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Exploring Implementation of Second Step at a Suburban Elementary School:

An Appreciative Participatory Inquiry Process

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The names of the school and city have been changed, and the demographic data has been modified slightly, to protect privacy.

Exploring Implementation of Second Step at a Suburban Elementary School:

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The focus on academic achievement and standardized testing in U.S. public schools has become a matter of public concern in recent years. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) have increased pressure on schools to ensure that students perform at high levels academically. As a result, schools often place an excessive focus on academics to the exclusion of other critical aspects of childhood education, in particular social-emotional learning (SEL). What is missed in this rigorous academic model is that social emotional competence is itself strongly correlated with positive learning outcomes in addition to interpersonal success (Garner, Mahatmya, Brown, & Vesely, 2014). In order to provide all children with opportunities to learn about and practice the skills that will make them socially and emotionally competent adults, as well as successful learners, it is critical to ensure that SEL is an integral part of the education that children are provided at school.

My action research project focused on the current state of the school-wide SEL curriculum at Bruner Elementary School in Safe, CA. Safe is a small, economically advantaged suburban city in the San Francisco Bay Area. Per U.S. Census Bureau (2015) estimates, Safe has a population of 20,000 living in its 2 square miles. Bruner Elementary School is a high-performing school located in a quiet, well-kept residential neighborhood in Safe that

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provides a good-quality learning environment to its 600 students (California Department of Education [CDE], 2015), including a school-wide SEL program.

While significant data is available on Bruner's academic successes, less is known about the successes of its SEL curriculum. Thus, my project sprang from a place of wondering how effectively social-emotional skills were being taught to Bruner students. Bruner and the other schools in the Safe Unified School District use the Second Step school-wide curriculum (Committee for Children, 2011). In addition, many other SEL programs (e.g., Mindful Schools, Welcoming Schools, Speak Up Be Safe, Tribes, Conflict Managers) exist at the school and are implemented to varying degrees. My Participatory Inquiry Process (PIP) (Lewis & Winkelman, 2017) involved speaking with teachers and students about what they enjoyed/appreciated about SEL in general and Second Step in particular at Bruner, what they found helpful or impactful, and what their visions were for making Second Step even more effective and beneficial in the future. I used a perspective of Appreciative Inquiry (Ludema & Fry, 2008; Lewis & Winkelman, 2017) to inform my approach to these conversations, so that the focus was on drawing out current strengths and considering how to build on those strengths to arrive at a dreamed-of future. Out of these conversations and the data gathered, I generated recommendations for future action that I shared with the principal, in the hopes that she and other major stakeholders at Bruner would consider and potentially implement my recommendations in order to move SEL at the school toward a more positive future.

Literature Review

A recent meta-analysis of 213 universal school-based SEL programs in K-12 schools found that overall, students that took part in SEL programs saw significant gains in both

social-emotional functioning and academic performance (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Carey, Dimmitt, Hatch, Lapan, & Whiston, 2008). In fact, the data indicate that participants gained an average of 11 percentile points in measures of academic achievement, in addition to "improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, [and] behavior" (Durlak et al., p. 405). Based on the preponderance of existing research, SEL is integral to academic success in schools.

Of the multitude of SEL programs that are currently on the market, Second Step is among the oldest and most well-known. The curriculum, based on the social learning theory developed by Bandura (1986, as cited in Larsen & Samdal, 2011), was first developed in 1986. It is designed to be presented by teachers and integrated into the classroom learning environment. Parents can also take part in reinforcing Second Step lessons through the use of supplemental materials designed for use in the home. The current Second Step curriculum for K-5 students focuses on four domains of SEL: skills for learning, empathy, emotion management, and problem solving (Committee for Children, 2011). Research regarding the impact of the program suggests that students who go through the Second Step program may become less physically aggressive and more prosocial as a result of the curriculum (Frey, Hirschstein, & Guzzo, 2000, as cited in Larsen & Samdal, 2008). Other research has found that Second Step increased coping and cooperation, as well as prosocial attitudes (Cooke et al., 2007; Neace & Muñoz, 2012) and social competence (Holseon, Smith, & Frye, 2008). Not all research has produces such positive data, however. For example, one study found that while Second Step reduced homophobic verbal aggression and sexual violence, it had no significant impact on overall bullying and aggressive behaviors (Espelage, Low, Polanin, & Brown, 2014). Another study found that Second Step

increased social and emotional knowledge, but also increased behavioral and emotional risk

(Brown, Jimerson, Dowd, Gonzalez, & Stewart, 2012).

