This Applied Clinical Project was designed as a Social Skills group for school age boys. The project was born out of a desire to address the high number of behavioral referrals received by fifth grade boys at a local elementary school. To accomplish this goal a social skills group, was implemented. The group sought to encourage students to become responsible, respectful, cooperative, self-confident, motivated and well-groomed young men. In an effort to change behaviors and provide characteristics of high self-esteem the students were taught social skills which included foundation skills in self-esteem, grooming, cooperation and giving appropriate feedback to others. The formulation, process and results of this group experience will be discussed.

The Project

During the first week of the 2005-2006 school year I met with administrators to review the behavioral referrals from the previous year, and to compile a list of eligible students for the group. Fifteen students were identified as having three or more behavioral referrals. The types of behavioral referrals the students received included: fighting; tying a string around another student's neck; constant disruption; disrespect; running; yelling; stealing; screaming at the teacher and knocking materials off of her desk; pushing another student causing injury; hitting another student with a book; defiance; making sexual remarks and gestures; refusing to sit down; throwing book bag; walking on desk across the classroom; poking another student; ongoing disobedience; ongoing physical aggression; pushing another student into the hedges; hanging from the partitions in the restroom; cursing; touching female student inappropriately.

A letter of interest was sent to the parents of the fifteen identified students, and fourteen returned showing interest. A meeting was then held with the five fifth grade
teachers to discuss the project. At the end of the meeting the fourteen names of students whose parents showed an interest in the program were placed in a bucket on individual sheets of paper. They were: AA; AB; BB; CS; DB; DS; DT; DST; EB; EF; GJ; TH; MM; MS. The papers were folded to shield the students names. Ten students were chosen randomly and given an equal chance of participation. Once chosen the name was returned to the bucket along with the others, so an equal amount of names existed on every turn. Each of the five teachers was given a chance to remove a name from the bucket resulting in the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Round 1 Selections</th>
<th>Round 2 Selections</th>
<th>Round 3 Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>EB</td>
<td>AA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH</td>
<td>CS</td>
<td>EB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>EF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>TH</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DT</td>
<td>DS</td>
<td>CS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It took three rounds of selection to choose ten students. The students chosen were, AA; AB; EB; EF; TH; MM; CS; MS; DS; DT.

Once students were selected a flier was sent home and mailed to the parents of the ten selected students inviting them to a parent meeting (See Appendix B). Two sessions were scheduled (morning and afternoon) in an effort to accommodate all parents. An explanation of the program as well as the expectations of parents and students was addressed during this meeting. Parental consent forms were also explained.

Due to varying parents schedules, the parent meetings were held on four different days. Day One was attended by the parents of EB; TH; MS; and DT. Day Two was
attended by the parents of AA and MM. Day Three was attended by the parents of AB; EF and CS. Day Four was attended by the parent of DS.

At the conclusion of each meeting parents agreed to and gave consent for their child’s involvement. All students attended the meetings with their parents and signed consent forms as well.

**Evaluations**

A progress report form was created asking for teacher comments on the students completion of assignments and homework, as well as preparedness for class and behavior. The teachers were asked to complete the forms on a weekly basis (See Appendix C). All of the teachers completed the forms in a timely manner each week.

Evaluation forms were created for students, parents, and teachers to assess the students feelings of self and the group experience; how relevant the materials were to the students needs; and group concerns, to be completed at the end of the group experience (Appendixes D-F). Evaluations were completed by all participants, parents and teachers.

**The Group Experience**

Student sessions were held weekly for forty-five minutes each. The students were provided a shirt and tie to be worn on group day. The students shirts were purchased with funds donated by the schools PTA. The shirts were provided to cultivate students in the proper attire for success. The groups were held on Wednesdays.

The group began with an introduction of the program, its expectations, and the need for rules. The students, in collaboration with each other developed the following eleven rules: (1) No talking when someone else is speaking; (2) No walking around without
permission; (3) Make sure you leave class and come directly to group being quiet in the hallways; (4) Never leave group without permission; (5) Be quiet during sessions; (6) Listen carefully to directions; (7) Keep hands, feet and objects to yourself; (8) No goofing around; (9) Have respect for each other; (10) No laughing at others answers; and (11) Everything said in group stays in group. The rules were posted during each session as a reminder of expected conduct. The rules were posted as a visual reminder for the students to be courteous, cooperative and respectful of each other at all times.

During the group experience, the following data was collected on each student: number of groups attended; number of times appropriately dressed; number of homework assignments completed; assessment of behavior; and number of behavioral referrals received. Seventy percent of the students attended the majority of the eighteen sessions, with five students having perfect attendance. Two students were removed prematurely from the group, TH by parental request (after session twelve) and DT because his family relocated outside the school boundary (after session fifteen) (Appendix G). Students were dressed appropriately an average of thirteen times, with two students being dressed one-hundred percent of the time (Appendix H). There were eleven homework assignments given to students during the eighteen weeks. The students completed an average of 6.75 assignments with two students completing one-hundred percent of the assignments (Appendix I). Teachers were asked to complete weekly progress reports on each student beginning week six. The reports once returned were mailed to parents giving them an update on their child’s’ behavior as well. A total of twelve weekly progress reports were collected, and students changed classroom behaviors on average by 50 percent (Appendix
J). The number of behavioral referrals students received was also examined, and students received an average of one referral during the program (Appendix K).

One of the most important components of the project was the evaluation of the program and its effectiveness. Sprenkle and Moon (1996), tell us that:

Outcome evaluations focus on the impact(s) of existing or newly developed programs on their target populations, determining how extensive and what kind of changes were introduced in target populations by the programs or interventions. Outcome evaluations are most appropriate in the later stages of program development, when it makes sense to evaluate whether and what kind of successes or failures a program or intervention has created. “Success” is usually determined by whether stated goals and objectives are met.

This project was designed to discover, (1) whether specialized group counseling focusing on social skills and rule following is effective in a school setting, and (2) if the number of students behavioral referrals could be decreased with such a groups use. Sprenkle and Moon further state that: Determining the impact of programs requires some type of comparison. This can be done by comparing participants with non participants, or by obtaining measurements of participants before and after interventions are implemented.

In evaluating this project students, parents, and teachers were surveyed to assess the students feelings of self and the group experience, the relevance of the materials used and group concerns. In addition to the surveys a comparison was made of the students previous and present number of behavioral referrals, along with their previous and
current grades.

**Student Feedback**

**Pre-Evaluation**

During the first group meeting the students were asked four questions to assess their needs:

1. What is the presenting problem?
2. What have you tried?
3. How would you like counseling to help you?
4. Circle the categories you would like to work on in counseling: behavior; goal setting; organization; social-skills; self-esteem; friendship; academics; conflict; self-confidence; other.

Students responses to question #1 included: work habits; behavior; the teacher; keeping my grades up; talking in class; academics; anger. Students responses to question #2 included: trying to do homework when I get home; try to do better; turning in my homework; move my seat; listen to the teacher; practicing at home; calming down. Students responses to question #3 included: learn a better way to behave; get a class change; help me to keep my grades up; help me to be less mean; learning how to do the right thing. When asked to circle the categories they wanted to work on students responded the following ways: 8 behavior; 3 goal setting; 14 organization; 1 social skills; 1 self-esteem; 2 friendship; 7 academics; 2 self-confidence; 0 conflict. The majority of the students felt a need for assistance with behavior and academics. Under the category
other students listed: work habits; manners; and grades.

Post-Evaluation

The students were asked to rate from 1-5 with 5 being the highest, eight questions regarding the group experience:

1. I enjoyed being in this group.
2. This group helped me to learn new things about myself.
3. I have changed some behaviors as a result of being in this group.
4. I feel better about myself since being in this group.
5. The counselor was helpful in this group.
6. The counselor listened to me in this group.
7. I want to be in another group sometime.
8. I would recommend this type of group to my friends.

The students were also asked to respond to the following four questions in writing:

1. What did you learn from your time in group counseling?
2. How have you applied the group principles to your daily life in school?
3. How have you applied these principles to your life out of school?
4. On a scale of 1-10, How would you rate the effectiveness that counseling has had on your life? And why?
The following responses were found:

**Question 1**

![Bar chart for Enjoyed Group]

100% enjoyed group

**Question 2**

![Bar chart for Learned New Things About Themselves]
90% learned new things about themselves

**Question 3**

**Changed Behaviors**

76% changed behaviors

**Question 4**

**Felt Better About Themselves**

74% felt better about themselves
Question 5

Found Counselor Helpful

98% found counselor helpful

Question 6

Felt Counselor Listened
96% felt counselor listened

Question 7

Would Participate In Another Group

52% would participate in another group

Question 8

Would Recommend Group To Friends

74% would recommend group to friends
Students responses to questions 9-11 were:

They learned: how to solve problems; how to control myself; to respect people; how to listen; how to be more responsible; to care about myself. Were able to use the skills in school by: learning to walk-away; learned how to help others; how to show respect; listening to my teachers; not looking for fights; not having problems in school every day. Were able to use the skills outside school by: walking away from trouble; being nice to others; not fighting; by listening to my mom.

