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ACTIVITY 6.1
Measuring Optimism

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Concept

The level of optimism people possess is a predictor of depression both currently and in the future. This test of optimism will help your students see their overall levels of optimism and in which area—permanence, pervasiveness, or personal—they have more pessimistic thoughts.

Units it could embed into

Health

Learning Targets

1. Students will participate in a sample psychological assessment and accurately interpret the results.
2. Students will demonstrate a clear understanding of how to measure their current level of optimism.

Materials

Sufficient copies of the Optimism Questionnaire (Handout 6.1A) and the Scoring the Optimism Questionnaire handout (Handout Master 6.1B) so that each student will have one.

Time

On average, the test takes about 15 minutes to complete, so this might serve as a good homework assignment instead of a class assignment.

Instructions

Instruct the students to take as much time as they need to answer each of the questions. There are no right or wrong answers.

Discussion

Hand out the sheet "Scoring the Optimism Questionnaire." Give the students time to total their scores, and then discuss their feelings about their scores. Did they score as high or as low as they anticipated? Why or why not? In answering the questions, did they see any trends in their answers? In which areas did they score the best or worst? What can the students do with the information they learned from this exercise?

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HANDOUT 6.1A

Measuring Optimism Questionnaire Learning Targets

1. Students will participate in a sample psychological assessment.
2. Students will measure their current level of optimism.

Directions

For each question, pick the choice that best describes how you would explain the given situation. Although you may not have experienced the situation before, put yourself in that situation to determine how you would respond.

1. The project you are in charge of is a great success.	**PsG**
a. I kept a close watch over everyone's work.	1
b. Everyone devoted a lot of time and energy to it.	0
2. You and your boyfriend/girlfriend make up after a fight.	**PmG**
a. I forgave him/her.	0
b. I'm usually forgiving.	1
3. You get lost driving to a friend's house.	**PsB**
a. I missed a turn.	1
b. My friend gave me bad directions.	0
4. Your boyfriend/girlfriend surprises you with a gift.	**PsG**
a. He/she just got a raise at work.	0
b. I took him/her out to a special dinner the night before.	1
5. You forget your boyfriend's/girlfriend's birthday.	**PmB**
a. I'm not good at remembering birthdays.	1
b. I was preoccupied with other things.	0
6. You get a flower from a secret admirer.	**PvG**
a. I am attractive to him/her.	0
b. I am a popular person.	1
7. You run for a community office position and you win.	**PvG**
a. I devote a lot of time and energy to campaigning.	0
b. I work very hard at everything I do.	1
8. You miss an important engagement.	**PvB**
a. Sometimes my memory fails me.	1
b. I sometimes forget to check my appointment book.	0
9. You run for a community office position, and you lose.	**PvB**
a. I didn't campaign hard enough.	1
b. The person who won knew more people.	0

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10. You host a successful dinner.	**PmG**
a. I was particularly charming that night.	0
b. I am a good host.	1
11. You stop a crime by calling the police.	**PsG**
a. A strange noise caught my attention.	0
b. I was alert that day.	1
12. You were extremely healthy all year.	**PsG**
a. Few people around me were sick, so I wasn't exposed.	0
b. I made sure I ate well and got enough rest.	1
13. You owe the library $10 for an overdue book.	**PmB**
a. When I am really involved in what I am reading, I often forget when it's due.	1
b. I was so involved in writing the report I forgot to return the book.	0
14. Your stocks make you a lot of money.	**PmG**
a. My broker decided to take on something new.	0
b. My broker is a top-notch investor.	1
15. You win an athletic contest.	**PmG**
a. I was feeling unbeatable.	0
b. I train hard.	1
16. You fail an important examination.	**PvB**
a. I wasn't as smart as the other people taking the exam.	1
b. I didn't prepare for it well.	0
17. You prepared a special meal for a friend, and he/she barely touched the food.	**PvB**
a. I wasn't a good cook.	1
b. I made the meal in a rush.	0
18. You lose a sporting event for which you have been training for a long time.	**PvB**
a. I'm not very athletic.	1
b. I'm not very good at that sport.	0
19. Your car runs out of gas on a dark street late at night.	**PsB**
a. I didn't check to see how much gas was in the tank.	1
b. The gas gauge was broken.	0
20. You lose your temper with a friend.	**PmB**
a. He/she is always nagging me.	1
b. He/she was in a hostile mood.	0
21. You are penalized for not returning your income-tax forms on time.	**PmB**
a. I always put off doing my taxes.	1
b. I was lazy about getting my taxes done this year.	0

