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INCREASING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS FOR FIRST GRADERS

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Rebecka Baxter

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science

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Introduction

Many grade school children may not have yet developed social-emotional skills and may have difficulty managing their emotions when they have challenges or difficulties in school. Children may feel overwhelmed, break rules, act out, or cry as a result of not knowing how to control their emotions. When children learn how to manage their stress and regulate their emotions, they are able to have positive relationships and perform better in school. In order to address the issue of lack of social-emotional skills in elementary school children, I created a two-day lesson for first graders at Barrett Elementary School in Morgan Hill, California.

Needs Statement

Many elementary school children have challenges managing their emotions when they face difficult situations in school. This difficulty with managing emotions leads to stress and may cause children to act out and break rules as a result of not knowing how to regulate their emotions. In order to help children manage their emotions, it is crucial that emotion recognition is taught in classrooms. Also, children should learn calming techniques and social-emotional skills to help them when they get overwhelmed and learn to regulate their big emotions.

For the most part, children act out as a result of not knowing how to manage or control their emotions. In a study conducted by Burgos, et al. (2009), emotional recognition is described as a very necessary skill that should be taught to children to get through the challenges of the real world. Emotional recognition is analyzed by elementary school students and their abilities to regulate and describe their emotions by having them role-play and put on a puppet show describing the emotions of their puppets based on different scenarios (Burgos, et al., 2009). It was found that children in programs, implemented in the classroom, intended to help children understand and regulate their emotions, were better able to understand their emotions and deliver

the emotions through the puppets than those without emotion regulation programs were. Researchers found that children who do not understand why they are feeling what they are feeling, since they were never properly taught how to regulate and recognize their emotions, tend to act out and break the rules more than children who understand their feelings and how to recognize their emotions (Burgos, et al., 2009). Ultimately, it is important to implement social-emotional learning programs in schools for children to teach them to understand where their emotions come from and how to handle them.

Teaching calming techniques to children in schools is beneficial to their self-awareness and self-regulation. Many children tend to internalize their emotions and problems because they do not know how to deal with them (Bogdan et al., 2022). Calming techniques can be taught to children through SEL (social-emotional learning) curriculum in order to give them resources and help them to control their emotions (Algina et al., 2021). In their study, Kaspar and Massey (2022) found the positive effects of a social-emotional learning curriculum in elementary schools and discussed how helpful it is for children to know what to do when they get overwhelmed and emotional. They found that the implementation of the SEL curriculum really helped children cope with their emotions and helped them get a better understanding of their feelings and why they feel what they feel. All in all, children should be taught calming strategies to practice when they get overwhelmed which can be accomplished through the SEL curriculum in order to create a more emotionally available atmosphere in elementary schools. Having an emotionally available atmosphere in schools is so important because it is the best way for children to grow socially and emotionally and gain a better understanding of their emotions. Calming strategies and learning what to do when overwhelmed can help to create a new learning environment in schools in

support of connecting with emotions and building resilience, as well as confidence in elementary students (Kaspar & Massey, 2022).

Teachers who incorporate SEL (social-emotional learning) into their daily lessons have students with better academic performance, better prosocial behavior, and better peer relationships than those who do not incorporate social-emotional learning in their lessons (Leech, Shapland, & Steed 2022). The SEL curriculum may include ways for children to deal with their feelings, ways to be kind to others, and ways to be problem-solvers (Leech, Shapland, & Steed 2022). Through social-emotional learning, children are able to learn social skills as well as different approaches on how to manage their big emotions (Leech, Shapland, & Steed 2022). SEL lessons can range anywhere from a vocabulary lesson to a lesson on acts of kindness and so many other things. Algina et al., (2021) reported that, in an SEL lesson, helping children find the right words and language to label their emotions allows them to regulate them correctly. Overall, creating social-emotional learning and curriculum in elementary schools is essential to help children regulate and understand their emotions.

Given the importance of teaching emotion recognition in classrooms, the necessary calming techniques available to help children when they feel overwhelmed, and the importance of social-emotional learning curriculum and lessons being taught to elementary students all being areas of concern, I developed a two-day lesson on learning to recognize and differentiate between emotions for first graders at Barrett Elementary School in Morgan Hill, California.

