh, I don't know how that's going to work," or "Do you think that's going to translate on the stage?" and then having that kind of emotional intelligence to say, "let's run with [student]'s idea. I think it's a really good story,", "Oh, but can I add my part?"

In English, Sarah saw the core competencies as fitting in with the "applied skills" involved in completing essays and assignments. She elaborated, indicating that the core competencies were demonstrated by "showing up for the test, studying for the test," and taking steps to complete their work. However, she found it difficult to assess core competencies in ELA:

> Unfortunately, in English. I don't see that as much because I can't say to a student "you're socially responsible today. You, you sat down and took out a pen and got a B." But with drama, you know, anybody who's sitting out or not participating, you know, they're in the wrong space.

Sarah also emphasized the importance of classroom environment and "creating safe space" as essential to teaching core competencies because it is a place where "their competencies are unlocked." While she felt this was easier to achieve in drama, she described her efforts to create a safe space for English students by communicating with students ("it's not like I have rules posted everywhere, but I just say this is a place where people need to be comfortable expressing themselves where they need to be able to get, um, the support and the feedback for growing") and establishing clear expectations for respectful communication ("kids are very aware of how

respectful I am of them…and then it always, like, I shut down any of that stuff right away. I'm like, yeah, "that's not a good choice. You know, it's not a good choice."), and encouraging them to "believe in themselves." She was also cognizant of sensitive topics and offered students choice when introducing texts with sensitive themes ("I would never choose literature that was offensive. I always ask students in the very beginning. If there's something, some sort of topic that we need to avoid, please let me know"). However, she found that students continued to struggle with speaking in front of their peers, worried about making mistakes or saving face, or not taking core competencies seriously.

In describing her observations of core competency development in her drama students, Sarah stated that progress in the "social competency" meant they were able to self-regulate when delivering a line or overcoming nerves. She also described the benefits to students of learning from one another and understanding the social signals or consequences of disruptive behaviour when classmates no longer want to work with them. She noted that this growth was particularly evident in her multi-grade drama course where levels of maturity and confidence varied. In particular, Sarah assessed core competencies by looking for leadership and initiative.

In ELA, Sarah recalled one occasion when she had been able to establish the right environment to focus on core competencies with a cohort of honours English students. She attributed this experience, in part, to the fact that the students were all academically strong, driven, and bonded by a sense of community in which they could participate authentically:

> … they were so motivated. Oh my God, their efficacy was off the charts and they were such a joy and they built each other up and we did a lot of—and it, wasn't always driven by me, the kids organized things and somebody would say something and it would turn into 45 minutes of this incredible conversation or connection between the kids. And then we'd all go away feeling so good, but we did really important things. And so the

> communication for those kids was amazing. There weren't any weak students in the class, so that was their comfort level to be able to share…

Sarah commented that in recent years, there had not been much professional development on the core competencies and noted that her school had focused more on Indigenous topics. She recalled having a disappointing introduction to core competencies through a professional development (ProD) session at her high school which focused exclusively on K-8. She and her colleagues felt they were "not really the target audience" and that the session was not as strategy-based as they hoped to be, rather an information session:

> …what we thought we were doing was taking away strategies to take into our own classroom, meanwhile, it was just kind of like a launching -- here is the information that we've been working on, and this is what we would like you to incorporate.

Sarah expressed that many "tuned out" of the presentation and did not engage in any meaningful or collaborative way.

However, Sarah recalled one positive ProD experience meeting with district staff and other high school drama teachers to discuss and share examples of the core competencies in their practice. She found that this group generally agreed that they were already incorporating core competencies in similar ways, but that she would like to continue to participate in this style of workshop in "smaller groups, more intimate settings, with strategies we can walk out of feeling like we can put them into place." She also underscored a desire for discussions to focus on successes and strategies that have worked, rather than frustrations and setbacks.

4.2.4. Case 4: Wendy

At the time of data collection Wendy had 9 years of experience and was co-teaching two cohorts of Grade 7 students in an English (non-French immersion)program. She was responsible

for the areas of ELA, core French, science, and social studies. Wendy described significant learning needs in the group, with almost half of her students requiring increased or one-to-one support. Coming to teaching "later in life," Wendy was educated and worked as a social worker which she described as her "raison d'etre" for teaching core competencies.

With respect to her school community, Wendy indicated that, based on conversations with colleagues, she did not feel a strong consensus regarding the importance of the core competencies in her school. However, she elaborated that she felt many had just not had their "aha moment" yet:

> I think for most people, it's still something you do at the end. You have them fill in a form. And this is, these are the people I'm referring to who are amazing teachers... I just don't think they know how to do it, or they haven't had that "aha moment."

When the core competencies were introduced, Wendy initially thought that "it kind of felt like this is one more thing we have to do." However, the evolution in her thinking occurred when she considered how integral the core competency skills had been for her son in starting his own business as an entrepreneur. For example, she described how his management of staff involved communication skills and that their business is based in a truly collaborative and creative industry that requires them to listen, offer ideas, and manage conflict. Through the example of the skills her son relied on as an entrepreneur Wendy came to "see how explicitly teaching these skills will set kids up for success."

Wendy felt she was primed for this "aha moment" by her teacher education program, her background as a social worker, and her personality. She credited her B.Ed. with emphasizing thinking and communication skills as the foundation of teaching but that her connection to the personal and social competencies arose from a natural fit with her teacher identity ("I think that's

more me and my personality and the way I teach, I think") and her approach to teaching core competencies emanated organically from her "lens":

> Like, part of it feels like it's just who I am. I'm a social justice — I was a social worker in a previous life. I am a feminist; I have that lens in my eyes. And um, so I don't know how much I plan naturally and how much is, because I'm thinking about it. I can't tease that apart so much.

She also felt that having the core competencies "front of mind" was part of what makes her a good teacher. Wendy believed that she found the core competencies accessible because she never saw herself as a "'content teacher," but rather as someone who "uses content to help the kids develop these life skills." While she thought the core competencies could be incorporated in all subjects, language arts stood out to her as especially compatible.

Illustrating core competencies in her ELA lessons, Wendy described a series of units developed with a partner-teacher linked by the theme of "identity." She noted that the design was not originally based on the core competencies but was inspired by the frequent inclusion of the word "identity" in the ELA curricular competencies.

One unit involved engaging with select fiction and non-fiction for "global read aloud" to support comprehension. Then students watched a series of short videos designed by Wendy and her partner prompting students to reflect on the concept of identity in each plot. Then, the teachers modeled, and students completed "identity webs" to reference and develop throughout each unit.

A subsequent identity unit was anchored with the book that follows the challenges of a girl with a learning difference. While reading, students engaged in discussions taking on the perspective of the protagonist:

> … we talked about how she (they) she felt stupid because she didn't do well in school, and how that the other kids teased about that, and how that impacted her identity, and how other people believed in her and that impacted her identity, and we talked about why we tend to believe our friends who say bad things about us instead of good things about us. And we unpacked that and they look at their identity webs and look at what things are true about themselves and what things are things they think are true about themselves.

Students wrote messages about inclusion using sidewalk chalk around the school grounds and created "I am" videos that contrasted black and white shots with negative labels they have heard or felt (e.g. "I am stupid"), with full-colour frames and labels that they embrace (e.g., "I am feminist", "I am bi") to post in the school.

Wendy also described using her walls as a "second teacher" posting the core competency "triangles" to reference at opportune times:

> … I'll run over to the board and go, "Oh, you are green, try-on green triangulating right now you are thinking, woo." And "Oh, that was so nice that you did that.", "Oh, that was such a — I love the way you problem solved." So it's part of the, um, the shtick about how I do it.

In terms of assessment, Wendy did on-going informal oral formative assessment but focused largely on students' self-assessment conducted after each unit from specific core competencies criteria related to the unit "made explicit on the whiteboard."

Wendy described wanting to be more explicit about teaching core competencies and noted that some students need "a lot of building prior knowledge" because they have not had a stable home or family life. She described this as one of the elements of her approach that was influenced by her social work career:

> … If you understand where the kid is coming from, their way of communicating, and their way of learning and thinking and how they talked to other people, how they talk to themselves about themselves… you know, I know that "Bobby" who just keeps saying he's stupid. That's personal communication. He thinks he's stupid because he's been told he's stupid... if you understand that they haven't had, they haven't had an enriched home life, you have to do a lot of building prior knowledge because they don't have any … if you know the background, it makes it even more important. It makes it easier to understand why you're teaching how to behave in a group, explicitly teaching how to communicate appropriately…if they've been in a home where being aggressive is modeled to them, you have to teach them how to be in a group. You have to teach them how to communicate appropriately, not just assume everybody knows how to do it.

Wendy shared several anecdotes to illustrate how teaching the core competencies influenced her students. The examples were described in the context of a regularly occurring ethics and philosophy activity Wendy used directly incorporating critical thinking, perspective taking, and communication through "Socratic" style questioning. She observed that her core competencies-centered approach challenged students thinking about criteria for success and learning. She noted it was particularly enlightening for a straight A student who had to work to shift her thinking:

> … they know how to "do school," and so they're not used to not getting a right answer. And so it was very challenging for her cause she didn't—couldn't get — she couldn't tell how she was doing because there was no "a hundred percent," there was no ex—I was interested in the process of the thinking. I wasn't interested in the outcome and she didn't know how to deal with that. She wasn't upset by it, like sad, upset. She was challenged by it, and she was like "You're, you're not gonna make me think anymore. Are you?"

Wendy also observed growth in a disengaged student who she described as capable but struggling to concentrate and engage in written or focus worked:

> … He's in my class and he's super smart. And hardly ever comes to school, tons of anxiety, challenging home life, but he has a mind like a steel trap and he not only does he know facts, he knows how to like draw conclusions about them. And I don't know where he's getting it, can't hold a pencil can't sit still, can't —he's not diagnosed, but I would say ADHD, like just so smart, so funny. And he loves these days because he, he just, his brain is just ready … Because he thinks all the time, he has a hard time writing it down and he has a hard time being socially appropriate with it, but this is his wheelhouse, and he loves it.

This student embraced the "Socratic" activity, utilizing communication and critical thinking skills and experiencing success in a task that prioritized core competencies allowing him to demonstrate his learning.

Wendy believed the core competencies made learning "rich and interesting for kids. Core competencies make the learning 'real'." In her view, they were a vehicle for challenging students to extend their thinking and apply their skills in authentic ways.

Wendy opined that implementing core competencies involved the same "regular challenges of planning" as other reforms and that, while she had taken steps to adapt her teaching, she wanted to make them even more explicit. In particular, she described other meaningful professional development experiences and hoped for a similar format in relation to the core competencies including observation, co-planning and co-teaching with mentors and expert teachers, as well as additional resources specific to the core competencies.

4.2.5. Case 5: Anne

Anne had been an educator for 23 years and was teaching Grade 8 in a French immersion program. Sharing student cohorts with two partner-teachers, her subjects included ELA, mathematics, social studies, and science. Anne had a Master's degree in education and described that her thesis was connected to the core competencies as it focused "on building better and more collaborative relationships in the workplace."

Anne emphatically emphasized that she had long been incorporating SEL in her teaching, and that it was a relief when the curriculum caught up to what she and her colleagues were already doing. She did not perceive a consensus amongst her colleagues about the importance of the core competencies and had not connected with many others to discuss them. However, she emphasized that she trusted her colleagues were great teachers and doing what they needed to do to support students.

Anne conceptualized the core competencies as "human competencies" and important skills for students "building them to be collaborative, creative citizens of the future." In particular, the concept of core competencies as "tools in a toolkit" arose several times in Anne's accounts. She believed in allowing students to learn from problem-solving on their own and developing their core competencies organically through experience,

> …a lot of it though, as you well know, is in the spur of the moment as something happened in a great discussion happened, or a problem solving thing happened, or a pandemic happens, or life happens and you have this moment to think, and then afterwards, you can look over your shoulder and say, "Oh yeah, we actually touched on those five competencies because life just had a teachable moment presented itself."

She also indicated that too much focus on the framework could be detrimental to expanding their "toolbox."

Anne embraced the core competencies as a natural part of her teaching role, but identified in her questionnaire responses that a key challenge for her was in striking a balance when supporting her students:

> When implemented, they occurred to me as a breath of fresh air. I was grateful to have a curricular place to hang all the things I love about teaching. The only challenge for me, really, is staying within the wheelhouse of my role as teacher, and not stepping into areas that require specialists such as counselors.

Her approach to teaching the core competencies centered on supporting students as opportunities arose in the classroom "in the moment" or "on the fly" and she felt that they did not need to be planned in advance or considered in isolation: "As soon as I wake up in the morning, I start practicing life's core competencies. These competencies are the backbone of life, and are put to work every day, all day. They are not compartmentalized." She suggested that the core competencies inherently fit in all aspects of the curriculum, though some competencies were more suited to certain subjects. She summarized her approach to planning, saying:

> … the curriculum, just kind of like—whatever you choose, it's going to fit into the core competencies because whatever you choose, we're going to have to talk about it, think about it, create around it, collaborate around it. We're going to have to be human about whatever this problem is. And it's, um, it's implicit in what I do. I mean, it's just, it's not something I stop and say, "Oh, I'm going to be designing a math project. Here's how I'm going to fit this and this and this in."

However, Anne described that she did consider the framework in the big picture when designing units describing them as a valuable vantage point for learning design ("it's like, that is the best place to plan from. I almost stand in the core competencies and it's like, what curriculum am I going to?"). In particular, she created a series of cue cards of all curricular competencies for each

of her subjects and for the core competencies as a visual reference to help pair complementary areas.

To illustrate what teaching the core competencies looked like in her classroom, Anne briefly described a language arts and social studies unit she associated with critical thinking and communication based on a board game. Students strategized and completed writing and historical research tasks as they collaborated and "conquered" various countries. Anne describes the unit as "rich with core competencies" despite not having been originally planned with them in mind. Anne felt that core competency development occurred through group work, discussion, and "daily coexisting."

Furthermore, Anne stated that she does not often refer to the core competencies framework with students. She commented that stopping frequently to identify core competencies in the run of a lesson can feel artificial, and that she favoured a more indirect approach:

> …you could be all day every day: "Stop, this is a core competency" or, "Hey, we're communicating this I can statement." No. It's like—it becomes too artificial. It's when you know them and you work them in, you're just in the land of—because most of them are building the human you want to build. So it just happens. But I never, I I'm not, yeah, I've never stopped. I certainly don't often to say "Stop, that's one of the core competencies."

However, in the focus group interview, Anne expressed the belief that there were multiple options for teaching strategies: "that's why the core competencies are really cool, you can either build them in, or you notice that they just, by osmosis, happen in a regular day to day and raising humans."

In both interviews, Anne provided examples of occasions when she does rely on the specific wording from the curriculum. One situation is in order to stretch students who are facing

disappointment or challenge to underscore the potential value of discomfort for students and to reframe struggle as opportunity for growth and resilience:

> …the only time I'll ever use [the core competencies framework] is when it's one of the uncomfortable ones that I can sit there, like the failing one, "Hey, this is actually one of the ministry driven core competencies you're supposed to learn. So, if you just failed, Woohoo! Some learning!" So if any—if anything I just, I will default to say, "that's something that the curriculum says you're supposed to learn, so it's okay."

Here, Anne referred to an "I statement" from Creative Thinking profile 5 "I am willing to accept ambiguity, setbacks, and failure, and I use them to advance the development of my ideas" (BC Ministry of Education, 2019). Anne saw this element of core competency language as helpful in trying to stretch students outside of their comfort zone or encourage independence, commenting that "the way through anxiety or the way through discomfort is through exposure." She identified that the curriculum gives her license to intercede for students who would benefit from support in core competencies:

> It is those kids that you just—that come with the least amount of core competency-based skill sets that you work it back into them that, you know, make you feel like you've raised an even better human being. You know, because the ones that are doing fine, just sail by, this one needed intervention. And so the core competencies allow you to intervene by Ministry orders if you want. So you have that backbone to be able to work that through with parents, but the kid can also (with a good relationship) and buy it, it's fun. It's fun watching them do that.

In addition, during the focus group Anne described doing a "toolbox inventory" with students in each term using core competencies language for them to assess strengths and needs: "it's great for them to take inventory of what they have, what they no longer need, but mostly

what they need. Um, and what are they going to go after builds … when they self-reflect." Therefore, while Anne generally described herself as not using the framework frequently with students, she has engaged with the core competencies to develop resources for planning and on-going self-assessment.

In describing the impact of core competencies on her students, Anne expressed that she saw the biggest impact in "behaviours in the classroom" and student communication. She observed, "it starts to become really easy over time to see who needs a bit more sharpening of this one, or needs more exposure to that one." She also noted that core competencies sometimes emerged at unexpected times, such as in group work when two students "rub each other the wrong way." She described that this could prompt excellent but sometimes "heated dialogue" that results in getting to know one another or changing points of view.

In her questionnaire, Anne expressed a belief that "subjects were developed so as to give practice to different core competencies" and therefore they would not all be equally "suited" but that it was possible to "find opportunities to teach core competencies in any subject." In particular, Anne identified positive personal and cultural identity as generally more challenging to implement than the other competencies. When asked to elaborate, Anne identified that her focus was more targeted in her responsibility as a French immersion teacher stating that: "my mandate is French culture, but it's not necessarily their identity." She also cited drawing greater attention to aspects of Indigenous culture that are emphasized in all subjects in the new curriculum.

Anne recalled when the new curriculum was introduced at her previous school to the entire staff and she had identified with colleagues that the core competencies were something they were "already doing." She did not describe any other specific professional development experiences but did attribute her interest in social and emotional learning to her Master's thesis

on social dynamics in the workplace. Anne felt that she did not need any additional support from professional development when it came to core competencies. She stated that,

> ...if anything, just leave me be, don't, don't come at me with a "this is how it has to be done." Don't come at me with some, um, you know, new book club on it, or guest speaker on it. Just, if anything, I, you know, I'm at a place in my career where I would support someone else in it. Um, so I'm not at a place where I need the support in it. I'm, you know, a 20 year veteran of core competencies in the way I feel proud that I raise human beings.

This comment reflects a sense of confidence and perhaps defensiveness, grounded in her sense of pride in her long career as an educator and her perception that she had always included core competencies consistent with her beliefs about contextual learning. She felt additional school or district involvement would be taking time away from her ability to hone her existing practice. However, she indicated that she would like time to collaborate with other teachers to share ideas.

In summary, all five participants varied with respect to their teaching context, how they described the core competencies in their teaching practice, the challenges they experienced with incorporating the framework, the impact that they observed on students, and the types of professional development experienced and what they wanted for the future.

In the next section, I describe the findings of my cross-case analysis into teachers' perceptions and experiences with implementing reform. I examined the similarities and differences in the accounts of each teacher generating themes in relation to each of the research questions focus on how participants made sense of the core competencies and how they incorporated the framework into their teaching practice.

4.3. Cross-case Analysis

The following section summarizes the findings of analysis across the five cases. Themes were triangulated across multiple participants and using the three sources of data for each case. Cross-case analysis was situated within the two research questions based on Fullan's (2016) description of the two key components of educational change. Eight themes were identified, the first three are related to research question one: *How have teachers conceptualized the core competencies and what factors influenced their meaning-making experiences?* The four subsequent themes are related to question two: *How have teachers implemented change in their teaching practice related to the core competencies reform and what factors influenced their approach?* Themes are summarized in Table 6. In the remainder of this chapter, I outline the themes identified through cross-case analysis with illustrating examples from the participants drawn from the qualitative questionnaires, individual interviews, and group interview.

Table 6 Cross-case findings summary

Categories	Themes	Summary
Q1: How did teachers make sense of the core competencies and what factors influenced their meaning-making experiences?	**1) Accepting the core competencies**	Teachers valued the core competencies as a worthwhile addition to the curriculum and accepted them as part of their teaching role and aligned with their teacher identities.
	2) Expanding curricular values	**Embracing the value of discomfort** Teachers perceived the core competencies as emphasizing the potential for growth in the face of challenge or failure. The framework encouraged teachers to stretch students out of their comfort zones.
		A broader spectrum of ability Participants perceived that the core competencies signified an expanding sense of what "counts" as success and learning in school and empowers students who otherwise struggle with traditional academics.
	3) Meaning-making and capacity building	Teachers experienced limited opportunities for shared meaning-making, disappointing professional learning experiences and largely engaged with the framework independently. However, even limited opportunities for collaborative meaning-making were influential.
Q2: How did teachers effect change in practice relate to core competencies and what factors influenced their approach?	**4) Situating the core competencies pedagogically**	Teachers differed in their interpretations of how they situated the framework within their practice. Some described re-orienting their teaching from a core competency lens, others described finding space in their practice to support core competencies one-to-one or with small groups of students, others described them as already present in their existing practice.
	5) Examining core competencies through contextual and focused teaching strategies	Teachers described implementing a variety of strategies for teaching the core competencies that fell into two categories. Contextual teaching occurred in "teachable moments" arising naturally out of everyday interactions and focused teaching involved specific planning and instruction related to one or more competencies.
	6) Situating Core Competencies in Relation to Curricular Competencies	Participants held a common perception that ELA was a complementary discipline for teaching the core competencies and described several examples from their practice. They also highlighted mathematics as a subject in which more focus on the core competencies was needed.
	7) Establishing core competencies as a common language	Teachers all implemented core competencies' language with students to varying degrees. They agreed on the significance of language for students and for keeping the core competencies front of mind. However, teachers discuss core competencies framework with less specificity than curricular competencies.
	8) Developing meaningful core competencies assessment	Teachers agreed that assessment was key for truly implementing core competencies. For some teachers, adding them into their regular assessment practices facilitated learning design. Some teachers introduced core competencies in particular rubrics but less substantively. For others, more support and guidance were needed to assess core competencies in a meaningful way.

4.3.1. Question 1: How have secondary ELA teachers made sense of the core competencies reform and what factors shaped their meaning-making experiences?

In line with Fullan's (2016) suggestion that the subjective meaning that teachers ascribe to reform is a key consideration in facilitating educational change, themes in this category are related to meaning the teachers' associated with the core competencies framework and the factors that influenced their sense-making experiences. The three main themes focused on teachers' acceptance of the reform within their roles, a shared view that the core competencies expanded the values and priorities represented in the curriculum in a meaningful way, and the ways in which teachers engaged in meaning-making and building capacity in terms of professional knowledge and skills for implementing the core competencies.

4.3.1.1. Theme 1: Accepting the Core Competencies.

Participants in this study were selected based on identifying themselves as actively implementing the core competencies with their students. However, the source of that motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic and teacher beliefs about a given reform can influence the direction and extent to which they exert agency to effect change in their practice (Jenkins, 2020). This theme was built upon data related to participants' perceptions of the framework relative to their professional identities and the beliefs that inspired them to implement the core competencies in the classroom. Analysis indicated that all five participants perceived the framework as aligned with their professional identities, they believed that the core competencies belonged in the curriculum, and were appropriately situated within their role as teachers.

Jane, Anne, and Sarah found that the core competencies were easily subsumed into their existing beliefs about teaching and learning. Jane described the introduction of the framework as "validating," bringing curriculum more in line with her established view about the "function of

school" and priorities for learning. Jane described that in teaching the core competencies, she felt like she was "modeling for them that social emotional connection that they're needing to develop" which fit instinctively into her professional role. In fact, Jane opined that the core competencies were so essential that "there should be a course in social emotional learning, like a whole course and every Grade 9 should have to take it." Anne, too, described a sense that the curriculum had finally "caught up" to her beliefs. She also perceived close alignment between the core competency objectives and the development of her adolescent learners and stated "Grade 8s are extremely social, emotional, political, activist, creative, critical thinkers. It's as if the core competencies had them in mind!" Sarah felt that the core competencies were key skills that she and other fine arts educators had long prioritized and that she wanted to emphasize in ELA, despite finding it more difficult to achieve.

Wendy and Amy described undergoing a more tangible process of shifting their thinking since the introduction of the framework but still recognized significant alignment. Wendy described that she initially thought the reform reflected "just another thing we had to do," but deeper consideration and an "aha moment" lead to the realization that the core competencies aligned closely with "who [she] [is]" as a person and as a teacher. Amy perceived the core competencies as valuable real-world "transferable skills" for students but recognized that she was still engaged in processing how to approach the reform.

This theme is significant in identifying that teachers conceptualize the core competencies reform as a worthwhile addition to the curriculum. Whether catching up to their existing beliefs about the importance of social and emotional learning or facilitating a meaningful shift in their thinking, participants' rationale for embracing the framework indicate intrinsic motivation, alignment with teacher identity, and a willingness to agentically engage to some extent with the core competencies in their teaching practice.

4.3.1.2. Theme 2: Expanding Curricular Values.

This theme was based on codes related to meaning teachers ascribed to the core competencies in terms of shifting the type of learning and skills that are valued in schools. Two sub-themes were identified in the data as particularly significant across participants' sensemaking. The first subtheme centered on participants' shared perception that the core competencies embraced the value of learning from discomfort and provided a basis from which teachers could encourage students to experience and learn from failure and persevere in the face of challenge. The second subtheme related to the idea that the core competencies framework expanded the type of learning that "counts" or that is valued within the BC curriculum to encompass a broader, more inclusive range of abilities beyond traditional academics.

4.3.1.2.1. Subtheme 2a: Embracing the Value of Discomfort. There was a common perception amongst participants that the core competencies "embraced" the value of discomfort. This was an aspect participants appreciated and characterized as previously absent from the curriculum or insufficiently articulated as a learning priority. Teachers believed the core competencies promoted perseverance, adaptability, and resilience and that these skills were key lessons for their students and part of their role as teachers that is unacknowledged in previous versions of the curriculum. For example, Amy discussed the core competencies in relation to the concept of "productive stress," which she described as the "uncomfortable part, but… the valuable part" of authentic learning and emphasized the benefits of developing personal responsibility from natural successes and consequences. For Sarah, implementing the core competencies meant asking students to put themselves "out there", "take risks", and get outside of their comfort zone. Similarly, Anne described that her "favourite" part of the framework was that it recognized that "failure" was actually a legitimate learning opportunity and that she relied on the core competencies as a "ministry decree" of responsibility to instill an understanding of

resilience in her students. Jane and Wendy also each discussed heartily and purposefully challenging their students to expand their thinking about learning and academic success in a way that characterized working through discord in their preconceptions as an indicator of growth. Wendy said that "It's hard for them to not have a correct answer" but that challenging them to persevere despite protestations that higher order "thinking is hard" was one of the most worthwhile aspects with the "biggest impact on kids" of implementing the core competencies.

The belief in the pedagogic value of discomfort is aptly articulated by Jane who, in describing the impact of the core competencies on her students, identified struggle as a learning opportunity:

> Sometimes students experience discomfort when they come face to face with the demands of learning through core competencies. This is a benefit as it usually indicates that students are on the cusp of growth, but it does need to be handled sensitively and expertly to ensure that the student remains engaged in the learning.

In particular, participants recognize that this discomfort occurred frequently amongst strong academic students. Jane described that her "high flying" students were more resistant to core competency-centered activities such as mindfulness and reflective thinking because they were used to finding success by following the rules and relying on "patterns of security." Wendy and Anne also described purposefully stretching "high-flyers" by stoking creative thinking and encouraging students to innovate in ways that were not bounded by a set of detailed instructions. Amy described the impact of focusing on core competencies with her students by stating that,

> …it flips where those students that are normally on track and like excelling and everything and they follow all the rules, they sometimes struggle the most…it's good to see that we can find ways to challenge those kids that are like technically very able.

The theme of embracing the value of discomfort also arose in the group interview in which Anne observed that students are encouraged and benefit from seeing their peers struggle and problem-solve, particularly when they eventually realize that they can "crack [ideas] open in different ways." Amy suggested that adding clarity to the core competencies framework, additional criteria for growth, and making more explicit links to the curricular competencies, could help to bridge the gap for the students who struggled to move outside of their comfort zone and clung to more traditional measures of success to "get good grades." Teachers discussed in the group interview that the recognition of discomfort as learning was one of the most meaningful aspects of the core competencies reform, as it acknowledged and encouraged what they saw as important learning strategies for developing essential skills, overcoming the types of social and emotional experiences that they will inevitably encounter in their lives outside of school.

4.3.1.2.2. Subtheme 2b: A Broader Spectrum of Ability. In balance with the previous theme that emphasized the value of learning from discomfort, particularly among strong academic students, the core competencies reform was also identified by teachers as meaningful for the opposite reason: They expanded students' sense of what forms of learning are valued in the curriculum and gave academically "low flying" students a chance to thrive.

Amy summarized the overarching perception captured in this subtheme in her statement that the core competencies "place people on a much broader spectrum of ability" and that the framework expanded conceptions of what skills are important to cultivate. She observed that the presence of the core competencies framework in the curriculum "…shows that the solar system, electricity, whatever -- that can all wait, we really need to have like eyes on the kids and kind of guiding feedback for things like collaboration."

