

SECOND STEP SEL PROGRAM IN UPPER ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Master Capstone Project

**Second Step SEL Program in Upper Elementary Education**

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I give permission to City University to store and use this MIT Project for teaching purposes.

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### **Abstract**

Administrators, teachers, and researchers have become progressively more aware of the need to acknowledge the importance of addressing students' social emotional development. Educators contribute greatly to the implementation and practice of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs the hope of fostering social emotional, and intellectual skills among all students. This classroom action research study was designed to examine the Second Step SEL curriculum and its impact on students' growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness. There were 7 fifth grade students who participated in this study. Baseline data was collected from a self-report 5-point rating scale survey before implementing lessons from the Second Step curriculum. The same survey was then taken midway through implementation and once more at the end of six weeks. The researcher's data analysis showed that there were increases in competence of student's growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness.

## Introduction

Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to a wide range of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that can affect a student's success in school and life (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Critical thinking, managing emotions, working through conflicts, decision making, and teamwork are the kind of skills that are not usually measured by tests; however, these skills support a student's education. Social emotional learning impacts student academic success, employability, self-esteem, relationships, as well as civic and community engagement. Students need to have social emotional capability to establish and maintain positive relationships with their peers and teachers to participate effectively within the inherently social and collaborative nature of the classroom (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). The purpose of integrating SEL instruction is to expand on students' power to understand their social and emotional world by employing a strengths-based, holistic view of children's development, rather than just trying to prevent the negative outcomes (Weissberg et al., 2015).

Students who are receiving continuous support and instruction in social emotional learning, tend to enjoy and feel more connected in school, show more positive social behaviors, have more positive attitudes toward themselves and others, have lower levels of anxiety and depression, and receive higher grades and scores on other measures of academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). Children who are taught and believe that their intelligence and social skills are flexible have higher course completion rates, have more success navigating school transitions, and are less aggressive when faced with peer victimization or exclusion (Yeager & Dweck, 2012; Yeager & Miu, 2011). Interventions to promote a growth mindset about intelligence and academic achievement have been shown to improve grades overall and increase the percentage of at-risk students who pass their classes (Dweck et al., 2014).

Due to a worldwide pandemic, most students have been kept out of school and have lost a year of relationship building and mindfulness practice. This generation of young people have experienced profound disruption to their lives and their learning because of COVID19. Amidst all this uncertainty, there is growing consensus that school closures in spring 2020 likely had negative effects on student learning (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). With this negative experience comes poor mental health and social-emotional challenges. Implementing SEL curriculums such as Second Step has the potential to increase student competencies in growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness (Thayer et al., 2019).

Second Step is a universal, classroom-based, program designed for kindergarten through fifth grade to increase students school success and decrease problem behaviors by promoting social-emotional competence and self-regulation (Committee for Children, 2011). The Second Step SEL curriculum promotes students' success, connectedness and helps to create a safe school climate by including lessons teachers use to teach students the skills that strengthen their ability to learn, manage emotions, have empathy, and solve problems.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that over the last year, with distance learning due to a worldwide pandemic, students have had limited to no peer interaction. Bandura (1977) stressed the importance of these relationships and interpersonal skills that students need for proper development. The social and emotional well-being of students plays a fundamental role in their academic successes (Brooker, 2020). During the past year, with the loss of connection between students, it is vital to understand the effects of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in the classroom.

### **Rationale**

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process in which people efficiently learn how to manage emotions such as empathy to others, maintain relationships, set and achieve goals, and guide them to sensible decision making (Weissberg et al., 2015). Students who have been kept out of school during the pandemic, have lost a year of relationship building and mindfulness practice. Applying mindfulness to personal experiences can provide a powerful method for restoring emotional balance and avoiding engagement in harmful behavior (Barseghian, 2013). Teaching students to understand and manage their emotions could be the key to channeling their attention to productive tasks, sustain motivation when work becomes demanding, and to handle the frustrations of sharing, learning, and actions with peers (Broderick, 2014). Researchers using trial and error found social and emotional learning programs have reliably shown that well-executed and designed prevention procedures offer a means of reducing problem occurrence while building skills for enhanced achievement, better classroom behavior and improving mental health (Broderick, 2014). The expected goal for implementing a mindfulness based SEL intervention is an increase in competence of growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness.

### **Literature Review**

Social and emotional learning (SEL) plays a crucial role in students' academic readiness and success. Teachers contribute greatly to the implementation and practice of SEL programs in hopes to foster affective, cognitive, and behavioral abilities among all students. The benefits of SEL programs are well documented. Several recent meta-analyses show that universal SEL curricula are successful in developing a broad array of outcomes, including social skills, growth-mindset, self-management, and academic performance (Lawson et al., 2019). Goleman (1996)

provided evidence identifying social and emotional intelligence as the complex and multifaceted ability to be effective in all the critical domains of life, including education. According to Goleman (1996), social and emotional intelligence is “a different way of being smart” (p. 5). Teachers, researchers, and representatives within the United States, and around the world, have become progressively more aware of the need to acknowledge the importance of addressing students’ social emotional development (Durlak et al., 2011).

Students who are receiving continuous support and instruction in social emotional learning, compared to their peers who do not, tend to enjoy and feel more connected in school, show more positive social behaviors, have more positive attitudes toward themselves and others, have lower levels of anxiety and depression, and receive higher grades and scores on other measures of academic achievement (Durlak et al., 2011).

### **Significance of the Problem**

Social and emotional competence facilitates the ability to successfully manage everyday life skills such as forming relationships, learning, solving everyday challenges, and adjusting to the difficult demands of growth and development (Elias et al., 1997). Self-awareness, control of impulsivity, social-awareness, and self-management are valuable social emotional skills that need to be developed in students for success. Unmanaged stress and poor impulsivity interfere with attention and memory and contribute to the behaviors that disrupt the learning process (Elias et al., 1997). Students in every school must frequently interact with their peers and teachers, as well as manage their attention and emotions in the face of academic requirements. Sadly, a troubling number of students reveal social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) problems that hinder their academic success and that of their peers (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010; Reinke, Herman, & Ialongo, 2011).

Negative experiences at an early age can also impair children's mental health and effect their cognitive, behavioral, and social emotional development (Lawson et al., 2019). Between 9.5% and 14.2% of children between birth and five years of age experience social emotional problems that negatively impact their functioning, development, and school readiness (Brauner & Stephens, 2006). The percentage of young people in the United States, in any given year, are being treated for some type of mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder is estimated to be between 14% and 20% (Perou et al., 2013).

This generation of young people have experienced profound disruption to their lives and their learning due to COVID19. Amidst all this uncertainty, there is growing consensus that school closures in spring 2020 from a global pandemic likely had negative effects on student learning (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). With this negative experience comes poor mental health and social-emotional challenges.

### **Student Mindfulness**

As teachers our goal is to capture student's attention long enough for them to retain the information given. Due to a worldwide pandemic many schools were closed and students were forced to learn virtually from their homes. In a survey done by The Gonski Institute, 78% of teachers reported a decrease in students' ability to focus on tasks through digital technologies (Patty, 2020).

The distractions observed day to day in virtual learning can be many different things including siblings, pets, toys, and even parents. Though, the most crucial distraction not physically seen is the mass decline in students' mental health. DKC Analytics reported that fifty percent of students mental health worsened, thirty five percent said their family relationships had been negatively affected, and well over sixty percent reported feeling lonely and anxious

(Brooker, 2020). The social and emotional well-being of students plays such a fundamental role in their academic successes. Teaching students to understand and manage their emotions could be the key to channel their attention to productive tasks, sustain motivation when work becomes demanding, and to handle the frustrations of sharing, learning, and act with peers (Broderick, 2014).

Mindfulness has been characterized as a specific method of focusing (Barseghian, 2013). Typically separated, the ideas of attention and emotions when in fact both research and personal experience proves how an emotional state can significantly affect the quality of our attention (Barseghian, 2013). Barseghian (2013) stated there are three mechanism strategies to intentional mindfulness. The first step is channeling your attention to the present moment by opening the experience of thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations shifting your cognitive focus away from troubling incidents in the past and future stressors. By doing this you interrupt the connections between automatic cognitive interpretations and patterns of reacting. Second, internal and external experiences should focus on present moment to help broaden attention and allow for suspension of previously practiced patterns of reacting which could entail avoidance or over engagement. Lastly, opening the mind to what is in front of you in a nonjudgmental way. This is a practice of adapting to experience with curiosity and acceptance.

When you apply this mindfulness in your experiences it can provide a powerful apparatus for restoring emotional balance and avoiding engagement in harmful behavior (Barseghian, 2013). Researchers, using trial and error, found social and emotional learning programs have reliably shown that well-executed and designed prevention procedures offer a means of reducing problem occurrence while building skills for enhanced achievement, better classroom behavior and improving mental health (Broderick, 2014). Bokoch and Hass-Cohen (2020) investigated the

Mindfulness and Art Therapy Group Program's (MATG-P) effectiveness for children's mental health outcomes and interpersonal impacts. Their reports showed large improvements in students' attention.

### **Benefits of SEL**

Students' feelings and relationships can have a substantial impact on their learning, including how and what they learn and how that learning is transferred and applied in various contexts. To generate educational goals and maintain an active interest in and genuine engagement with learning, students must be able to successfully regulate their emotions (McNeeley, 2016). Students need to have social emotional capability to establish and maintain positive relationships with their peers and teachers to participate effectively within the inherently social and collaborative nature of the classroom (Durlak et al., 2008). Recognizing the importance of social and emotional competence on educational outcomes has caused intensified attention on social emotional learning. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults obtain and successfully apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to comprehend and manage emotions, and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, set and achieve positive goals, and make responsible decisions (Elias et al., 1997).

The highly valuable skills learned through the schoolwide implementation of SEL programs will help students in developing their inter- and intrapersonal tools to successfully navigate adolescence, adulthood, and careers (Taylor et al., 2017)

Integrating SEL in schools may help expand students' power to understand their social and emotional world by employing a strengths-based, holistic view of children's development, rather than just trying to prevent the negative outcomes (Weissberg et al., 2015). Several meta-

analyses indicate these interventions are successful in improving prosocial behavior and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). The SEL skills students learn also serve as a protective factor in decreasing behavioral problems and emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011).

### **Implementation**

Implementing SEL programs in school settings is a promising approach to encourage critical social and emotional competencies for all students. However, this can become challenging for schools to implement manually. There are many setbacks including program cost, competing demands, and content that is pre-programmed and cannot be customized to personal classroom desires. (Lawson et al., 2019). Distinguishing fundamental components of evidence based SEL programs may make it possible to develop more feasible approaches to implementing SEL in schools. To assist in the expansive distribution of SEL curricula, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) published a framework for organizing SEL competencies and analytically identifying well-designed, evidence based SEL programs. Given the large quantity of SEL programs, the CASEL Guide was designed to assist educators in carefully selecting evaluated curricula with well-documented impact and efficacy on student outcomes. (Lawson et al., 2019).

### **Second Step**

Numerous programs have been created to assist teachers in supporting the social and emotional development of students of all ages. One such program is *Second Step*, a comprehensive SEL program developed by the nonprofit organization Committee for Children (2016). Thayer et al., (2019) examined the *Second Step* program with the purpose of gauging whether the program creates considerable effects for different theoretically constructed groupings of students who are representative of the full spectrum of students in a school. The

researchers used data from a large-scale randomized controlled trial evaluating Second Step. They included students in kindergarten through second grade enrolled in five school districts in Washington and in one district in Arizona. The school districts ranged from rural to urban settings and were drafted in spring 2012 (Thayer et al., 2019). They analyzed the extent to which group membership according to the dual continua model of mental health differentially changed based on whether the student was in the intervention or control condition (Thayer et al., 2019). Both conditions experienced transitions in membership but overall, the results evidenced significant effects favoring the intervention condition across groups in line with their general hypotheses, (Thayer et al., 2019). On average, most students demonstrated change in the expected direction, and for most, the differences were larger in favor for the treatment condition. The differential treatment effects at baseline still have vital implications for practitioners and the future development and implementation of evidence-based universal programs (Thayer et al., 2019).

A different approach was applied by Low et al. (2016) who gathered data from participants in one year of randomized, controlled trials of Second Step instruction. Sixty-one schools, 321 teachers, and over 7300 students participated in the study. Schools within Washington and Arizona were matched on free and reduced lunch and percent of non-White students. The results suggested there were no significant differences between treatment and control groups on baseline measures (Low et al., 2016). Latent classes of implementation were then identified to be used to predict student outcomes. Teachers reported student outcomes and on three dimensions of implementation including dosage, adherence, competency. Experimental data was also used to evaluate classroom behavior both disruptive and academic engagement (Low et al., 2016). The results indicated that a three-class model fits the data best, labeled as

high-quality, low-engagement, and low-adherence classes. Only the low-engagement class showed significant associations with poorer outcomes, when compared to the high-quality class (Low et al., 2016).

### **Caring School Community**

The Caring School Community socioemotional learning program is an evidenced-based, student-centered, and comprehensive socioemotional learning program (Sener, 2020). The program consists of advisory lessons, weekly random pairing of students, use of cooperative structures, one-on-one conferences, weekly class meetings, and occasional home connection activities (Sener, 2020). The Caring School Community program components had distinct scripts and examples specific to each grade level. The professional learning plan consists of a 35-minute weekly professional learning collaborative activity, a 90-minute introduction session for teachers with the outside expert, a 1-hour introduction session for the leadership team with the outside expert, monthly 1-hour virtual leadership team meetings with the outside expert, and a 90-minute mock lesson study in each grade with the outside expert (Sener, 2020).

A study was conducted by Matthew Noyes (2020) to examine the implementation of the Caring School Community Program as a Social Emotional Learning curriculum in a middle school setting. The focus of his study was to understand teacher and student perceptions of the program by exploring the positives and negatives of the curriculum and our implementation process (Noyes, 2020). One hundred and seven students completed the 12 question 5- point Likert Scale Qualtrics email survey. Eighty-nine percent of students surveyed (43% strongly agree and 46% agree) reported that they enjoy participating in the Caring School Community lessons. Seventy-three students (68%) feel like the CSC lessons have helped them learn about themselves, while 100 of the students (94%) feel like the lessons have helped them to learn about

others in their learning community (Noyes, 2020). Results indicated that the program may also be an effective vehicle for building caring relationships with and among students (Noyes, 2020).

## **7 Mindsets**

The 7 Mindsets program is a proven, research based SEL curriculum that aids educators in sustaining positive school cultures engrained in relationships (PR Newswire, 2020). 7

Mindsets is different from other K-12 SEL programs in that it nurtures the mindsets of educators first.

The program includes a comprehensive web-based curriculum, professional development and ongoing coaching designed to foster the social emotional health of teachers and provide training needed for everyone to succeed. The curriculum can be configured to work with any school schedule for both on-site and virtual learning. Founded in 2010, 7 Mindsets is a pioneer in delivering social emotional learning (SEL) solutions that include mindsets, equity, and multicultural pedagogy. The program has been implemented with more than 1 million students across the United States and internationally (PR Newswire, 2020).

## **Summary**

Social emotional learning (SEL) curriculums address multiple core competencies and skills (Taylor et al., 2017). The skills students learn through the implementation of SEL programs are extremely beneficial to children, developing inter- and intrapersonal tools to successfully traverse school, adulthood, and even their careers (Taylor et al., 2017). The overall long-term benefits of SEL interventions are clear. Researchers have demonstrated how these interventions are effective in improving prosocial behavior and academic outcomes (Taylor et al., 2017). The success of SEL interventions underlines the importance of adopting these standards in school curricula, along with standard academic goals; however, there is often an

insufficient connection between the SEL skills addressed by studied interventions and the outcomes measured (Taylor et al., 2017).

### **Question**

How does the Second Step SEL curriculum impact student competence in growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness?

### **Theory of Change**

I believe that the Second Step SEL curriculum will increase student competence in growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness. Implementing a lesson from Second Step SEL curriculum every day in class for 25-30 will increase student competence in those areas. This will improve students' behavior and academic readiness.

### **Methodology**

#### **Design**

This is an action research study. The study was executed with a group of fifth graders in hybrid learning model with a desired outcome to improve social and emotional competencies. Data was collected using a self-report survey (Appendix A) that measured four student SEL competencies including growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness. The SEL program was implemented over the course of six weeks. The survey was given at the beginning of the study to gather baseline data, midway at three weeks for analysis, and at end of the research period.

#### **Context**

The study was conducted at a Title 1 urban elementary school in the Pacific Northwest. Students in this study were learning in a hybrid model classroom after being fully remote for the first 6 months of school. Cohort A met on Mondays and Thursdays in person for 5 hours, Cohort

B met in person on Tuesdays and Fridays for 5 hours, and all students zoomed together on Wednesdays for 30 min. Halfway through the study at 3 weeks the cohorts merged, and all students were coming to school 4 days a week for 5 hours with Wednesdays off. The first three weeks of the study the students received Second Step SEL lessons two times a week during their in-person days and one on Wednesdays through Zoom. The following three weeks the students received 4 lessons of SEL in person as a whole group. The lessons were 30-40 min long at the end of the day after lunch.