Development

Emotional development includes the ability to understand and recognize emotions and the reasoning behind feelings and the feelings of others (Berger, 2017). Emotional development is the process in which children begin to express and experience emotions while learning

effective ways to manage and deal with their feelings. Children are expected to begin to learn emotional regulation at a young age, which begins with the demonstration and help of their parents. If adults start teaching children how to regulate their emotions when they are young by comforting them and teaching them how to calm down when they are upset, they will be more likely to understand different ways to regulate their emotions as they grow older (Berger, 2017). Children around the age of first grade should be able to notice their emotions as well as those of others, know how to express emotions, as well as how to manage emotions (Berger, 2017). Observing children who know how to manage their emotions as well as express them is likely to be seen more in schools where children have SEL programs incorporated into their curriculum (Connolly et al., 2016). Many children around ages 5-7 tend to have a lot of different emotions and may have difficulty understanding and expressing them, as I have observed in many kinder-first grade classrooms in the past. In order to help children notice, express, and manage emotions, it is imperative that they have a safe and supportive environment, in their homes as well as in their classrooms, to encourage and allow children to discover different emotions and ways to manage them. Temperament and personality may affect the way children develop emotionally, but they should relatively be around the same when it comes to the emotional development of 6 and 7-year-olds (Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016). Through my observation as well as the observation of the first-grade teachers at Barrett Elementary, I have found that many of the first-graders at Barrett Elementary have difficulty managing their emotions and understanding the emotions of others. My project expands on ways for children to express their own feelings and understand those of others, while also expanding on self-control and ways for children to manage their emotions. In addition, I will expand on how to behave in

ways that are socially appropriate and how to manage the feelings they are going through by teaching calming techniques.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted at Barrett Elementary School in Morgan Hill, California at the after-school program in a class of eleven first-graders. The first-graders at Barrett Elementary School should also be reflective of the ethnic diversity of the school. According to the School Accountability Report Card (SARC, 2021), Barrett Elementary School is 2.8% African American, 0.3% American Indian, 6.6% Asian, 2% Filipino, 62.7% Hispanic or Latino, 0.3% Native Hawaiian, 18.8% White, and 3.6% two or more races. Participants must also be English-proficient since my content and project will only be provided in English. Since 28.7% of students at Barrett Elementary are English learners, participants who are not proficient in English may be excluded from participating (SARC, 2021).

Content is specific for lower-grade elementary school students and would not apply to children of higher grade levels since older children may already know and understand their feelings and how to regulate their emotions. The content and activities presented only apply to lower grade levels because only nine simple emotions are described rather than the rest of the more intricate emotions. If older children were to participate in a project like this, it could be modified to include the definitions of more intricate emotions. More worksheets could also be created to incorporate more learning opportunities for higher grade levels and older children to learn about emotions and feelings. Older children may also have difficulty managing their emotions, but a childish youtube video describing simple calming techniques may not apply to them or catch their interest. Therefore, it may be helpful and more appropriate to explain to them

the different causes of stress and what to do when they are feeling stressed with activities that are more likely to spark their interest while trying to expand their social-emotional skills.

Learning Outcomes

I intend to provide a two-day lesson on social-emotional learning for first graders at Barrett Elementary School in Morgan Hill, CA.

Upon completion of the project, participants will be able to:

1. Identify at least five different emotions mentioned in the book
2. Describe two different emotions by using them in two different sentences
3. Indicate two calming techniques to regulate emotions

Method

Day 1

On the first day, I explained to the first graders that they were going to do an activity involving their emotions and how they feel. I introduced it by asking them each, one by one how they were feeling at the moment. They each answered and then I explained to them that those feelings they were feeling were called emotions. Then, I read them a book called *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain to teach them more about emotions and their feelings. Throughout the story, after each emotion was described, I asked the children to demonstrate that emotion by making a facial expression of that specific emotion. If the children were lost or confused and didn't know how to demonstrate the emotion, I helped by showing them an example of me doing that facial emotion. After the story was over, I let each child go to the whiteboard and draw a picture of one of the emotions that was talked about in the story. Then, we had a group discussion sharing out loud as many emotions as they could remember from the story, preferably at least five emotions. Next, I told the children they were going to play a game called matching emotions. I handed out two

different worksheets: the first was a chart with nine different emotions that were in the book I had just read, and the second was a worksheet with two sentence starters and instructions explaining to pick two emotions and describe how you would feel in a certain situation with that chosen emotion. See Appendix A for the emotion chart. See Appendix B for the matching emotions worksheet. After they filled out the worksheet, I had them each, one at a time, pick one of their sentences to read out loud. I told them not to share the emotion that goes with their sentence. The other students then tried to guess what emotion went with the sentence they wrote. After that, we went around the room until everyone had shared one of their sentences, and their emotion was guessed by one of their classmates. I concluded day one by handing out emoji stickers to the kids when they guessed the correct emotion of one of their classmate's sentences.