This theme was also present in descriptions of three teachers (Wendy, Jane, Anne) of the benefits of the framework and their observations of the impact on implementation on their students. They found that students who had negative academic self-concepts had a chance to experience success and recognize their strengths when learning was connected to the core competencies. For example, Wendy emphasized that the framework draws attention to the fact that these students are capable and helps them to "recognize that their thinking is valued." She explained the big-picture importance of what the reform means:

> …when you actually see it as, this is what our curriculum says is valuable. It's not just your teacher who likes you, or your mummy. It's like our curriculum is saying your thinking is valuable. Your perspective taking is valuable. And so what - you have a hard time spelling!

Anne described the example of a student who had received the same negative report comments from teachers over the course of multiple grades. By developing a strong relationship with that student and focusing on developing their core competencies, she helped the student to realize they were more capable and took greater pride in and ownership of their learning.

Some participants shared stories of students who struggled academically but were more comfortable with shifting focus away from curricular content to core competencies than stronger performing students. Jane observed that her less academically inclined students were "used to the pain of the wheels going around" and engaging their problem solving and metacognitive skills because it was how they approached other challenging areas and " … they get what it is to have to really think hard about and sometimes not be able to figure out why they don't get something." Similarly, Wendy commented on how much more engaged her students were when core competencies were the main drivers of the lesson and when academic scores were deemphasized.

Amy also referred to the fact that when the focus is on the core competencies, “some students are kind of like, just successful…It's good to see that confidence coming into the classroom to be like, “Oh, I can make my own decisions. And “I know this and this is easy.” In this case, her observation was not attributed to any particular group of students but emphasizes the positive influence on students’ self-concept as it relates to learning.

This sub-theme describes that participants viewed the core competencies as meaningful for making the curriculum more inclusive and expanding the criteria for success. Teachers perceived that the reform had the effect of formally acknowledging the educational value of a wider range of skills which they saw as a meaningful change for all students. This sub-theme reinforces the overarching theme that teachers associated the core competencies framework with shifting and expanding the goals of education and the skills that are valued in school which they view as a much-needed departure from the old curriculum.

The exception to the characterization of the core competencies described in this sub-theme was Sarah who did not see the same benefits for her disengaged students. She found that they were reluctant to participate or share ideas, and, if they engaged at all, they were unwilling to stretch beyond the minimum requirements for their ELA assignments and concrete criteria for assessment. In contrast to other participants’ thinking described above, Sarah explained that her struggling learners did not engage with anything beyond the minimum graded criteria because “it's a win, if they come to class.” She expressed with sarcasm that focusing on core competencies and asking these students “Are you feeling competent?” was unhelpful.

A deeper analysis of Sarah’s characterization of her disengaged students indicates that potential gaps or misalignment in her own beliefs about the core competencies limit the extent to which she feels she is able to implement reform. The barriers that Sarah describes to being able to implement the core competencies in her ELA courses are actually observations that her

students displayed low social and emotional competence. For example, she described that she could not implement the core competencies in her English classes because of her students' unwillingness to engage in creative thinking ("outside of the box," "risk taking," "saving face"). She also commented that her only specific memory of being able to teach the core competencies in ELA was in an advanced class where students already accepted each other, were intrinsically motivated, and academically strong. In other words, the group of academically strong students came to her Grade 12 class already demonstrating a high level of self and social awareness, positive personal identity, and communication skills and only then could she incorporate the core competencies into learning design.

Sarah's own social and emotional competencies were another potential contributor to misalignment between her beliefs and practice. She reflected that her challenges with fostering core competencies in disengaged ELA students was due in part to her own upbringing in a family that emphasized the importance of initiative, problem-solving, and perseverance. Sarah's realization that she struggled to understand and support unmotivated students because of her own learned social and emotional disposition points to the influence of Sarah's professional and emotional capacity on her agency to implement changes in her ELA practice in line with the core competencies framework.

The overarching theme of expanding curricular values lends insight into teachers' beliefs about the framework, particularly in relation to how it benefits students. This is another component of what informs teachers' choices about implementation and helps to understand their perceptions of the core competencies as a worthwhile reform.

4.2.1.1. Theme 3: Meaning-Making and Capacity Building.

The final theme in this category is focused on teachers' experiences with collaborative and independent meaning-making, capacity building through professional development, and the

influence of those experiences on how teachers engaged with the reform. Overall, participants described accessing very limited ProD opportunities related to the core competencies and that their understanding of the framework and planning for implementation occurred largely on their own. However, for teachers who did engage collaboratively with colleagues in making sense of the framework, even briefly, those interactions set the tone for how they conceptualized the reform and influenced the degree to which they engaged in changing their teaching practice.

Jane stated that working with a small group of colleagues was instrumental in helping her identify how the reforms could fit into her practice in a meaningful way that facilitated a shift in the underlying pedagogic assumptions that fueled her learning design. However, the shared meaning did not extend to other peers in her school and Jane described colleagues outside of her planning group as resistant and even discouraging, limiting her opportunities to develop her practice. Jane described that other ProD experiences such as the district-wide professional development for English teachers were not helpful because discussion centered on the curriculum as whole and were not specifically focused on the core competencies. She developed her impressions of the core competencies mainly through collaboration with select colleagues and through her own interest and voracious reading about SEL.

Anne's collaboration experience was also limited but influential. She described getting together with staff at her previous school where administrators introduced the new curriculum as a whole. In this experience, she and her colleagues identified that the core competencies aligned with what they were already doing in practice. The sense that she was already teaching in line with the framework prior to its introduction was a recurring point in Anne's accounts. In her current school, Anne indicated that she had no sense of how her colleagues were approaching the core competencies and had not engaged in any additional collaboration or specific professional learning in that context. Anne felt fully equipped to implement the framework and stated that she

wanted to be left alone to teach the core competencies in the way she always had. Anne did describe engaging with the framework independently, for example creating cue cards to use for planning, however, she expressed that her perception, based on both collective and individual meaning-making experiences, was that little change was needed.

Sarah described disappointing district professional development that felt like an information session focused on elementary grades. She described that her colleagues had been hoping for strategies and resources but found the session generally unhelpful. However, on a school-level, Sarah recalled collaborating within her Fine Arts department and being motivated by the sense of shared beliefs and a united approach. Like Anne, Sarah and her department identified the core competencies as already embedded in how they were teaching. This idea was consistent across Sarah's discussion of the core competencies in drama. With respect to ELA, Sarah's department did not engage in shared meaning-making and were deeply entrenched in long-standing practices. The context was a significant barrier for Sarah who, when it came to making changes to her ELA courses, felt isolated and expressed that "it would be nice to feel that you're on the same page" about the core competencies with colleagues in that department. Collaborative sensemaking was pivotal in Sarah's engagement with the framework in drama and its absence contributed to her disengagement with the framework in ELA.

Amy had a particularly strong sense of community in her school and felt that there was a shared belief about the importance of the core competencies. This alignment with her peers helped motivate her to try to incorporate the framework in practice. However, there was no process of collective sense-making or capacity building in Amy's accounts. She did describe school wide initiatives that she was able to use as a starting point including the example of putting the *Zones of Regulation* as anchor charts on her walls. However, Amy framed these as the school's choices and not a collective exercise in considering the core competencies. The

absence of tangible guidelines, specific resources, and curriculum connections left Amy feeling isolated in her solo "trial and error" approach.

Wendy, too, described that she had largely worked with the core competencies framework independently. She only vaguely recalled the initial introduction to the core competencies by administrators to the teachers in her school but she did not specifically remember collaboration or any other related district or school-based professional development. She lamented the lack of follow up noting **"**You have to start somewhere and look at it, but we haven't gone any farther" and wanted ProD that would "make it accessible and to show people how to do it, not just tell." As part of her independent planning process, Wendy described planning at least one related unit on identity together with a partner teacher but noted that the unit was not developed specifically in relation to the core competencies but was based on a thematic approach to ELA. Therefore, Wendy engaged in co-planning to enhance SEL in ELA, but not necessarily in collaborative sensemaking about the specific core competencies reform. In addition, Wendy specifically referenced other meaningful professional learning experiences and expressed a wish that she could have the same opportunities with the core competencies. She described that connecting, observing, and co-planning with mentors would help her to move forward with her goals for teaching core competencies more explicitly.

Participants' perceptions and approaches to the core competencies framework were related to the direction of their collaborative sense-making experiences (Jane, Sarah, Anne) or limited by the absence thereof (Sarah, Amy). Only Wendy described a largely individual process of sense-making that was not especially influenced by the absence or presence of collaboration. However, Wendy expressed a strong desire for opportunities to engage with colleagues about the core competencies in the future, a sentiment that was echoed by the other participants.

One other factor that contributed to how participants made sense of the reform was their previous professional or educational backgrounds. Three teachers made direct connections between their past professions or postgraduate study and their motivation, beliefs, and practices in relation to the core competencies. For instance, Wendy's background in social work was fundamental to her beliefs about learners and the value the core competencies held for them. Jane also cited her background as a nurse as shaping her thinking about assessment and learning. Anne described first finding an interest in communication and personal and social awareness through her Master's thesis. These connections indicate that teachers viewed their additional credentials and experiences as a source of professional knowledge informing their approach to the core competencies. Sarah also indicated that she held a Master's degree in Educational Psychology but did not make specific reference to this learning experience in connection with the core competencies. She cited more grounding from her experience in theatre and the social and emotional dynamics of drama and performance.

Sarah (in drama), Wendy, Jane, and Anne all expressed a greater degree of confidence in their approaches to the core competencies, particularly when compared to Amy who stood out as feeling the most "in transition." Amy referred to international teaching experience as informing her thinking about the curriculum reform but was the only participant without additional formal learning and professional experience outside of the usual teacher qualifications. She was also the only participant who did not express being predisposed to the core competencies to some degree. Four teachers derived capacity for SEL from experiences beyond the usual education and experiences of classroom teachers, and three explicitly attributed their additional training as a basis for their approach to implementation.

This theme indicates that teachers varied with respect to their opportunities for collaborative meaning-making and ProD regarding the framework. Collaborative sensemaking

arose as a particularly important part of their experiences. In some cases, collaboration motivated teachers to effect change, on some occasions it limited them, and the absence of opportunities for collaboration left some participants feeling adrift. Four of the teachers in this study also drew on professional backgrounds and experiences outside of teaching to inform their understanding of and engagement with the framework. Regardless of their past experiences, all teachers emphasized the desire for future time to collaborate to facilitate their ongoing engagement with the reform.

4.3.2 Question 2: How have teachers implemented change in their teaching practice related to the core competencies reform?

In this category, themes are related to teachers' perceptions and experiences with the process of implementing the core competencies reform, particularly related to Fullan's (2016) three dimensions of change in practice: pedagogical beliefs, resources and curriculum, and teaching strategies. These findings are interconnected with those outlined in the previous category and offer additional insight to teachers' beliefs and pedagogic understanding of the core competencies. However, they are organized together because of their common basis in the practical, objective realities of teachers' approach to educational change (Fullan, 2016). Themes in this category identify the varied ways in which participants situated the core competencies pedagogically within their planning process, how they situated the framework relative to curricular competencies, the varied teaching strategies they employed, and their practices and beliefs regarding the importance of core competencies language and the role of assessment in implementation.

4.3.2.1. Theme 4: Situating the Core Competencies pedagogically.

This theme was built primarily on data related to each participants' description of their pedagogical approach to learning design, namely when and how they considered the core competencies when engaged in big-picture planning. Understanding how the core competencies fit into the planning processes offered insight into how participants' adopted change in the three dimensions of pedagogical beliefs, teaching strategies and resources.

Two teachers, Wendy and Jane, took steps towards orienting their teaching and learning design to stem from a core-competencies "lens." Each described adopting the framework as a vantage point and using curricular competencies as a "vehicle" for developing core competencies. Both Wendy and Jane identified that having always seen themselves as "non-content teachers" made the core competency-centered lens easily accessible. These teachers engaged in shifting the pedagogical ideas underpinning their teaching practice to align with the core competencies reform.

For Amy, implementing the core competencies involved making "space" in her teaching for connecting with students one-to-one or in small groups to guide and facilitate core competency-centered discussion and provide opportunities for them to stretch and grow their skills in self-directed learning activities. Amy specifically described that her planning process started with curricular competencies and content, and then moved to finding ways of "marrying core competencies and curriculum" through prompting and guiding students in assignments. Amy recognized that there were still additional changes to be made to bring her practice pedagogically in line with the framework and redesigned curriculum in general. She commented that she was in "transition" between curricula. She used the language of "trying," "in the process of," "getting there," "in progress" and working through "trial and error" when referring to core competency implementation. She also knew that she could use more help with this shift and with

changing the resources and strategies that she employed. Amy identified concretely that curriculum wording, resources, and collaboration would make a difference to implementing reform. For example, she commented that the absence of direct links from core competencies to curricular competencies signaled that they were not a priority: “to be honest, if it's not explicitly tied into the curricular competencies, then it doesn't make it in school time.” She believed that if the connections were more explicit in the subject curriculum it would greatly facilitate planning.

Anne described limited change in her pedagogical approach as she felt that her teaching practice already encompassed the core competencies because social and emotional learning was “inherent” in everything teachers do. Her process for situating the core competencies with her learning design was less clear. She described creating tools (cue cards) to keep the core competencies in mind when planning, but that she largely only used them when working with other colleagues or pre-service teachers. She described that learning activities were not planned around the core competencies, but that they were present in completing the assignments. She described including core competencies in her project rubrics, but mainly to draw students’ attention to the fact that they had been involved in the activity. The core competencies did not drive Anne’s pedagogy from a curriculum standpoint, but they were present in the activities, and she was intentional to some extent about bringing their presence to students’ attention. Anne did not perceive her practice as having *changed* to any significant degree to align with reform but did view her practice as closely aligned with the reforms.

Sarah described a similar view to Anne about her drama courses, that “the cool thing about the core competencies in drama is it's something that I've always been incorporating.” For Sarah, the core competencies were equally foundational to her drama courses as the theatre-related curricular competencies. She saw the framework as an additional resource to reinforce these skills. She described changes in the language she used with students to be based in the core

competencies, but that her pedagogic orientation and teaching strategies remained consistent. However, Sarah felt limited in her capacity to implement core competencies-related change in ELA. She approached learning design for ELA similarly to Amy, planning for curricular competencies and looking for opportunities to engage her students' core competencies in work habits and select activities but found her students unreceptive. Sarah attributed the inability to integrate the core competencies to low student engagement and high academic needs. Again, there was no sense that she had made shifts in her pedagogical orientation, strategies, or resources in ELA beyond introducing curricular language. The exception was when she taught advanced placement Grade 12 English and she found that she was able to focus more on core competencies because students were already academically strong. In this case, Sarah described being able to adopt core competencies more centrally in her curricular focus, but she did not describe particular teaching strategies or resources employed with these students.

