

You're Fun, You're Funny, and You Dress Good! A Classroom  
Social Skills Intervention with a Nurtured Heart Touch and Its Effect  
on Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn

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### *Abstract*

This study looks at the connections between the Nurtured Heart Approach, Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports, and the instruction of social skills. Historical data from the Performance Screening Guide (Gresham & Elliott, 2008), completed by a classroom teacher as part of a social skills intervention in a fifth grade classroom, was used. The dependent variables were teacher ratings on the Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn scales. The materials and procedures used for the social skills instruction were adapted from the Social Skills Improvement System (Elliott & Gresham, 2008) and the Nurtured Heart Approach (Glasser, Bowdidge, & Bravo, 2007). The students in this study showed an improvement from pre- to post-intervention ratings. Factors related to these improvements are discussed, as is the potential place of the Nurtured Heart Approach in Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports systems.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Estimates of the number of students with mental health disorders range as high as 20 percent (Evans & Seligman, 2005; Nastasi & Varjas, 2008). Millions of these children have unmet mental health needs (Lazarus & Sulkowski, 2011). Since these are unacceptable statistics, we must ask: how do we prevent children from developing mental health disorders, and how do we meet the behavioral and mental health needs of all children, especially when resources are scarce? The answer may be the public school system. In fact, schools are already the de facto provider of behavioral and mental health supports for children (Doll & Cummings, 2008; Evans & Seligman, 2008; Nastasi & Varjas, 2008). Since this is already established, it makes sense to figure out the most efficient way to use school resources to provide the best supports for students.

One system developed to meet the behavioral and mental health needs of school-age students is Positive Behavior Supports. “The overriding goal [of Positive Behavior Supports] is to prevent the development and intensification of problem behaviors and maximize academic success for all students” (Sugai, Horner, & McIntosh, 2008, p. 765). The School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) model has five overriding features (Sugai et al., 2008). The features are prevention,

behavioral theory, instructional approaches, evidence-based procedures, and a systems perspective. Services are provided at three tiers of intervention. At Tier 1 all students receive primary, preventative interventions. At Tier II selected students receive more targeted interventions. At Tier III individual students receive very targeted interventions. The universal application of Tier I interventions helps to lessen the number of students who develop behavioral and mental health problems, which then frees up resources for students at Tiers II and III.

The instructional aspect of SWPBS includes “teaching and strengthening specific social skills” (Sugai et al., 2008, p. 768). Deficits in social skills have detrimental effects on students’ success in school and life (Bardon, Dona, & Symons, 2008; Corkum, Corbin, & Pike, 2010; Gresham, 2010; January, Casey, & Paulson, 2011; Lane, Menzies, Barton-Arwood, Doukas, & Munton, 2005). Therefore, social skills instruction is a very important aspect of SWPBS. However, social skills instruction research shows mixed results relating to effectiveness (Gresham, 2010). Often, whether a social skills intervention is considered “effective” depends on how the results were measured—for example, whether office discipline referrals or other measures are used (Bardon et al., 2008; Gresham, 2010).

A basic definition of social skills is “learned behaviors that encourage positive interactions with others” (Elliott & Gresham, 2007, p. 3). To get students to learn those positive behaviors, the research indicates certain best practices in social skill instruction (January et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2005). One of the best practices relates

to the skills and intention of the adult social skills instructor. According to Lane et al., (2005) a social skills facilitator should have empathy, ability to manage groups of students, and be able to help students generalize their social skills to situations beyond the classroom. One approach which focuses on the skills of adults is the Nurtured Heart Approach (NHA) (Bravo, 2012; Glasser, Bowdidge, & Bravo, 2007; Glasser & Easley, 1998). NHA espouses three “stands” as its framework. Those stands include creating and nurturing successes, wherever and whenever they occur; refusing to energize negative behavior choices; and being absolutely clear about rules and consequences. When adults use the three stands in balance, children experience positive transformation.

This paper examines a social skills intervention in a fifth grade classroom, in a school with a Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) model in place. SWPBS and social skills training have established research bases; the Nurtured Heart Approach does not. This project begins an exploration of the place the Nurtured Heart Approach may have within the SWPBS model and social skills training.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Estimates of the number of American children and adolescents with mental health problems or disorders vary from 17% (Lazarus & Sulkowski, 2011) to 20% (Evans & Seligman, 2005; Gresham, 2010; Nastasi & Varjas, 2008). Approximately 5-9% of children qualify for the category of severely emotionally disturbed, and less than half of all school-age children develop the social-emotional competencies required for success in life (Lazarus & Sulkowski, 2011). Children who experience emotional and behavioral deficits have a greater possibility of failing classes and dropping out of school, are more unlikely to attend college, and have more difficulties in employment and relationships as adolescents and adults than do children without those difficulties (Cheney et al., 2010).

According to Lazarus and Sulkowski (2011) and Evans and Seligman (2008), there are two major problems in mental health services for children and adolescents. One is lack of availability. There are approximately 7.5 million American children with unmet mental health needs (Lazarus & Sulkowski, 2011). This idea is supported by the fact that only 1% of children receive services as emotionally disturbed under the IDEA 2004 definition, yet, as mentioned above, 17-20% have a mental health issue or disorder (Gresham, 2010). The second problem is

fragmentation of services. Child and adolescent mental health services are divided into six areas: services are provided by the child welfare, education, juvenile justice, primary health care, specialty mental health care, and substance abuse systems (Evans & Seligman, 2008). But of these six systems, the educational system is the *de facto* provider of mental health services to children and adolescents (Doll & Cummings, 2008; Evans & Seligman, 2008; Nastasi & Varjas, 2008.) This is logical, as all children come into contact with schools due to compulsory attendance laws. In fact, children spend over 14,000 hours in school over the course of their K-12 education (Sugai et al., 2008). The question then becomes: how do schools most effectively meet the mental and social-emotional needs of their students?

### *Positive Behavior Supports*

#### *Terminology*

There are several relatively interchangeable terms for Positive Behavior Supports (PBS). There is, of course, Positive Behavior Supports (PBS), which is a more generic term (Knoff, 2008). Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is another term, originating in 1998 with the opening of the National Center on PBIS (Sugai et al., 2008). SWPBS, or School-wide Positive Behavior Supports involves the use of PBS on a whole-school basis (Frey, Lingo, & Nelson, 2010; Sugai et al., 2008). And a fourth term used is RTI-B, or Response to Intervention-Behavior. This paper will use School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) as its terminology.

### *Definition*

A system being embraced by greater and greater numbers of schools is Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports, or SWPBS. Estimates of the number of schools using SWPBS range from 9,000 (Frey et al., 2010) to over 13,000 (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010). SWPBS provides three tiers of social-emotional, behavioral, and mental health supports for students. Traditionally, schools have used punishment and restriction as approaches to student behavioral problems. While there may be an immediate stop to the behavior, the research shows little lasting behavioral change (Goh & Bambara, 2010.) Rather than punishing students for poor behaviors, SWPBS looks at preventing behavioral and social-emotional problems before they occur.

There were two original intentions of Positive Behavior Supports. The main intention was to improve quality of life for individuals by enhancing their strengths; the secondary consideration was to lessen problem behaviors (Dunlap et al., 2010). Positive Behavior Supports on a schoolwide scale has the following components: collecting behavioral data for the purpose of making decisions (Curtis, Van Horne, Robertson & Karvonen, 2010; Farkas et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010); operationally-defined goals and behavioral expectations (Farkas et al., 2011; Horner et al., 2010); praise and reinforcement (Frey et al., 2010); a continuum of consequences which do not provide payoffs for negative behaviors (Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010); using evidence-based behavioral interventions which are

carried out with fidelity (Farkas et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2010); schoolwide leadership teams; overriding philosophies of behavior; and specific behavior expectations within those philosophies (Curtis et al., 2010; Frey et al., 2010).