Part of what mediates the level of success of Second Step may be the support teachers

receive from administration in the implementation process. Graham, Phelps, Maddison, and

Fitzgerald (2011) report that teachers overwhelmingly understand that mental health is a critical

part of any education program, but many feel poorly equipped to teach social-emotional skills to

their students. Larsen and Samdal (2008) found that in order for school-wide Second Step

implementation specifically to be maximally effective, school principals need to carefully lead

and manage the process by providing training, time for collaboration among teachers, and room

in the class schedule to teach the lesson. Ongoing follow-up, such as requesting feedback and

reminders of the importance of the program, are also required to maintain teachers' focus over

time (Larsen & Samdal, 2008). Further, the more extensive the school-wide implementation is,

the more likely teachers are to carry out the lesson plans with fidelity (Larsen & Samdal, 2007).

When implemented effectively, Second Step can potentially strengthen the entire school

community in a range of cultural settings. A study of the effects of Second Step on primary

teachers in Norway found that they reported positive changes to their communication with

students, parents, and colleagues following the use of Second Step in their classrooms (Larsen &

Samdal, 2011). Second Step provides a clear series of problem solving steps that can be used in

situations in and out of the classroom, and it also provides a framework to use in discussing

student behavior and possible interventions with parents.

The framework that I used to explore teacher and student experiences of Second Step

implementation at Bruner Elementary School was modeled on Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a

methodology that centers on identifying the *positive core* within an organization as a means of strengthening and expanding that core to ultimately move toward the realization of the organization's greatest envisioned potential (Ludema & Fry, 2008). In other words, AI focuses on what is already working rather than on what is deficient or weak. The AI perspective "redirects conversations toward figuring what can be done to work together to create what is desired" (Lewis & Winkelman, 2017, p. 64). Traditionally, this is done through the "4-D" model of AI (Ludema & Fry, 2008; Hennessy & Hughes, 2014; Modic, 2015; Filfolt & Lander, 2013), which includes the following steps: "(1) *discovery* of the best of what is, (2) *dream* to imaging what could be, (3) *design* what will be, and (4) *destiny* – to enact change learning to become what we most hope for" (Ludema & Fry, 2008, p. 283; italics added). An alternative model posed by Lewis & Winkelman (2017) is the "4-R" model, which is centered on what they call *relational wellness* or "relationships and interactions grounded in mutual respect and the shared goal of promoting the learning power of individuals, groups, and the organization" (p. 69). This process includes: (1) *relational connection* through empathetic listening, (2) *relational dialogue* about positive possibilities with and among a wide range of organizational stakeholders, (3) *relational action* through taking initial cooperative steps toward bringing about the positive dreams inherent in a new reality, and (4) *relational assessment* and reflection about the results of actions taken and recommendations for further steps. Both models provide a positive framework for approaching organizational assessment and change. Although this project did not strictly follow either the 4-D or the 4-R model, it is infused with the spirit of AI, and particularly with the elements of *discovery/dream* and *relational connection/relational dialogue*.

Community

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The city of Safe is an educated, diverse community. Most adults in Safe (70%) have at least a Bachelor's degree, and the median household income is $80,000. Safe has somewhat diverse racial demographics: 55% White; 30% Asian; 10% Hispanic or Latino; 4% Black or African American; .5% American Indian or Alaska Native; .2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; and 7% Two or More Races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Per the *2013-2014 School Accountability Report Card for Bruner Elementary School* (CDE, 2015), Bruner has similar racial demographics: 39% White; 31% Asian; 13% Hispanic or Latino; 2% Black or African-American, .5% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; .3% Filipino; and 14% Two or More Races. Of the student population, 13% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, 26% are English learners (with a total of 29 languages spoken at the school), and 8% have disabilities (CDE, 2015). Bruner is outperforming district and state averages in terms of academic testing results, with 83% of students testing Proficient or above in Math and 77% testing Proficient or above in English Language Arts, and it has a statewide Academic Performance Index (API) Rank of 9/10 (CDE, 2015).

This action research was conducted with a sampling of Bruner teachers and students. In order to obtain teacher input from the different grade levels, I asked for one teacher volunteer from each grade level (K-5) to participate in the study, making a total of six teachers who were interviewed in a one-on-one setting. All teachers who volunteered were White and female (consistent with the majority of teachers at the school). Of those six teachers, I asked three of them to allow me to distribute informed consent and permission slips for the children in their classrooms (approximately 85 students total) to participate in focus groups looking at their thoughts about Second Step from the perspective of AI. I identified one 2nd grade classroom, one

4th grade classroom, and one 5th grade classroom in which to conduct focus groups. Focus group participation was offered to all students in these three classrooms. Five 5th graders, four 4th graders, and six 2nd graders returned their parent permission and student consent forms and participated in the groups. Of the 15 students, eight were White, five were Asian, one was Native American, and one was Filipino. There was one student with special education eligibility in each focus group, for a total of three. Seven student participants were girls and eight were boys. None were English learners (it was not feasible to translate the permission slip and informed consent documents for this project). Although not a perfect reflection of the demographics of the school as a whole, this mix of students did bring a variety of perspectives to the focus groups.

Participatory Inquiry Process: Initial Steps

This section details the participatory inquiry process described in Lewis and Winkelman (2017) that guided the current action research project.

Phase One: Initiating Conversations and Identifying Challenges

Step 1: Ecology of place. Overall, Bruner appears to be a well-functioning elementary school. Many teachers and staff remarked to me that it is rare for staff to leave the school due, to its desirability as a workplace. The school offers individual and group mental health counseling and a wealth of academic supports for students that need such supports. It also offers a robust range of services for students in special education such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, adaptive physical education, and full inclusion services. The school is clean, the yard is large and contains a nice playground, and the classrooms are well maintained. The PTA is highly involved in the life of the school. Nevertheless, according to teachers and other staff, there are many

students at Bruner that struggle with bullying, low self-esteem, and other common social-emotional problems.

Step 2: Changing one thing. In speaking with my supervisor, the principal, and other school staff, I learned that one thing that has been historically lacking at Bruner is a school-wide SEL program. While many programs have been offered over the years, it has traditionally been up to individual teachers to decide whether and to what extent to teach SEL in their classrooms. This year, for the first time, teachers in every classroom were directed to implement the Second Step SEL program. In addition, Second Step mini-lessons were included in staff and parent newsletters most weeks, and the principal supplemented Second Step lessons in the lower grades by giving related lunchtime talks to K-3 students in the multipurpose room on Mondays and Fridays. While the principal expressed hope that Second Step would lead to an increase in positive student outcomes, there was nothing concrete in place to gauge whether Bruner was moving in the direction of fulfilling that hope.

Phase 2: Engaged Inquiry

Step 3: Exploring possibilities. While Second Step was purportedly being implemented school-wide, teachers had not received any specific in-service or supplemental trainings, and there had been no opportunities for formal dialogue about program strengths or implementation challenges. Additionally, students and families had not been provided with any opportunities to provide feedback to teachers or administrators about how they perceived the program. Rather, teachers had simply been given access to the Second Step curriculum and directed to implement it in their classrooms. The exception was that in two classrooms, mental health interns were

teaching the Second Step lessons each week; however, the principal felt strongly that teachers, rather than interns or other support personnel, should be teaching the classroom lessons.

Step 4: Talking to key allies. The principal noted that it would be helpful for her to know what teachers and students really thought about Second Step, whether they found it to be useful, and whether it was being implemented consistently in classrooms. As no data was available, my questions were very basic ones: Are teachers using Second Step, and to what extent? What do they like about it? What do they find valuable? Do students enjoy the lessons? Do students learn anything that they find to be valuable in their lives? Do teachers offer other types of social-emotional learning in their classrooms that they see as or more beneficial than Second Step?