Within the data there were also some tensions in teacher perceptions of whether core competencies are "on top" of disciplinary curriculum or "within" it. Wendy described experiencing a shift in thinking about the reform. She described that, initially, she perceived the framework as an additional responsibility and thought about it as "another thing we have to do." However, after more consideration and independent sense-making, she came to view the core competencies as interconnected with the curricular competencies and began to adopt a core competency-centered lens in her teaching. Jane similarly described the curricular and core competencies as "not mutually exclusive" using one area of the curriculum as a "vehicle" to teach the other. Sarah, on the other hand, described that a need to focus on students' literacy skills in language arts prevented her from teaching core competencies in that subject.

Amy recognized that she still needed support with building the core competencies *into* her teaching practice rather than *onto* it stating, "I can replace work and work differently, but I can't

do more at capacity." As Amy notes, this tension raises the issue of how teachers' pedagogic understanding of the core competencies is related to capacity. In her comment, she describes being "at capacity" in terms of the practical limits of time and energy in the course of what she is already teaching during the school year. However, she also refers to the type of capacity with which she needs additional support: developing the pedagogic understanding of how to "work differently" to implement the core competencies within her existing practice.

Again, Sarah presents an interesting contrast as she seems to view the core competencies as being "on top of" the language and literacy learning in English but views the core competencies as interconnected and occurring "within" the curricular goals for drama. Her diverging perspectives in each discipline reinforce the importance of making connections between the core competencies and each particular subject area as well as highlight the significant role that beliefs and capacity play in shaping how teachers choose to engage with reforms.

4.3.1.3. Theme 5: Examining Core Competencies Through Contextual and Focused Teaching Strategies.

Teachers varied in the strategies they characterized as facilitating core competencies development. Two main types of strategies were identified: contextual teaching and focused teaching. A contextual approach to the core competencies involved using opportunities that naturally arose in course of interacting and learning to specifically discuss, introduce, or support core competencies concepts and skills with students. A focused approach to teaching the core competencies consisted of pre-planned lessons or learning activities that featured core competencies strategies, skills, and themes as the primary topic. All five teachers described

contextual teaching as part of their approach to teaching core competencies, but not all teachers engaged in focused teaching.

Anne and Amy employed contextual teaching as their main strategy, using natural opportunities to encourage students to stretch and access core competencies to problem-solve, think outside of the box, and build confidence in their skills. Anne emphasized that, in her class, core competencies learning often occurred in situations where, "afterwards, you can look over your shoulder and say, "Oh yeah, we actually touched on those five competencies because life just had a teachable moment that presented itself". Amy sought to create "space" for core competencies during self-directed projects and flexible activities that gave students an opportunity to demonstrate their independence and gave her an opportunity to connect directly with students and support their communication, thinking, personal and social responsibility on a smaller scale. Both teachers described primarily supporting students directly as needed, in one-to-one conversations, and when appropriate occasions arose to have group or class discussions.

Jane's and Wendy's approach to teaching the framework primarily involved focused teaching, specifically and directly addressing core competencies concepts and skills in their lessons and routines. For example, Jane described a unit on the theme of identity and social justice, and Wendy shared a unit about identity and self-awareness. They selected texts that aligned with these themes and activities that asked students to reflect on and engage with core competencies while also developing their ELA curricular competencies. Despite already seeing herself as making overt connections, Wendy regularly noted a desire to make the core competencies more explicit in her practice. She commented that, while some degree of core competency development was inherent in certain topics such as personal and social responsibility in teaching about climate change, critical thinking in teaching about slavery in

ancient civilizations, and use of communication in French, she believed that "it can improve if I do it more explicitly across the subjects."

Sarah employed both types of strategy in her practice. She employed focused teaching of incorporating the framework in her lessons and assessment in drama, "brainstorming," and engaging in direct learning about achieving core competency goals. She also described problem-solving contextually with students; for example, if communication broke down in a group. However, she felt limited in her ability to do the same in her English classes and indicated that core competencies were mainly demonstrated through students' responsibility in their academic work. Sarah attributed the inability to integrate the competencies in ELA to low engagement and high academic needs but stated that she did use focused teaching in years when she had strong and engaged students.

Sarah also described in the focus group interview having done further reflection following her individual interview, following up with her colleagues on their approach and reflecting on her own teaching strategies:

> …after I talked to [the researcher] last time I asked everybody, are you actually putting the core competencies in your course outlines so that kids are reading this and understanding it from day one and nobody in my department, English or Fine Arts had done that yet. So that actually made me really think about it. Even though I know that I'm doing this kind of work every single day with reading and reflecting and communicating in the performing arts, um, I realized that you have to let kids know when you have to be transparent at the very beginning and you have to reemphasize it all the time.

She considered how she could raise students' awareness of the fact that they were engaging with the core competencies.

Another noteworthy similarity among participants' accounts was that, when providing examples to illustrate what core competency implementation looked like in their classroom, three participants used examples of units that they described as not having been designed with the framework in mind but in which they identified the core competencies "fit" after the fact. For example, Wendy pointed out that her identity unit was inspired by the frequent use of that particular theme in the ELA curriculum rather than emanating from the core competencies framework but that it "still works." Jane made a similar statement about her social justice unit and Anne expressed that communication and critical thinking competencies were already embedded in her strategic domination unit rather than having to be "purposefully added."

This theme highlights the ways in which teachers have interpreted strategies for implementation. They fall into two distinct categories, one that requires considerable advanced planning and the other that requires attention and presence of mind in the moment.

4.3.1.4. Theme 6: Situating Core Competencies in Relation to Curricular Competencies.

With respect to implementing core competencies within particular disciplines, while participants had experience in a range of subject areas, Jane, Wendy, Anne, and Amy all independently identified English language arts as a particularly complementary subject for the core competencies. There was a common sense that, as phrased by Jane, "I don't know how you could teach English and not teach the core competencies." Two teachers also briefly noted particular opportunities in social studies (Anne, Wendy) but this connection was not explored in depth given the focus of the present study on ELA.

Amy described that language arts was most directly linked to the core competencies: "I use language arts as like the basis, because of communicating, collaborating as the most explicit in that curriculum." In addition, she references the concept of "space" for core competencies in

language arts in contrast to socials and sciences which are less “open-ended.” Given her primarily contextual approach to teaching the core competencies, the introduction of the reform necessitated change in her practice that required her to find time (or space) to connect with students personally or in small groups to support core competencies. This also aligned with the view held by Amy, Sarah, and Anne that project-based learning is particularly compatible. In addition, Anne also described that “language arts is a place where a lot more of the communication based [competencies] would naturally fall into” but felt that some core competencies were better “suited” to some subject areas.

An examination of the strategies teachers adopted or associated with ELA and SEL offer additional insight into this perception. Participants described combining ELA activities with core competencies including featured novels, graphic novels, and short stories (Wendy, Jane), poetry (Jane), and non-fiction texts (Jane, Amy), writing activities (Jane, Wendy, Anne), creating videos (Wendy), oral skills (Wendy) and classroom structures such as mindfulness activities (Jane) and visual prompts (Amy, Wendy, Anne).

Sarah held a contrasting viewpoint claiming there were few opportunities in ELA to implement core competencies. Sarah embedded core competencies in drama activities including improvisation, storytelling, and performance. However, her description of challenges in ELA were guided by her limiting experiences within her English department and based on her beliefs about students. For example, she described that, compared to drama, she was “not able to get the personal and social core competency to match my other courses because a lot of the times we get kids who either get quite competitive, or they don't want to help other students.”

Furthermore, participants identified that there was a vital need for increased attention to supporting students’ social and emotional skills in mathematics. While teachers were selected based on identifying ELA as a teaching area and questions specifically asked about the core

competencies in ELA, four of the teachers in the study had previously taught mathematics in their careers (except Sarah) and discussed their past experiences and observations about the need for explicit opportunities to grow students' core competencies.

Jane stated that there was "no more emotionally-laden subject than math," because of the "baggage" that students carried in relation to the subject. She elaborated by saying students needed a wide range of adaptive social and emotional strategies to persevere and find success in the subjects they find most challenging:

> … if you're not exploring your toolbox, when you're trying to make it through-- And often I think of math, but whatever your Achilles heel subject is as a kid, that's where you're really going to need to do that regular inventory to see what you need, but then you also need to do it in your, like your golden stars subject, right? Because you need to be able to see I've got-- I do have tools and those tools that I've got, where I'm being successful, I can bring them over and use them in the places where, you know, I'm struggling and falling apart. Right?

Jane went on to describe her approach to support students' SEL in a previous role as a mathematics teacher. She recognized the need to support students early on in her Grade 10 mathematics course after being "shocked to see tears" and observing "these feelings, deep, deep feelings of "I am not capable." Feeling that students would not be able to learn until they overcame their strong emotional response, Jane conducted "inventories" with students identifying where they had experienced success and strategies from other classes that worked. She also described getting students to connect with one another for "positive reinforcement" and social support. She summarized that she "really broke the math part down into pieces and then tried to build in some sort of resilience steps along the way where kids were helping other kids."

Other participants agreed and observed similar emotional responses from students or having had the experience personally in their own mathematics learning.

This theme identifies how teachers situate the core competencies relative to the curricular competencies, especially in English and mathematics. Teachers' beliefs about the compatibility of the core competencies with each subject is an important element in understanding how teachers implement change in practice on a limited or comprehensive basis.

4.2.1.1. Theme 7: Establishing Core Competencies as a Common Language.

The most overt example of a change implemented by all participants was in teachers' use of core competencies language with students. All five participants described adopting language in some way including by posting it on the walls and referring to the visual aids with students (Wendy, Amy), specifically adding associated language and learning goals into their assessment practices (Jane, Sarah), referencing the framework when planning for learning design (Jane, Wendy, Anne), or using core competencies language with students in their daily interactions (all).

This finding was reinforced in a focus group conversation in which teachers agreed that using core competency language with students was pedagogically important. Wendy, for example, described that making it "the common language" in her classroom was particularly helpful for year-end reporting. She found that students required less support to self-assess as they could "look at the I-statements" on her walls and recall occasions when they had used their competencies or experienced shifts in their thinking. Sarah also emphasized her use of language with her students through binders that she provides for each unit to students including core competency language to shape classroom expectations and goals. She also described brainstorming concepts with students and generating common understanding of terms.

Jane agreed that "the language is absolutely essential," noting that it signified the importance of the core competencies to students. She emphasized the rationale that "if you don't teach them the words, then how can they communicate about it?" and described incorporating core competencies language explicitly into her content and assessment. Jane also shared that she had observed "generational" change in students' familiarity with core competency language over the years. She believed that they were more able to recognize the concepts and goals from hearing them frequently in previous grades.

However, the teachers themselves used less nuanced language when it came to the core competencies compared to curricular competencies. For example, teachers drew on specific language arts curricular competencies in describing their lessons such as "making connections to self, text, and the world," (Wendy, Jane) and "assessing different sources" and "assessing like what sources are most reliable" (Amy), as well as citing particular content topics such as "argumentation," "debate," (Wendy) and "metacognition" (Jane) (BC Ministry of Education, 2018). By contrast, teachers used less specific language when referring to core competencies. None of the participants mentioned or described the incremental competency profiles, though Amy did refer to the core competencies as "starting to flesh out… developmental steps towards being able to creatively think and collaborate and communicate." Also, while two teachers did make reference to the "I statement" element in general (Wendy and Anne), only Anne quoted a specific statement in her discussion of supporting students to rebound from failure and being resilient in the face of struggle (BC Ministry of Education, 2022a). In fact, Anne discussed the core competencies framework with the most specificity, despite also describing herself as referring to the framework infrequently with students. Teachers more often referred to the broad competency categories such as "The thinking competency" (Sarah) or "all the personal pieces," (Anne) or referred to particular sub-competencies which had been outlined for the participants in

the qualitative questionnaire. Teachers also all referenced the core competencies under the wider umbrella of “this new curriculum” on multiple occasions or diverged into reflections about the breadth of the overall curriculum reforms ("I think this new curriculum is really giving us this opportunity to actually push those kids farther than they've been pushed before,” Jane).

In this theme, teachers emphasized the importance of core competencies language for their students and described it as a meaning strategy for implementation. However, the lack of specificity with which they spoke about the core competencies suggests that they may be less familiar with the details of the framework or thinking about it in broad terms under the umbrella of the wider educational changes.

4.2.1.2. Theme 8: Developing Meaningful Core Competencies Assessment

Assessment was identified by participants as critical to achieving actual reform and bringing teachers’ beliefs and practices in line with the core competencies. There was significant discussion about how assessment facilitates buy-in to the core competencies for teachers, students, and even parents. These conversations centered on a belief about what “counts” in school and the challenges with moving students from thinking about content to being interested in stretching, innovating, and exploring competencies. As Sarah noted, “students are very aware of how they are being graded all the time” and are reluctant to spend time and energy on other pursuits.

For example, Jane referred to her strong academic students who clung to their “numbers” and were reluctant to buy in to “fluffy” activities. Students focused on grades and doing exactly what they needed to get top marks tended to have them discount the core competencies. Amy had a similar experience with a parent hyper-focused on knowledge and project criteria who

blocked, to some extent, the student's opportunity to exert their core competencies to problem-solve and take ownership of their learning.

In terms of implementing core competencies reform, Jane stated that the changes to her assessment practice was one of the "most fundamental" shifts that she had made for herself and her students. Including the core competencies in her charts and inviting students to reflect on and contribute examples of their own growth had a positive impact on student buy-in and facilitated her own planning.

Sarah also found that establishing core competencies as the foundation of her drama classes influenced student attitudes, whereas assessment in ELA tied to departmental and district reporting guidelines did not allow for the same flexibility. She summarized the current challenges that she perceived to be unique to high school:

> The elementary school teachers in our district have been working very hard to incorporate the core competencies. It is more challenging in high school because we have an outdated (maybe rigid is the right term?) assessment program where there is no mention of the core competencies in overall assessment. There are just a few characters allotted to reporting with a code for work habits. The "system" is currently not set up for reporting this effectively to students and their families for high school students...

Sarah underscored the need for structural change in departmental, school, and district policies for grading, exams, and reporting as a means of putting value on the core competencies in her English language arts courses.

Anne described sometimes adding core competencies to project rubrics to draw students' attention to the fact that they engaged those skills while completing the assignment:

> …the only reason I put it into a rubric is for them to be aware that that was a piece that was important… do I sit there and say, "Oh, I'm going to really assess your critical thinking as

a reporting out?" No, I just really want you to connect with the fact that this is what critical thinking is, a little bit deeper than a thought.

She noted that students' ability to shift their thinking about grading was a sign of growth moving students from extrinsic to intrinsic locus of control: "…'you gave me this grade' to, 'Oh no, I earned this grade' is a neat shift that is happening through self-reflection, through core competencies." Anne also opined that assessment of core competencies would be facilitated by changing the format of report cards to focus on the core competencies as the primary categories for reporting rather than traditional subjects.

Wendy said that she asked students to self-assess in relation to the core competencies at the end of a project or unit. Otherwise, she conducted "oral, ongoing" formative assessment of students' core competencies in their day-to-day interactions.

Amy commented that her students were only aware of the importance of core competency self-assessment in year-end self-reports, the "mystery one that we've got to do one once a year.". The message she perceived from the use of the form was "just do it for the report cards and tick the box" and questioned the efficacy of the self-assessments where students wrote comment such as "I can do it, but I don't do it" in reflecting on their use of core competencies over the year.

Overall, this theme points to the role that assessment plays in shaping learning design, the diverse ways in which teachers approach formative and summative assessment and highlights the participants' perception that there was a lack of meaningful assessment guidelines in relation to the BC framework.

4.3. Summary

Cross-case analysis of five of the participants' qualitative questionnaires and individual and group interviews led to the development of eight themes related to the two research questions that guided this study. The first three themes related to the first research question

regarding how participants made sense of the core competency framework identifying that 1) they accepted the core competencies within their professional role, 2) that they perceived the core competencies as expanding the values represented in the curriculum, and 3) they had varied experiences with meaning-making and capacity building, with collaborative meaning-making identified as particularly significant as well as their background outside of teaching. Themes four to eight related to the second research question regarding participants' approach to implementing the core competencies in their teaching practice. These themes identified that participants varied with respect to 4) how they situated the core competencies within their pedagogic approach, 5) the teaching strategies they employed, including contextualized and focused teaching, 6) how they situated core competencies relative to curricular competencies, and 7) the importance of core competencies language for student learning; and 8) the importance of meaningful assessment. In the final chapter, I engage in a discussion situating my findings within the literature on educational change and SEL, describe the limitations of the study, and implications for policy, practice, and research.

5. Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1. Introduction

British Columbia introduced the core competencies as part of the large-scale curriculum reform between 2015 and 2019 becoming the first Canadian province to implement a free-standing social and emotional learning framework in the curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2015c). The reform formalized teachers' roles in fostering social and emotional skills in the areas of critical and reflective thinking, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, personal awareness and responsibilities, social awareness and responsibility and positive personal and cultural identity (BC Ministry of Education, 2022a). The MoE stated that, "along with literacy and numeracy foundations, they are central to British Columbia's K-12 curriculum and assessment system" positioning the framework as an essential element of the redesign (BC Ministry of Education, 2022a, para 1).

This component of educational change was motivated by a desire to foster "citizens who are competent thinkers and communicators, and who are personally and socially competent in all areas of their lives" (BC Ministry of Education, 2022b, para. 6) and to support students' mental health (BC Ministry of Education, 2020b, Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020) and success in a rapidly evolving society (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2018, 2020; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020). However, achieving lasting and meaningful educational change is a complex process (Fullan, 2016). Teachers are the most influential agents of change, particularly when reforms, like the core competencies, position teachers as primary curriculum designers with significant scope and limited guidance for implementation (Biesta et al., 2015; Buchanan, 2015; Fullan, 2016; Jenkins, 2020).

The purpose of this multicase study is to develop an understanding of how five BC secondary English language arts teachers conceptualized the core competencies, how they

implemented the framework in their practice, and the factors that shaped their approach. This research contributes to the literature on educational change and is one of the few studies that has examined large-scale SEL-based reform. From the lens of educational change theory based in the work of Fullan (2016), I examined teachers' experiences with navigating implementation of the core competencies reform in answering two overarching research questions grounded in two key elements of teachers' change experiences: 1) How have secondary ELA teachers made sense of the core competencies reform and what factors shaped their meaning-making experiences?; and 2) How have teachers implemented change in their teaching practice related to the core competencies and what factors influenced their approach?

Drawing on responses to qualitative questionnaires, individual interviews, and a focus group interview, within-case and cross-case analysis led to the development of eight themes. Three themes were related to the first research question about the meaning teachers ascribed to the core competencies reform including 1) Accepting the core competencies, 2) Meaning-making and capacity building, 3) Expanding curricular values which included two sub themes a) Embracing the value of discomfort and b) Recognizing a broader spectrum of ability. In connection with the second research question, five themes were identified related to teachers' perceptions and experiences with implementing the core competencies in their teaching practice. These themes included 4) Situating the core competencies pedagogically; 5) Examining core competencies through contextual and focused teaching strategies; 6) Situating core competencies in relation to curricular competencies, 7) Establishing core competencies as a common language; and 8) Developing meaningful core competencies assessment.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss my findings within the existing body of literature on educational change and SEL. I then outline the limitations of the study and describe the implications for future policy, practice, and research directions.

5.2. Discussion of the Findings

The themes identified in this study revealed that participants were at varied stages of engagement with the core competencies with respect to both of the key aspects of educational change identified by Fullan (2016). That is, they had engaged to varying degrees in the process of generating an understanding of the meaning underlying the reform, and in implementing changes in their practice to align their pedagogic beliefs, teaching strategies, and curriculum/resources with the core competencies framework (Fullan, 2016). In addition, consistent with research on teachers experiences with curricular reforms outside of SEL (e.g., Biesta et al, 2015; Fargason & Lockhart, 2019; Wallace & Priestley, 2017), participants' engagement and agency with respect to implementing BC's SEL-based reform were shaped by their teacher identities, beliefs, and capacity or related professional knowledge and skills. In order to discuss the implication of these findings and situate them with the literature on educational change, I frame my discussion in relation to two overarching research questions.

5.2.1. Question 1. How have secondary ELA teachers made sense of the core competencies reform and what factors shaped their meaning-making experiences?

5.2.1.1. Claim 1: Participants conceptualized the core competencies as a worthwhile reform that expanded the type of learning valued in the curriculum in a way that aligned with their beliefs and teacher identities.

Findings in Theme 1 indicate that teachers conceptualized the core competencies in alignment with their teacher identities and beliefs which supported agency and motivation to engage with the framework. These findings are congruent with existing research that shows teachers have often embraced social and emotional learning as valuable for students (Collie, et al., 2015; Lewis, 2020). In addition, participants' perceptions that the core competencies aligned

with their teacher identity is consistent with research positing that teachers' beliefs about the value of SEL for students and in their role as teachers influences their willingness to engage in reform (Collie et al., 2012, 2015; Zinsser et al. 2014). In this respect, all five educators described exerting a degree of what Jenkins (2020) identified as "proactive agency" by engaging with the reforms of their own accord motivated by interest and alignment rather than through pressure from administration or colleagues (p. 172). This finding underscores the importance of teachers' identity and beliefs as significant in their choice to engage with the core competencies framework and in shaping how they understand the framework within their professional roles.

Theme 2 offered a more nuanced understanding of some of the particular elements of the meaning participants ascribed to the core competencies that they perceived to be of value for students. Participants appreciated the framework as signalling a shift in priorities in education and expanding the idea of what skills are valued, what skills are important to develop, and what "counts" in school. This view aligns, at least in part, with the BC MoE vision of the reform as broadening the scope of the curriculum to keep up with the changing needs of learner and to develop "citizens who are competent thinkers and communicators, and who are personally and socially competent in all areas of their lives" (BC Ministry of Education, 2022b, para. 6).

Teachers perceived the core competencies as making the curriculum more inclusive and that the framework emphasizes learning from discomfort and overcoming challenges. This finding is particularly promising given the rising need amongst Canadian adolescents for support in developing self-concept, connection, and resilience identified by Craig et al. (2020a). The theme indicates that these five secondary teachers conceptualized the core competencies as a worthwhile reform that supports social emotional learning in line with MoE objectives and the needs of adolescent learners, and that it is appropriately situated within their professional roles. This finding contributes to our understanding of teachers' beliefs about the reform, and reveals

alignment between the meaning they ascribed to the framework and the overarching purpose of the reform.

5.2.1.2. Claim 2: Even limited opportunities for collaborative meaning-making contributed to teachers' thinking about the framework, one way or another.

As described in Theme 3, participants' experiences with collaborative engagement with the framework set the tone for their future experiences and for their approach to implementation. However, as identified by Lockton & Fargason (2019), not all collegial discussion is created equal, and while some participants' collaborative experiences were highly supportive, for others their discussions were lacking or even limiting. Jane experienced constructive support in her collaboration endeavours that had a significant impact on her confidence and the trajectory of her implementation and shift to a core competency-centred lens.

Sarah's ELA experience also reflected a key finding by Lockton and Fargason (2019) that teachers can feel pressured by their colleagues or department to maintain the status quo due to deep-seated traditions and priorities. The lack of support Sarah perceived from her ELA colleagues also aligned with the findings of Collie et al. (2015) who identified that, even when educators agreed with implementing SEL, perceptions of support within their school were closely connected to their beliefs about SEL. Sarah articulated that she wanted to collaborate more with English colleagues but only if it was positive and focused on what was working with implementation, rather than the collaboration being mired by complaints. Also of note, early collegial engagement for Anne and Sarah (with her fine arts department) about the framework contributed to their view of the core competencies as already encompassed in their teaching and their belief that no significant change in practice was needed.

Finally, Amy experienced a supportive school culture which provided some resources for core competencies derived from an SEL program (Zones of Regulation), but she largely planned in isolation and her experience reflected Lockton & Fargason's findings that "going it alone" is a more difficult way to engage with reform (p. 479). The authors emphasized the importance of ensuring expertise in professional collaboration, sharing ideas and resources, and creating conditions that allow teachers to push against the status quo while preserving relationships (p. 486). The findings in this study lend support to the idea that collaborative meaning-making is influential, and therefore should be grounded in constructive, supportive, and expert experience in order to facilitate meaningful educational change.

5.2.2. Question 2: How have the teachers implemented change in their teaching practice related to the core competencies and what factors influenced their approach?

5.2.2.1. Claim 3: Teachers varied with respect to the dimensions and depth of the changes they implemented in their practice.

Themes 4-6 show diverse ways in which teachers situated the core competencies in their practice and the range of strategies they viewed as facilitating learning. However, upon closer examination, the many ways in which teachers took up the core competencies in their practice reveals that the dimension and depth of the change each teacher implemented also varied in relation to Fullan's (2016) description of "surface" and "deep structure" change (p. 54).

Fullan (2016) explained surface change in terms of using related material "and even imitating the behavior without specifically understanding the principles and rationale of the change" (p. 46). He noted that teachers may be "focusing on materials and seeing that students were 'busy" or "tried to address goals *literally*," without considering the underlying reasoning (p. 44) or describing vague connections between their goals and learning activities (p. 49). By

contrast, deep structural change involves meaning-making and a sense of purpose that is closely tied to practice. Deep change is characterized by "reflectivity, purposefulness, and awareness" and the ability to articulate related goals connected to learning activities (p. 48).

Table 7 includes examples of statements by Amy identified as surface engagement compared to deeper engagement described by Jane in implementing the core competencies framework. The table shows that Amy acknowledges that she has not fully engaged with the components of the framework and that her approach is sometimes passive introducing core competencies through posters with self-monitoring sentence starters and using a learning format that puts more onus on the student. This reflects surface level engagement compared to Jane's active engagement with the framework, "weaving" and planning purposeful activities and assessments that emphasize core competencies learning goals.

Table 7 Surface vs Deep engagement examples

Topic	Examples of surface engagement: Amy	Examples of deep engagement: Jane
Meaning-making	…it's kind of inside the content... Like I don't like - just that communicating and collaborating book that I've used… but I haven't had, I've got it printed out right here, like waiting when my huge pile of things to read. Um, but they haven't been able to use that yet, but yeah, find more general resources that are more, kind of conceptual and then figuring out how it works for this class is ideal. Like, um, I haven't found any that are like a kit that you like give out, like teachers pay teachers or anything like that that's really like useful. Um, cause a lot of the stuff I find is really like gets away from the curriculum… So even though we get it to kind of fit, so let's put the curriculum first. (Interview)	…so when the new documents came out, I was just happy to see that and I jumped right into it. I didn't wait for them to come out of draft as soon as they were there. I formalize them into my work and part of the motivation there to, to bring them sort of like the words actually into my work was that I liked to work with student teachers and it didn't make any sense to me to not be working with what we were moving forward into. (Interview)
Planning	…we've got like a month and I want you to read a bunch of different stuff. It's fully your choice. And here's your like, um, reading response criteria. And I think it was more of that format of being like the ball's in your court. (Interview)	…so the core competencies are really weaved into my assessment… I build everything that I plan and everything that I assess comes out of the chart. So I work backwards from the chart and then like there's so much flexibility around content, so, I really use content to help as a vehicle, I think, to teach the core competencies. (Interview)

Assessment	[in response to Anne discussing an "I can" statement] …with the "I can statements," to be honest, I wasn't … like, I was doing it *subconsciously* with math because like, yeah, it is like critical thinking and we do number talks and we do all of that stuff, but I hadn't really like made that connection myself and I'm embarrassed to say, but it's true. (Focus group)	[describing an example to relate to CC assessment] …I do all kinds of writing in there, like free writing so that they're thinking about their own personal identity and at the same time that they're thinking about other people's identity in this country and, and that kind of thing. (Interview)
Language	...And then in class I try and like…use the walls as a second teacher. I've got one all about the zones of regulation that the school is really into, and I tied the core competencies into that. Like self-monitor and sentence starters for when you're feeling frustrated, and you really are dysregulated and what you could do. (Interview)	I think we have to continuously be reinforcing and building the language for students, because if you don't give them -- if you don't teach them the words, then how can they communicate about it? And I think, if we think about communicating and thinking and being socially responsible, all of those things, they actually spread through, or they can, if you choose to explicitly, you can thread them through your content, um, really pretty easily. (Focus group)
Core vs curricular	I feel like there's so much kind of like background knowledge that I wanted them to get before being creative. (Interview)	Another nice place where I have enjoyed using the [core] competencies is in novel study and having the kids notice those competencies come through in a protagonist, for example… we relied on *Indian Horse* because the protagonist is so amazing at doing all of those, all of the things successfully and not so successfully that I've done -- gone through and had them track that as we've read…they were making the connections between the fictional character and seeing these skills and qualities that they may be needed to work on themselves and, and making those connections. (Focus group)
Group work	So then they started like researching and I started like teaching collaborative skills more explicitly then like doing those, like a group membership grids and things like that to figure out what everybody brings to the table, but what everybody wants to investigate. (Interview)	…so I know in the English class I've done groups, right, but I don't assess the piece that comes out of that as that's not actually what I'm assessing, I'm assessing their listening skills, I'm assessing their communicating with each other I'm assessing their ability to reflect individually and as a group. (focus group)

Considering the different ways in which teachers implemented the framework in their practice along the lines of deep or surface change adds insight into their understanding of the reform and related pedagogic beliefs. The clearest example of "deep structure" change was provided by Jane who described orienting her learning design from a core competencies "lens." This change would fall within the scope of "deep structural" change in practice as she engaged in internalizing and shifting the underlying orientation of her pedagogic decision making in relation to the reforms (Fullan, 2016, p. 54). This change was also situated in what Fullan describes as

the most fundamental dimension: shifting the pedagogic beliefs that underlie their teaching practice. The depth of change in this case may be attributed, at least in part, to the influence of Jane's collaborative meaning-making experiences as she explicitly engaged in shifting her assessment practice with her like-minded colleagues. Jane's success with effecting meaningful change in her pedagogic lens lends support to the educational change research emphasizing the significant link between collaboration, meaning-making, and teachers' pedagogic beliefs in achieving reform (Biesta et al., 2015; Wallace & Priestley, 2017).