Day 2

On the second day, I explained to the first graders that they were going to continue learning about emotions and started by having an open discussion about what they do when they are mad or upset. I let the children share out loud some of the things they may do or may observe their friends do as a result of being mad. After the discussion, I showed a short video on calming techniques and things to do when feeling angry or overwhelmed (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5642ygNaR4>). After watching the video, I asked the children to discuss which calming techniques from the video, they will use next time they are feeling upset or angry. After that, I practiced some of the calming techniques of their choosing with them. Finally, I helped them each make a stress ball out of balloons and uncooked rice. I explained to them that the next time they are feeling upset or overwhelmed, they can squeeze their stress ball and it will help them calm down and feel a little bit better.

Results

Learning outcome one was for the participants to identify at least five different emotions mentioned in the book, *The Way I Feel*. While reading the story to the children, I paused after each emotion to see if they could demonstrate the emotion talked about by using facial expressions. After going around the class, each child was able to demonstrate at least five different emotions by using facial expressions. After a group discussion on what emotions they could remember from the book, nine out of eleven of the children were able to name five different emotions that were talked about in the book. See Figure 1 for details. One of the two children who did not name five different emotions from the book fell asleep during the story and the other one was able to name five different emotions, but two of them were not mentioned in the book. All of the children, except the one who fell asleep during the story, were able to go up to the whiteboard and draw a facial expression that they learned from the book as well. Therefore, I believe that this learning outcome was met.

Learning outcome two was for the participants to describe two different emotions by using them in two different sentences. I distributed a worksheet to each of the eleven participants to see if they could describe two different emotions by using them in sentences (See Appendix B). I reviewed each of the participants' answers on the worksheets. Seven out of the eleven participants were able to choose two emotions and put them in a sentence describing something that makes them feel that way accurately. See Table 1 for details. See Figures 2-5 for details. Three out of the eleven participants were able to use one emotion and describe it in a sentence, and one participant chose not to fill out the worksheet at all. Based on the results from the worksheet, I believe that this learning outcome was partially met.

Learning outcome three was for participants to indicate two calming techniques to regulate emotions. After showing the participants a video on calming techniques and practicing some of them together, a group discussion was held on how to manage emotions when feeling angry or overwhelmed. Eight of the eleven participants were able to indicate two different calming techniques after going around the classroom and discussing them. The other three participants were able to name one calming technique. See Table 2 for details. After another discussion, however, all eleven participants seemed to understand multiple different things to do when they are feeling angry, stressed, or overwhelmed. Based on the discussion, I was able to conclude that this learning outcome was met.

Discussion

I have concluded that this project was successful. Two of the three learning outcomes were met and one was partially met, which I believe was very successful for eleven first-graders. For the most part, the participants were engaged and interested in the curriculum I presented them with. They seemed to really enjoy the matching emotions game, which was great as it was able to teach them a lot while also allowing them to have fun. It was really interesting to see each child read one of their sentences out loud and to see which participants could guess what emotion they chose based on the sentence. They did a really good job and matched pretty much every emotion with their classmates' sentences. They also really enjoyed making stress balls and practicing calming techniques which was great as well. Days after the lesson, when I would notice them getting frustrated or angry, I reminded them of the calming techniques that were taught to them, and it was really interesting to see how many of them were practicing them days after the curriculum was taught to them. It seemed to resonate with them, which is exactly what I had hoped for.

When it came to diversity, I believe that my project included everyone, although it was geared toward lower grade levels. If I wanted to do a project and work on social-emotional skills with children of older grade levels, I would have included a curriculum that was geared towards older participants. I would have included a curriculum that had more writing, like journaling for example and thinking about the feelings and emotions of their peers rather than just of themselves.