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22. You ask a person out on a date, and he/she says no.	**PvB**
a. I was a wreck that day.	1
b. I got tongue-tied when I asked him/her on the date.	0
23. A game-show host picks you out of the audience to participate in the show.	**PsG**
a. I was sitting in the right seat.	0
b. I looked the most enthusiastic.	1
24. You are frequently asked to dance at a party.	**PmG**
a. I am outgoing at parties.	1
b. I was in perfect form that night.	0
25. You buy your boyfriend/girlfriend a gift, and he/she doesn't like it.	**PsB**
a. I don't put enough thought into things like that.	1
b. He/she has very picky tastes.	0
26. You do exceptionally well in a job interview.	**PmG**
a. I felt extremely confident during the interview.	0
b. I interview well.	1
27. You tell a joke, and everyone laughs.	**PsG**
a. The joke was funny.	0
b. My timing was perfect.	1
28. Your boss gives you too little time in which to finish a project, but you get it finished anyway.	**PvG**
a. I am good at my job.	0
b. I am an efficient person.	1
29. You've been feeling run-down lately.	**PmB**
a. I never get a chance to relax.	1
b. I was exceptionally busy this week.	0
30. You ask someone to dance and he/she says no.	**PsB**
a. I am not a good enough dancer.	1
b. He/she doesn't like to dance.	0
31. You save a person from choking to death.	**PvG**
a. I know a technique to stop someone from choking.	0
b. I know what to do in a crisis situation.	1
32. Your romantic partner wants to cool things off for a while.	**PvB**
a. I'm too self-centered.	1
b. I don't spend enough time with him/her.	0
33. A friend says something that hurts your feelings.	**PmB**
a. She always blurts things out without thinking of others.	1
b. My friend was in a bad mood and took it out on me.	0

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34. Your employer comes to you for advice.	**PvG**
a. I am an expert in the area about which I was asked.	0
b. I am good at giving useful advice.	1
35. A friend thanks you for helping him/her get through a bad time.	**PvG**
a. I enjoy helping him/her through tough times.	0
b. I care about people.	1
36. You have a wonderful time at a party.	**PsG**
a. Everyone was friendly.	0
b. I was friendly.	1
37. Your doctor tells you that you are in good physical shape.	**PvG**
a. I make sure I exercise frequently.	0
b. I am very health-conscious.	1
38. Your boyfriend/girlfriend takes you away for a romantic weekend.	**PmG**
a. He/she needed to get away for a few days.	0
b. He/she likes to explore new areas.	1
39. 39. Your doctor tells you that you eat too much sugar.	**PsB**
a. I don't pay much attention to my diet.	1
b. You can't avoid sugar: It's in everything.	0
40. You are asked to head an important project.	**PmG**
a. I just successfully completed a similar project.	0
b. I am a good supervisor.	1
41. You and your boyfriend/girlfriend have been fighting a great deal.	**PsB**
a. I have been feeling cranky and pressured lately.	1
b. He/she has been hostile lately.	0
42. You fall down a great deal while skiing.	**PmB**
a. Skiing is difficult.	1
b. The trails were icy.	0
43. You win a prestigious award.	**PvG**
a. I solved an important problem.	0
b. I was the best employee.	1
44. Your stocks are at an all-time low.	**PvB**
a. I didn't know much about the business climate at the time.	1
b. I made a poor choice of stocks.	0
45. You win the lottery.	**PsG**
a. It was pure chance.	0
b. I picked the right numbers.	1

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46. You gain weight over the holidays and you can't lose it.	**PmB**
a. Diets don't work in the long run.	1
b. The diet I tried didn't work.	0
47. You are in the hospital, and few people come to visit.	**PsB**
a. I'm irritable when I'm sick.	1
b. My friends are negligent about things like that.	0
48. They won't honor your credit card at a store.	**PvB**
a. I sometimes overestimate how much money I have.	1
b. I sometimes forget to pay my credit-card bill.	0

Scoring Key

PmB	_____	PmG	_____
PvB	_____	PvG	_____
HoB	_____		
PsB	_____	PsG	_____
Total B	_____	Total G	_____
G - B	_____		

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HANDOUT 6.1B

Scoring the Optimism Questionnaire

Seven categories are measured on the Optimism Questionnaire and one overall combined score reflects your level of optimism. Score each category separately first and then determine the final composite score.

Permanent Bad (PmB): Believing the causes of bad events are permanent. Total the numbers in the right-hand margin from items 5, 13, 20, 21, 29, 22, 33, 42, and 46. Record this total in the PmB line on the scoring key. If you totaled 0 or 1, you are very optimistic on this dimension. 2 or 3 is a moderately optimistic score; 4 is average; 5 or 6 is quite pessimistic; and 7 or 8 is very pessimistic.

Permanent Good (PmG): Believing the causes of good events are permanent. Total the numbers in the right-hand margin from items 2, 10, 14, 15, 24, 26, 38, and 40. Record this total in the PmG line on the scoring key. If you totaled 7 or 8, you are very optimistic. 6 is a moderately optimistic score; 4 or 5 is average; 3 is a moderately pessimistic score; and 0, 1, or 2 is very pessimistic.

Pervasiveness Bad (PvB): Believing failures are universal and extend beyond the situation. Total the numbers in the right-hand margin from items 8, 16, 17, 18, 22, 32, 44, and 48. Record this total in the PvB line on the scoring key. If you totaled 0 or 1, you are very optimistic on this dimension. 2 or 3 is a moderately optimistic score; 4 is average; 5 or 6 is quite pessimistic; and 7 or 8 is very pessimistic.

Pervasiveness Good (PvG): Believing good events are universal and extend beyond the situation. Total the numbers in the right-hand margin from items 6, 7, 28, 31, 34, 35, 37, and 43. Record this total in the PvG line on the scoring key. If you totaled 7 or 8, you are very optimistic. 6 is a moderately optimistic score; 4 or 5 is average; 3 is a moderately pessimistic score; and 0, 1, or 2 is very pessimistic.

Hope Score (HoB): A combination of pervasive and permanent beliefs about bad events. Take your PvB total and add it to your PmB total. This will yield your hope score for bad events. If it is a 0, 1, or 2, you are extraordinarily hopeful. 3, 4, 5, or 6 is a moderately hopeful score; 7 or 8 is average; 9, 10, or 11 is moderately hopeless; and 12, 13, 14, 15, or 16 is severely hopeless.

Personalization Bad (PsB): Believing faults are personal and internal and, therefore, difficult to change. Total the numbers in the right-hand margin from items 3, 9, 19, 25, 30, 39, 41, and 47. Record this total in the PsB line on the scoring key. If you totaled 0 or 1, you have very high self-esteem. 2 or 3 is a moderate self-esteem; 4 is average; 5 or 6 indicates low self-esteem; and 7 or 8 indicates very low self-esteem.

Personalization Good (PsG): Believing faults are external and not personal Total the numbers in the right-hand margin from items 1, 4, 11, 12, 23, 27, 36, and 45. Record this total in the PsG line on the scoring key. If you totaled 7 or 8, you are very optimistic. 6 is a moderately optimistic score; 4 or 5 is average; 3 is a moderately pessimistic score; and 0, 1, or 2 is very pessimistic.

Computing the Overall Score

First, add the three B scores (PmB + PvB + PsB). This is your Total B (bad events) score. Next, add your three G scores (PmG + PvG + PsG). This is your Total G (good events) score. Subtract B from G. This is your overall score (G-B).

Interpreting the Overall Totals

If your B score is from 3 to 6, you are marvelously optimistic. If it is in the 6 to 9 range, you are moderately optimistic; 10 or 11 is about average; 12 to 14 is moderately pessimistic; and anything above 14 cries out for change. If your G score is 19 or above, you think about good events very optimistically. If it is from 17 to 19, your thinking is moderately optimistic; 14 to 16 is about average; 11 to 13 indicates that you think quite pessimistically; and a score of 10 or less indicates great pessimism. Finally, if your G-B score is above 8, you are very optimistic across the board. If it is from 6 to 8, you are moderately optimistic; 3 to 5 is average; 1 or 2 is a moderately pessimistic score; and 0 or below is very pessimistic.

Reference

Seligman, M. E. P. (1998). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life* (2nd ed.). New York: Pocket Books.