Amy's approach to implementation was to find space for more contextualized teaching through project-based learning and group work which falls closer to the "surface" end of the continuum (Fullan, 2016, p. 54). Amy made some changes in her teaching practice by adding core competencies on top of her existing program and did not describe engaging to a great extent in changing her pedagogical beliefs or the focus of her guiding resources and curriculum. Amy's observation that she could "replace work" or "work differently" but could not add to her work because she was "at capacity" was connected with her perception of the core competencies as an additional responsibility. Priestly and Minty (2013) identified a similar perception of reform as an added burden in cases where teachers were positioned as primary curriculum designers, but had inadequate support to build capacity, which in turn, limited teachers' ability to "manoeuvre between repertoires in their practice" (p. 50) . However, in this case, Amy also recognized that she was in a period of transitioning between curricula and could learn to "work differently" and implement further changes with additional support. This was also Wendy's initial reaction to the core competencies as "another thing we have to do." However, Wendy found that additional independent meaning-making and reflection allowed her to recognize and adopt the core competencies into her pedagogic lens.

Anne engaged in focused sense-making of the core competency framework and believed that she was already implementing core competencies in her practice so little change was needed. She made surface changes to her practice by adopting core competencies language but did not describe shifts in her resources or curricular focus, teaching strategies, or pedagogical underpinnings in relation to the core competencies. This was similar to Sarah's surface changes such as adopting competency language into her existing drama teaching and assessment practice which she perceived as already well-aligned with the framework. Sarah also found that she could not enact change to implement the core competencies in ELA owing to barriers created by students' learning needs and lack of willingness to engage.

While all participants in this study described adopting the core competencies in some manner, none of the participants implemented reform across all three dimensions of practice described by Fullan (2016) as necessary for meaningful change (pedagogical beliefs, strategies, and curriculum/resources). As outlined, Jane described reorientating her pedagogical lens and specifically embedding the core competencies in her assessment practice, however, she also noted that the unit she used to illustrate the core competencies in her practice was not developed specifically with them in mind. Similar statements were made by Wendy, Anne, and Sarah about examples that they provided. Therefore, the extent to which these teachers adopted changes to their resources and teaching strategies in relation to the reform is unclear. On the one hand, this finding underscores that teachers have engaged in the process of sense-making by finding entry points within their existing teaching practice to align with the reform (Fullan, 2016). As seen in Jamieson's (2015) linking of *Oliver Twist* and empathy or Belland's (2007) *Romeo and Juliet* and self-awareness, the participants in this study were engaged in marrying SEL and ELA to varying extents. On the other hand, teachers could be retro-fitting the core competencies at a surface-level change in line with the findings described by Lewis (2020) that teachers tend to

interpret SEL to fit their practice and raises questions about the degree to which the core competency component of the lesson was incidental or intentionally structured. The tendency to interpret reforms to suit existing practice could also be reflective of "socialisation" to prior policy that is described by Priestley and Minty (2013) as being reflective of limited professional development opportunities.

Seen through the lens of Fullan's (2016) framework, the teachers in this study varied in the extent or depth with which participants engaged in implementing change in their practice. In these examples, the majority of changes occurred at a surface level. Fullan (2016) indicates that "it is possible to value and even articulate the goals of the change without understanding their implications for practice" (p.46). Some insight into the factors that influenced their sense-making and decision making can be garnered from the literature on educational change.

5.2.2.2. Claim 4: Teacher implementation of the core competencies was influenced by professional and emotional capacity.

The findings captured in this study do not provide a complete picture of the sources of information and knowledge upon which participants built capacity for teaching the core competencies. However, findings across several themes indicate that teachers' capacity played a role in how they approached the framework. First, it was clearly identified in Theme 3 that teachers felt that they had participated in little meaningful professional development specifically related to the core competencies and most participants expressed a desire for additional support. Participants' disappointment in their core competencies' ProD was consistent with the BCTF surveys (BCTF, 2017, Gacoin, 2019) which reported repeated concerns about preparing educators for teaching and assessing the core competencies. Teachers were united in their ideas of what they wanted going forward: professional development opportunities that brought

colleagues together from the same disciplines and grade levels to share resources and strategies. They wanted more time to connect and plan with their colleagues and share their ideas and experiences. Additional support in the form of targeted resources and opportunities to work with mentor teachers and colleagues who were experienced with implementing SEL were also desired by most participants. Teachers' requests were entirely in line with research on capacity building that emphasizes the efficacy of specific, collaborative, and contextualized professional learning (Butler et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2016; Priestley & Drew, 2019).

However, most participants in this study were able to access other related professional or educational backgrounds that helped to a limited extent with implementation. The idea of learning about SEL by drawing on other professional contexts aligns to some extent with research by Holliday (2015). The author found that participating in counselling education can contribute to teachers' own social and emotional capacity as well as their comfort with teaching SEL, which facilitates a shift in teachers' understanding of SEL in relation to their roles as educators.

Potential gaps in capacity building were also indicated in participants' use of core competencies language (Theme 7). Teachers' emphasis on the importance of using the language of core competencies with students was reminiscent of Dyson's (2019) findings that teachers recognize the benefits of being explicit with vocabulary for effective SEL. Yet the lack of specificity with which teachers discussed the core competencies reflected limited familiarity with the nuances of framework, especially when compared to their discussion of ELA curriculum. This type of broad and intuitive use of reform language was also identified by Biesta et al. (2015) in their study of large-scale reform towards broader, flexible language. These authors indicated that teachers' superficial understandings of proposed curricular reforms limited their ability to make corresponding changes in their practice. They were further limited by a lack of

professional discourse about the new curriculum changes and a tendency to focus on the practical application rather than the underlying pedagogical ideas.

Teachers' emphasis on the importance of language align with existing literature on pedagogic metalanguage. In an ELA context, metalanguage "'reorders and refocuses' knowledge about language produced in the academy for educational applications" (Rose, 2019a, p. 3). Some literacy researchers view establishing metalanguage as a necessary prerequisite for explicit and effective teaching in a pedagogic area (Chen & Myhill, 2016; Rose, 2019). As seen in this study, the core competencies have the potential to be the basis for a SEL metalanguage framework for BC teachers by distilling SEL concepts and skills identified in educational psychology research as beneficial for learners into terminology for application in school contexts. However, according to participants, there has been little by way of professional learning and capacity building to support them in adopting and implementing the metalanguage with their students. Rose (2019b) suggests that, when it comes to ProD, metalanguage should be "recontextualized" for teachers on two levels: Situating the language in the context of educational research and in the context of classroom teaching (p. 1). This two-pronged approach is seen in Rose & Martin's (2012) Read to Learn (R2L) model which is a popular integrated model in secondary schools (Hipkiss & Varga, 2018). R2L present a potential example of how to support teachers' pedagogic capacity with respect to knowledge of SEL and their ability to introduce SEL metalanguage in the classroom.

Findings also indicate a need to foster teachers' capacity in the sense of their own social and emotional competencies. Sarah was disheartened when her students were unwilling to think creatively, take risks, self-regulate, and persevere in challenging situations. She did not recognize these skills in her students as core competencies themselves but, somewhat ironically, framed them as barriers in her ability to implement the core competencies in ELA. Sarah did

recognize, however, that her own social and emotional competence limited her ability to implement core competencies in ELA. She acknowledged that her own upbringing emphasized responsibility and engagement and that this ingrained disposition made it difficult to empathize with students who struggled to exhibit these same skills. Capacity building for the core competencies includes providing opportunities and tangible support for teachers to grow their professional knowledge and skills for SEL (Collie et al, 2015; 2017).

Finally, Themes 4-6 indicated that participants in this study varied significantly in their pedagogic beliefs about the core competencies and how they situated the framework within their practice. The extent of these differences amongst participants raises questions about teachers' capacity and the degree of alignment with what the MoE envisioned as meaningful implementation. For example, Anne and Sarah's impressions that they have long been teaching the core competencies and little change was required in their practice seems contrary to the concept of curricular reform. While the findings in this study did not sufficiently capture teachers' reflections on this issue to confidently draw conclusions, their shared perspective in this respect merits further examination which Fullan (2016) describes as necessary for achieving lasting, meaningful change.

One possible interpretation is that their beliefs represent what Jenkins (2020) identifies as "reactive agency" in which teachers consider reform and ultimately determine not to enact change or, in the case of these two teachers, determine that it is unnecessary. As described elsewhere in the literature, this response can often be linked to the weight and responsibility of engaging with the reform as primary agents of change and as curriculum designers (Priestly et al., 2015; Priestly & Minty, 2013; Gibson & Brook, 2012).

Alternatively, it may be that teachers don't know what they don't know. Priestley et al. (2015) suggest that without proper structural change, teachers may lack the capacity to realize or

adopt educational reform and "innovation is often mediated to fit with prior practice" (p. 193). As teachers work to situate the framework within their existing practice and transition towards educational change, they require conditions that encourage a break from the status quo and opportunities to engage deeply with the pedagogical ideas that underpin the reform (Fullan, 2016; Lockson & Fargason, 2019).

Finally, Anne and Sarah may be entirely right. Their respective teaching practices may already align with the MoE's vision of core competencies implementation and effective SEL without need for change. The difficulty with the latter rests in the lack of guidance provided by the MoE and insufficient engagement in capacity building related to this significant curriculum reform. By positioning teachers as curriculum designers with little guidance for implementation, the MoE assumed a significant degree of capacity in teachers' knowledge and skills relative to the core competencies (Priestley at al., 2015, p. 193) This assumption is puzzling given the lack of any requirement or even option for professional qualifications or coursework related to SEL in Canada (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). In addition, educational change researchers emphasize the importance of a clear and coherent plan for reform (Fullan, 2016, Fixsen, 2019), and meaningful measures of accountability that can ideally be employed intrinsically by teachers (Buchanan, 2015; Fullan & Quinn, 2015; Olivant, 2015). There is a fair degree of clarity and cohesion in the framework itself (BC Ministry of Education, 2019), but little when it comes to the plan for practical realities of classroom implementation. The findings in this study lend credence to Mellegard & Pettersen's (2016) finding that there is often a gap between policy makers' focus on the theoretical goals of reform and teachers' focus on practical application.

5.2.2.3. Claim 5: Teachers viewed ELA as a complementary subject area for core competencies implementation and described a variety of opportunities for overlap.

This study also contributes to the body of literature drawing connections between ELA and SEL. In line with existing research (Aidman & Price, 2018; Ee et al., 2014), four teachers perceived significant congruence between the core competencies and the curricular competencies for English language arts. Teachers used diverse reading, writing, representing, and creating activities to ground their lessons and create connections with the core competencies. Wendy used novels and short stories to draw on character's experiences to help students connect and reflect on their own identity comparable to examples seen in earlier literature (Beland, 2007; Nikolajeva, 2014; Vogel, 2008). Jane drew on graphic novels, short stories, poetry, and non-fiction texts to promote reflection of identity and social justice issues in civil rights and Indigenous experiences. Amy was the only participant to refer to a preformatted SEL program, the *Zones of Regulation* (Kuypers, 2011), that was adopted by the staff in her school to support self-regulation. She also made space for facilitating the core competencies as they engaged in open-ended language arts inquiry projects, similar to Anne's approach of utilizing teachable moments during cross-curricular group activities. By and large, teachers developed their own lessons, resources, and tools for implementing core competencies.

This finding is significant for two reasons. First, where previous SEL research has offered a more general idea of ELA teachers' perceptions of fit within their subject area, these findings add to our understanding of where and how teachers perceive overlap between the core competencies and ELA with more specific examples. Second, this finding highlights both the creativity of English teachers when it comes to the core competencies in language arts, as well as the lengths to which these five teachers have gone to develop materials to implement the framework. The implication of this finding was underscored by Amy's observation during the

focus group interview that, as a whole, the participants in this study were united by a shared passion for learning design but that her other colleagues were less inclined to engage in planning from scratch. Evidence-based SEL resources for the secondary level are scarce (Sande et al. 2019, Williamson et al. 2015) but continue to be developed (Durlak et al., 2015). The challenges with finding grade-appropriate resources only underscores the need to create opportunities for teachers to connect to share resources and engage in professional learning specific to SEL.

5.2.2.4. Claim 6: Teachers identified mathematics as the subject with the greatest need to implement the core competencies.

