SUPPORTING SOCIAL COMPETENCE AMONG SECONDARY STUDENTS IN HONG KONG: TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT SCHOOL-WIDE INTERVENTIONS

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To examine the key factors that lead to effective implementation of school-wide behavior interventions, this study examined the extent to which school-wide behavior interventions were implemented in four Hong Kong schools. The study also explored Hong Kong teachers' beliefs about behavioral and social skill programs for secondary students with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. Findings indicated that the adoption of behavioral and social skill programs were common practices in schools and that the majority of participants in the present study believed that behavioral and social skill programs should be implemented in schools at an early stage. Furthermore, findings suggested that it is important to consider the interrelationship of professional, strategic, contextual, and attitudinal factors that support students' social competence and minimize their challenging behavior.

Social and behavioral problems of children have become a very important educational issue in many countries in the world. Teachers consistently report that poor social skills and classroom discipline have been primary concerns of schools (e.g., Corso, 2007; Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012). In the context of Hong Kong, the public media often report cases of students with social and behavioral difficulties. For instance, in November 2010, in an elite secondary school in Tai Po, Hong Kong, two male students were reported to have distributed 40,000 Hong Kong dollars (about 6,000 USD) and eight Smart Phones to their classmates. Although their purpose was to gain attention from their peers—especially their female classmates, by showing off their wealth, their behavior had caused unrest in the school. One of the boys was then reported to have chronic social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (SEBD; Cheng, 2010).

How can teachers support the social competence development of students with SEBD? Many researchers and practitioners have noted that by providing social skills interventions, the school can become an optimal setting that fosters the development of social competence in students with behavioral problems. In view of the potential educational outcomes for all students, as proposed by some researchers (e.g., Algozzine & Algozzine 2005, Algozzine & Kay 2001, Lane, Wehby, Robertson, & Rogers 2007; Upreti, Liaupsin, and Koonce 2010), school-wide behavior interventions have been recommended as an effective strategy to promote inclusive education, prevent the development of problem behavior, and reduce the impact or intensity of problem behavior occurrences.

Literature Review
A significant number of studies concerning the effectiveness of various behavioral interventions have been documented over the past 10 years (e.g., Baker, Lang, & O'Reilly, 2009; Chen & Estes, 2007; Greenhalgh, 2001; Gulchak, 2008; Poon-McBrayer & Lian, 2002; Regan, 2009; Richardson & Shupe, 2003). However, there has also been both uniformity and inconsistency with regard to the essential *constituents* of supporting social competence and preventing challenging behavior among students.

Effectiveness of school-wide interventions
Effective school-wide interventions that meet the needs of all students have been recognized as crucial in ameliorating educational outcomes for students, and especially those with SEBD (Algozzine & Kay, 2001). Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, and Leaf (2008), Clough (2005) and Kirk (2009) further argued that students with SEBD are at high risk of failing in school and often fall behind because they do

not receive appropriate interventions at an early stage. Algozzine and Algozzine (2005) emphasized that one of the key features of proactive school-wide behavior interventions is the inclusion of all students in schools that emphasize a three-level intervention framework (i.e., primary, secondary and tertiary interventions) and address a wide range of needs across the three groups (Algozzine & Algozzine, 2005). Similarly, Lane, Wehby et al. (2007) promoted the implementation of school-wide interventions by claiming that this framework provided *a systematic approach to preventing the development of new behavioral problems, while providing the necessary level of support to manage existing behavioral concerns* (p. 3).

Although many other educators consider that individualized tailored interventions are necessary for students with SEBD, some educators and psychologists have contended that whole-school interventions are by no means less significant than individualized tailored interventions, and are therefore highly recommended to be adopted in the education field (e.g., Algozzine & Algozzine, 2005; Lane, Wehby et al., 2007; Rogers, 2005; Royer, 2001; 2005White, Algozzine, Audette, Marr, & Ellis, 2001; Upreti et al., 2010). In particular, findings of White et al. (2001) and Upreti et al. (2010) indicated the potential efficacy of universal prevention strategies to reduce the development of new incidence and current prevalence of school-related problems. Similarly, the data presented in Corkum, Corbin, and Pike's (2010) and Wu, Lo, Feng, and Lo's (2010) studies indicated that certain typical universal or primary level school-wide interventions (e.g., violence prevention, conflict resolution, and social skill programs) are vital in monitoring student progress and identifying students in need of more intensive prevention efforts.