If I had to do this project again, I would definitely make sure to gather more data, whether that be with worksheets or just documenting with pictures of what the participants are doing. I would try to do fewer group discussions and include more personal answers in order to get more of a feel of what my participants were thinking while delivering the curriculum. Although I believe the participants learned a lot and the information will resonate with them in the future, more documentation of results could have been helpful. Overall, the participants seemed to really enjoy the curriculum I presented them and are walking away with a much better understanding of how to regulate their emotions and what to do when they feel upset or overwhelmed in the future.

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*Table 1**Chosen emotions for matching emotions game*

Student #	Emotion #1	Emotion #2
1	happy	angry
2	scared	happy
3	sad	crazy
4	happy	sad
5	sad	excited
6	nervous	?
7	sad	happy
8	?	?
9	scared	?
10	happy	surprised

*Table 2**Responses to indicate calming techniques*

Student #	Calming Technique #1	Calming Technique #2
1	breathe	?
2	breathe	Squeeze stress ball
3	Count backward	breathe
4	breathe	?
5	Relax in a cozy chair	Listen to music
6	Read a book	breathe
7	exercise	Read a book
8	meditate	breathe
9	Squeeze stress ball	Count backward
10	breathe	meditate

Figure 1

Results of the discussion on the different emotions mentioned in the book for learning outcome 1