An unexpected finding in this study was participants' strong emphasis on the need to enhance core competencies in mathematics. While teachers were selected based on their shared expertise in English language arts, all but one teacher also had experience teaching mathematics. Teachers drew on their prior teaching experiences and personal experiences in emphasizing mathematics as the "most emotionally laden" subject area. For example, Jane described her previous efforts to support students in developing their "toolbox" of adaptive social and emotional strategies to persevere and find success in mathematics or other subjects they find challenging. This finding was not identified in any of the research on educational change or SEL completed in the course of this study. Additional research is needed to examine teachers' experiences with implementing the core competencies in mathematics and to explore effective ways in which the framework can be enhanced in this context.

5.2.2.5. Claim 7: Participants varied in their approach to core competencies assessment but agreed that to support reform, assessment must be meaningful.

Assessment was highlighted as particularly important in effecting change in the pedagogical underpinnings that inform teachers' planning (Fullan, 2016) and making the core

competencies a more central focus (Theme 8). This idea was indicated both by teachers who had incorporated the core competencies into their assessment practices to some degree, and teachers who had not yet made such changes. Jane demonstrated that meaningful assessment can be designed with the grids that she developed with her school colleagues. Anne and Wendy described adding core competencies to project rubrics. Amy had students complete a district-developed self-assessment worksheet but was skeptical about its value in terms of accurately assessing student learning or deepening their understanding of the concepts. Teachers agreed that designing meaningful assessment practices would be an important component of achieving reform. Participants in this study felt that support was needed to help teachers' craft meaningful strategies to assess and report on students' core competency development. This finding resonates with the requests and concerns expressed by teachers across BC reported in the BCTF curriculum implementation survey (BCTF, 2019) and the importance of assessment for successful reform is also emphasized in educational change research (Quinn & Fullan, 2015).

5.3. Summary

Connecting to Fullan's (2016) model of teachers' experiences with educational change, the five teachers in this study varied greatly in the extent to which they engaged in meaning-making and in accessing opportunities for collaborative sensemaking and professional development specifically related to the core competencies. As was found by Biesta et al. (2015), the degree of professional discourse and opportunities for sense-making was related to teachers' beliefs about the curriculum and the extent to which they exerted agency to effect change in their teaching practice. None of the teachers in the study reported change across all three of the dimensions of change that Fullan describes as necessary for meaningful reform; however, each teacher described making some steps to incorporate the framework with their students. Some teachers

described making deep adjustments to their learning design and assessment, others had only implemented surface level changes at this point in their engagement with the framework.

Teachers agreed that ELA had considerable potential for incorporating the core competencies through reading, writing, reflecting, and oral activities, as well as on the dire need for increased focus on core competencies in mathematics. They also agreed on the importance of using core competencies language with students and the central function of assessment in establishing the value and importance of the core competencies in the curriculum.

In terms of sense-making, participants' initial introduction to the core competencies and subsequent collaborative discussion with colleagues, to any extent, were significant in shaping their individual approaches to implementation and had an enduring effect on how they conceptualized the core competencies in their practice. Participants were largely on their own in determining how to adapt their teaching to develop core competencies most effectively. The teachers were creative, passionate, and engaged educators. Given the limited opportunities for capacity building described by participants and limited guidance provided by the ministry, the question remains as to how their approach to core competencies aligned with MoE expectations and how it might expand with additional access to the contextualized collaborative professional development that they so strongly and unanimously requested.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this study with respect to data collection and analysis. First, the pandemic forced a shift away from classroom observation and may have had an influence in limiting teachers' willingness or capacity to share documents and limited my opportunities for seeing change or lack of change in the classroom. For example, I had only a partial understanding of participants' contexts and teaching strategies in relation to the core competencies and analysis was based on teachers' descriptions. In addition, the context of

COVID-19 may have also influenced teachers' accounts and my analysis in light of the tense and changing situation, despite attempts to encourage teachers to distinguish between their usual teaching context and COVID-19 experiences.

Another limitation related to the pandemic was my decision to examine teachers' feedback and experiences related to emergency remote teaching and COVID-19 in a separate analysis. If I had explored the data pertaining to teachers' perceptions of SEL during COVID-19 and emergency remote teaching in my overall dissertation, it may have provided a different perspective of teachers' beliefs and implementation of the core competencies.

Given the relative novelty of Zoom at the time, virtual interaction may have also had an impact on my process of data collection and analysis. For example, in the focus group the video format may have constrained the degree to which teachers were comfortable interjecting. Also the online environment is less conducive to reading body language which could aid in understanding teachers' responses (Woodyatt et al, 2016) . Tone and some elements of language (stumbling, pauses) added meaning and interpretation; however, there was no significant consideration of other prosodic features such as facial responses, gesture, and other forms of body language and expression. Similarly, the focus group video was transcribed but further analysis of the video recording may have helped in capturing additional elements of the teachers' accounts.

Another drawback to this study is the lack of consideration of how socio-cultural factors may have shaped participants' experiences. The cases were selected based on diversity of teaching experience and engagement with the framework: no other factors were considered in participant selection. Pseudonyms were attributed based on my perception of the participants as female. However, participants were not asked to confirm any personal demographic information or to self-identify with respect to race, ethnicity, gender or other factors. The choice not to

request this information meant that I was unable to understand important components of teachers' contextualized experiences and how their approach to the core competencies may have been shaped by several influential aspects of their identities and professional life. Consideration of socio-cultural factors and potentially wider representation would contribute to a deeper understanding of the breadth of experiences and interpretations identified in this study. Furthermore, given the nature of the core competencies as an SEL framework, it is essential to consider this curricular reform from multiple critical lenses with close examination of issues of classism and Eurocentrism embedded in Canadian education systems and to explore how (or whether) core competencies can be implemented to address racist and colonial practices and perspectives in educational settings. The wider social and ethical implications of the core competencies merit specific, thorough investigation as the pedagogy of social and emotional learning continues to evolve in BC and beyond.

5.5. Implications for Policy

The findings in this study have several implications for school leaders and education policy makers with respect to teachers' current experiences in the change process and how the process has progressed. In line with BCTF reports (2017, 2019), the teachers in this study valued reforms for shifting the priorities of education towards SEL and recognizing a diversity of skills and abilities.

Additional support is needed, not in the form of prescriptive requirements, but in generating a confident sense of best practices, pedagogy, and supporting teachers' professional capacity in line with research (Collie, 2017; Dolev & Leshem, 2017) and recommendation in the literature for instituting lasting and meaningful educational change (Domitrovich et al., 2015; Rivers et al., 2012). With such resources, teachers could continue to develop creative and

engaging learning opportunities that are pedagogically aligned with SEL and subject-specific curriculum and personalized for their students and their school contexts (Aidman & Price, 2018).

According to participants, capacity should be pursued through specific, collaborative, and contextualized professional learning opportunities involving experts or mentor teachers who can share resources directly related to SEL. This approach is supported in educational change literature that emphasizes collaborative professional learning that is relevant to the educator's particular teaching environment (Biesta et al., 2015; Butler et al., 2015; Fullan, 2016; Lockton & Fargason, 2019).

The provincial reporting order includes a requirement for summative assessment once a year (BC Ministry of Education, 2016). This requirement was limited to year-end self-assessment only by MoE clarification (BC Ministry of Education, 2017). The participants emphasized the fundamental role that assessment plays in establishing priorities and buy-in for teachers, students, and families, therefore, assessment measures should be reconsidered and support provided to elaborate on core competencies assessment (as originally envisioned by the framework designers) so that the core competencies are placed on par with literacy and numeracy skills (Advisory Group 2012, 2013)

5.6. Implications for Practice

Participants agreed that English language arts is a complementary subject area for core competencies implementation. Teachers recognized potential to draw connections between ELA and core competencies through print novels, graphic novels, short stories, poetry, and non-fiction texts, and through writing, creating videos, oral response activities, and daily classroom routines. They described that the perceived "space" within the ELA curricular competencies and project-based learning opportunities allowed teachers to stretch students outside of their comfort zone

and engage in one-to-one core competencies support. Teachers also indicated a need to increase focus on supporting core competency development in relation to mathematics. Reflecting on their own mathematics teaching and learning experiences, participants identified mathematics as an "emotionally laden" subject in which students would benefit from increased support with specific, integrated opportunities for social and emotional learning.

Incorporating core competencies language in the classroom was perceived as an important component of effective reform. Introducing students to social and emotional concepts and skills by explicitly naming and discussing the core competencies to develop a common language may increase student awareness and provide continuity across secondary grades. In addition, participants indicated that assessment is important for signaling the value of SEL to students and families.

5.7. Implications for Research

This study yielded many areas of inquiry that warrant further investigation. More research is needed to understand the efficacy of the wide range of practices in how teachers can best facilitate students' SEL within their teaching practice. While SEL research has generally been the focus of educational psychology researchers, the time is ripe to strengthen the contributions to the field from the lens of curriculum and instruction to develop our understanding of pedagogy and learning in this domain.

As a starting point, insight and inspiration might be garnered from professions outside of education that have connections to SEL. Four teachers in this study attributed their previous professional backgrounds or educational experiences outside of traditional teacher-education as shaping their views and strategies for teaching the core competencies including social work and nursing. Future research should consider pedagogy deployed in these professional programs to

support SEL skill development and the experiences of teachers with other career experiences as a potential source of knowledge.

Complementing the development of the pedagogical foundations of SEL, research is needed to examine possible directions for specific professional and emotional capacity building for teachers with respect to SEL at the secondary level and in relation to specific subject areas. This need also extends to the research examining how SEL can be enhanced within teacher-education programs in Canada as other SEL frameworks emerge across the country (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2020).

Finally, research into effective strategies for authentic and meaningful SEL assessment would support teachers' efforts to effect change in practice and facilitate SEL learning design.

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APPENDIX A Information Letter and Consent Forms

University of Victoria

Superintendent Consent Form

Dear _____,

I am seeking permission to conduct a study entitled "Connecting with Core Competencies: Learning from the experience of BC secondary language arts educators with curriculum-based social and emotional learning," with middle and high school teachers in school district X.

As well as being a teacher at Lansdowne Middle School, I am currently a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria. I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ruthanne Tobin.

Purpose and Objectives
The purpose of this research project is to highlight the ways in which language arts teachers have approached and engaged with the mandated social and emotional core competencies in the classroom and identify their perceptions of successes and ongoing challenges. As a teacher and school counsellor in school district 61, I have observed and spoken with colleagues who are approaching core competencies in a variety of ways and am interested in understanding what has gone into their planning as well as their feedback in various contexts.

Importance of this Research
Research of this type is important because BC educators are positioned to play a pivotal role in supporting student social and emotional competence. However, according to a 2017 BCTF survey, teachers report feeling underprepared for this shift and that more support is required. There is also a gap in social and emotional learning research at the secondary level and from the curriculum perspective as the domain that has been largely led by educational psychology. I hope that my research will help to bridge these gaps building on my experience as a teacher, school counsellor, and conflict resolution professional.

What is Involved
I will conduct interviews with teachers outside of instructional time, classroom observations, and collect any documents deemed relevant by the teacher including student work products. While students will be observed in class and their work may be analyzed, my primary purpose is understanding the experiences and perspectives of teachers in the hopes of yielding knowledge that will assist educators with implementation of SEL in BC schools and across Canada. In my analysis, I will look for themes regarding what informed teacher planning for core competency integration, what methods teachers use, how they make language arts connections, and teacher's contexts and perceptions about implementation.

If you consent for this research to be conducted, the teacher and student will need to voluntarily participate in this research. If a student chooses not to participate in the research, they will complete all of the activities described above because I will be doing this unit regardless of her/his participation. Students and their parents will be asked to sign a letter each to choose to participate and it will be explained that they can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

Risks
There are no known or anticipated risks to teachers or students by participating in this research.

Benefits
The potential benefits of teachers' participation in this research include the furthering of knowledge in practice in incorporating core competencies in language arts, teachers' perceptions and desired supports. The teachers will also benefit from reviewing and reflecting on their teaching practice and goals in this area.

Voluntary Participation
Teachers and students' participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If students decide to participate, they may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If students withdraw from the study their data will not be used. To withdraw after having given consent, parents/guardians or students will be asked to contact _____. Both print and digital copies of parent/guardian and student consent forms will be sent home to the parents' email addresses that have been provided by the school with the principal's permission.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants: As a teacher and school counsellor in *********, I have a relationship as professional colleagues with teachers in this study but do not hold a position of power or influence over them.

Anonymity
In terms of protecting anonymity, pseudonyms will be used in the writing and dissemination of the research.

Dissemination of Results
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in my Doctoral dissertation, in scholarly publications, and in professional development involving other teachers.

Disposal of Data
Data from this study, including documents, field notes, and teacher interviews, will be erased, and any paper copies of data will be shredded within five years of the successful defense of my thesis.

Contacts
Individuals who may be contacted regarding this study include myself at **********, ******** or Dr. Tobin at rtobin@uvic.ca or ********. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (******* or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent for the teachers and students in SD 61 to participate in this research project.

Name of Superintendent	Signature	Date

Please keep a copy of this consent form and return the second copy of the completed form to Meaghan Storey.

University of Victoria

Consent Form
Principal

Dear _____,

I am seeking permission to conduct a study entitled "Connecting with core competencies: Learning from BC educators incorporating social and emotional learning with secondary language arts curriculum" with teachers in your school. As a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria, I am required to conduct research as part of my Doctor of Philosophy degree. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ruthanne Tobin (rtobin@uvic.ca or *********).

Purpose and Objectives: The purpose of this research is to learn from secondary language arts educators who are incorporating the core competencies in their classroom. Developed as part of BC's redesigned curriculum, the competencies encompass essential social and emotional skills such as communication, critical thinking, personal and social awareness and responsibility, and positive personal and cultural identity. I aim to examine how teachers have approached this new aspect of the curriculum and to understand their perspectives, experiences, and feedback with this process in their various teaching contexts.

Importance of this Research: This research is important because BC teachers are positioned to play a central role in supporting student social and emotional competence and youth mental health. There are many ways these core competencies can be incorporated in the classroom and current research suggests that pre-service and current teachers would like more support in this area. It is important to learn from current teachers' perspectives and experiences to inform policy and procedures and to support educators and student learning. This study will add to the literature on social and emotional learning at the secondary level and to extend existing knowledge about curriculum and instruction in this domain.

Participants Selection: I am recruiting middle or high school teachers in ********* who self-describe as making efforts to incorporate the core competencies into language arts curriculum. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Whether teachers choose to participate or not will have no effect on their position or treatment.