SWPBS involves intervention in three tiers. At Tier I, the goal is to increase positive behaviors and discourage negative behaviors through providing interventions to all students (Cheney et al., 2010; Frey et al., 2010; Goh & Bambara, 2010). All students are explicitly taught school rules, and receive positive reinforcement for following the rules and logical consequences for not following them (Farkas et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010). Not only teachers, but all school staff, are involved in the initiatives at Tier I (Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010). In addition, Tier I initiatives encourage collaboration between home and school and school and community. The goal is having 80% or more of all students be successful at Tier I and needing no further intervention (Frey et al., 2010).

At Tier II, students who need extra intervention are identified by collected behavioral data (Horner et al., 2010), with the goal being to “prevent reoccurrences of problem behavior” (Frey et al., 2010, p. 403). These at-risk students receive targeted support and interventions, usually in small groups. The interventions used are expected to work quickly at producing change in student behavior. A suggested goal is 15% or less of all students receiving Tier II interventions (Frey et al., 2010).

At Tier III, identified individual students receive intensive behavioral and social-emotional support (Cheney et al., 2010; Farkas et al., 2011; Goh & Bambara,

2010) for a longer period of time than at Tier II. These students have not responded to interventions at the first two tiers. The goal is to have five percent or less of all students need Tier III intervention (Frey et al., 2010). Additionally, school staff teach and reinforce social skills throughout all tiers (Cheney et al., 2010).

### *The Impact of Positive Behavior Supports*

Research shows positive results of SWPBS by several different measures. Farkas et al. (2011) found increases in academic performance and lessening of behavioral problems in schools with Tier I implemented with fidelity. January et al. (2011) cite lower amounts of negative behaviors in schools with SWPBS. Schools which implement SWPBS with fidelity have experienced decreases of 20 to 60 percent in office discipline referrals and student suspensions (Frey et al., 2010). Curtis et al. (2010) studied the effects of SWPBS over a five year period in an elementary school and found several statistically significant findings. Lost instructional days decreased by 56.5%, out of school suspensions decreased by 67%, and behavioral referrals decreased by 47.8%. Another study compared 37 elementary schools over a five year period. Some of these schools operated under a SWPBS model and some did not. The study found that the schools with SWPBS had fewer behavioral referrals and out of school suspensions than the schools without SWPBS (Horner et al., 2010). Also, research has shown that PBS can reduce problem behaviors by teaching better alternatives to those behaviors (Dunlap et al., 2010) and Tier I prevention can prevent behavior issues (Curtis, et al., 2010). One way

SWPBS increases positive behaviors and decreases negative ones is through social skills instruction.

### *Social Skills*

#### *Definition*

Gresham (2010) defines social skills as “a set of competencies that (a) help initiate and maintain positive social relationships, (b) contribute to peer acceptance and friendship development, (c) result in satisfactory school adjustment, and (d) allow individuals to cope with and adapt to the demands of the social environment” (p. 339). Gresham also points out that there are “socially important outcomes for children and youth” (p. 339) and social skills are what enable them to achieve those outcomes. The most important research-supported social outcomes are acceptance from teachers and parents, acceptance from peers, and school success and achievement.

Elliott and Gresham (2007) define social skills as “learned behaviors that encourage positive interactions with others” (p. 3). They highlight two important aspects of social skills. Number one, social skills involve both verbal and nonverbal skill and knowledge. Number two, social skills are often context-specific; what is appropriate in one setting may be inappropriate in another.

#### *The importance of possessing social skills.*

Social skills instruction is an intervention used at all three tiers of SWPBS. Possessing social skills is very important to student success, in school and life. Child

and adolescent deficits in social skills are correlated with adjustment issues and mental health problems (Corkum, Corbin, & Pike, 2010; January et al., 2011; Gresham, 2010); academic difficulties or failure (Bardon et al., 2008; January et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2005); behavioral problems and difficulty with emotional self-regulation (Bardon et al., 2008; January et al., 2011); criminal behavior (Corkum et al., 2010); and higher likelihood of developing an emotional/behavioral disorder (Gresham, 2010). In addition, students who have difficulty with social skills often experience rejection from teachers and peers (Bardon et al., 2008; January et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2005). This rejection can be linked to aggressive behavior (January et al., 2011). Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, and Zimbardo (2000) found achievement test results in third grade were not as strong as prosocial behavior in predicting academic achievement in eighth grade.

#### *Effectiveness of social skills training (SST)*

Gresham (2010) reports that since 1985 there have been seven meta-analyses of the social skills literature. Six of the seven were carried out with reliability and validity. Those six meta-analyses showed around 65% of students in social skills training groups demonstrated improvement in social skills vs. 35% in control groups. This is considered a moderate effect size.

However, there are some studies and meta-analyses which show “only negligible effects” of social skills training (Gresham, 2010, p. 348). Some of the discrepancy in results can be explained by how effectiveness of social skills training

is measured (Bardon et al., 2008; Gresham, 2010). There are three types of effectiveness measures. Type 1 measures “predict long-term outcomes that are important to society, such as school dropout, delinquency, adult mental health difficulties, and arrest rates” (Gresham, 2010, p. 350). Examples of Type 1 measures in schools are numbers of office discipline referrals and suspensions, and teacher ratings of student behaviors (Gresham, 2010).

Like Type 1 measures, Type 2 measures are also tied to important social outcomes. However, they are more sensitive to short-term change, which is both positive and negative. This is positive because it is valuable to determine whether social skills training is having an effect, but negative because short-term results do not necessarily predict long-term success. Type 2 measures consist of behavioral observations in students’ natural settings. Type 2 measures are often used in social skills training single-case design research (Gresham, 2010).

Type 3 measures have the highest face validity, but have the lowest correlation with the socially important outcomes listed above. Evaluating a student’s ability to perform prosocial skills in a role-play is an example of a type 3 measure. According to Gresham (2010), “there is little evidence to suggest that these measures are related to naturally occurring social behaviors observed in authentic educational settings...” (p. 351). In other words, these measures do not correlate with real-life performance.

*Best Practices in Social Skills Training*

With social skills being so crucial to student success, it is important they are taught in the most effective ways. Social skills should be taught as early in life as possible; in fact, some researchers suggest the age of eight is the “cut-off” point for learning social skills. After age eight, social skills become more difficult to learn (Lane et al., 2005). Those students who have documented behavioral and learning disabilities are the most resistant to social skill interventions, which also suggests the idea of early intervention, before students can demonstrate those issues (Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, & Tribe, 2006). January et al. (2011) pointed out that research in all areas supports the idea of earlier interventions for children rather than later ones. And the authors’ meta-analysis of social skills interventions found that the most improvement in social skills occurred in preschool and kindergarten students. However, the meta-analysis found that the next greatest improvement was shown in the early adolescent age group. The authors suggest that there is a second “window” of opportunity which occurs in early adolescence because of the increased importance of social connections for that age group.

Lane et al. (2005) concluded that for every student who needs improvement in social skills, there should also be two to three students with adequate social skills participating in the intervention. The students with adequate skills can model desired behaviors. If a social skills intervention is only directed at, or taught to, students who have social skill deficits, those students may reinforce each other’s

negative choices. In addition, the struggling students may be looked at negatively by their peers not experiencing the intervention (January et al., 2011).

According to Lane et al. (2005), effective social skills instruction should follow six steps. They are: 1) choose the students who need intervention; 2) choose the skills those students need to learn or practice; 3) organize the students into groups; 4) train the adult instructors; 5) teach the social skills; and 6) monitor progress. As Lane et al. (2005) note, the second component is especially important, since one cause of ineffective social skill interventions is a poor match between the skills focused on and the needs of the students involved. Another difficulty with social skills instruction is lack of generalization to different settings (Corkum et al., 2010; Gresham, 2010). In the generalization phase, use of the skills in other situations than the classroom is taught and discussed. To truly internalize a social skill, a student must be able to use it in all situations (Lane et al., 2005).

Length, setting, and methods of social skills training should also be considered. A school may be an effective place to teach social skills because it is a natural environment for students and provides many opportunities to practice (Corkum et al., 2010). Longer interventions (months and years, rather than days or weeks) provide greater impact than shorter ones, and truly effective social skills instruction should occur daily. This is, unfortunately, more time than school calendars can usually afford. In addition, active and hands-on interventions are more effective than passive instruction (January et al., 2011).

The skills and qualities of adults in teaching situations affect the success of students. Research has found that students who have connected relationships with their teachers experience more quality outcomes (Cheney et al., 2010). More specifically, adults who teach social skills need certain characteristics: the ability to listen as well as speak; behavior management skills with groups of children; knowledge of observation, imitation, practice, and reinforcement principles; and empathy for children and their social situations (Lane et al., 2005). In fact, the adult-student relationship is so important that one program specifically identifies the most important aspect the adult facilitator should possess. The Check, Connect, and Expect program, an evidence-based Tier II intervention, posits that the most crucial characteristic for the adult to possess is “positive and unconditional caring for students with challenging behavior” (Cheney et al., 2010, p. 153).

In addition, an important distinction should be made between social skills instruction and social skills reinforcement. Students who do not display adequate social skills can be divided into two categories: those who have acquisition deficits and those who have performance deficits (Gresham, 2010). Students who have acquisition deficits do not possess knowledge of appropriate social skills. They cannot perform what they do not know, and require instruction. Students with performance deficits possess the knowledge and abilities to perform adequate social skills, but choose not to. These students need motivation and reinforcement, not instruction.

### *Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)*

One system which aims to remedy both acquisition and performance deficits is the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS; Gresham & Elliott, 2008). SSIS is a comprehensive system which provides screening tools, rating scales, classroom-wide social skills training, and targeted social skills training, in order to “identify students at risk for academic or social behavior difficulties and then to help students develop and improve their foundational social skills behavior” (p. 6). SSIS is designed to fit into the three tiers of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports. See Appendix A for a detailed diagram of the Social Skills Improvement System.

At the Tier I level, SSIS provides both universal screening and intervention. The universal screening component is the SSIS Performance Screening Guide, which classroom teachers use to evaluate students in the categories of Prosocial Behavior, Motivation to Learn, Reading Skills, and Math Skills. The Performance Screening Guide is used to benchmark students three times per year: September, January, and May. Classroom teachers rate each student on a scale of 1 to 5 (Elliott & Gresham, 2008).

The universal intervention component of SSIS is the Classwide Intervention Program (Elliott & Gresham, 2007), a series of social skills lessons designed to be taught in the classroom by the classroom teacher. Ten social skills are included, chosen based on feedback from hundreds of American teachers. These ten were deemed to be most important: listen to others, follow the steps, follow the rules,

pay attention to your work, ask for help, take turns when you talk, get along with others, stay calm with others, do the right thing, and do nice things for others. The format of the lessons includes six steps: Tell, Show, Do, Practice, Monitor Progress, and Generalize (Elliott & Gresham, 2007).

At Tier II, SSIS provides selected assessments and interventions (Elliott & Gresham, 2008). Students who are rated below proficient by their teachers in the categories of Prosocial Behavior or Motivation to Learn on the Performance Screening Guide, or who do not respond to the interventions in the Classwide Intervention Program, are assessed by the SSIS Rating Scales and possibly other assessments. Based on the results of assessment, these students are then taught in small groups using lessons from the SSIS Intervention Guide. The Intervention Guide contains twenty social skill lessons, separated into seven domains: communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, engagement, and self-control. These domains are aligned with subscales on the SSIS Rating Scales. These twenty lessons include nine of the ten core lessons from the Classwide Intervention Program, plus eleven others. These lessons are primarily targeted toward students who have acquisition deficits. The SSIS Intervention Guide's two theoretical bases are social learning theory and applied behavior analysis.

Students who do not respond to intervention at Tier II are then assessed at the Tier III level. The same assessment, the SSIS Rating Scales is used, as are interventions from the SSIS Intervention Guide, but at a more individualized,

targeted level. If the Tier III interventions are not successful, the student may be assessed for special education eligibility (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

### *The Nurtured Heart Approach*

As mentioned earlier, the skills and outlook of the adult facilitator are important parts of social skills training. One framework which focuses on adult skills is the Nurtured Heart Approach (Glasser & Easley, 1998; Glasser, Bowdidge, & Bravo, 2007). The Nurtured Heart Approach (NHA) is “a way of thinking and a set of strategies that are particularly useful for difficult, intense children, but it can also be tremendously valuable for all children” (Glasser et al., 2007, p. 2). The goal of NHA is to inspire positive behavioral changes in children by helping adults to change the way they interact with them, especially the children with difficult behaviors (Glasser & Easley, 1998; Glasser et al., 2007). Nurtured Heart’s focus on adult behaviors and attitudes fits within the School-wide Positive Behavior Supports Model; Frey et al. (2010) point out that in SWPBS, the role of school psychologists and social workers is to “provide indirect services to children by addressing the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of adults” (p. 411).

According to Glasser and Easley (1998), the Nurtured Heart Approach avoids the pitfalls which make traditional parenting/teaching approaches fail with difficult children. Those pitfalls are inadequate coordination of praise/positives and limit-setting, and not enough intensity given to the facets of praise and limit-setting. In fact, many adults give their highest level of energy to children’s poor behaviors. “In

effect, as a culture, we try to teach the rules and limits when they are being broken. But there's a backlash: the energy given to the broken rules actually reinforces the undesirable behavior" (Glasser & Easley, 1998, p. 22).

Nurtured Heart gives adults three "stands" to live by, and by using those stands, helps them to transform intense children. A stand is defined as "a consistent, resolved, and committed position based on specific and targeted strategies" (Glasser & Easley, 1998, p. 27). The first stand involves creating and nurturing successes; the second stand encompasses refusal to energize negative choices; and the third stand involves clear rules and consequences. All stands are considered equally important and must balance each other in order for transformation to occur (Glasser et al., 2007).

#### *Stand 1: Create and Nurture Successes*

In Stand 1, as the first step, adults are taught to redefine how they measure success. For behaviorally intense and struggling children, respectful, appropriate social skills may be considered the ultimate success, but those skills will not happen overnight. Success must be looked at as sequential movements toward the ultimately desired behaviors. For the intense child, small movements *are* success (Glasser et al., 2007).

The second step involves nurturing and reinforcing those small steps to ensure they continue to occur. The nurturing and reinforcing comes through specific

verbal praise from the adult, given with enthusiasm and energy. The specificity of the praise teaches children exactly what they have done correctly, and the energy and enthusiasm fulfill intense children's needs for attention and recognition. This eventually replaces the intense child's usual way of gaining energy and attention, which is through intense adult reaction to the child's negative behaviors (Glasser et al., 2007). The Nurtured Heart Approach's focus on praise and reinforcement is a key connection with SWPBS, which also espouses praise and reinforcement (Frey et al., 2010). The Nurtured Heart Approach has four explicit praise and reinforcement techniques, three of which will be discussed here.

The first technique is Active Recognition. In Active Recognitions, the adult describes aloud exactly what is seen. There are no value judgments, just a description of what is happening (Glasser et al., 2007). An example of this technique occurred in the social skills lessons that are the subject of this paper. I often commented, after I asked a question and before I called on someone, "I see you raised your hand."

The second technique is Experiential Recognition. In Experiential Recognitions the value words are added to the descriptions from the Active Recognitions. Values which adults want to reinforce and recognize are highlighted, values such as responsibility, respect, generosity, politeness, etc. (Glasser et al., 2007). An example of an Experiential Recognition paired with the above Active

Recognition example would sound like this: “I see you raised your hand. That shows me you are respectful of the rules in this classroom.”

The third technique is Proactive Recognition. Proactive Recognitions appreciate and praise children when they are NOT breaking rules. Often adults feel a good time to teach and reinforce the rules is when they are being broken. However, many intense children perceive the well-meaning attention they get from adults at this time as desirable, and the rule-breaking behavior is inadvertently reinforced. Proactive Recognitions teach and reinforce the rules when they are NOT being broken, and avoid the unintended pitfalls of reinforcing negative behavior (Glasser et al., 2007). Adding a Proactive Recognition to the above examples would sound like this: “I see you raised your hand. That shows me you are respectful of the rules in this classroom. You could have just blurted out your answer, but you didn’t.”