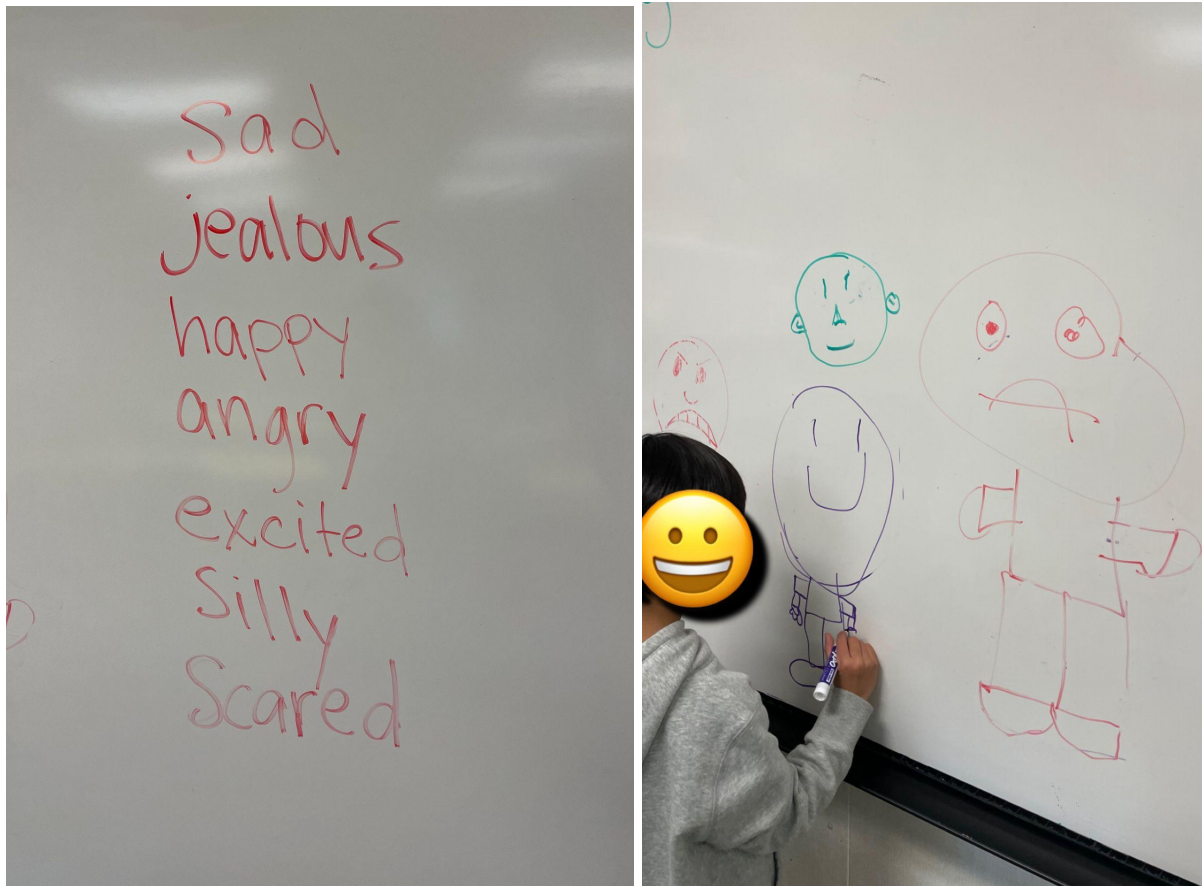


Figure 2

Results from matching emotions worksheet

Matching Emotions

Name: Maya
Date: _____

Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.

1. EMOTION: Fearful How I feel when

I sleep in the dark.

2. EMOTION: Happy How I feel when

its summer time.

Figure 3

Results from matching emotions worksheet

Matching Emotions

Name: Mason

Date: _____

Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.

1. EMOTION: Happy . How I feel when

I eat ice cream .

2. EMOTION: Angry . How I feel when

I do homework .

Figure 4

Results from matching emotions worksheet

Matching Emotions

Name: Kevin

Date: _____

Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.

1. EMOTION: Happ. How I feel when
I'm playing with my friends

2. EMOTION: _____. How I feel when
_____.

Figure 5

Results from matching emotions worksheet

Matching Emotions

Name: Alex
Date: _____

Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.

1. EMOTION: sad . How I feel when

I cry .

2. EMOTION: crazy . How I feel when

I eat candy .

Appendix A

Emotion chart for learning outcome 2



Appendix B

Matching emotions worksheet for learning outcome 2

Matching Emotions

Name: _____

Date: _____

Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.

1. EMOTION: _____. How I feel when

_____.

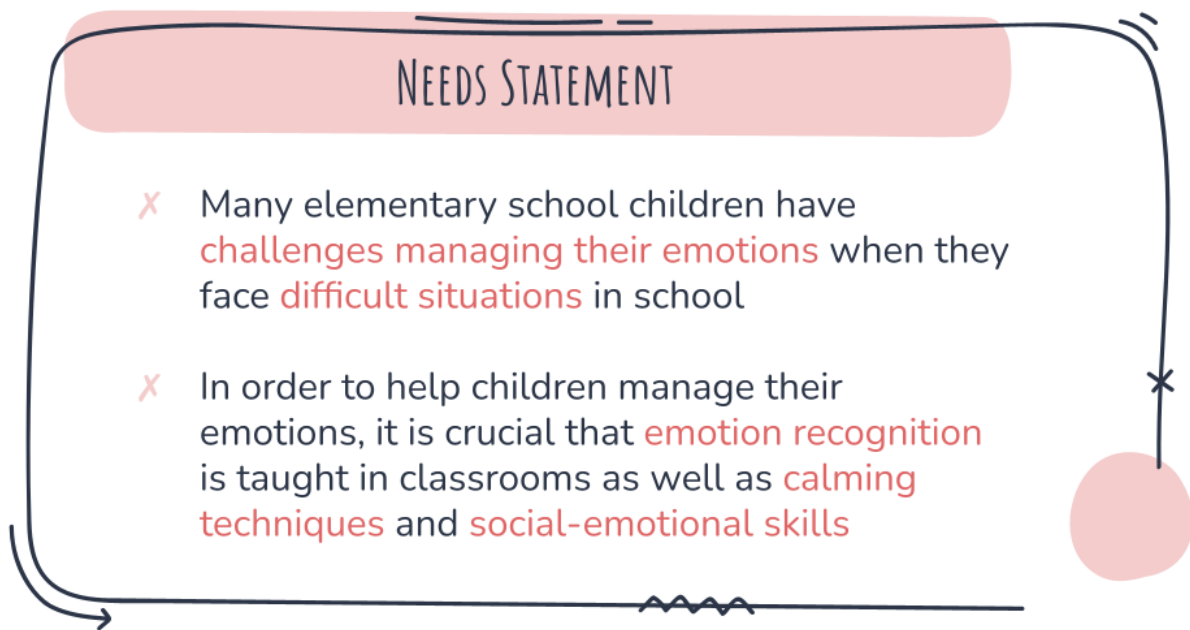
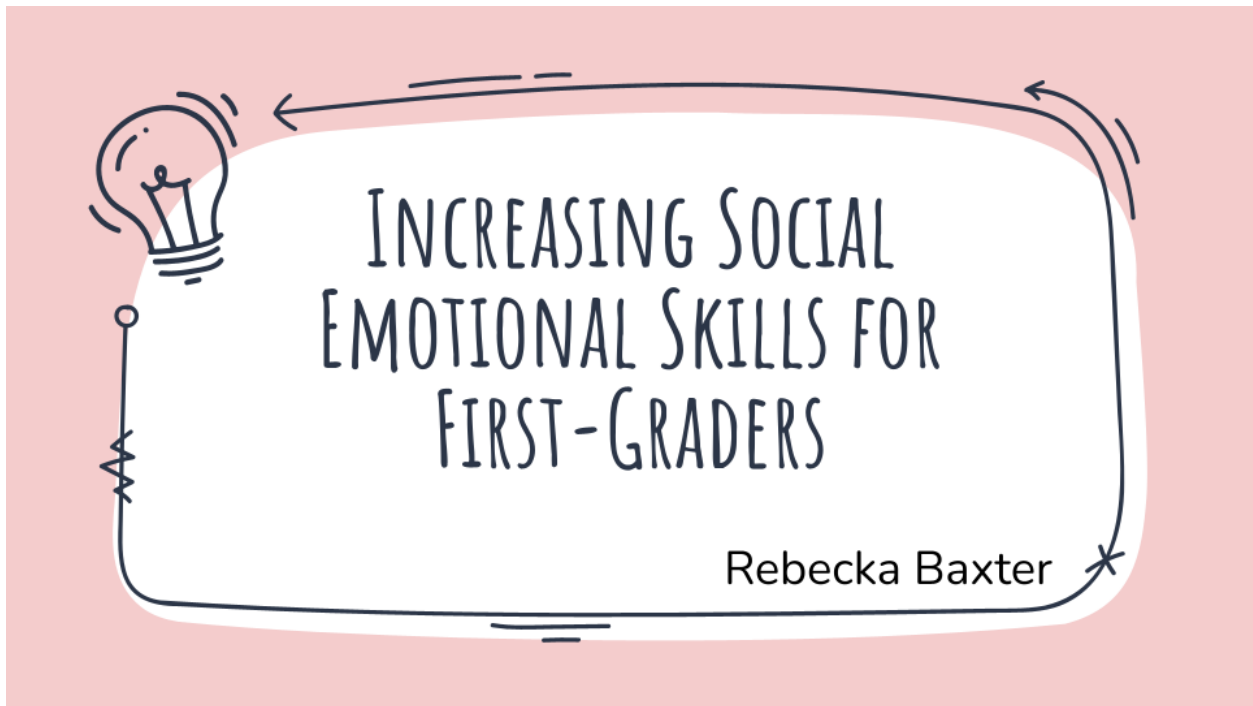
2. EMOTION: _____. How I feel when

_____.



Appendix C

Presentation from Capstone Festival



DEVELOPMENT

- X Emotional development includes the ability to **understand** and **recognize emotions** and the reasoning behind **feelings** and the **feelings of others**
- X In early elementary grades, children begin to **express** and **experience emotions** while learning effective ways to **manage** and deal with **their feelings**

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PARTICIPANTS AND LOCATION

- X 11 First-Graders
- X After-School Program
- X Barrett Elementary School
- X Morgan Hill, California



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LEARNING OUTCOMES

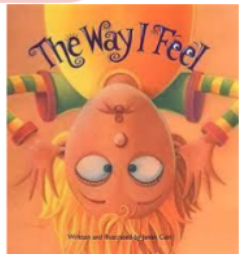
Upon completion of the project, participants will be able to:

<p>LO1</p> <p>Identify at least five different emotions mentioned in the book</p>	<p>LO2</p> <p>Describe two different emotions by using them in two different sentences</p>	<p>LO3</p> <p>Indicate two calming techniques to regulate emotions</p>
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DAY ONE

- Read a book on emotions
- Had children draw an example of an emotion learned in the book
- Lead group discussion on how many emotions they remember from the book
- Played matching emotions game



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HOW DO I FEEL?