A complementary approach to the adoption and maintenance of school-wide interventions
Similar to Algozzine and Algozzine's (2005) and Bradshaw et al. (2008) studies, which emphasized the three-level intervention system, Siegel (2008) and Sugai and Horner (2006) proposed a three-tiered prevention continuum of positive behavior support.   However, Sugai and Horner's (2006) prevention continuum not only showed the categorization of interventions into three levels (i.e., primary, secondary and tertiary interventions), but it also indicated that generalized interventions, when implemented with a high degree of integrity, are a prerequisite to increasing the success of individualized interventions.
This is consistent with Corkum et al. (2010), Upreti et al. (2010) and Wu et al. (2010) studies on the potential student outcomes of effective pre-interventions. O'Neill and Stephenson's (2010), Siegel's (2008) and Sugai and Horner's (2006) studies also highlighted the vital importance of systems-level supports, such as funding, and visibility and training, to promote social competence and desired goal-related behaviors.

Teaching models that promote school-wide interventions
The framework of school-wide interventions presented above provided a foundation for educators and psychologists working with students with SEBD. Corso (2007) and Fox et al. (2003) described similar teaching models for promoting students' social-emotional development and preventing and addressing students' challenging behavior with respect to the school-wide interventions framework. The models were designed to promote the social-emotional development and behavior of all students, including those with and without SEBD. The four levels of practice in their teaching models (i.e., Level 1: building positive relationships; Level 2: implementing classroom preventive practices; Level 3: using social and emotional teaching strategies; and Level 4: planning intensive individualized interventions) were designed in a way that corresponded to the goals of school-wide interventions, as proposed by Algozzine and Algozzine (2005), Siegel (2008) and Sugai and Horner (2006).

Thought-provoking issues concerning practices to promote school-wide interventions
While positive teacher-student relationships appeared to be associated with aspects of students' social and behavioral adjustment in Corso's (2007) and Fox, Dunlap, Hemmester, Joseph, and Strain's (2003) studies, it might also be important to develop a better understanding of how negative teacher-student relationships affect students' social and behavioral adjustment. Murray and Murray's (2004) study showed that conflict in teacher-student relations was more strongly associated with students' internalized and externalized SEBD. Similarly, Doumen et al. (2008) study on the reciprocal sequence of interactions between teachers and students around disruptive behaviors in classrooms illustrated that the aggressive behavior of students (e.g., noncompliance, negative response or student leaves) was highly related to the constant negative teacher responses (e.g., commands or reprimands) to disruptive behavior.

Corso (2007) and Fox et al. (2003) elaborated on the practice of social and emotional teaching strategies by presenting different sets of strategies (e.g., describing, modeling and rehearsing) that had been

deemed effective in teaching social emotional literacy skills in classroom contexts. Other researchers (e.g., Arritola, Breen, & Paz, 2009; Bullis, Walker & Sprague, 2001) suggested that social skills are best acquired within classroom settings where the behavior normally occurred. However, more recent studies have shown that it is beneficial to incorporate social skills in a digital environment in the repertoire of socialization strategies taught to students. Klein's (2008) and Richardson's (2007) studies, for instance, reported that social networking sites (SNSs) played a pivotal role in the inclusion of students with SEBD in the general population. The main reason being, compared to real life situations, digital academic and social environments have less space, time and social constraints, therefore students with SEBD are more willing to participate in such environments.

Since most of the studies mentioned above were conducted in Western countries, it appears that more effort should be devoted to improving current social skill interventions practices and to identifying more proven strategies in the Asian context. While there have been studies that illustrated the effects of social skills interventions and services on students in Singapore and Taiwan (Chen & Tan, 2006; Cheng, 1998; Hung, 1998; Lim & Nam, 2000; Tam, 2004), it seems that there has been a lack of research in Asia and in particular, little emphasis has been put on evaluating the effectiveness of school-wide behavior interventions in Hong Kong. The present study aimed to examine the extent to which school-wide behavior interventions were implemented in Hong Kong secondary schools and to explore Hong Kong teachers' beliefs about (a) the implementation of behavioral and social skill programs within school contexts, and (b) the provision of a supportive learning environment in schools. More specifically, the present study aimed to bring new insights into the concept and significance of school-wide behavior interventions and to determine the key factors that lead to effective social skills interventions.

Methodology
The following research questions set the direction of the study:
1.   What are teachers' general beliefs about the extent to which school-wide behavior interventions had been effectively implemented in their schools?
2.   To what extent is there a match or a mismatch between Hong Kong secondary school teachers' beliefs and Corso's (2007) and Fox et al. (2003) teaching models?
3.   What are teachers' beliefs about the key factors that hinder or support teachers in facilitating students' social competence with respect to school-wide behavioral interventions?

Participants
To select schools that had implemented school-wide interventions for students with SEBD, the authors conducted an online search of schools that had specific programs for students with SEBD (In Hong Kong, the term SEBD is not a formal diagnosis, and thus there are no well-defined guidelines for its use. Most typically, when a child or adolescent is described as having a SEBD, this means that he or she has a diagnosed—or diagnosable—emotional/behavioral disorder). As a result, more than 20 school websites and school annual plans were reviewed. Schools that used school-wide interventions were invited to participate in the study. Four schools (labeled A, B, C, and D to protect the schools' privacy) responded in a timely manner and were therefore selected as the target schools. Teachers from the four schools were invited to participate in the study, and a total of 60 teaching staff agreed to be involved (approximately 15 individuals from each school). Nineteen of the 60 teachers (approximately five individuals from each school) also agreed to participate in follow-up interviews. All participants were involved in the implementation of school-wide behavior interventions, or had been members of the counseling or discipline teams of the schools.

Procedures
In order to examine the beliefs of teachers about school-wide interventions supporting social competence among secondary students in Hong Kong, a questionnaire (developed by the researchers) was sent to each participant. The questionnaire presented participants with 30 statements reflecting various beliefs about school-wide interventions and asked them to rate the extent to which they agreed with these statements on a five-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

To test the content and concurrent validities of the instrument, three teachers (who did not subsequently participate in the main study) were asked to review and give suggestions for improving the pre-test form of the questionnaire. Statements in the questionnaire were then revised and retested until they were understood accurately by each pre-test participant. Finally, the revised questionnaire was sent to two experts in the field for further review and refinement. To ensure that all participants could understand

terms used in the questionnaire (e.g., social competence, school-wide interventions), a glossary was provided for each participant.

To elicit further information about teachers' beliefs concerning school-wide interventions for students with SEBD, follow-up interviews with 19 teachers were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The content and question flow of this guide were exploratory in nature. The exact use of the interview guide differed based on each participant's specific experiences. As the teachers' comments during interviews matched the majority of answers on the questionnaire, data collected from the interviews revealed insights and perspectives that could not be obtained from the questionnaire, and this enhanced the reliability of the study.

Findings and Discussions
Research question one: What are teachers' general beliefs about the extent to which school-wide behavior interventions had been effectively implemented in their schools?
Several of the statements in the questionnaire (i.e. Statements 1, 7, 11, 15, 18, 21, 24, and 28) focused specifically on teachers' general beliefs about school-wide interventions and the extent to which school-wide behavior interventions had been implemented in their schools. The purpose of these items was to examine participants' beliefs about and attitudes towards the structure and effectiveness of the intervention implemented in each school. Table 1 showed the mean responses of each school to the aforementioned statements in the questionnaire.

Table 1. Teachers' General Beliefs about the Extent to which School-Wide Behavior Interventions had been Effectively Implemented in their Schools

Statement		School A	School B	School C	School D
1	Behavioral and social skill practices have been effectively implemented in our school	4.33	4.47	4.00	4.27
7	School-wide intervention practices that meet the needs of ALL students are important for improving educational outcomes for students.	4.87	4.80	3.73	3.87
11	Behavioral and social skill interventions have been adopted in our school to meet the needs of ALL students	4.73	4.80	3.60	3.80
15	Some specific behavioral and social skill intervention programs have been adopted and implemented in some classes/forms	3.93	4.07	4.13	4.27
18	Specific behavioral and social skill intervention have been planned for individual students	3.53	3.53	3.73	3.60
21	Behavioral and social skill interventions implemented in our school are only for some individuals or groups of individuals, rather than for all students in our school	1.20	1.40	2.40	2.67
24	Behavioral and social skill interventions have been adopted in our school at 3 levels (i.e. individual, classroom/group and whole-school levels)	3.80	3.73	3.53	3.53
28	School-wide behavioral interventions appear to be essential for students with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties, but NOT for all students	1.13	1.27	2.20	2.87

Similar to Algozzine and Algozzine's (2005) proposed three-level school-wide intervention framework and Siegel's (2008) and Sugai and Horner's (2006) continuum of positive behavior support, participants from the four schools consistently thought that behavioral and social skill intervention practices should be adopted in their schools. In addition, while universal instructions or procedures were used to avert the onset of behavioral or social problems of all students (Corkum, Corbin, & Pike, 2010; Wu, Lo, Feng, & Lo, 2010), teachers indicated that more intense and specialized interventions should be provided for individual students.

Moreover, similar to Corkum et al. (2010), Sugai and Horner's (2006), Upreti et al. (2010) and Wu et al. (2010) views on the extensiveness of universal level of interventions, participants of Schools A and B gave particularly high ratings (higher than 4.5) for Statements 7 and 11, but particularly low ratings (lower than 1.5) for Statements 21 and 28 (see Table 1). This suggested that they had a very strong belief in the need to adopt universal prevention strategies within school contexts. According to data obtained from the interviews, teachers from Schools A and B had widely developed and adopted preventive strategies that were directed towards all students across all school settings, and had involved the school, families, and community members. For instance, in school A, in addition to programs targeted at a particular group/level of students (e.g., Discipline and Motivation Camp for junior secondary students), a wide range of strategic prevention strategies were used for all students, and involved not only school teachers, but also community members from various organizations. Other prevention programs included bullying presentations organized by the Hong Kong Police Force, leadership training camps organized by the Salvation Army, and positive attitude talks organized by the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong.

Research question two: The match or mismatch between Hong Kong secondary school teachers' beliefs and Corso's (2007) and Fox et al. (2003) teaching models
The development and maintenance of positive teacher-student relationships, Statements 3, 8, 12, 16, 23, and 26 in the questionnaire focused on teachers' beliefs about the development, maintenance, and significance of positive teacher-student relationships. Table 2 shows the mean responses of each school to the aforementioned statements of the questionnaire.

Table 2. Teachers' Beliefs about the Development, Maintenance and Significance of Positive Teacher-Student Relationships

Statement		School A	School B	School C	School D
3	It is difficult to develop and maintain positive teacher-student interaction/relationships	2.07	1.80	2.27	2.27
8	Students who have social or behavioral problems are those who have negative feelings towards oneself and the school.	4.13	4.33	4.20	4.40
12	Students who always misbehave or have social emotional difficulties are those who always complain	3.67	4.00	3.47	3.53
16	Teachers should try to praise and approve more than they criticize or reprimand/punish.	4.33	4.27	4.47	4.33
23	Criticizing or punishing students' misbehavior is an effective means to minimize students' challenging behavior	1.27	1.47	1.53	1.40
26	Rewards should be used liberally/extensively to ensure that all students benefit	4.00	4.13	4.33	4.07

With respect to Doumen et al. (2008) and Murray and Greenberg's (2006) studies on how negative teacher-student relationships affected the social and behavioral adjustment and functioning of students, participants proposed ways to optimize negative teacher-student relationships. In addition, nearly 85% of the participants suggested that teachers shift their attention from students who did not follow directions/instructions to those who did, and provide appropriate incentives or encouraging responses.