While much quantitative data could be gathered using a general survey asking teachers to report the frequency and duration of their Second Step lessons, their overall satisfaction with the program, etc., the principal and I did not want this research to feel like a program evaluation or audit coming from administration and from a power position. Rather, we wanted to create an opportunity for honest and open-ended feedback that was strengths-based yet authentic. In addition, we felt it was important to hear the voices of Bruner students as well as teachers. Thus, we agreed that I would use an AI-oriented approach to gather qualitative feedback about SEL and Second Step at Bruner from teachers and students by engaging them in conversations about SEL and seeking to find the strengths and potentials that currently existed. The hope was that this process would lead to recommendations regarding how to further strengthen SEL programming at Bruner going forward.

Phase 3: Collaborative Action

Step 5: Problems, challenges, and actions defined and shared. My intervention

involved (a) interviewing one teacher volunteer from each grade level, and (b) forming focus

groups from the classrooms of three teacher participants. The interviews consisted of a set of six

defined, positively-framed questions about Second Step and SEL at Bruner (Appendix A), and

the focus groups with students utilized a similar list of six questions (Appendix B). The

challenge and action informing the questions was designed as an AI approach to elicit and listen

to the voices of the teachers and students who were participating in Second Step, with a central

goal of determining the *positive core* (Ludema & Fry, 2008) of Second Step and SEL at Bruner

in order to build upon it.

My problem statement was as follows: There is no mechanism in place to gather data

about the feasibility, acceptability, or perceived success of Second Step and other

social-emotional learning activities at Bruner. My hypothesis was that the results of this initial

AI process would be twofold: 1) Teachers and students would be able to identify multiple

successes and strengths of Second Step and other SEL activities as implemented at Bruner

Elementary School; and 2) these ideas, once shared with the administration, would point to a

path or path(s) forward that could strengthen the SEL curriculum as a whole in future years. In

addition, by engaging in a positive and optimistic future-forming or lifescaping evaluation

process, I was hopeful that participants would experience an increased commitment to SEL at

Bruner.

Step 6: Taking action. I received approval from the University Institutional Review

Board (IRB) to move forward with my research on December 13, 2015. At a weekly staff

meeting on January 20, 2016, I made a general announcement to the Bruner staff explaining the

research and asking for volunteers. Teacher volunteers from each grade level stepped forward over the next several days, and as of February 1, 2016, all teacher interviews were completed. Permission slips were then distributed to students in the 2nd-, 4th- and 5th-grade classrooms of the teacher participants, with a deadline of February 12, 2016. All students who returned signed slips participated in the focus groups. Student focus groups were held between February 25 and March 1, 2016.

Phase Four: Community Assessment and Reflections

       Step 7: Results and reflection. Teacher interviews began with teachers signing a consent form. They were provided with the written list of the six questions, and the researcher then read each question to the teacher and gave the teacher an opportunity to respond. Follow-up questions were used for clarification purposes. Teacher interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Focus groups began with an explanation of the research and the signing of minor assent forms. Confidentiality and respectful listening were discussed. Students were then asked each question in turn (e.g., each student was given an opportunity to answer question one before the group moved on to question two). They were also provided with a written list of the questions for reference. Student focus groups lasted approximately one hour. All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded so that transcripts could be produced and themes identified.

       A careful review of the interview recordings revealed many positive themes, as well as hopes for the future. Teachers felt overwhelmingly that the social-emotional climate at Bruner was already strong, with students exhibiting great care and support of one another, good conflict resolution skills, and a common language such as the use of an "I" message (taken from Bruner's Conflict Managers program) to solve conflicts. In addition, teachers expressed their own

commitment to the social-emotional health of their students, and a desire to connect with students on a more personal level.

Many teachers noted that social-emotional programs besides Second Step (such as Conflict Managers and Mindful Schools) have contributed greatly to the positive climate of the school. For a plurality of teachers, the abundance of social-emotional tools and curricula at the school was a point of frustration, because different teachers have different preferences and it was considered difficult to allocate time for social-emotional learning appropriately. For others, the shift in priority to Second Step caused some confusion among the teachers, as they did not understand why other programs were now considered less important.

