The effect of You Can Do It! Education in six schools on student perceptions of wellbeing, teaching, learning and relationships

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Abstract

This research investigated the impact of a social and emotional learning program, You Can Do It! Education (YCDI), on different aspects of student social and emotional wellbeing. YCDI was implemented on a whole-school basis in six primary schools with six matched schools serving as controls. At the end of the school year, students in Grade 5 in both types of schools completed the Attitudes to School Survey (Victorian Department of Education) and again at the end of the following school year when they were in Grade 6. The results indicated significant improvements over time on different aspects of student wellbeing in the YCDI schools and not in the non-YCDI schools. The positive impact of a train-the-trainer model used in this study in a variety of schools under naturally occurring conditions holds promise for low-cost, preventive mental health programs.

Introduction

There continues to be great international concern about the extent of mental health problems in children and youth. Far too many young people are having difficulty managing developmental demands and are exhibiting psychological problems. High

levels of behavioural and emotional problems (e.g. depression, substance abuse, conduct disorder) contribute to and often are concomitant with other equally serious social and behavioural problems such as school failure, gang-related affiliation and teen pregnancy (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2006; Dryfoos 1997). In Australia, similar high levels of mental health problems have been reported (Bernard 2008a), with young people aged 7 to 17 reported to experience high amounts of anxiety (41%), anger (32%) and feelings of hopelessness (21%), with approximately 30 per cent of young people displaying low levels of overall social and emotional wellbeing.

Empirically based intervention programs exist to treat a variety of childhood disorders (e.g. Kendall 2006). However, given the scope of mental health problems in children and youth (e.g. Sayer 2008), policy and practice for the treatment of mental health problems of young people has moved over the past two decades to the prevention and promotion of mental health and positive development. As a result of the promising findings on the impact of preventive health promotion programs, the field of mental health has moved to the prevention of mental illness and promotion of health.

Schools are now seen as appropriate settings to implement preventive mental health and wellness-promotion programs, with promising research findings influencing local, state and federal policy (e.g. Elias, Zins, Graczyk and Weissberg 2003). The most common school-based prevention efforts are ones that aim to teach all students a range of social and emotional skills in safe and caring learning environments. This field of education and pedagogy is called 'social and emotional learning' (SEL) and consists of different curriculum programs and practices introduced throughout the school-home community that strengthen the individual, psychological capabilities of young people (e.g. self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, relationship management). Such programs have been shown to moderate young people's behaviour, emotional health and achievement as well as to reduce adolescent health and social development risks (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning 2008). A major new meta-analysis conducted by CASEL (2007a) revealed that students who participate in school-based programs focused on social and emotional learning profit in multiple ways. The combined findings of 207 studies of SEL programs involving a broadly representative group of more than 288,000 students from urban, suburban and rural elementary and secondary schools found that, compared to students who do not experience SEL programming, students who do participate in SEL programs improve significantly with respect to: (a) social and emotional skills, (b) attitudes about themselves, others and school, (c) social and classroom behaviour, (d) conduct problems such as classroom misbehaviour and aggression, (e) emotional distress such as stress and depression, and (f) achievement test scores and school grades. These positive results do not come at the expense of performance in core academic skills, but rather enhance academic achievement. Moreover, among those studies that collected follow-up data in each of the above categories, the positive benefits to students were found to persist over time.

This study examines the effectiveness of the implementation of the SEL program You Can Do It! Education (YCDI) that has as its goal the promotion of mental health and social-emotional functioning and the prevention of negative outcomes (e.g. Bernard 2006c). YCDI is a school-home collaborative SEL program covering students in pre-school/kindergarten, primary and secondary grades. The social and emotional learning theory of YCDI developed by Bernard (e.g. Bernard 2004a, 2004b, 2006a; Vernon and Bernard 2006) is based on a body of rational-emotive/cognitive-behavioural and allied theory, research and practice with children and adolescents that illuminate different attitudes, ways of thinking and coping skills that moderate achievement, behaviour, relationships and emotional wellbeing. Chief amongst these internal social and emotional learning characteristics are: rational/irrational beliefs (Bernard and Joyce 1984; Bernard and Cronan 1999; Ellis and Bernard 2006), learned optimism–helplessness beliefs and explanatory style (Seligman 1975, 1991), self-instructional self-talk (Meichenbaum 1977), self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1977), attributional style and locus of control (Rotter 1966; Weiner 1979), interpersonal cognitive problem-solving strategies (Spivack, Platt and Shure 1976), cognitive aspects of academic procrastination (e.g. Solomon and Rothblum 1984), cognitive aspects of internal motivation (e.g. Spaulding 1992) and internal goal setting (e.g. Schunk 1996). A summary of the five SELs and the twelve supporting positive habits of the mind (attitudes, beliefs) taught in YCDI are described below. The five SELs are confidence (work, social), persistence, organisation, getting along and resilience (Bernard 2006c).

