The Nurtured Heart Approach: An Odyssey of Discovery and Implementation

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The Nurtured Heart Approach
An Odyssey of Discovery and Implementation
Alexandria Pacheco • Dr. Mary K. Sanford

Captain’s Log Deep Space 1: FIND WHAT WORKS
The Nurtured Heart Approach is a program specifically designed to confront the task of managing behaviorally challenged children, usually Tier 3, in and out of the classroom. It is a program that has transformed my students and my classroom. While enrolled in Research in Education in the Special Education Graduate Program, my topic was Positive Behavior Support and my professor Dr. Sanford suggested the NURTURED HEART APPROACH as one method. Could “proactive, and positive recognition of appropriate behavior” be an effective management technique? Testimonials from teachers and parents described the transformative results from NHA. I not only researched it; I began using it in my classroom. At the time I was writing to try anything. We were a class of students, defiant, and abusive to each other, and one frustrated new teacher.

Captain’s Log Deep Space 2: MY CREW
My class is a self-contained program of students with severe learning and behavioral difficulties, from difficult home situations as well. Could I create a loving, family in my classroom, and would they begin to see a future for themselves, one of promise and opportunities?

Captain’s Log Deep Space 3: IMPLEMENTATION
NHA is the Foundation of the classroom. My students are welcomed, loved, and appreciated for their gifts and abilities. NHA began with small steps and recognitions, acknowledging that the child is more than his behavior. The triggers for inappropriate behavior could be avoided with proactive management strategies - RECOGNIZING THEM FOR THINGS THEY DIDN’T KNOW, WERE SUCCESSES, AND WERE PRAISEWORTHY, (a foundational principle of NHA), giving descriptive rather than evaluative praise. It became automatic for me.

THE “LIFT-OFF” FOR CHANGE BEGAN, AFTER ALL, WITH ME.
My students reacted with eagerness to please that revealed their need for positive attention from me. In a class with Professor Piccininni I shared my experiences using the NHA, Professor Piccininni emphasized that a child’s negative behavior has an underlying factor. When you know your students as individuals, you have a better chance of preventing certain behavior and fostering appropriate behavior.

I began applying NHA in the classroom by first changing the seating arrangements. I watched a video of Dan Peterson, a NHA Trainer who recommended changing clusters of desks to an L shaped arrangement with my desk in the center. He referred to this as making yourself the prize; children seek time with you. All my students needed my attention, so why not give it to them? Success!!

“The Community Meeting”: We discuss three questions: how we feel, what our goal is for the day, and who can help us with our goal. This has helped the children in my class tremendously with giving name to a feeling, creating a goal for themselves, understanding what a goal is, what an attainable daily goal versus long-term goal can be, and creating healthy peer relationships in the classroom with other children.

Overall, I believe that in order to be successful, whether it is with my students or in a Professional Development with my colleagues, compassion and understanding really do go a long way. And NHA is focused on seeing the good in people and helping them to see the good in themselves. For me, applying NHA in my interactions with the little people in my classroom, as well as the people outside of my classroom is the true test of finding the positive in everyone.

~ Alexandria Pacheco

References:
Glasser, W. (2002). *Nurtured Heart.*c

The L Shaped Classroom

The Community Meeting

The Three Stands of NHA

1. Absolutely "No!" Refuse to energize negative behavior.
2. Absolutely "Yes!" Relentlessly energize positive behavior.
3. Absolute clarity. Maintain clarity about rules that demonstrate fair and consistent boundaries

Messages from the Crew:
“School is cool, we have computers and dancing, we get to learn about people like Michael Jackson, Harriet Tubman, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr. and Theodore Roosevelt. We also go on trips like to concerts, mansions, zoos, science museums, baseball games, McDonald’s, and to the 92nd St Y. Ms. Pacheco takes us to a lot of different places.

I like this year better than last year because we get to fun stuff like learn different biographies like Michael Jackson. I never went on trips with “Ms. Smith” because I would get mad all the time and hit the other kids. She told me my mom wasn’t allowed on trips. I feel smart too. I like coming to school and then teaching my mom about the biographies,” Johnny, 2nd grade

“I have been with Ms. Pacheco for three years and this year is the best one. Ms. Pacheco gives me different responsibilities to do around the school like deliver papers, give out certificates, answer the phone in the class, put away technology, and give notes to the office. I’m a level P now so I’m a better reader. I started at a level A, I’m happy and my Mom is happy I can read third grade books now.”

USS Nurtured Heart

"Students in classes where effective management techniques are employed have achievement scores that are 20 percent higher than students in classes where effective management techniques are not employed." - Robert Marzano

My teacher gives us free time if we earn it by being good in school, by doing our work, by being our best, and by trying our best. We earn free time a lot. Even if we mess up she lets us earn it back. (This is another important principle of NHA. Glasser calls it falling off and getting back on “THE GREATNESS TRAIN”.

NHA’s success in my classroom extends beyond positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior. Children who see themselves growing no longer view themselves through the lens of their shortcomings and school becomes a source of challenge and success.

Positive reinforcement → Self esteem → academic success

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Poster Design: Leslie Lieman & Crystal Negron

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At the beginning of the year, the students were defiant, and abusive to each other, and one frustrated new teacher.

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References: