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Social Emotional Learning: Developing an Activity-based Program for Enhancing the Social-emotional Intelligence of Middle School Students

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INTRODUCTION

- The purpose of our project was to develop new Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programming at a middle school mentorship program based on SEL competencies.
- SEL is the process of building life skills for successful interactions with others and includes five competencies identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).¹
- Studies have found SEL programming to have long-lasting benefits for students, including positive attitudes, better behaviors, and improved academic performance.^{2,3}
- Occupational therapists' knowledge of student contextual, psychosocial, and performance factors, as well as task analysis, can improve the way SEL skills are taught and implemented in schools.

GOALS

- Pilot protocol format
- Develop engaging activities for SEL units
- Maintain affordability
- Pilot system to gather data needed for sustainability

SEL COMPETENCIES



METHODS

- Performed a literature review
- Conducted in-person and email surveys of teaching staff and community mentor
- Conducted in-person and online surveys of students
- Developed protocol format and contents for SEL curriculum
- Evaluated success of protocol format and curriculum activities

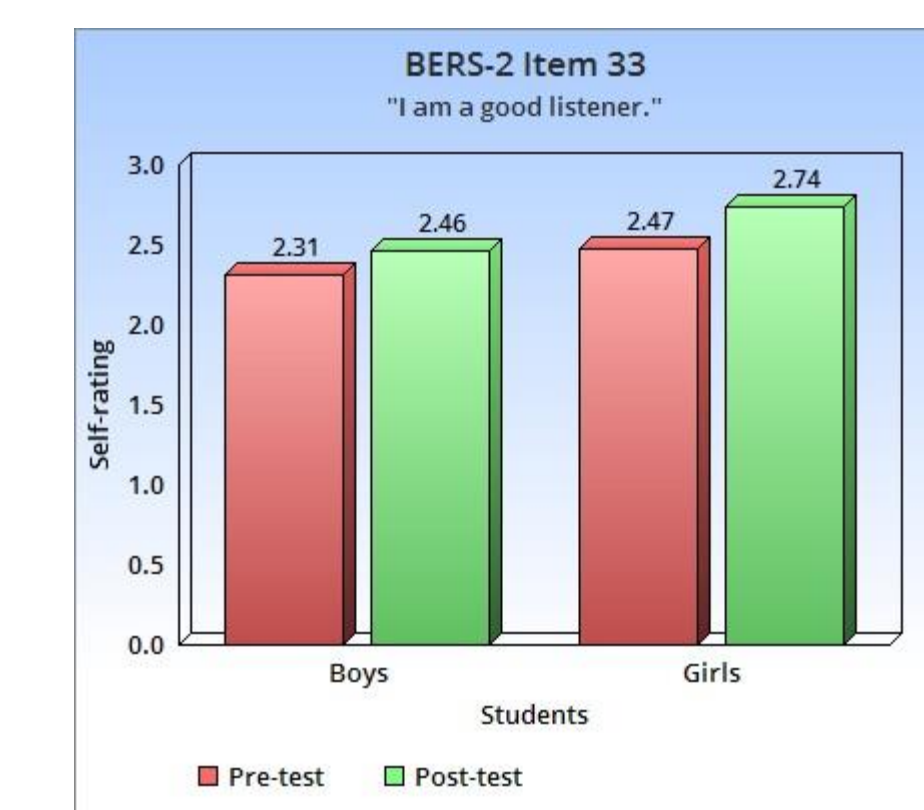
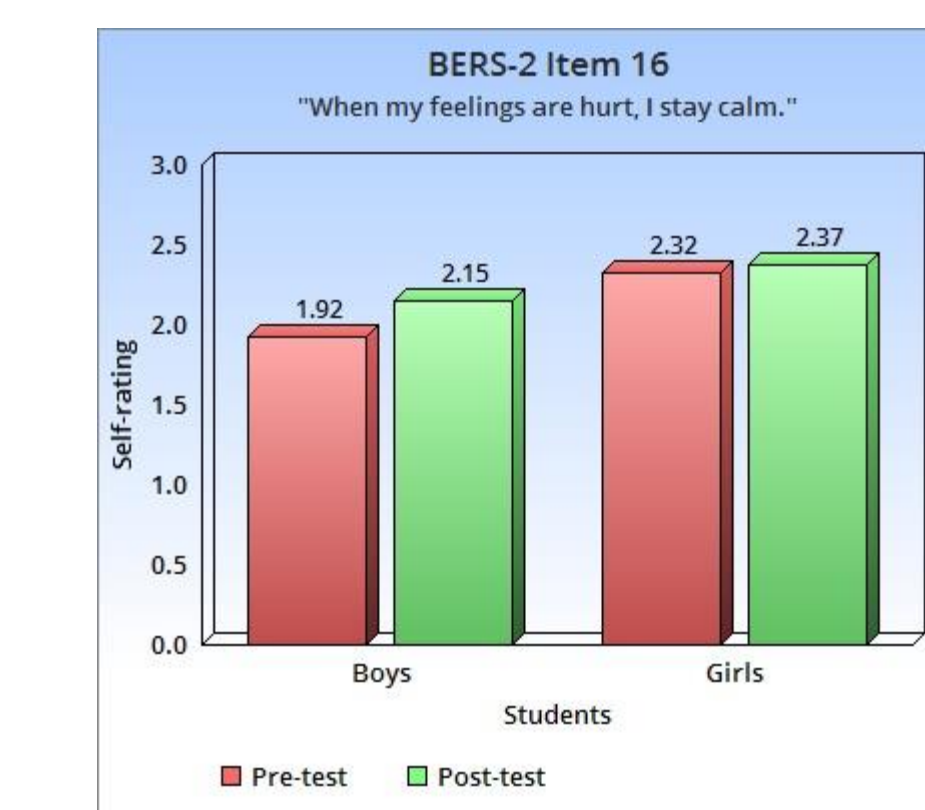
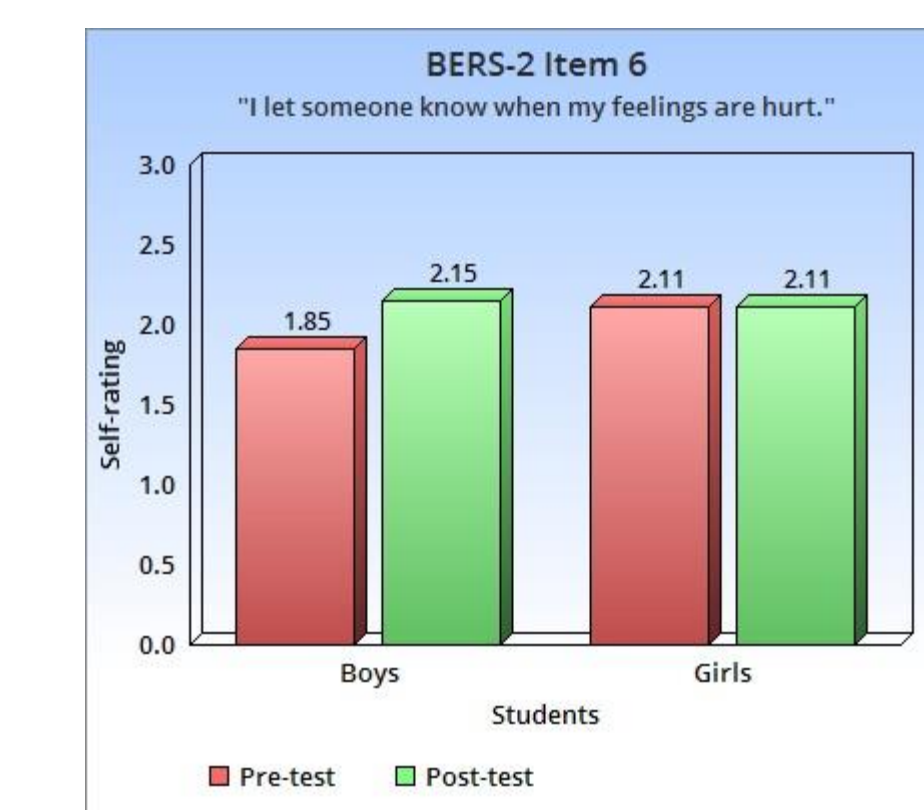
SEL CURRICULUM