Explicit vs. Implicit use of social and emotional teaching strategies. Statements 2, 4, 6, 10, 13, 17, 20, 22, 27, and 30 in the questionnaire concerned teachers' beliefs about the use of social and emotional teaching strategies. Table 3 shows the mean responses of each school to the aforementioned statements in the questionnaire.

Table 3. Teachers' Beliefs about the Use of Social and Emotional Teaching Strategies

Statement		School A	School B	School C	School D
2	Social skills are best acquired during teachable moments, or within classroom settings where the behaviors normally occur (e.g., during class teacher periods)	4.33	4.07	4.00	4.20
4	Appropriate social skills can be taught/acquired outside classroom (e.g., by means of social networking sites)	3.60	3.73	3.33	3.20
6	Teachers need to provide students with textual- or theory-based information about social skills, such as conflict resolution and dealing with anger appropriately	2.27	2.67	2.07	2.20
10	Social skill programs are particularly useful and therefore should be implemented in Hong Kong schools	3.80	4.87	3.67	4.73
13	Social skills cannot be taught/acquired in school contexts	1.13	1.27	1.13	1.33
17	Appropriate social skills can be acquired through different means (e.g., case studies, role plays, experience sharing and discussion)	4.33	4.27	4.47	4.33
20	Social skills could be incorporated in the digital world.	4.07	4.13	4.00	4.07
22	It is important to enhance students' environment social skills (e.g., making moral decisions, using positive thinking patterns)	4.40	4.47	4.60	4.33
27	It is teachers' responsibility to enrich students' social skills (e.g., conflict resolution, cooperating with others, and dealing with anger and stress appropriately)	3.93	4.07	4.20	4.13
30	Social skills programs should be adopted in secondary schools as early as possible	3.80	4.93	3.47	4.87

Referring to the mean scores of Statements 10 and 30 in Table 3, participants of two schools (Schools B and D) gave high ratings for their beliefs about the early and extensive adoption of social skill programs within school contexts/curricula. In addition, all participants from School D claimed that special educators, educational psychologists and behavior interventionists had given assistance to most class teachers of the junior forms who were running social skill programs in their classes.

On the other hand, with reference to the mean scores of Statement 20 in Table 3, more than 80% of the participants believed that social skills could be incorporated in the digital environment. Their beliefs are in line with the findings of Klein's (2008) and Richardson's (2007) studies on the implications of indirect/implicit social and emotional teaching strategies in terms of the use of the a digital environment, particularly social networking sites. However, contrary to Morgan's (2010) findings on the benefits and

widespread of use of social networking sites to model appropriate social behaviors for students, particularly those with SEBD, most participants (75%) suggested that even though a digital environment may provide a possible platform for social cognition and for acquiring appropriate social behavior, it was difficult for them to evaluate students' outcomes with regard to the effectiveness of these strategies.

Research question three: What are teachers' beliefs about the key factors that hinder or support teachers in facilitating students' social competence with respect to school-wide behavioral interventions?
Statements 5, 9, 14, 19, 25, and 29 in the questionnaire focused on teachers' beliefs about the key factors that hinder or support teachers in facilitating students' social competence with respect to school-wide behavioral interventions. Table 4 shows the mean responses of each school to the aforementioned statements of the questionnaire.

Table 4. Teachers' Beliefs about the Key Factors that Hinder or Support Teachers in Facilitating Students' Social Competence with Respect to School-Wide Behavioral Interventions

Statement		School A	School B	School C	School D
5	Teachers should work with other colleagues as a team to help solve students' social and behavioral problems	4.20	4.33	4.00	4.20
9	Teachers can succeed in supporting students' social competence and help solving their social and behavioral problems/difficulties even without professional training	1.53	1.80	1.13	1.60
14	Teachers cannot succeed in supporting students' social competence if they have negative feelings towards students who present social or behavioral problems	3.80	4.13	4.33	4.00
19	Teachers may fail to assist students with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties/problems due to inadequate resources provided in school contexts	3.67	3.93	3.80	4.93
25	Close partnership with parents is the key to success in enhancing students' social skills	4.13	4.27	4.47	4.13
29	Close partnership with special educators, school psychologists, counselors and behavior interventionists is the key to success in enhancing students' appropriate social skills	3.53	4.07	3.93	4.87

Sugai and Horner's (2006) and Siegel's (2008) studies indicated the importance of systems-level supports, such as funding, visibility, working structures, operating routines, resource supports, and staff development in school-wide interventions for students with SEBD. In line with these studies, participants in this study generally believed that the willingness of collaborative work among teachers and other professionals, the acquirement of professional training and the adequacy of resource supports were essential criteria when judging the success of school-wide interventions.

Participants of School D gave high ratings for their belief in systems-level supports (see the mean scores of Statements 19 and 29 in Table 4). They further suggested that junior form teachers had found it useful and necessary to receive resources and support from experienced educators, psychologists and behavioral interventionists when running social skills programs. The participants of School D were particularly in favor of the interactive follow-up sharing sessions that were arranged for them to talk things over with experienced educators, psychologists and behavioral interventionists, and colleagues from other schools.

The findings above suggested that with respect to the adoption of school-wide behavioral interventions, three other factors—namely, professional factors, attitudinal factors and contextual factors—may also hinder or facilitate students' social competence development. In order to enhance the effectiveness of the interventions illustrated in Corso's (2007) and Fox et al. (2003) teaching models, teachers' professional development opportunities in the area of social skills training are vital and should therefore be extensively introduced into the education field. In addition to knowledge-based courses, participants suggested that interactive training programs, which aimed to provide in-service teachers opportunities to talk things over with colleagues regarding the difficulties they encountered and the success they achieved with students with SEBD, should be made available.

Regarding contextual factors, participants suggested that in order to design sound social skills programs, school-wide behavioral interventions should be applied within a school context where the working structures, operating routines, resource supports and staff development were well organized. With respect to attitudinal factors, participants indicated that teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of school-wide intervention, their positive attitudes towards inclusion of students with SEBD, and the provision of inclusive class will also help foster students' social development.

Limitations
There are potential limitations in the present the present study. First, since only four schools were involved in this study, the data may not represent the responses of all teachers in Hong Kong. A small sample such as this can result in bias, and it gives no information about beliefs of teachers who were not involved in this study. Second, because of time constraints, students' feedback about school-wide interventions was not included in the study.

Implications
Using findings from this present study, larger-scale research studies could be further developed to evaluate the effectiveness of school-wide interventions for students with SEBD. Further research studies could also target more secondary schools in Hong Kong.
It would also be worthwhile to consider students' responses to school-wide interventions. Moreover, as the data of the present study suggest that besides teachers, social workers and educational psychologists also play an important role in school-wide interventions; further studies that involve these professionals may provide helpful insights into interventions that promote social competence in students with SEBD.

Conclusions
School-wide interventions were not favorably acknowledged by scholars in the 1990s (e.g., Lane, Rogers, & Parks, 2007; Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). However, the present study confirmed the view that school-wide behavior interventions are an effective set of strategies to promote inclusive education and develop students' social competence (Algozzine & Algozzine, 2005; Bradshaw et al., 2008; Lane, Wehby et al., 2007). To prevent the development of problem behavior as well as to reduce the impact or intensity of problem behavior occurrences, participants of this present study indicated that the adoption of behavioral and social skill programs were common practices in their schools and recommended that social skill programs be implemented in schools at an early stage.

At the same time, according to the study, although the teacher participants generally had a strong belief in systems-level support, some of them reported that they found it challenging to implement school-wide interventions, mainly due to the lack of professional training, resources, and support from more experienced educators, psychologists and behavioral interventionists. To increase the effectiveness of school-wide interventions in secondary schools in Hong Kong, it is also high time that different parties in the education field, including teachers, educators, psychologists and behavioral interventionists, focus more on the potential effect of contextual, professional, and attitudinal factors, and work together to support students' social competence.

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