What is involved:

- **Interviews and focus group**: The teacher will participate in an individual one-hour interview at the beginning of the study and one focus-group with other teacher-participants at the end. I will collaborate with each teacher to choose a time and location that works for them, either at their school or at the University of Victoria. Interviews will be audio recorded on Voice Memo on my password-protected mobile phone.
- **Observation**: I will observe the teacher for approximately one hour, five times during the project. I will collaborate with them to determine which blocks of time are most suitable for observation.
- **Teacher documents**: I will ask teachers to provide documents they think are relevant to their incorporation of core competencies with language arts curriculum. For example, lesson plans, instructional materials, collaboration notes, research or professional learning, or other materials used or created in preparing, planning, teaching, assessing, or reporting on core competencies.
- **Anonymous Student documents**: I will ask teachers to anonymize and share documents created by students in the course of their lessons that teachers deem relevant to their incorporation of core competencies with language arts curriculum. For example, individual or collaborative print, digital, or creative work product.

Inconvenience, Risks, and Benefits: Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to teachers, including spending approximately five hours to participate in interviews and to prepare shared documents. There are no known or anticipated risks to teachers or students by participating in this project. The potential benefits of participation include furthering our understanding of teachers' perceptions of the core competencies, how they are incorporating them in the curriculum, and how teachers wish to be supported. Teachers may also find it beneficial to engage in discussion and reflection of their teaching practice and goals

in this area during interview discussions and document review. There are no known or anticipated benefits to students.

Voluntary Participation & On-Going Consent: Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Participants may withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation. To make sure that participants continue to consent to participate, I will remind them at intervals throughout the study that participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time. Teachers may contact me or my supervisor at any time to withdraw consent. If teachers withdraw, their data will not be used in any part of this study and will be immediately destroyed by me.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants: As a teacher and school counsellor in *********, I have a relationship as professional colleagues with teachers in this study but do not hold a position of power or influence over them.

Anonymity & Confidentiality: Pseudonyms will be used for the names of teachers, students, and schools in the writing and dissemination of the research. Participant confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing the research data on my password-protected computer.

Dissemination of Results: It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared in the following ways: Orally and in print in my doctoral dissertation; online or in print in scholarly publications; presentations at scholarly meetings and conference proceedings; and in presentations in professional development sessions.

Disposal of Data: Data from this study will be disposed of five years after the successful defence of my dissertation. Electronic data will be erased, and paper copies will be shredded by me.

Contacts: You may contact me (**********, ******) or Dr. Tobin (rtobin@uvic.ca, *******) about this study. You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (*******or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates you understand the above conditions of participation, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent for the teachers and students in your school to participate in this research project.

Name of Principal	Signature	Date

Please keep a copy of this consent form and return a completed copy to the researcher.

University of Victoria

Participant Consent Form
Teacher

Dear Colleague,

You are invited to participate in a study entitled "Connecting with core competencies: Learning from BC educators incorporating social and emotional learning with secondary language arts curriculum."
I am a graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria. I am required to conduct research as part of my Doctor of Philosophy degree. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ruthanne Tobin, you may contact her at rtobin@uvic.ca or **********

Purpose, Objectives and Importance of this Research
I aim to learn from secondary language arts educators who are incorporating the core competencies in their classroom. The competencies encompass social and emotional skills such as communication, critical thinking, personal and social awareness and responsibility, and positive personal and cultural identity. I aim to examine how teachers have approached this new aspect of the curriculum and to understand their perspectives, experiences, and feedback with this process in various contexts. BC teachers play a central role in supporting student social and emotional competence and mental health. There are many ways core competencies can be incorporated, and current research suggests teachers would like more support in this area. It is important to learn from teachers' perspectives and experiences to inform policy and procedures and to support educators and student learning. This study will add to the literature on social and emotional learning at the secondary level and existing knowledge about curriculum and instruction in this domain.

Participants Selection
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a secondary (middle or high school) language arts teacher in the ********** region who has self-described as incorporating core competencies in your classroom. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your position or how you will be treated.

What is involved
If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

- **Interviews and focus group**: You will participate in an individual one-hour interview at the beginning of the study and one focus-group with other teacher-participants at the end. We will collaborate to choose a time and location that works for you, either at your school or at the University of Victoria. Interviews will be audio recorded on my password-protected phone.
- **Observation**: I will come to your school and observe you in your teaching context for approximately one hour, five times during the research project. We will collaborate to determine which blocks of time would be most suitable for observation. In an effort to better understand your perspective and experience, I will take note of factors such as the physical setting, elements of a lesson, your words and actions, interactions with students, student comments, questions, and verbal and non-verbal responses to activities and discussion. No names or identifying information will be recorded of students during observations.
- **Teacher documents**: I will ask you to share documents that you think are relevant to your incorporation of core competencies with language arts curriculum. For example, lesson plans, instructional materials, collaboration notes, research or professional learning notes, or other materials used in preparing, planning, teaching, assessing, or reporting on core competencies.
- **Anonymous Student documents**: I will ask you to anonymize and share documents created by students in the course of your lessons that you think are relevant to your incorporation of core competencies with language arts curriculum. For example, individual or collaborative print, digital, or creative work product. These documents will serve to illustrate and provide examples of your perspective or teaching context. For example, you may choose a piece of student writing that you feel represents the impact that integrating core

competencies has had on students or because it exemplifies your teaching goals in a particular lesson.

Inconvenience, Risks & Benefits
Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including spending approximately five hours of your time to participate in interviews and to share relevant documents. There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. The potential benefits of your participation in this research include furthering our understanding of teachers' perceptions of the core competencies, how they are incorporating them in the curriculum, and how teachers wish to be supported. You may also find it beneficial to engage in discussion and reflection of your teaching practice and goals in this area during interview discussions and when reviewing documents to share.

Voluntary Participation & On-Going Consent
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. To make sure that you continue to consent to participate, I will remind you at intervals throughout the study that your participation is voluntary and may withdraw at any time. You may contact me or my supervisor at any time to withdraw your consent. If you withdraw your consent at any time throughout the study, your data will not be used in any part of this research and will be immediately destroyed by me.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants
As a teacher and counsellor in **********, we have relationship as professional colleagues.

Anonymity & Confidentiality
To protect anonymity, pseudonyms will be used for the names of teachers, students, and schools in the writing and dissemination of the research. Your identity will be known by the other participants in the focus group interview. However, no names or identifying information will be included in the reporting or dissemination of the research. Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing the research data on my password-protected computer.

Dissemination of Results
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared in the following ways: Orally and in print in my doctoral dissertation; online or in print in scholarly publications; presentations at scholarly meetings and conference proceedings; and in presentations in professional development sessions.

Disposal of Data
Data from this study will be disposed of five years after the successful defence of my dissertation. Electronic data will be erased, and paper copies will be shredded by me.

Contacts
You may contact me at **********, **********or Dr. Tobin at rtobin@uvic.ca, **********about the study. You may verify ethical approval of this study or raise any concerns with the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (**********, ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Name of Participant	Signature	Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

University of Victoria

Participant Implied Consent Form
Survey

Dear Colleague,

You are invited to participate in a study entitled "Connecting with core competencies: Learning from BC educators incorporating social and emotional learning with secondary language arts curriculum."
I am a graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria. I am required to conduct research as part of my Doctor of Philosophy degree. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ruthanne Tobin, you may contact her at rtobin@uvic.ca or **********.

Purpose, Objectives and Importance of this Research
I aim to learn from educators who are incorporating the core competencies in their classroom. The competencies encompass social and emotional skills such as communication, critical thinking, personal and social awareness and responsibility, and positive personal and cultural identity. I aim to examine how teachers have approached this new aspect of the curriculum and to understand their perspectives, experiences, and feedback with this process in various contexts. There are many ways core competencies can be incorporated, and current research suggests teachers would like more support in this area. It is important to learn from teachers' perspectives and experiences to inform policy and procedures and to support educators and student learning.

I am also interested in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' perspectives and approaches to core competencies.

This study will add to the literature on social and emotional learning and existing knowledge about curriculum and instruction in this domain.

Participants Selection
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a teacher in the ******** area. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your position or how you will be treated.

What is involved
You will be asked to respond anonymously to a short questionnaire (approximately 15 minutes). Questions include information regarding demographics, your experience in teaching, and your perceptions and of social and emotional core competencies.

Risks & Benefits
There are no known or anticipated risks to respondents in this research. The potential benefits of your participation include furthering our understanding of teachers' perceptions of the core competencies, how they are incorporating them in the curriculum, and how teachers wish to be supported.

Implied Voluntary Participation
By choosing to reply to this survey, your consent to participate in this research is implied.

Anonymity & Confidentiality
This survey is being conducted anonymously. Any identifying information inadvertently provided will be kept confidential. At the end of the survey, there is an optional invitation to include your name and contact number if you are willing to be contacted for a follow up interview. If you provide your contact information,

Data is collected through an online survey and stored by the researcher on a password-protected computer. The confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing the research data on my password-protected computer. Data from this study will be deleted five years after the successful defence of my dissertation.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared in the following ways: Orally and in print in my doctoral dissertation; online or in print in scholarly publications; presentations at scholarly meetings and conference proceedings; and in presentations in professional development sessions.

Contacts

You may contact me at **********, *********or Dr. Tobin at rtobin@uvic.ca, ******about the study. You may verify ethical approval of this study or raise any concerns with the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (******* ethics@uvic.ca).

By choosing to proceed with this survey, it is implied that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

APPENDIX B Semi-Structured Individual Interview Questions

1. Can you describe how you see your role in teaching core competencies?

2. Can you describe your approach to planning and incorporating the core competencies in your teaching?

3. Can you describe an example of what the core competencies "look like" in your practice?

4. How do you perceive the impact of incorporating core competencies for your students, if any?

5. Could you describe your approach to assessment with respect to the core competencies?

6. How would you like to be supported in incorporating the core competencies?

7. Individualized question based on questionnaire response

   e.g. In your questionnaire, you rated the sub-competencies in the following ways (very easy – very challenging), could you tell me more about these ratings?

   In your questionnaire you made the following comment "xxx". Could you elaborate on this idea?

8. Has the pandemic and the shift to distance learning influenced your perspective or approach to the core competencies?

9. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?

APPENDIX C Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions

1) What do you think is working about how you are approaching core competencies?

2) How do you gauge the impact on your students?

3) Can you speak more about the difference between directly planning for the core competencies in your lessons, compared to teaching them in the moment when occasions arise?

4) How do you approach core competencies in language arts and how do you think this compares to other subjects?

5) What would you say to other teachers who want to engage more or are struggling with the core competencies?

6) Can you speak to the resources for planning and assessment that you use and what you have found most effective?

7) What have you noticed with respect to students' perceptions of the core competencies or their response to your approach in this area?

8) What reflections do you have about your experiences in the context of COVID-19 in relation to the core competencies?

    a. How did you approach core competencies during this time?

    b. Has the experience influenced your students' core competency development?

    c. How has the experience during remote learning compared to teaching core competencies in your usual teaching context?

APPENDIX D Qualitative questionnaire

Implied consent form	
Overview of BC's core competencies	
Part 1: Demographics	
1. In which district do you primarily teach?	
2. What grade(s) do you currently teach (Check all that apply)?	
3. What best represents your current teaching assignment (check all that apply)	
4. How many years of teaching experience do you have?	
5. If you have education or experience in a profession other than teaching, please describe it below.	
Part 2: Usual teaching context	
6. Describe some examples of what core competencies look like in your teaching practice (e.g., writing, group work, projects, class routines, inquiry, etc.)	
7. How would you rate the level of ease or challenge of each sub-competency when it comes to incorporating them in your curriculum?	Very easy, Somewhat easy, Somewhat difficult Very difficult
8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? a. I think teaching core competencies is more important for elementary grades than secondary. b. I think that core competencies are better suited to being incorporated with some subjects than others. c. Counsellors and learning support teachers should play a bigger role in core competencies than classroom teachers.	Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree
9. What do you see as the benefits and risks of incorporating core competencies for your students?	
10. What challenges do you experience in planning/teaching core competencies (e.g., time, resources, knowledge, student response, etc.)?	
11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? a. Students' development of core competencies can be accurately assessed and evaluated. b. In my school community, there is a strong consensus regarding the importance or value of incorporating core competencies in the curriculum for all students. c. I would like more training and resources regarding how to incorporate the core competencies for my students.	Strongly agree Somewhat agree Somewhat disagree Strongly disagree
12. Do you think that all sub-competencies should or can be incorporated equally in each subject/grade? Please explain.	

13. How do you assess core competencies (e.g., formative, summative, self-assessment or teacher reported, using district	
14. 14. How would you like to be supported by the Ministry, your district, or school when it comes to the core competencies (e.g., resources, Pro-D, collaboration time, school initiatives, etc.)?	
Part III: COVID-19 Impact	
15. In your view, what level of priority should be placed on teaching core competencies compared to subject-specific content?	Less priority than subject content; In equal priority with subject content; Greater priority than subject content
16. Has COVID-19 had an effect on your views of the importance and relevance of teaching the core competencies? Please explain.	
17. Describe the benefits and challenges of online-learning formats in teaching core competencies?	
18. Since the onset of the pandemic, what opportunities have you identified to incorporate the core competencies in your teaching and interactions with students?	
Part 4: Follow up	
19. Optional: If you consent to being contacted for follow up interviews, please include your name and contact information:	

APPENDIX E Ethics Certificate of Approval

University of Victoria
Office of Research Services I Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 I F 250-721-8960 I uvic.ca/research I ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval - Amendments

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	**Ruthanne Tobin** (Supervisor)	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER** Expedited review - delegated	**20-0035**
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT	**Meaghan Storey** **PhD student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE	28-Feb-2020
UVIC DEPARTMENT	**Curriculum & Instruction**	APPROVED ON	11-May-2020
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE	27-Feb-2021

PROJECT TITLE **Connecting with core competencies: Learning from BC teachers incorporating social and emotional learning and navigating COVID-19**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS
Meaghan Storey - principal applicant, UVic

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING
SSHRC, National Research Council

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL
DirectorSuperintendent Consent Form v2.docx - 09-Apr-2020
Principal Consent Form v2.docx - 09-Apr-2020
Teacher participant consent form v3.docx - 09-Apr-2020
Teacher Survey v1.pdf - 06-Apr-2020
Sample Interview Questions v2.pdf - 05-Apr-2020
Survey teacher recruitment statement v1.pdf - 05-Apr-2020
Survey Implied Consent Form v1.pdf - 05-Apr-2020
UVic SurveyMonkey Canada Storage.pdf - 05-Apr-2020

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropiate standards of ethcis as outlines by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

Dr. Rachael Scarth
Associate VP Research Operations

Certificate Issued On: 11-May-2020