- We developed a written protocol format based on SEL competencies.
- Protocols were designed to be implemented over five weeks with 32 middle school students.
- An OT mindset was used to incorporate real life situations, multiple learning styles, and social participation into the activities.
- Affordable materials were used in the activities.
- Pre/post testing was administered to determine curriculum effectiveness (The Behavior and Emotional Rating Scale 2 [BERS-2]).
- After program completion, protocols were modified in response to feedback from students and instructors.

BERS-2 Pre-test Administered			
SEL Units	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
1. Self-awareness	Animal leadership quiz	Strengths and areas of growth	Famous leaders quiz
2. Self-management	Worry beads and stones	1-2-3 breathe	Don't eat the marshmallow!
3. Social awareness	"Mingle" icebreaker	Walk a mile in my shoes	First impression judgments
4. Relationship skills	"Mirroring" activity	Active listening partner activity	Using "I" statements
5. Responsible decision making	Responsible and irresponsible decisions	Decisions: No, snap, planned	Brendan's dilemma
BERS-2 Post-test Administered			

PROGRAM EVALUATION

- Students' pre- and post-test self-ratings reflected no significant change in social-emotional skills for the class as a whole, possibly due to the short duration of our program.
- Student responses to certain items on the BERS-2 did indicate change when results were separated by gender. These charts are a representative sample of such items.

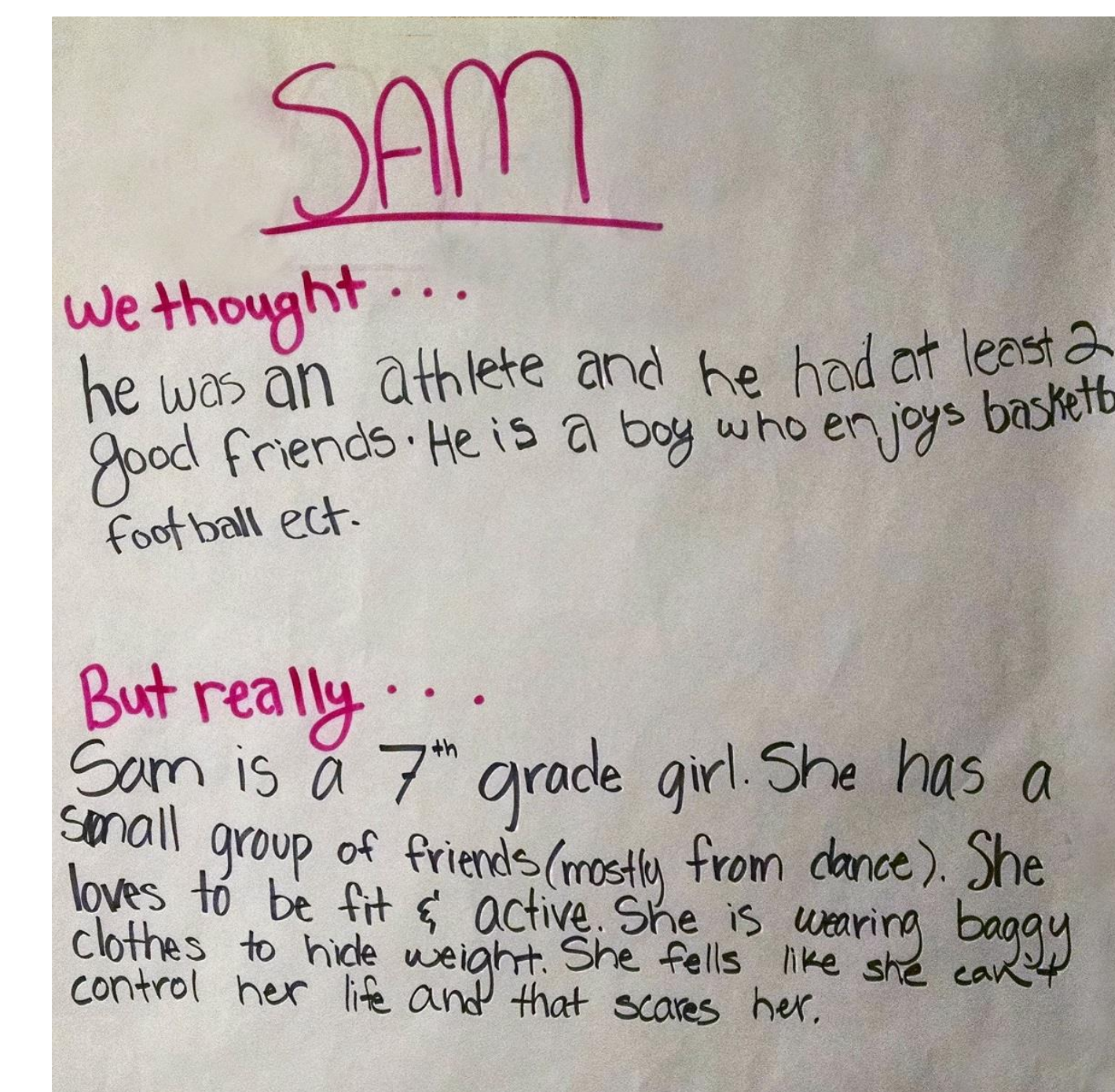


- Teachers reported that protocols were well-organized, fun, and engaging for students and could easily be expanded for additional social-emotional instruction.
- Based on student survey responses, the more interactive the activity (making a craft, acting out a scenario, etc.), the more students remembered and enjoyed the activity.
- The survey also included open-ended questions, in which students shared how they used these skills outside of class:
 - "When I had an argument with my mom, I said 'I feel' instead of blaming her. It really helped!"
 - "I have started to be a better active listener when I talk to someone."

CONCLUSIONS

- We met our goal of creating an SEL program that teachers can easily implement and expand in their middle school classrooms.
- The program facilitates the development of social-emotional competencies with activities that target multiple learning styles.
- Students reported improved self-ratings for some SEL competencies, indicating that this activity-based pilot program has potential as a solid foundation for an effective SEL curriculum.
- To maximize the effect of our five units, related activities need to be incorporated throughout the school year.

PROTOCOL IN ACTION



REFERENCES

1. Social and emotional learning core competencies. (n.d.) In *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*. Retrieved November 29, 2014, from <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies>
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