SWPBS advocates praise and reinforcement as a core principle (Frey et al., 2010), but adults still often use punishment instead of praise, or attempt to give praise but do so in an ineffective way. The Nurtured Heart Approach is a logical supplement to SWPBS because it gives school staff explicit techniques on how to praise and reinforce (Bravo, 2012). Haydon and Musti-Rao (2011) emphasize that there are two kinds of praise: general praise and behavior-specific praise. General praise includes statements such as “good job” or “nice work.” As Glasser (2007) notes, general or normal praise “is inherently vague” (p. 16). Behavior-specific

praise, conversely, addresses or describes the desired behavior which is occurring. Behavior-specific praise is more effective for just that reason (Haydon & Musti-Rao, 2011) and the Nurtured Heart Approach teaches recognition techniques which give school staff the skills to carry out behavior-specific praise.

The specificity of praise given through the Nurtured Heart Approach also makes it especially suited to go hand-in-hand with social skills instruction, because as children use appropriate social skills they are being reinforced and further taught those skills through the praise and recognition. Through using NHA recognition techniques, adults give children “clear, specific feedback...regarding values, behaviors or attitudes that are considered desirable” (Glasser & Easley, 1998, p. 59). This is particularly helpful to students with social skills performance deficits; that is, those students who possess social skills but choose not to use them. The energetic praise and recognition in Stand 1 can serve as reinforcement for those students.

Also, as mentioned earlier, social skills training should occur daily (January et al., 2011); however, most schools do not have the time to implement daily scheduled time for social skills training. By giving praise and recognition to prosocial behavior occurring in everyday moments, teachers are doing social skills training without allocating extra time for it. Finally, when teachers and other school staff use praise to recognize prosocial behavior in everyday moments, they are promoting the all-important generalization phase of social skills training.

*Stand 2: Refuse to energize negativity.*

“Some children come to believe, on the basis of our actions, that they can get the best quality time when they are misbehaving” (Glasser & Easley, 1998, p. 55). Many well-intentioned adults raise their voices, use multiple and detailed words, and increase their energy when dealing with misbehavior. Their goal is to discourage negative choices, but the opposite effect occurs with intense children. As this pattern is established in the intense child’s life, the child becomes, in effect, addicted to the energy received when misbehavior occurs. Being “good” becomes less and less attractive because there is not the payoff of energy which occurs from being “bad.” Nurtured Heart aims to reverse this phenomenon by combining Stand 1: Create and Nurture Successes and Stand 2: Refuse to Energize Negativity (Glasser et al., 2007). This fits with the SWPBS idea of a continuum of consequences which do not provide payoffs for negative behaviors (Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010).

In fact, a crucial concept of the Nurtured Heart Approach is the analogy of “Toys Are Us” (Glasser, et al., 2007). The “Toys Are Us” analogy compares adults to toys, and looks at how children react to toys. Children explore the features a toy has and want the toy to react. In the same way, more difficult and intense children explore to see what will get adults to react. Intense children get the idea that the “toys” (adults) are “much more animated, interesting, exciting, responsive and emotional” when they (the children) misbehave (p. 24).

Gresham (2010) discusses this pattern of children being more reinforced for poor behavior than positive behavior. The author cites Herrnstein's "matching law," which asserts that behavior occurs at a rate which is proportional to the rate at which it is reinforced. "...That is, behaviors having a higher rate of reinforcement will be chosen...by individuals more frequently than behaviors reinforced at lower rates" (p. 343). The author uses the example of a classroom with concurrent reinforcement schedules to show matching law at work. In the sample classroom, every four times a disruptive behavior occurs it is reinforced, while a prosocial behavior is reinforced every twenty times it occurs. The result is a classroom where disruptive behavior is five times more frequent than prosocial behavior.

*Stand 3: Set Clear Rules and Consequences.*

In Stand 3 rules are clear and consistently enforced. This gives the intense child clarity. As mentioned above, clear rules and behavioral expectations are also a facet of SWPBS (Curtis et al.; Frey et al., 2010). In the Nurtured Heart Approach a consequence for inappropriate behavior is given immediately and swiftly. When the child has served the quick consequence, usually a brief time-out, the adult can then " 'accuse' the child of being successful for completing a time-out and for not breaking that very same rule in this new present moment" (Glasser et al., 2007, p. 94). This is another connection with SWPBS, which does not use traditional punishment and restriction approaches to discipline, realizing that these approaches do not lead to lasting behavioral change (Goh & Bambara, 2010). Like the Nurtured

Heart Approach, SWPBS utilizes consequences that do not provide payoffs for negative behaviors (Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010). The Nurtured Heart Approach seeks to build “inner wealth” within a child, which, when it exists, helps the child to make choices “that reflect a sense of values and character” (Glasser et al., 2007, p. 3). Lasting behavioral change comes from making choices which reflect values and character.

### *Transformation*

As the three stands are applied in balance with each other, transformation occurs in the child. This transformation is described as follows: “They [children] become invested in *not* pushing the limits. They can then also apply control and bring themselves to a halt before they cross the line, despite their intense feelings and intense energies. Rather, they get to a place where they can apply their intense energies to healthy endeavors” (Glasser & Easley, 1998, p. 24). The transformation which occurs through the Nurtured Heart Approach brings to mind the two original intentions of Positive Behavior Supports; number one, improving quality of life for individuals by enhancing their strengths, and number two, reducing problem behaviors (Dunlap et. al, 2010). Transformation, in other words, equals children’s quality of life being improved by having their strengths enhanced. While not the end goal of the Nurtured Heart Approach, when children transform, they also naturally reduce their problem behaviors.

### *Summary and Statement of the Research Problem*

Seventeen (Lazarus & Sulkowski, 2011) to 20% (Evans & Seligman, 2005; Gresham, 2010; Nastasi & Varjas, 2008) of American children have mental health problems or disorders and less than half of all children develop the social-emotional competencies needed for success (Lazarus & Sulkowski, 2011). Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports is a framework which implements behavioral interventions and supports in three tiers, developed to meet student mental health and behavioral needs in the most efficient way possible. The three tiers provide escalating levels of support and intervention based on student needs at each tier (Cheney et al., 2010). SWPBS has a solid research base supporting its effectiveness. SWPBS has been shown to reduce behavioral problems (Curtis et al., 2010; Farkas et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010; January et al., 2011), increase student academic performance (Farkas et al., 2011), and lessen lost instructional days (Curtis et al., 2010).

Social skills training is often a facet of SWPBS. Students with social skills deficits often have mental health issues (Corkum et al., 2010; January et al., 2011; Gresham, 2010), academic difficulty (Bardon et al., 2008; January et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2005), and behavioral problems (Bardon et al., 2008; January et al., 2011). The literature shows some evidence of effectiveness of social skills training, but results are often contingent on what the dependent variable measures. There are short-term and long-term measures of effectiveness: an example of a short-term

measure is a behavioral observation; an example of a long-term measure is number of office discipline referrals (Gresham, 2010). A gap in the research is lack of generalization of social skills to all settings (Corkum et al., 2010; Gresham, 2010). To effectively know a social skill a child must be able to use it in all settings, not just the one in which it was learned (Lane et al., 2005).

The Nurtured Heart Approach does not have a research base at this point but is considered a promising practice in some regions (Children's Success Foundation, n.d.). However, the characteristics of NHA fit within the SWPBS model and best practices in social skills training. SWPBS calls for praise and reinforcement of students (Frey et al., 2010) and NHA provides explicit techniques for praising and recognizing positive student behaviors (Bravo, 2012; Glasser et al., 2007). Those explicit techniques teach social skills in everyday moments, providing both generalization of skills and daily social skills instruction, called for in the literature as a best practice (January et al., 2011). SWPBS also espouses consequences which do not inadvertently provide payoffs for negative behaviors (Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010) and NHA espouses Stand 2, which calls for refusal to energize negative student behaviors (Glasser et al., 2007).