 NERVOUS	 UPSET	 SHY
 SAD	 SURPRISED	 HAPPY
 EXCITED	 ANGRY	 SCARED

FRIENDZY.CO
Grade K-2

Matching Emotions

Name: _____
Date: _____

Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.


1. EMOTION: _____. How I feel when _____


2. EMOTION: _____. How I feel when _____

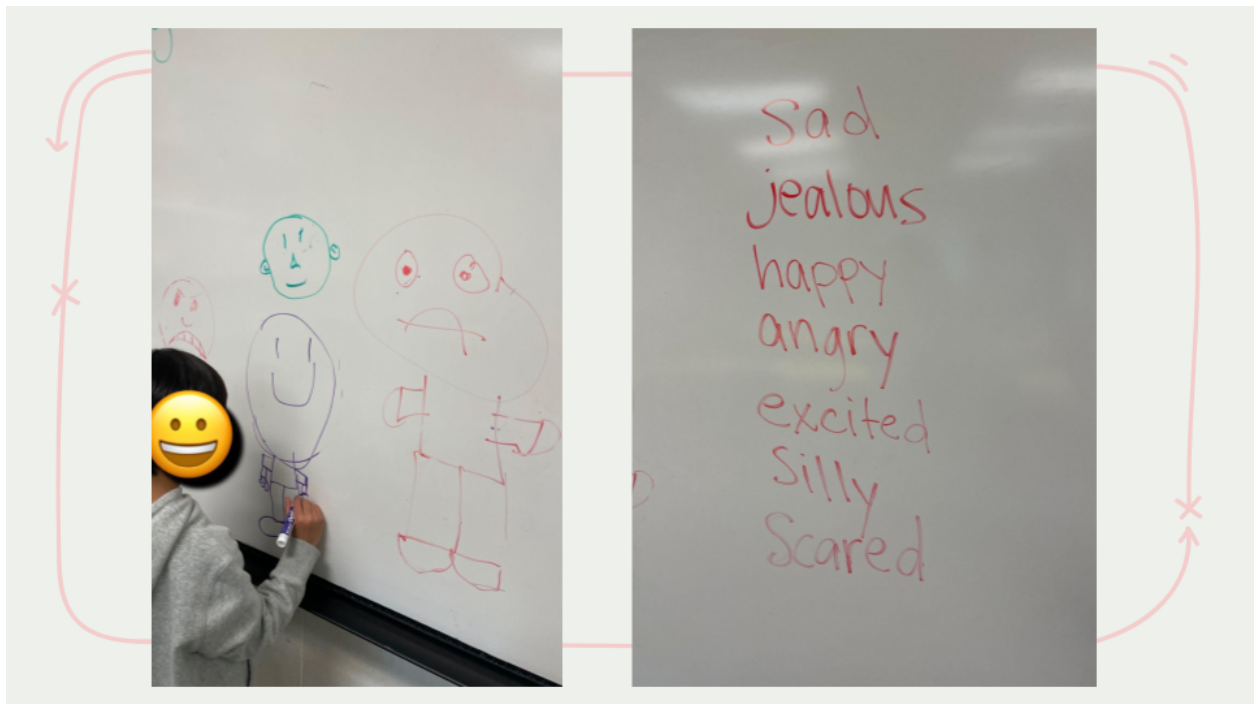
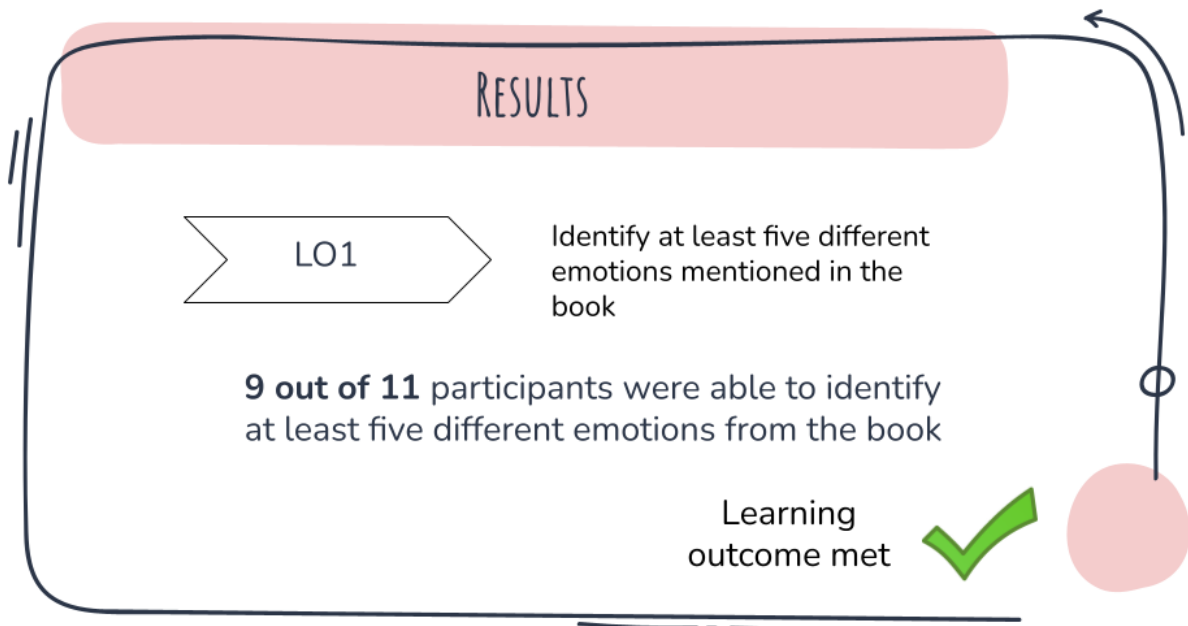