### **Participants**

Participants were from a fifth-grade classroom in which the researcher completed their student teaching. Data was collected from seven students, age 10-11 years. There were 3 male students and 4 females. One student was on an Individual Education Plan and one with accommodations on a 504 Plan. Five of the students were White, one was African American, and one was Asian.

### **Intervention**

The researcher collected baseline data from the participants in four Social Emotional Learning (SEL) competencies; growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness. The 2011 edition of Second Step curriculum was implemented in the classroom over the course of six weeks.

The researcher observed and took notes on students' behaviors a week prior to implementation to track progress. The researcher taught students in a whole group what social emotional learning (SEL) is using the Second Step curriculum. Students were taught that SEL is a curriculum that includes a wide range of topics that once learned, can affect their success in academics and life. The researcher informed students that research has shown that students who

participated and engaged in SEL interventions showed an increase in prosocial behaviors and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). The students then completed a self-assessment survey (Appendix A), which was used for baseline data. The first three weeks of implementation the students were in a hybrid learning schedule, which was split into two cohorts. They attended school twice a week and received a total of 9 lessons ranging from 25-30 minutes. Three of the nine lessons were taught virtually through zoom as a whole class.

The lessons ranged from whole group activities, small group, and individual reflections. During the first three weeks, the researcher taught the first unit in Second Step, which had a focus on empathy and skills for learning. To address empathy, students were taught that being able to feel and understand what another person is feeling prepares them to manage their own strong emotions and solve interpersonal problems with others (Committee for Children, 2011). They learned skills for identifying emotions in themselves and others, labeling these emotions, and taking the perspectives of others. To address skills for learning, students were taught that this skill is necessary for having empathy, managing emotions, and solving problems (Committee for Children, 2011). Student behaviors were observed during the first three weeks for evidence of change. They received the same survey after the first three weeks to track changes. Throughout the study the students kept track of their mood on a mood tracker (Appendix C).

After the first three weeks, the students merged cohorts and started coming to school four full days each week. This changed the implementation from two days in person with half a class and one virtual as a whole class, to four days in person as a whole class. The students received a total of 12 lessons ranging from 25-30 minutes. All lessons were taught in person and ranged from whole group activities, small group, and individual reflections. During the second three weeks, the researcher taught the second unit and all but one lesson in the third unit of Second

Step. These two units included lessons on emotion management and problem solving. For emotion management, students were taught proactive strategies that help prevent strong emotions from escalating into negative behaviors. Calm students are better able to use other skills, such as problem solving, to help them get along better with others and make good choices (Committee for Children, 2011). For problem solving, the students were taught to create a neutral problem statement, generating safe and respectful solutions, and evaluating the consequences of these solutions steers themselves toward selecting prosocial behavior. Student behaviors were observed during the second three weeks for evidence of change. They received the same survey after the first three weeks and the researcher tracked the data. Throughout the study, the students kept track of their mood on a mood tracker (Appendix C). Data were collected and analyzed.

### **Data Gathering Instruments/Assessments**

**Assessment #1: SEL self-assessment survey.** The Social Emotional Learning Self-Assessment Survey (Appendix A) is a self-report rating scale that assesses four student social emotional learning (SEL) competencies. The assessment is strength-based. The researcher measured student competence in four SEL competencies; growth-mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness from a self-assessment survey (Appendix A).

**Assessment #2: Researcher observational notes.** The observational notes (Appendix B) were taken weekly by the researcher to track students' behavior, peer connection, mood, and the four SEL competencies.

**Assessment #3: Student mood tracker assessment.** Students tracked their mood daily throughout the study on a mood tracker (Appendix C). They tracked their mood by coloring in the coordinating color to their mood/ feeling from the day.

### **Action Research Cycles**

After identifying the problem of students having limited to no peer interaction between each other in the last year, a plan was developed to identify the potential increase in competence of student's growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness using Second Step curriculum. During implementation of Second Step social emotional learning curriculum (SEL) data was tracked using self-assessment surveys (Appendix A) and behavioral observation (Appendix B). After analyzing the data collected after the first three weeks a decrease in social awareness occurred. The implementation was adjusted for the following three weeks with integrated empathy training in premade lessons. After data analysis, the researcher concluded that there was an overall increase in competence over 6 weeks of implementing Second Step SEL curriculum.

### **Results**

The researcher gathered qualitative data to determine how the Second Step SEL curriculum impacted student competence in growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness. At the conclusion of the six-week study, the results of student competence were calculated (Appendix D). The class averages of scores from each time they took the survey were compared.

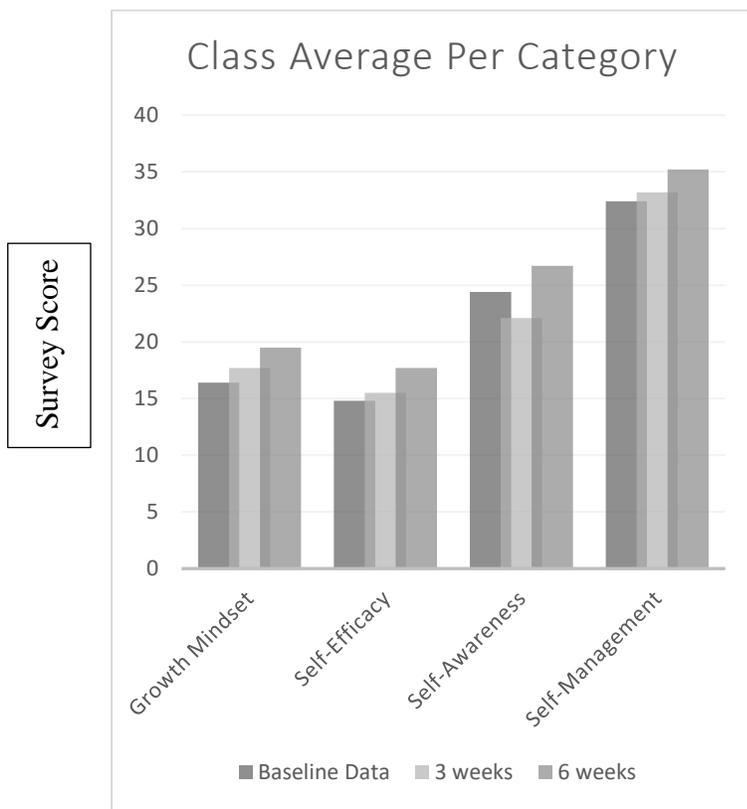
Data collected (Appendix D) showed an increase for all students, in all four SEL categories, after 6 weeks of implementing Second Step SEL curriculum compared to baseline data. Baseline data (Appendix A), data collected from observational notes (see Appendix B), and data collected from student mood tracker (Appendix C) were compared. The baseline data showed that the class average survey score increased from 88.1 prior to implementation to 99.2

at the end of week 6. Scores are out of 110 and are only relevant to show percentage increase among student competence. This showed an average increase of 9.8% competence.

When the data was divided by each of the four competencies (Figure 1) you can see the increase or decrease of class average scores in growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness.

Figure 1

*Comparison of class average SEL competence Baseline Data v. Post Second Step SEL Implementation Data*



As indicated in Figure 1, there was an overall increase in score throughout all categories by the end of six weeks. There was minimal increase from baseline data to three weeks in the growth-mindset, self-efficiency, and self-management competencies and a decrease in self-awareness. There was a slightly larger increase in scores from the 3-week mark to the end of 6

weeks in all categories. This increase could have resulted from the number of lessons the researcher was able to do in the final three weeks of the study. When the students moved to in-person learning at the end of three weeks the students got one more Second Step SEL lesson a week and the virtual lesson was also in person.

After analyzing the data collected in the first three weeks and noticing the decrease in self-awareness, changes were made to the lessons. The following 3 weeks the Second Step curriculum lessons were implemented as directed but with additional self-awareness lessons and practice. The lessons were taken from the Second Step curriculum and used again with emphasis.

The student mood tracker (Appendix C) and researcher observational notes (Appendix B) were aligned and analyzed to triangulate the data collected. The researcher observational notes also tracked student self-management and social awareness supporting the results of the student's self-reflection surveys. There were no assessments that had vastly different information.

Validity: The researcher followed a qualitative action research approach to collect data about fifth grade students' competence in growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness, while following a systematic inquiry-based model with continuous, ongoing reflective planning (Hendricks, 2017). To maintain the trustworthiness of this study, a combination of strategies for increasing the validity of the study were used. To demonstrate that the results had an accurate representation of what occurred during the study, three data sources were gathered and triangulated (Hendricks, 2017).