This paper outlines a case study which combined Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports, social skills training, the Social Skills Improvement System, and the Nurtured Heart Approach. This case study serves as a preliminary look at how the Nurtured Heart Approach fits within the above frameworks.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### *Setting*

The school which participated in this study is in a medium-sized city in the upper Midwest. The school district has 12 elementary schools. This particular school had 366 kindergarten through fifth grade students in the 2010/2011 school year. Twenty-six percent of students in the school identified themselves as coming from homes speaking a language other than English. Students in the school represented 22 different languages and 14 different cultures. The school was piloting Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports, and used AIMSweb as its data-management system. AIMSweb is a computer-based “benchmark and progress monitoring system based on direct, frequent and continuous student assessment” (AIMSweb, 2010). The behavior portion of AIMSweb uses the Social Skills Improvement System (Elliott & Gresham, 2008) as its basis (AIMSweb, 2011).

#### *Participants*

Participants in this study included 21 fifth grade students, 10 males and 11 females. All of the students were in the same fifth grade class. Approximately 50 percent of these students were from ethnic minority cultures. This classroom was chosen for intervention as a result of behavioral ratings given to the students by the

classroom teacher. This class contained several students who had ratings that were a concern.

### *Materials*

#### *SSIS Assessment*

*Structure.* The Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Performance Screening Guide was used for data collection. The SSIS Performance Screening Guide is used in the AIMSweb Behavior system to benchmark students three times per year: September, January, and May (AIMSweb, 2011). During benchmarking all students are rated by their classroom teachers in the categories of Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn. Each student receives a rating of 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 in each area, with 1 representing very low proficiency and 5 representing very high proficiency. Four and 5 are considered “green” categories and represent students who do not need intervention, 2 and 3 are considered “yellow” categories and represent students who need some intervention, and 1 is a “red” category. These students are considered at-risk and needing significant intervention. The ratings are based on age-level criterion for expected behavior (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). See Appendix B for detailed descriptions of the criteria for each rating category.

*Reliability and Validity.* The SSIS Rating Scales Manual (Gresham & Elliott, 2008) reports results from two reliability studies and one validity study for the Performance Screening Guide. The first reliability study, a test-retest study, found reliability coefficients at the elementary school level of .69 for Prosocial Behavior

and .74 for Motivation to Learn. These are moderate to strong test-retest reliabilities. The second reliability study, an interrater study, found reliability coefficients at the elementary level of .55 for Prosocial Behavior and .62 for Motivation to Learn. These are moderate reliabilities.

Validity for the SSIS Performance Screening Guide was computed by comparing scores/ratings obtained by individuals on the Performance Screening Guide and the SSIS Rating Scales (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The SSIS Rating Scales, as stated earlier, are a Tier II measure used to assess the social skills and problem behaviors of students with more significant behavioral difficulties. Results were reported for the age ranges of 5-18. The validity coefficient between the category of Prosocial Behavior on the Performance Screening Guide and the category of Social Skills on the Rating Scales was .70. This is a strong validity coefficient. The validity coefficient between Prosocial Behavior and the category of Problem Behaviors on the Rating Scales was -.58. This is a moderate coefficient. The validity coefficient between Motivation to Learn and Social Skills was .58 and -.56 between Motivation to Learn and Problem Behaviors. These are also moderate validity coefficients (Gresham & Elliott, 2008).

### *SSIS Intervention*

The social skills interventions used came from the SSIS Intervention Guide (Elliott & Gresham, 2008). The Intervention Guide contains 20 social skills lessons designed to be used as a Tier II intervention. The Intervention Guide lessons are

meant to be delivered over a 15 week period with two 45 minute sessions per week; facilitated by a school psychologist, school social worker, or school counselor; and delivered to groups of 4-6 students. The authors recommend that one lesson should be delivered per week over the two sessions. The first session of the week is designed to be focused on the Tell, Show, and Do sections of the lesson; the second session of the week is focused on the Practice, Monitor Progress, and Generalize sections (Elliott & Gresham, 2008). There are suggested steps for each section of the lessons. See Appendix C for detailed descriptions of each step in the lessons. Due to time constraints the sessions reported in this study only addressed the Tell and Show components. The SSIS Intervention Guide does not provide reliability or validity information.

#### *Nurtured Heart Approach*

*Training.* There are a number of options available for learning the Nurtured Heart Approach. There are several books which teach the approach, including *Transforming the Difficult Child* (Glasser & Easley, 1998), *Transforming the Difficult Child Workbook* (Glasser et al., 2007), *Notching Up the Nurtured Heart Approach - The New Inner Wealth Initiative for Educators* (Bravo, 2012), and several others. There are several trainings provided by the Children's Success Foundation, the nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting and teaching the Nurtured Heart Approach. These include two online courses, traveling trainings, and Advanced and Master Training. The online courses are the eight hour *Exploring the Nurtured Heart*

*Approach*, and the 15 hour *Nurtured Heart Approach Foundations Course*. The traveling trainings involve a Master Trainer coming to a community to provide one or two day trainings to large groups of people. Advanced Training is a 5 ½ day, in-person training which teaches the Nurtured Heart Approach at an in-depth level. Completing Advanced Training gives participants the ability to hold trainings and teach the Approach to others. In addition, Advanced Training is a pre-requisite for becoming a Master Trainer. Master Training curriculum and requirements are currently in development by the Children's Success Foundation. Finally, individual Advanced Trainers provide trainings in their communities to parents, educators, treatment professionals, and colleagues. The length of these trainings vary (Children's Success Foundation, n.d. a). It is important to note that anyone who reads a book or completes a training is able to use the NHA in their interactions with children, but to teach the Approach to others a person must be an Advanced Trainer or above.

I am an Advanced Trainer. I learned of the Nurtured Heart Approach in the fall of 2010 from a school psychologist who is an Advanced Trainer. I started reading *Transforming the Difficult Child Workbook* soon after learning of the Approach and also attended a half day training presented by another Advanced Trainer. Reading the book and attending the half-day training, along with starting to use NHA in my personal and professional life, satisfied the prerequisites for attending Advanced

Training. I attended Advanced Training for the first time in January 2011, shortly before beginning the intervention which is the subject of this paper.

*NHA Activity.* A recognition activity recommended for use in tandem with the Nurtured Heart Approach is *Me, You, Superstar* (Glasser, 2012). This is a group activity with several variations; each variation involves group participants drawing a card or strip of paper with Me, You, or Superstar written on it. If participants draw Me, they must recognize themselves with praise. If participants draw You, they must recognize the person to the right of them with praise. If participants draw Superstar, they must stand up and receive praise and recognition from each member of the group.

*Reliability and Validity.* The Children's Success Foundation website does not report any reliability or validity information at this time. The Children's Success Foundation, the nonprofit organization which supports the Nurtured Heart Approach, reports research is underway. However, much of the behavioral principles underlying the Nurtured Heart Approach do have a research basis.

#### *Procedure*

The data examined in this study were originally gathered as part of a classwide intervention in a school implementing SWPBS procedures. I implemented the intervention under the supervision of the building's school psychologist and the classroom teacher. During January benchmarking one student in the elementary classroom received a "red" rating in the category of Motivation to Learn. He was

initially considered the only student in the classroom in need of significant intervention; however, there were also several students who were rated “yellow” in both categories. Because of the significant number of students with ratings of red or yellow in this classroom, it was decided by the school psychologist and classroom teacher that classwide social skills instruction would be provided. In addition, this classroom teacher was willing to allow an intervention in her classroom.

The AIMSweb Behavior (AIMSweb, 2011) computer program generated a list of 17 possible SSIS social skills lessons based on the behavioral ratings of the one student who had obtained the “red” score. The list contained the majority of the lessons from the SSIS Intervention Guide. The classroom teacher identified eight of the 17 lessons as areas she felt should be targeted in her classroom. It was determined instruction would occur two times per week, for 20 minutes each time, for a period of four weeks. Six of the sessions were spent on SSIS lessons, and with the teacher’s permission, two SSIS lessons were replaced with the Nurtured Heart Approach activity of *Me, You, Superstar*. Table 1 lists the eight lessons taught across the four weeks of intervention.

The subject matter for each lesson was modified to fit the time allotted. As 20 minutes per lesson topic is considerably less than the two 45 minute sessions per topic recommended by the SSIS authors (Elliott & Gresham, 2008), I modified each lesson to fit the time frame. In each 20 minute period the Tell and Show sections were covered. There was not time to include the other sections in each lesson.

Table 1

*Session Topics by Week*

<u>Week</u>	<u>Session Topics</u>
Week 1	Getting Along with Others Following Directions
Week 2	Expressing Feelings Paying Attention to Others
Week 3	Staying Calm When Disagreeing Doing Your Part in a Group
Week 4	Me, You, Superstar Me, You, Superstar

The Nurtured Heart Approach was utilized throughout the teaching of the lessons. Stand 1, Create and Nurture Successes, and Stand 2, Refusal to Energize Negativity, were used extensively. As the lessons were taught, appropriate behavior was recognized and reinforced, and inappropriate behavior was not recognized and not reinforced. During the first lesson, Getting Along with Others, I started with asking questions relating to the topic. Students who blurted out answers did not receive a response. Before I called on anyone, I recognized all the students who had their hands raised, commenting that they already knew how to get along with me, because they were respectfully raising their hands and waiting to be called on. I also commented that they were showing they wanted to get along with me because they

were joining in with my lesson. During the Following Directions lesson I also praised and recognized students who raised their hands, and commented that they were following the classroom directions to raise their hands when wanting to speak.

Just by the nature of the Nurtured Heart Approach, use of it contributed to the generalization of the skills to other areas. For example, each morning at the school I sat in a commons area assisting a student with a project on the computer. The commons area was outside the targeted classroom, so I saw the fifth grade students as they arrived at school. As I got to know them I called them by name and said good morning. Then, during the lesson of Paying Attention to Others, I tied those morning greetings to the topic. I recognized all the students who had said good morning to me in the commons area. I pointed out that those students were paying attention to others, shown by the fact that they were aware of me saying hello to them. I also recognized them for being respectful and tied this action back to the Getting Along with Others topic. After this concept was introduced, students constantly approached me in the mornings to say hello. The students responding to this reinforcement reflects the truth of the following statement: "...it is the group leader's knowledge of the students and ability to connect the intervention to students' daily life that will provide the biggest impact" (Gresham & Elliott, 2008, p. 65).

An example of using Stands 1 and 2 together occurred during one of the last lessons presented. I posed a question to the class, and a female student blurted out

her answer. I did not verbally respond to her answer, look directly at her, or acknowledge her in any way, but I did look at her peripherally. I noticed her quietly say “oh,” then quickly raised her hand. I immediately recognized her for stopping herself and raising her hand, then called on her. This is an example of the student developing self-monitoring skills.

The Nurtured Heart Approach activity of *Me, You, Superstar* (Glasser, 2012) was used for the last two sessions. The students moved their desks to the sides of the room and sat on the floor in a circle. I had three large pieces of paper with Me, You, and Superstar written on them; they were turned over so the students could not see what was on each piece of paper. One at a time they were instructed to draw a piece of paper and follow the directions based on what word they drew. This activity was chosen as a way to reinforce all the previous social skills lessons. Getting Along with Others was highlighted by this activity, as the students learned that complimenting others helps with relationships with others. The Following Directions lesson was reviewed because the students had to follow the directions which went with the word they drew. By giving compliments and recognitions to their classmates they were Expressing Feelings and Paying Attention to Others, and also Doing [Their] Part in a Group. It was during this exercise the comment occurred which became the title of this paper. I drew the Superstar card and several students gave me recognitions. It was a fifth grade girl who thought for a moment, then exclaimed loudly: “You’re fun, you’re funny, and you dress good!”

Post-data was collected in late April. Benchmarking data is usually gathered in May, but this data was gathered early so I could present on my project before the end of the semester. The classroom teacher filled out ratings on all the students in her classroom in the categories of Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The 21 students in this fifth grade classroom were rated on a 1-5 scale in the categories of Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn by their classroom teacher. A rating of one means the student needs significant intervention and a rating of five means the student has very competent skills. See Appendix B for detailed descriptions of each rating level. The first rating occurred in January as part of SWPBS benchmarking procedures and the second rating was completed in April. In between these two rating periods the social skills intervention occurred. Table 2 includes the number of students rated by the teacher on Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn at each rating level before and after the intervention.

The pre and post information for both categories was statistically analyzed by using a paired means t-test. An alpha level of .05 was used. For Prosocial Behavior there was a significant difference in the ratings from January ( $M = 3.71, SD = 1.102$ ) and April ( $M = 4.24, SD = 0.889$ );  $t(20) = -2.750, p = .012$ . For Motivation to Learn there was not a significant difference in the ratings from January ( $M = 3.71, SD = 1.056$ ) and April ( $M = 4.14, SD = 0.964$ );  $t(20) = -2.007, p = .058$ . Thus, there was a significant difference between the January and May ratings for Prosocial Behavior, but the difference in Motivation to Learn ratings did not quite reach significance.

Table 2

*Frequency and Percentage of Students at Each Rating Level for Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn Across First and Second Ratings.*

<u>Level</u>	<u>Prosocial Behavior</u>		<u>Motivation to Learn</u>	
	<u>First Rating</u>	<u>Second Rating</u>	<u>First Rating</u>	<u>Second Rating</u>
1	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (5)	1 (5)
2	4 (19)	0 (0)	1 (5)	0 (0)
3	4 (19)	6 (29)	6 (29)	2 (10)
4	7 (33)	4 (19)	8 (38)	10 (48)
5	6 (29)	11 (52)	5 (24)	8 (38)

*Note.* Percentages are in parentheses

In both categories, Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn, almost all students either stayed the same or improved by one or two levels. Of the nine students who stayed the same in Prosocial Behavior, five of them stayed at a rating of 5, and three stayed at a rating of 4. In Motivation to Learn, nine students stayed at the same rating. Of those students, five stayed at a rating of 5, and four stayed at a rating of 4. In the Social Skills Improvement System Performance Screening Guide, ratings of 4 and 5 are considered adequate and not needing intervention. So, while it could be argued that nine students in each category staying the same is evidence

that the intervention did not have an effect, it could also be argued that these students were already at the level at which they needed to be.

In the category of Prosocial Behavior, there were eight students rated at 1, 2, or 3 and considered needing intervention. Of those eight students, seven improved by at least 1 rating; and three of the eight improved enough to move out of the needing intervention categories (1, 2, 3) and into the categories of not needing intervention (4, 5). In Motivation to Learn, there were also eight students rated as needing intervention. Of those eight, all of them improved their rating by at least one level, and six improved enough to move out of the needing intervention categories.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The data reported in this project suggest that combined elements of the Social Skills Improvement System and the Nurtured Heart Approach had a positive impact on this teacher's perceptions of her students' behaviors, as expressed through her ratings on the SSIS Performance Screening Guide. The change in ratings from pre-intervention to post-intervention in Prosocial Behavior was statistically significant; the change in Motivation to Learn ratings just missed statistical significance.

This project used many of the practices recommended by the social skills training literature. While Lane et al.'s (2011) meta-analysis of the social skills training literature found the most improvement in social skills in preschool and kindergarten students, the second highest improvement occurred in the early adolescent age group. The students in this project, fifth graders, were in very early adolescence. The authors' hypothesis that early adolescence is a good time to intervene because those students are more focused on social connections may be true.

Lane et al. (2005) recommend as a best practice that social skills instruction should occur with a ratio of 1:2 or 1:3; that is, one student who is lacking social skills

to every two to three students who have adequate skills. Under this arrangement there is less chance that students lacking in skills will reinforce each other's negative choices. Also, students with strong social skills can be role models for the other students. This project, taking place in a general education fifth grade classroom, involved students with a mix of social skill abilities. In the categories of both Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn, the ratios of students needing intervention to those not needing intervention were 8:13. This is close to a 1:2 ratio.

Lane et al. (2005) also recommends six steps for social skill instruction. The steps are 1) choose the students who need intervention; 2) choose the skills those students need to learn or practice; 3) organize the students into groups; 4) train the adult instructors; 5) teach the social skills; and 6) monitor progress. Five of these six steps occurred in this project. Through the pre-intervention data provided by the Performance Screening Guide, several students were chosen as needing social skills intervention. A computer-generated list of social skills, combined with teacher input, was used to identify the targeted skills. The students were not divided into groups, but rather taught as a whole classroom. I, as the adult instructor, was already trained in the Nurtured Heart Approach. And finally, the social skills were taught, and progress was monitored by teacher ratings on the Performance Screening Guide.

Finally, behavior-specific praise was given through the use of the Nurtured Heart Approach recognition techniques (Glasser et al., 2007). The techniques of

Active Recognitions, Experiential Recognitions, and Proactive Recognitions provided students in this project with very behavior-specific praise. Behavior-specific praise is more effective than general or vague praise (Haydon & Musti-Rao, 2011). The behavior-specific praise given in this project also explicitly addressed generalizing the skills to other areas than the classroom.

### *Limitations*

Since this was not a controlled experiment results must be interpreted cautiously. It may be that the social skills intervention combined with the Nurtured Heart Approach led to improvements for these children, but there are other possible explanations.

There was no control group in this study, so other variables cannot be excluded as causal factors in the outcomes. One variable which needs to be considered is maturity. The pre-intervention ratings were given in January, the intervention happened throughout April, and the post-intervention ratings were given in late April. These students matured in age by almost four months between pre and post data. It is possible that the students' behaviors improved because the students aged. Also, there is an almost three month gap of time between when the pre ratings were given and when the intervention started. It is possible that something else happened in the three months prior to intervention which caused behavioral changes in the students.

The behavioral data considered in this study is based on teacher ratings. The

classroom teacher knew the students were experiencing a social skills intervention, and sometimes stayed in the classroom to witness the intervention. It is possible that the teacher expected positive changes in the students because she knew the intervention was happening.

Also, data from only 21 students were available for this study. While there was a significant difference in pre and post intervention ratings for Prosocial Behavior, the difference for Motivation to Learn just missed significance. Had data from more students been available, that difference may also have reached significance.

Another validity issue is fidelity of implementation of the Social Skills Improvement System. This process did not occur with fidelity as recommended by the SSIS authors. The SSIS program (Gresham & Elliott, 2008) recommends using the Classroom Intervention Guide to teach social skills to all students as a Tier I intervention in the classroom setting, then, if needed, using the SSIS Intervention Guide to teach social skills to small groups in need of more instruction. However, in this situation, a small group of students was identified as needing extra intervention, but the decision was made to instruct all of the students in these students' classroom. Also, the Classroom Intervention Guide was not used—instead, selected lessons from the Intervention Guide were used. The school psychologist later reported that the school, at that point, was only in the implementation stages of SWPBS, and did not know the complete protocol. Using the Social Skills

Improvement System with complete fidelity could change the outcomes found by this study.

A final validity issue is training, both in the Social Skills Improvement System and the Nurtured Heart Approach. I received no training in the Social Skills Improvement System before conducting this intervention. I taught myself how to implement the lessons. In contrast, I am highly trained in the Nurtured Heart Approach.

In attempting to replicate this study, levels of training would have to be considered. It is possible that another implementer would have a different level of training in the Social Skills Improvement System. Also, it would take considerable effort and cost to train an implementer to the same level of education in the Nurtured Heart Approach. More investigation is needed to determine if a lesser level of Nurtured Heart training could obtain the same results.

And finally, prior research shows that the personality of the adult teaching social skills has an effect on the success of the intervention (Lane et al., 2005). There is no way to exactly quantify an adult personality or to determine what aspects of it, if any, have an effect on the success or failure of an intervention. The skills and personalities of the adults involved will always be a factor in further social skills interventions or in an attempt to replicate this project.

### *Future Research*

To better understand the impact of adding Nurtured Heart procedures to social skills training interventions, a study incorporating control groups would need to be completed. This type of study might include having control classroom groups which receive no intervention, other groups which receive lessons from the SSIS Classroom Intervention Guide delivered by adults with no knowledge of the Nurtured Heart Approach, and other classroom groups which also receive Classroom Intervention Guide lessons but from adults who are trained in the Nurtured Heart Approach.

Additionally, in analyzing this project and looking ahead to further research, the areas of training, age level of students, social skills curriculums, and the Nurtured Heart Approach should be explored. As an Advanced Certified Nurtured Heart Approach trainer I brought a high level of Nurtured Heart skills to this project. It would be important to know the degree of training in the NHA needed to increase the effectiveness of interventions such as those used in the SSIS system. The hope would be that lesser levels of training could achieve similar results, because that would save time and money.

Further research should explore the effects of this intervention on different age levels of students. The research (January et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2005) suggests better success in social skills interventions with younger students rather than older. Further research should include both early elementary and middle and high school

students to explore this further, especially in combination with the Nurtured Heart Approach, and see whether this still holds true.

Another area to explore is using the Social Skills Improvement System differently, and/or using a different social skills curriculum. Further study should determine whether using the Social Skills Improvement System with complete fidelity makes a difference in results. It should use the Classroom Intervention Guide, not the Intervention Guide, for a whole classroom intervention, and the lessons should be carried out for the suggested amount of time. Or, a different social skills curriculum could be used instead of the Social Skills Improvement System.

### *Conclusions*

Research supports the effectiveness of Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports (Curtis et al., 2010; Farkas et al., 2011; Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010; January et al., 2011) and there are already thousands of schools using SWPBS (Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010). Social skills research is more vague about effectiveness, depending on the measure(s) used for the dependent variable(s) (Bardon et al., 2008; Gresham, 2010). What is clear is that students with social skills deficits have academic and behavioral struggles (Bardon et al., 2008; Corkum et al., 2010; Gresham, 2010; January et al., 2011), so it seems likely that social skills will continue to be taught as a part of SWPBS.

As social skills are taught, best practices must be kept in mind. Teaching younger rather than older students is more effective (Denham et al., 2006; January et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2005), as is having a mix of social skills abilities in intervention groups (January et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2005). Social skills should ideally be taught every day (January et al., 2011) and student generalization of skills to all areas should be a focus (Corkum et al., 2010; Gresham, 2010).

The Nurtured Heart Approach is considered a promising practice in some regions and people from all over the United States are conducting research towards the goal of making it an evidence-based practice (Children's Success Foundation, n.d. b). In the meantime, the Nurtured Heart Approach contains many facets which fit nicely within the frameworks of SWPBS and social skills training. Stand 2, refuse to energize negativity (Glasser et al., 2007) connects with the SWPBS idea of consequences which do not provide payoffs to students (Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2010). The detailed praise and recognition techniques of Stand 1, create and nurture successes, give explicit instruction on how to carry out the SWPBS facet of praise and reinforcement (Frey et al., 2011). The daily practice of the Nurtured Heart Approach fits with the social skills instruction best practices of long-term (months and years) interventions and daily instruction (January et al., 2011).

This project was a starting point towards the integration of SWPBS, social skills training, and the Nurtured Heart Approach. The data showed some statistically significant changes, but no conclusions can be made about what caused those

changes. However, the Nurtured Heart Approach seems to be a logical and comfortable supplement to social skills training and SWPBS. Further research with larger numbers of participants and use of control groups will be needed to determine if there is a causal relationship between student behaviors and the independent variables in this study—the Nurtured Heart Approach, the Social Skills Improvement System, social skills training, and Schoolwide Positive Behavior Supports. Finally, despite the limitations of this study, it is encouraging that the classroom teacher noted improvement in student behaviors. Even though this intervention was not implemented with total fidelity it seems there were enough effective elements to result in positive outcomes.