The overall group rating was 9.
Parent Feedback

The parents were asked to rate from 1-5 with 5 being the highest seven questions regarding the group experience:

1. My child enjoyed this group.
2. My child learned while in this group.
3. My child is able to apply group principles at home.
4. The counselor was available for assistance or questions.
5. My child has changed some behaviors as a result of being in this group.
6. I would recommend this group to others.
7. Overall rating of the group.

The parents were also asked to comment or make suggestions about the group. The results of this inquiry were:

**Question 1**

**Felt Student Enjoyed Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>AA</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>EB</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>TH</th>
<th>MM</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>DS</th>
<th>DT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

88% felt student enjoyed group
Question 2

Learned From Group

76% felt student learned from group

Question 3

Student Could Apply Group Principles

At Home

62% felt student could apply group principles at home
Question 4

Felt The Counselor Was Available For
Assistance or Questions

84% felt the counselor was available for assistance or questions

Question 5

Felt The Student Had Changed
Some Behaviors

74% felt the student had changed some behaviors
Question 6

Would Recommend Group To Others

94% would recommend group to others

Question 7

Overall Group Rating

The average overall group rating was 4.3
The parents made the following suggestions and comments: the group was a great learning experience; my child is changing now; my child looked like a young man when he was dressed; behavior has changed a lot at home; since the group; I see my child maturing; keep the group and expand it so that it can be accessible to more children.

Teacher Feedback

The teachers were asked to rate from 1-5 with 5 being the highest six questions regarding the group experience:

1. The group lessons were relevant to the needs of the students.

2. My students seemed to enjoy group.

3. My students were able to understand and apply the concepts/skills involved in the group.

4. The group helped my students develop learning and/or social skills needed for school success.

5. The subject matter and the material was age appropriate.

6. Overall group rating.

The teachers were also asked to comment or make suggestions about the group. The results are as follows:
Question 1

Teachers thought lessons were relevant with an average rating of 4.6

Question 2

Teachers thought students enjoyed group with an average rating of 5
Question 3

Thought Students Learned and Were Able
To Apply Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers thought students learned and were able to apply skills with an average rating of 4.2
Question 4

Thought Group Helped Students Develop

Social Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers thought group helped students develop social skills with an average rating of 4.2

Question 5

Thought Material Was Age Appropriate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher E</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers thought the material was age appropriate with an average rating of 5
The average overall rating was 4.6

The teachers made the following comments and suggestions: Liked: use of lifelong goals and discussions; differentiated dress; made students feel special; gave students an opportunity to learn skills in appropriate settings. Suggested: different program day.

**Student Progress**

Student progress was assessed by reviewing the number of behavioral referrals the students received during the program period compared with the number received last year, and a review of the students grades. The following results were found: Even though student progress reports showed marginal changes in the student’s classroom behaviors fewer referrals were received by students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Number of Referrals 2004-2005</th>
<th>Number of Referrals 2005-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EB</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EF</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DT</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Grades**

Fifty percent of the students increased one letter grade in at least one subject as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>1st 9weeks</th>
<th>2nd 9weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EB</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EF</td>
<td>Dropped two letter grades with two grades remaining the same.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Studies   C       B
MM
Language        C       B
CS
Math            F       D
Science         F       D
Student also dropped two letter grades in two subjects.
MS
Dropped three letter grades with one grade remaining the same.
DS
Science         B       A
Student also dropped one letter grade in a subject.
DT
Student dropped one letter grade in one subject.

During the beginning of the eighteen week sessions students indicated a need for assistance in behavior and academics. After completing the group the majority of students stated they enjoyed the experience, learned new things (how to control themselves, respect others, be more responsible and problem solve), had changed some of their behaviors, felt better about themselves, and felt the counselor listened and was helpful. Only half of the students would participate in another group but would recommend it to other students. The parents of the participants felt the students were learning from the group, able to apply the group principles at home, and had changed some of their behaviors both at home and school. The majority of parents felt the program needed to be expanded to include more children. The teachers participating with the project found the lessons relevant, felt the students were learning, felt the students had changed some of their behaviors in the classroom and could apply the skills taught in the classroom setting. The project results showed a decrease in students behavioral
referrals and an increase in students grades. These results seem to show that group work is effective in the school setting.
Project Results

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of group work in the school setting. An indication that the training produced the intended effect can be seen in both the teacher and parent evaluation of the students changes in behavior. Parents ratings revealed 76% of them feeling the child learned, 62% felt student could apply the group principles at home and 74% felt students had changed some behaviors. Teacher evaluations revealed that group sessions helped students develop social skills and that students were able to learn and apply the social skills taught with an average rating of 4.2 on a scale of 1-5.