DAY TWO

- Watch video to learn calming techniques to practice when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed
- Practice calming techniques
- Make a stress ball







RESULTS

LO2

Describe two different emotions by using them in two different sentences

7 out of 11 participants were able to describe two different emotions by using them in sentences

Learning outcome partially met

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<p style="margin: 0;">Matching Emotions</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Name: <u>Maria</u></p> <p style="margin: 0;">Date: _____</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p style="margin: 0;">Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.</p> </div> <p style="margin: 0;">1. EMOTION: <u>Sad</u> . How I feel when <u>I sleep in the dark</u> .</p> <p style="margin: 0;">2. EMOTION: <u>Happy</u> . How I feel when <u>its summer +/ms</u> .</p>	<p style="margin: 0;">Matching Emotions</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Name: <u>Mason</u></p> <p style="margin: 0;">Date: _____</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p style="margin: 0;">Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.</p> </div> <p style="margin: 0;">1. EMOTION: <u>Happy</u> . How I feel when <u>I eat ice cream</u> .</p> <p style="margin: 0;">2. EMOTION: <u>Angry</u> . How I feel when <u>I do homework</u> .</p>
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Matching Emotions Name: Alex
Date: _____

Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.

1. EMOTION: sad. How I feel when
I cry

2. EMOTION: crazy. How I feel when
I eat candy

Matching Emotions Name: Kevin
Date: _____

Choose two emotions from the emotion chart. Write two different sentences describing a situation that makes you feel one of your two chosen emotions.


1. EMOTION: Happy. How I feel when
I'm playing with my friends

2. EMOTION: _____. How I feel when


RESULTS: CHOSEN EMOTION FOR MATCHING EMOTIONS GAME

Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6	Student 7	Student 8	Student 9	Student 10	Student 11
happy	scared	sad	happy	sad	nervous	sad	?	scared	happy	happy
angry	happy	crazy	sad	excited	?	happy	?	?	surprised	?

RESULTS


Indicate two calming techniques to regulate emotions

8 out of 11 participants were able to indicate two calming techniques

Learning outcome met 

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RESULTS: CALMING TECHNIQUE DATA

Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5	Student 6	Student 7	Student 8	Student 9	Student 10	Student 11
breathe	breathe	Count backwards	breathe	Relax in cozy chair	Read a book	exercise	meditate	Squeeze stress ball	breathe	Go on a walk
?	Squeeze stress ball	breathe	?	Listen to music	breathe	Read a book	breathe	Count backwards	meditate	?

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DISCUSSION

- ✗ I have concluded that this project was successful
- ✗ Learning outcomes were met
- ✗ If I conducted this project again, I would collect more data and evidence
- ✗ I would have more worksheets and activities rather than group discussions

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THANKS FOR LISTENING!

Rebecka Baxter

Any questions?

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