Alison L. Brennan, B.A. & Joel M. Hektner, Ph.D.
North Dakota State University

Abstract
The Nurtured Heart Approach to parenting (NHA; Glasser & Easley, 2008) is intended for use among families with children exhibiting emotional and behavioral difficulties in the clinical range, but is increasingly being promoted for parents and teachers of any children. Many elements of the approach have been shown to improve psychological support, yet NHA as a whole remains to be empirically evaluated. The present study is a quasi-experimental evaluation of NHA using data from 41 five-week NHA parent training courses offered to the general public in a Midwestern U.S. city. A total of 303 parents attended; 236 completed pre and post questionnaires. An information-only comparison group was recruited from the same community. Pre and post questionnaires were completed by comparison participants. Questionnaires included scales measuring parenting confidence and relational frustration, parenting practices, and child internalizing difficulties. Program parents reported gains in well-being, while control parents remained relatively stable. Trained parents increased in providing positive attention to their child and decreased in yelling, scolding, and responding with negativity. At both baseline and follow-up, parents in the control group perceived more strengths in their children than did program parents, but at follow-up the difference narrowed to half of a standard deviation. NHA shows promise as a parent training model and its effectiveness should continue to be studied with more rigorous research designs both among parents and in schools.

Background
The Nurtured Heart Approach to parenting (NHA; Glasser & Easley, 2008) was developed for use with “intense” or “difficult” children—children who are often given formal diagnoses such as Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or Oppositional Defiant Disorder. Yet NHA is increasingly being promoted for parents and teachers of any children, and is being implemented in several schools (e.g., 6th graders). Parents using NHA are trained to minimize attention to undesirable behavior, provide positive attention and praise for compliance with rules, and to guide their children. A recent qualitative study (Brennan, 2008) among parents suggested several potential benefits of NHA, and establish a set of clear rules and consequences. A wealth of anecdotal evidence exists in support of the approach (Glasser & Easley, 2007; Glasser, 2008), and many elements of the approach have strong theoretical support (see Brenner, 2003; Glasser & Brodsky, 2007). Hence, NHA as a whole remains to be empirically evaluated.

Although several evidence-based parent training programs exist (e.g., Incredible Years; Webster-Stratton, 1992), some programs without such distinction, such as NHA, are disseminated through the popular press and are used more widely (Barth et al., 2005). One of the key advantages of NHA may be its accessibility to extensive use of a conversational tone, narrative style, and analogy and metaphor to convey key ideas. This may be an effective means of packaging and disseminating evidence-based strategies.

The purpose of the present study is to evaluate the effectiveness of NHA in a quasi-experimental pilot study.

Method
Participants
- Mid- and East-Midwestern city, approximately 90% Caucasian
- Over two years, 41 five-week courses were offered for parents
- 303 parents attended; 236 completed pre and post questionnaires
- Information-only comparison group was recruited from the same community
- Boys were the focus for 21% (50%) of the participants
- Boys were the focus for 41% (37%) of the children between the ages of 4 and 10

Measures
- Parent well-being
  - 2-scales: Parenting confidence and relational frustration from the Parenting Relationship Questionnaire (PRQ; Kamprath & Reynolds, 2006)
  - Parenting confidence: a = .85 (present study)
  - Relational frustration scale: a = .50 (present study)
- Parent practices
  - 36 items adapted from The Parent Discipline Scales (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2001)
- Other items were measured to assess the four domains of discipline discipline did not cohere, so some of these items were analyzed as separate items

Perceptions of child’s interpersonal strengths
- Interpersonal strengths scale from the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale, 2nd Edition (BERS II; Epstein, 2000)
- Present study a = .93
- Scoring based on national norms provided by Epstein (2000)

Procedure
- Identical pre- and post-questionnaires
- NHA sample completed the pre-questionnaire on paper before beginning the first training session, ID numbers were used to match pre and post questionnaires.
- The pre- and post-questionnaires and feedback form were completed after the final session.
- In the comparison sample, participants completed the pre-questionnaire upon enrollment in the study, either online or on paper. Upon completion, they were emailed a link to a Survey tool on the Internet, which included the pre-questionnaire, and decreased in yelling and scolding, but at follow-up the difference had narrowed by half of a standard deviation.

Research Questions
1) Is parent training in NHA related to changes in parents’ well-being?
2) Are changes in parent practices related to participation in NHA training?
3) Is parent training in NHA related to changes in parents’ perception of their children’s social and behavioral well-being?

Discussion
• Summary
  - Program parents experienced beneficial changes in their frustration in the parental role as well as in their parenting confidence and practices
  - Parenting practices included increased providing positive attention to their child and decreased in yelling, scolding, and responding with negativity
  - Program parents increased in providing positive attention to their child
  - Though program parents in the control group perceived more strengths in their children than did program parents, but at follow-up the difference had narrowed by half of a standard deviation.
  - Changes in parent perception, frustration and confidence likely translate into improved parent-child relationships and behaviour family system

- Strengths
  - Comparison-group
  - Reliable measures (PRQ, BERS)

- Limitations
  - Self-report
  - Standardized scales
  - No fidelity checks

- Future Directions
  - Long-term follow-up
  - Use with average children (Differential sensitivity)
  - Use with special groups (e.g., autism)
  - Qualitative data collected but not included due to space

Acknowledgments
Thank you to the Casey County Extension Parenting Resource Center

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Confidence</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Practices</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s Interpersonal Strengths</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Child’s Interpersonal Strengths
- Compliant
- Class
- Class

Data from
- Glasser & Easley, 2008
- Glasser & Brodsky, 2003
- Brenner, 2003
- Brennan, 2008
- Kamprath & Reynolds, 2006
- Epstein, 2000
- Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2001

= .90

= .05

= .01

= .001