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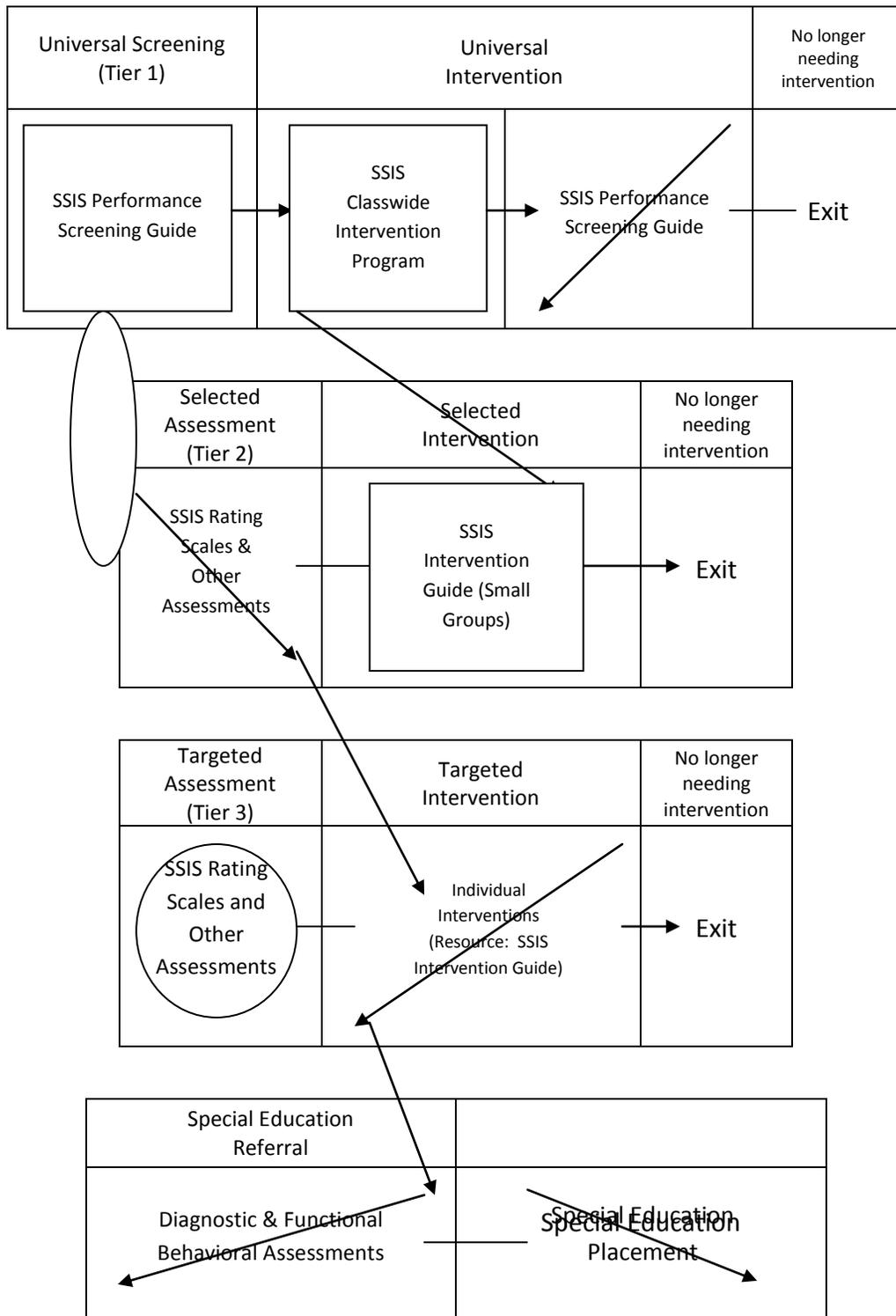
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Appendix A

Diagram of the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)



Adapted from Gresham & Elliott, 2008

Appendix B

SSIS Performance Screening Guide Rating Levels for  
Prosocial Behavior and Motivation to Learn

### Prosocial Behavior

Students at each performance level will demonstrate most of the following traits:				
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<p>--<b>very limited</b> communication or cooperation skills</p> <p>--<b>extreme difficulty</b> initiating and sustaining conversations/ interactions in an age-appropriate manner</p> <p>--<b>poor</b> self-control</p> <p>--<b>little or no</b> concern for others</p>	<p>--<b>frequent difficulty</b> communicating or cooperating with others</p> <p>--<b>frequent difficulty</b> initiating and sustaining conversations/ interactions with others</p> <p>--<b>limited</b> self-control</p> <p>--<b>little</b> concern for others</p>	<p>--<b>occasional difficulty</b> communicating or cooperating with others</p> <p>--<b>occasional difficulty</b> initiating and sustaining conversations/ interactions with others</p> <p>--<b>somewhat less than expected</b> self-control</p> <p>--<b>some</b> concern for others</p>	<p>--<b>a general competence</b> when communicating or cooperating with others</p> <p>--<b>adequate</b> skills to initiate and sustain conversation/ interactions with others</p> <p>--<b>adequate</b> self-control</p> <p>--<b>an appropriate</b> level of concern for others</p>	<p>--<b>excellent</b> skills to communicate and/ or cooperate with others</p> <p>--<b>excellent</b> skills to initiate and sustain conversations/ interactions with others</p> <p>--<b>excellent</b> self-control</p> <p>--<b>a high</b> level of concern for others</p>

From Elliott & Gresham, 2008.

### Motivation to Learn

Students at each performance level will demonstrate most of the following traits:				
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<p>--little to no engagement in instructional activities</p> <p>--significant difficulty staying on task to complete an activity</p> <p>--little to no effort when confronted with difficult work</p> <p>--little to no attending skills in most situations</p>	<p>--frequent difficulty engaging in instructional activities</p> <p>--frequent difficulty staying on task to complete an activity</p> <p>--a less than expected level of effort when confronted with difficult work</p> <p>--frequent difficulty being attentive in many situations</p>	<p>--inconsistent levels of engagement in instructional activities</p> <p>--some difficulty in staying on task to complete an activity</p> <p>--inconsistent levels of effort when confronted with difficult work</p> <p>--frequent difficulty being attentive in many situations</p>	<p>--a moderate level of engagement in a variety of instructional activities</p> <p>--infrequent difficulties staying on task to complete an activity</p> <p>--a general level of effort when work is difficult</p> <p>--an adequate level of attentiveness in a variety of situations</p>	<p>--a high level of engagement in almost all instructional activities</p> <p>--a high capacity to stay on task until the activity is completed</p> <p>--a high amount of effort, even when confronted with difficult or complex activities</p> <p>--a high level of attentiveness in almost all situations</p>

From Elliott & Gresham, 2008.

Appendix C  
SSIS Intervention Guide Social Skill Lesson Steps

## SSIS Intervention Guide Social Skill Lesson Steps

### Tell

1. Provide a learning objective for the featured social skill.
2. Introduce the skill via questions.
3. Define the specific skill and stress Key Words.
4. Discuss why the skill is important.
5. Outline steps for doing the behavior.

### Show

1. Model the behavior.
  - a. Model positive behavior.
  - b. Model negative behavior.
2. Discretely model each of the major steps for enacting the skill.
3. With a student helper, direct a role play of a typical situation.
4. Lead a discussion of alternative behaviors to accomplish the social behavior objective.

### Do

1. Ask students to define the skill.
2. Ask students to state the steps required to accomplish the skill.
3. Ask students about the importance of using the skill.
4. Repeat critical steps for enacting the behavior.
5. Ask students to model the skill in role plays.
6. Ask other students to provide feedback for the students using the skill in the role plays.

### Practice

1. Review and apply the skill in workbook activities.
2. Have pairs of students practice the Skill Steps and provide each other feedback.
3. Encourage use of the skill in class sessions outside of the SSIS Intervention Guide lessons.

### Monitor Progress

1. Ask students to think about how well they are doing with the social skill.
2. Ask students to complete a self-monitoring chart.

### Generalize

1. Give a homework assignment to use the skill in other settings or with other students.
2. Have students demonstrate the skill with a parent or older sibling to communicate information about the social skill they are working on in the program.

From Elliott & Gresham, 2008















