Other researchers have found groups effective in improving the social behavior of children (Brigman & Goodman, 2001; Shcechtman, 2002; Hayes, 2001; Prout, 1999). Therefore, the results of the project are consistent with other research in this area.

Unexpected Findings

The true nature of the program was for the students, families, and school to work together. I was surprised to find that all of the families saw this as an opportunity for the school to fix a problem. Even though a weekly progress report was mailed to each parent, none initiated a conversation with the teachers to discuss or correct the problems listed each week. During the project period there were no request for conferences with the teachers by the parents.

Another revelation was the enthusiastic response from the teachers. With all their responsibilities and current paper work issues, grading papers, lesson plans, and various school related forms, the teachers were extremely helpful with data collection on the
students progress and in giving feedback. How the student was absorbing the information provided was critical to the outcome of the project and teachers were readily available to communicate their experiences with the students throughout the project.

**Personal Reflections**

Throughout the project I was concerned with whether I was providing the children with the necessary skills and structure to make a change. Therefore, there were many times that I had to assess whether or not I was an adequate group leader. Was my style, personality, skills and group substance sufficient for this project. While making this assessment one of the most important themes of psychotherapy became ever present, “self” in the room. In short I had to be careful of the baggage I carried into the room. It became a challenge for me to remove all of my hats each week. As a counselor, mother and all around lover of children I had to be mindful that first and foremost I was a therapist and researcher.

The project’s ultimate goal was to effect change, change in student behavior and grades. There was one participant during the project that was not doing well. The participant attended seventy-five percent of the group sessions, often being the one with the most concrete answers during discussions. At the same time the student refused to dress in the appropriate attire or complete homework. The majority of the student’s weekly progress reports were poor, and he received the most referrals within the group. The student was eventually removed from his class due to constant disruptions and placed in another classroom where his behavior continued to decline. As a therapist/researcher I had to be mindful not to take this personally as though I had failed
him.

Hubble, Duncan, and Miller (1999), list four interrelated components that influence favorable outcomes:

1) client (40%; personal strengths, talents, resources, beliefs, social supports, spontaneous remission, and fortuitous events in the client's life),

2) relationship (30%; perceived empathy, acceptance and warmth),

3) expectancy (15%; the client’s hope and expectancy of change as a result of participating in therapy, and

4) model/technique (15%; theoretical orientation and intervention techniques used by the practitioner).

The authors conclude that the first three factors account for a substantial contribution to therapeutic change totaling 85%. Feeling that all components were in place during the therapeutic relationship, and realization that the students contribution to the project was of significant importance, I have to concede that I did not fail him, I failed to understand what he wanted from the experience.

**Limitations of the study and implications for further research**

Several limitations are present within the project. The use of one setting and a select group of students is the first. The school was chosen due to convenience which limit generalization to other school settings with similar populations; the small number of students participating in the project is not representative of the entire population of male fifth grade students within that school. The second limitation was program length, the project only covered the first two nine weeks of the school year it may be that the length
of the intervention was not sufficient to see a large enough change. The third limitation, the group was gender specific it may be that female students could have benefited from the program as well.

**Reflections for the Future**

There were very few studies found which attempted to investigate the effects of social skills groups within the school setting. An area for further research would be to study successful programs in this area. There are several questions to explore: (1) Could the program be more effective in a large group setting in the classroom as a guidance or therapeutic lesson, where you could reach more of the population? When considering this you would also have to add the elements of more distractions, more behavior problems, and a limited amount of time due to the students class schedule. (2) Is small group training the best setting? In this setting the students are in a different environment, there is more one on one participation and input, there are less behavior problems, and more group control. (3) Is brief training in the area more effective? There would be less one on one participation, there would not be enough time to cover or implement the skills, and you would not get to know the students and their problems. (4) Is training throughout the entire school year more appropriate? There would be more time to teach self management skills, more time for students to change behaviors, more time to monitor and evaluate social and academic progress, and more time to evaluate positive improvements. The list of considerations could be endless, which shows the necessity for further research in this area.
Appendix H

DRESSED DAYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>Number of Times Appropriately Dressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>EB</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EF</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TH</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DS</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DT</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K

REFERRALS

NUMBER OF REFERRALS

PARTICIPANTS