With respect to Second Step specifically, teachers expressed many benefits to the program, including exposing students to important concepts like empathy, providing tools (e.g., songs, videos, posters for the wall, puppets for the younger children) to illustrate important points, and provoking class-wide conversations about topics of personal, emotional importance to the students. One teacher noted that parent feedback about the program was also very positive. However, several teachers expressed a desire to find a way to shorten lessons so that they could be taught with greater frequency.

When asked about their dreams for the future of Second Step, many teachers offered innovative and creative suggestions for increasing the effectiveness and dynamism of the curriculum. Ideas included having student ambassadors travel from class to class performing skits related to Second Step themes; providing time and opportunity for training; and creating spaces for teachers to collaborate and mentor one another around teaching Second Step. Teachers

were also interested in being able to just have a conversation about how other teachers were feeling about the curriculum as a whole.

When considering their recommendations for use of Second Step, most teachers indicated that the curriculum was most useful when it was adapted to suit individual preferences and needs within different classrooms and grade levels. Whether this meant skipping certain lessons, incorporating novel activities or elements, or slowing the progression of lessons down, each teacher had unique ideas about how to be most successful with Second Step in their own classroom. All teachers acknowledged that they were not teaching Second Step each week (although the staff and parent newsletters indicated that they were), and only one teacher of the six reported being on track to finish all of the Second Step lessons by the end of the year. All teachers felt like the pace expected of them was unrealistic. Furthermore, and consistent with the literature, every teacher interviewed explicitly articulated a desire to have increased opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues to improve their own implementation of Second Step.

The student focus groups, similar to the teacher interviews, produced a wealth of information. Students expressed strong social-emotional capacities, such as resolving conflicts and seeking out help when feeling upset. Many students identified their peers, rather than adults, as their primary sources of emotional support at school, although some students did mention that they would go to teachers or yard duty personnel when they needed help with a social problem. Reflections on conflict resolution at all grade levels centered largely on walking away, asking a peer or an adult to mediate, or using some kind of relaxation strategy (e.g., taking deep breaths) to calm down. Conflict managers were mentioned as a less desirable tool due to the frequently perceived uncomfortable nature of conflict mediation through this process.

When asked how adults could support their emotional well-being at school, students had some unexpected input. Several mentioned that they felt talked down to by teachers and administrators, and that boys were treated differently than girls. Students expressed a wish to be treated with respect, and for equal treatment across genders to be the norm. Many students did, however, acknowledge the supportiveness of their teachers in listening to them and offering help when needed, and appreciation for teachers when suggesting strategies to help students calm down.

As far as the usefulness of Second Step, students found the most useful parts of the lessons to be the songs, posters, and specific phrases that stuck in their heads and reminded them of key concepts (e.g., empathy). Many students found the lessons themselves to be somewhat awkward, but others noted that the conversations provoked by the lessons could be extremely beneficial and enlightening. They had many suggestions for improving Second Step, most of which involved increasing student involvement (e.g., writing skits, planning activities, including art projects and group work). The overarching message from the students was that they would like more opportunities to make Second Step their own and to tailor it to their interests. They also uniformly expressed a desire to spend more time in informal discussion around the themes rather than formal instruction time; this was especially true among the 4th and 5th grade focus group participants.

Overall, much rich content was gleaned from the interviews and focus groups. However, this preliminary research had many limitations as well. There were relatively few participants, and all were self-selected (or parent-selected) and thus were likely to be more invested in Second Step than those that did not volunteer. In addition, the participants did not reflect all

demographic groups that are present at the school (e.g., there were no male teachers, African American or Hispanic students, or English learners). Thus, some important voices are missing from the data. Furthermore, the interviews and focus groups were very brief, meaning that many themes had to be covered quickly and without great depth. With respect to the student participants, they did not represent all of the grade levels at the school, and the questions themselves were not modified for specific grade levels. The 2nd graders had substantial difficulty responding to many of the questions, as the questions were more appropriate for older students.

One of the largest limitations of the study was that all data gathered was qualitative. Although I did not want to use questionnaires or other quantitative measures that may have made teachers feel audited, it would be extremely valuable to know exactly how often teachers are providing Second Step lessons, and how long the lessons typically last. This would help the administration to determine, for example, how much time they would need to make in the schedule for teachers to feel that they could proceed with a full and regular implementation of Second Step.

Finally, it is important to note that not all stakeholder groups were included in this process. Administration, parents, specialists, and instructional aides, among others, likely have thoughts about Second Step and social-emotional learning at Bruner. Given the research design of this study, such voices could not be heard.

Step 8: Recommendations. Several recommendations for future action arose from the results of this action research, a handful of which are enumerated here. First, staff should be allocated time and opportunity for training, dialogue, and discussion around Second Step and other SEL programs. Second, teachers should be given the chance to observe each other teaching

lessons. Third, it would be beneficial to gather anonymous polling data from teachers and students about which SEL programs they prefer and would like to prioritize. Such data could suggest whether Second Step is the most useful program to emphasize at Bruner. Fourth, teachers should be encouraged to adapt and modify lessons to suit their own classrooms, and to involve their students as much as possible in planning and implementation. Fifth, students should be given a voice and an active, participatory role in SEL in classrooms. Sixth, the importance of classroom conversations about core SEL topics should be emphasized, as students expressed that such conversations are useful, informative, and greatly enjoyable.

Step 9: Plans for action. The final step in this process was to compile the results of this research into a brief, bulleted, user-friendly fact sheet that I shared with the school principal Appendix C). This document included a brief summary of the findings and recommendations described above, with an emphasis on both identified strengths and future opportunities for growth. I also offered to provide further staff training in the importance of SEL during the Spring term, but my offer was declined due to scheduling constraints. Ideally, one or more of the recommendations will be implemented in the coming years as the school community works to strengthen its social-emotional program on an ongoing basis.

Conclusion

While this action research project barely scratched the surface of understanding how to optimize social-emotional teaching and learning at Bruner, it provided some initial insights into the strengths and potential of SEL in the school community. Fortunately, both teachers and students expressed many existing social-emotional strengths (both individual and communal) and interest in social-emotional growth and development. Additionally, both groups demonstrated

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familiarity with many SEL concepts (e.g., conflict resolution, empathy) and motivation to apply

those concepts in their lives. As the Bruner community continues to work toward ever-greater

success in teaching and promoting SEL, my hope is that the conversations started with teachers

and students over the course of this project will continue, and will deepen. Whether or not

Second Step continues to be the SEL curriculum of record at Bruner, the information gleaned

through these interviews and focus groups highlights the potential for even more successful

social-emotional teaching and learning at the school going forward.

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Appendix A

Teacher Interview Questions

1. How would you characterize the climate at Bruner in terms of social-emotional learning? What do you think are this school's primary strengths as far as promoting the social-emotional health of all students?

2. How do you see students successfully resolving conflicts at Bruner? Do you have any examples? What do you see in the school climate that helps students be effective in dealing with conflict?

3. What do you see as your own strengths as a promoter of social-emotional competence in your students? Is there anything you can think of that would help you grow in this regard?

4. How have you seen the relational connections between your students be enhanced by Second Step? Are there ways that you can envision even greater success in this regard moving forward?

5. What are two or three hopes you have to increase the effectiveness of Second Step as a school-wide social-emotional curriculum at Bruner in the future?

6. What would you suggest to other teachers who are using Second Step with students?

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Appendix B

Student Focus Group Questions

1. When you have feelings at school that are hard, like feeling mad or sad, who helps you? How do they help you? What helps you the most when you are feeling upset or worried?

2. What are some skills you use to help you when you have a disagreement with someone at school? What is the very best way that you know of to stop a disagreement that you are having?

3. What is one thing you would like your teacher or other adults at the school to do to help you feel happy and good about yourself?