## **Conclusions**

Based on data analysis, the researcher confirmed that Second Step SEL Program had a positive effect on student competence in growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness. The class average score on their survey increased by 11.1 points showing

growth in competence. The researcher observational notes supported the data from the survey and showed an increase in students' positive behavior, self-management skills, social-awareness, self-efficiency, and growth mindset. By the end of the study, students were more prepared for class each day, had positive attitudes towards school and their peers, and were more aware of their feelings as well as the feelings of others. Students' feedback on the mood tracker also supported the data gathered from the researcher's observational notes (Appendix B). At the beginning of the intervention in the first week, 71% students were choosing lower moods such as tired, sad, stressed, and anxious. By the end of the intervention at week 6, 85% of the students chose positive moods such as excited, happy, and joyful.

### **Relevance**

The results supported that teachers can positively impact the students using Second Step because SEL interventions are successful in improving prosocial behavior and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011). Student social emotional learning competencies can give educators valuable information that helps them understand students' strengths and identify the areas in which students need additional support (Dweck et al., 2014). When used correctly SEL competencies can help teachers tailor their instruction and classroom environment to assist students more effectively.

Each of the four competencies discussed in this study have their own benefits for student education. Self-management skills help students regulate their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations (Brauner, 2006). Self-efficiency reflects confidence in the ability for students to have sufficient control over his/her environment to succeed. Students with a growth mindset believed that they could develop their skills through effort, practice, and perseverance (Brauner, 2006). Students who can demonstrate strong social awareness are able to

engage in a positive communication with their peers and solve conflicts as they arise (Brauner, 2006).

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations. First, the students had been learning virtually from their homes for over six months prior to the study. During the first three weeks of the study, students were only coming in-person twice a week at half capacity thus limiting the number of lessons taught. Three lessons were taught virtually. Midway through the study the students schedule changed to in-person full capacity, four days a week.

Second, outside factors could also have influenced student's mood tracker. Students social emotional learning competencies were not the only consideration when students were completing the charts. Students' life outside of school may have influenced them emotionally thus changing their mood.

Finally, data was only tracked for 7 students. A researcher would need a much larger population of students to implement Second Step SEL curriculum to determine if the study could be generalized.

### **Recommendations**

There are three recommendations to improve the design of this study. First, I recommend extending the study. Not only to provide more time for lessons but to expand the research to tracking the long-term impact of the SEL implementation.

The second recommendation would be to increase the number of questions on the survey in both the growth-mindset and self-efficiency categories. Adding statements like "I can learn from my mistakes" and "challenging myself won't make me any smarter." Extending the survey can give the researcher more information about the student's social and emotional competence.

The final recommendation would be to implement the study in other grade levels, to see if the Second Step social emotional learning (SEL) program would improve student competence in growth mindset, self-efficiency, self-management, and social awareness. Second Step has lessons designed for kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade but was only tracked in 5<sup>th</sup> grade for this study.

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## Appendix A

### SEL Self-assessment survey

***SEL Self-assessment Survey***

*Self-Management*

Please answer by circling how often you did the following during the past 30 days.

I came to class ready.	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Once in a While</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost All the Time</i>
I followed directions.	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Once in a While</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost All the Time</i>
I immediately got my work done instead of waiting until the last minute.	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Once in a While</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost All the Time</i>
I did not get distracted and paid attention.	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Once in a While</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost All the Time</i>
I stayed concentrated on my work.	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Once in a While</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost All the Time</i>
I stayed calm even when my peers distracted me.	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Once in a While</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost All the Time</i>
I shouted out in class.	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Once in a While</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost All the Time</i>
I was well-mannered to my teacher and peers.	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Once in a While</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost All the Time</i>

Adapted from CASEL (2018) Student self-report of social and emotional competencies.

<https://measuringSEL.casel.org/product/core-districts-sel-survey/>.