4. What is one way that you use Second Step lessons to help you get along when you are with your family or friends?

5. What is something that might make Second Step lessons better or more exciting for you in the future?

6. What would you suggest to other students about how to get the most out of Second Step?

Appendix C

Research Summary Fact Sheet

Second Step: Successes and Dreams
Summary Results of an Action Research Project at Bruner Elementary School
by Bethany Toy

Second Step: Does It Work?
The Literature Says...
- Universal social emotional learning (SEL) programs increase student academic performance by an average of 11 percentile points. AND...
- Teachers know this, but they don't always feel equipped to teach these skills.
- Second Step   lead to: a decrease in aggression and an increase in prosocial attitudes and behavior; cooperation; coping; and social competence. BUT...
- Second Step is not always successful. Factors contributing to successful implementation include:
    o Amount of training teachers receive
    o Time for collaboration/mentorships between teachers
    o Room in class schedules to consistently present lessons
    o Opportunities to provide feedback about program to administration and one another
    o Accountability
- When Second Step is implemented successfully, teachers report that it   . It improves their communication with students, parents, and colleagues.

What about the Bruner Community?
The Teachers Say...
- They are passionate about social-emotional learning and enjoy connecting with their students on that level.
- Bruner students are caring and supportive of one another and have many conflict resolution skills (e.g., using an "I" message to solve conflicts).
- The many social-emotional programs that exist/have existed at Bruner have contributed to the positive climate of the school (but it can be tough to have to let go of some programs in favor of others, and teachers have different favorites).
- Second Step's strengths include (1) its focus on empathy and (2) the many tools that come with the curriculum (e.g., songs, videos, puppets for younger grades).
- Teachers would   to have more dedicated time provided for training, collaboration, and planning.
- They also   of having room in their day to teach lessons more consistently.
- They have lots of ideas for making Second Step easier to implement, like:
    o Shortening the lessons to help them fit in a tight schedule.
    o Slowing the progression of lessons down to a more manageable pace.

o   Creating time for class discussion about feelings and real-life challenges (this is what everyone seems to like the most).
o   Letting older students participate in teaching younger students (e.g., by acting as "student ambassadors" to younger classrooms, presenting skits).

The Students Say...

- They feel supported at school when they have difficulties or conflicts. Peers are the primary source of support, but students also feel safe and comfortable asking adults for help.
- They have lots of strategies for solving conflicts: talking through the conflict; asking peers for help; asking yard duty/other adults for help; asking conflict managers for help (less common, because the process can be awkward for some); taking time to think and calm down; walking away; letting the other person have it their way.
- Teachers can help them feel good by taking them seriously, treating them with respect, and treating boys and girls the same.
- There are things about Second Step that they really like, such as: the focus on empathy; the posters, which act as great reminders; and the songs (sometimes). BUT...
- **THE CONVERSATIONS that are sparked in the classroom by Second Step lessons are their overall favorite aspect of the program.** AND...
- They think that Second Step could be even better if:
  o   There were **more conversations** and fewer formal lesson elements (e.g., videos).
  o   The student could participate more in planning and teaching, such as by writing skits to perform at assemblies or in other classes.
  o   There were a greater variety of activities incorporated, like small group work, art, games, etc.

Some Recommendations....

1. Allocate time and opportunity for staff training and discussion about Second Step and any other social-emotional learning programs that are being used.
2. Give teachers the chance to observe their colleagues who are having success teaching Second Step lessons in their classrooms.
3. Gather anonymous polling data (e.g., Survey Monkey) from teachers about which social-emotional learning programs (e.g., Second Step, Mindful Schools, Welcoming Schools) they prefer and would like to prioritize, as well as about how often they are teaching lessons and what is impeding their success in implementation. This data would lead to a better understanding of what may help teachers feel as supported as possible in participating in social-emotional learning at Bruner.
4. Encourage teachers to adapt and modify lessons to suit their own classrooms.
5. Encourage teacher to involve their students as much as possible in planning and even teaching the lessons (e.g., let older students write skits to present in younger classrooms).
6. **Emphasize class discussion about topics related to social-emotional learning.** Both teachers and students find class discussion to be the most enjoyable and beneficial part of the lessons, especially in the higher grades.

EXPLORING IMPLEMENTATION OF SECOND STEP