**Appendix A (continued)**

*Growth Mindset*

**Circle** how true each of the following statements is for you:

My intelligence is something that I can't change very much.	<i>Not at All True</i>	<i>A Little True</i>	<i>Somewhat True</i>	<i>Mostly True</i>	<i>Completely True</i>
I will not become smarter facing challenges.	<i>Not at All True</i>	<i>A Little True</i>	<i>Somewhat True</i>	<i>Mostly True</i>	<i>Completely True</i>
There are some things I cannot learn.	<i>Not at All True</i>	<i>A Little True</i>	<i>Somewhat True</i>	<i>Mostly True</i>	<i>Completely True</i>
If I don't understand a subject now, I never will.	<i>Not at All True</i>	<i>A Little True</i>	<i>Somewhat True</i>	<i>Mostly True</i>	<i>Completely True</i>

*Self-Efficacy*

**Circle** how confident are you about the following at school?

I can earn an A in my classes.	<i>Not At All Confident</i>	<i>A Little Confident</i>	<i>Somewhat Confident</i>	<i>Mostly Confident</i>	<i>Completely Confident</i>
I can do well on all my tests, even when they're difficult.	<i>Not At All Confident</i>	<i>A Little Confident</i>	<i>Somewhat Confident</i>	<i>Mostly Confident</i>	<i>Completely Confident</i>
I can become a master in the hardest topics in my classes.	<i>Not At All Confident</i>	<i>A Little Confident</i>	<i>Somewhat Confident</i>	<i>Mostly Confident</i>	<i>Completely Confident</i>
I can meet and exceed all the learning goals my teachers set.	<i>Not At All Confident</i>	<i>A Little Confident</i>	<i>Somewhat Confident</i>	<i>Mostly Confident</i>	<i>Completely Confident</i>

Adapted from CASEL (2018) Student self-report of social and emotional competencies.

<https://measuring.sel.casel.org/product/core-districts-sel-survey/>.

**Appendix A (continued)**

*Social Awareness*

**Circle** how often you did the following during the past 30 days. During the past 30 days...

How carefully did you consider other people's points of view?	<i>Not Carefully At All</i>	<i>Slightly Carefully</i>	<i>Somewhat Carefully</i>	<i>Quite Carefully</i>	<i>Extremely Carefully</i>
How much did you care about other people's feelings?	<i>Did Not Care At All</i>	<i>Cared A Little Bit</i>	<i>Cared Somewhat</i>	<i>Cared Quite A Bit</i>	<i>Cared A Tremendous Amount</i>
How often did you praise your peers accomplishments?	<i>Almost Never</i>	<i>Once in a while</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost all the time</i>
How well did you get along with students who are different from you?	<i>Did Not Get Along At All</i>	<i>Got Along A Little Bit</i>	<i>Got Along Somewhat</i>	<i>Got Along Pretty Well</i>	<i>Got Along Extremely Well</i>
How clearly were you able to describe your moods?	<i>Not At All Clearly</i>	<i>Slightly Clearly</i>	<i>Somewhat Clearly</i>	<i>Quite Clearly</i>	<i>Extremely Clearly</i>
When others disagreed with you, how respectful was your response?	<i>Not At All Respectful</i>	<i>Slightly Respectful</i>	<i>Somewhat Respectful</i>	<i>Quite Respectful</i>	<i>Extremely Respectful</i>

Adapted from CASEL (2018) Student self-report of social and emotional competencies.

<https://measuringSEL.casel.org/product/core-districts-sel-survey/>.

## Appendix B

### Researcher Observational Notes

Teacher Observational Notes

Student:	Date:
Observation: (behavior, peer connection, signs of distress)	

Student:	Date:
Observation: (behavior, peer connection, signs of distress)	

Appendix C

# MOOD tracker

A large grid for mood tracking with numbered boxes from 1 to 31. Box 20 is highlighted with a separate box containing the numbers 20 and 21.

- |  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
|  | EXCITED            |
|  | ENERGETIC          |
|  | HAPPY              |
|  | JOY                |
|  | FOCUSED/PRODUCTIVE |
|  | CALM               |
|  | OKAY               |
|  | SAD                |
|  | DEPRESSED          |
|  | ANXIOUS/STRESSED   |
|  | ANNOYED            |
|  | FEAR               |
|  | ANGER              |

**Appendix D**  
**Results Table**

Table 1

*Comparison of SEL competence Baseline Data v.*

*Post Second Step SEL Implementation Data*

Student	Overall baseline survey score	Overall survey score after 3 weeks of SEL implementation	Overall survey score after 6 weeks of SEL implementation	% difference between baseline and 6 weeks
1	87	95	103	(+) 14%
2	86	82	95	(+) 6%
3	75	75	92	(+) 15%
4	105	105	108	(+) 3%
5	71	72	88	(+) 16%
6	93	92	105	(+) 11%
7	100	100	104	(+) 4%
<b>Average</b>	<b>88.1</b>	<b>88.7</b>	<b>99.2</b>	<b>(+) 9.8%</b>