Research indicates the positive impact of YCDI's approach for teaching the five core SELs and supporting positive habits of the mind on different aspects of student learning, behaviour and wellbeing. In reviewing the results of five studies that explored different applications and impacts of YCDI, Bernard (2006a) found that teaching SELs on a weekly basis using activities from lessons in *Program achieve: a social and emotional learning curriculum* (Bernard 2006b) usually combined with classroom integration support provided by teachers (e.g. visual imagery, awards, integration in academic learning) leads to a number of positive outcomes with students in Grades 5 through 10 with identifiable problems (e.g. under-achievement, low grades) and without problems when taught in the regular classroom or alternative settings (after-school homework club; mentoring groups that meet during the school day). These outcomes include (a) increases in student social and emotional skills and concomitant positive attitudes towards learning, (b) increases in 'effort' ratings of student homework and overall quality of homework, (c) increases in class grades and on standardised achievement tests, and (d) decreases in truancy. Bernard (2008a) found a positive impact of YCDI on the emotional resilience of 'at-risk' elementary-age students with behavioural, emotional, social and achievement problems who attended eight sessions of direct, cognitive-behavioural counselling in emotional resilience using activities drawn from *Program achieve*. A comparison control group that received traditional forms of counselling other than cognitive-behavioural showed no improvement.

The present investigation

The present study sought to determine the effectiveness of YCDI on different aspects of student wellbeing where two representatives (normally, a student

counsellor/wellbeing coordinator and a classroom teacher) from each of six primary schools (kindergarten–Grade 6) attended three one-day train-the-trainer workshops throughout the school year in the theory and practice of YCDI. These school representatives served as trainers at their school sites, providing ongoing staff training in YCDI practices. Changes in end-of-year outcomes for students in Grade 5 in 2006 and these same students in 2007 on the (Student) Attitudes to School Survey in the six schools were compared to students enrolled in six 'matched' schools that did not implement YCDI.

There has been discussion in the SEL health promotion literature of a gap between well-designed SEL interventions in well-funded, highly controlled preventions trials and the typical implementation of prevention programs in schools and communities. The issue here is that there is more limited research concerning SEL program effectiveness in a variety of school settings under less-controlled naturally occurring conditions (Mrazek and Haggerty 1994). This study addresses this gap.

The five SELs taught in You Can Do It! Education

1. Confidence means knowing that you will likely be successful at many things you do. It means not being afraid to make mistakes or to try something new. Positive habits of the mind that help develop confidence:

- **Accepting myself**: not thinking badly about yourself when you make a mistake.
- **Taking risks**: thinking that it's good to try something new even though you might not be able to do it; preferring but not needing to be successful all the time.
- **Being independent**: thinking that it's important to try new activities and to speak up even if your classmates think you are silly or stupid; preferring but not needing others' approval.
- **I can do it**: thinking that you are more likely to be successful than to fail.

2. Persistence means trying hard and not giving up when schoolwork feels like it's too difficult or boring. Positive habits of the mind that help develop persistence:

- **I can do it**: thinking that you are more likely to be successful than to fail.
- **Giving effort**: thinking that the harder you try, the more successful you will be.
- **Working tough**: thinking that, in order to be successful in the future, you sometimes have to do things that are not easy or fun in the present.

3. Organisation means setting a goal to do your best in your school work, planning your time so that you are not rushed, having all your supplies ready, and keeping track of your assignments' due dates. Positive habits of the mind that help develop organisation:

- **Setting goals**: thinking that setting a goal can help you be more successful at a task.

- **Planning my time**: thinking about how long it will take you to do your schoolwork and planning enough time to get it done.

4. Getting along means working well with teachers and classmates, solving problems without getting too angry, following the rules of the classroom and making positive contributions to school, home and the community, including protecting the rights of others and looking after the environment. Positive habits of the mind that help develop getting along:

- **Being tolerant of others**: accepting that everyone acts unfairly towards others some of the time, and not making overall judgements about people's character ('good person', 'bad person') based on their differences or behaviour.
- **Thinking first**: when someone treats you badly, you need to think about different ways you can react, the consequences of each, and the impact of your actions on the other person's feelings.
- **Playing by the rules**: thinking that by following important school and home rules, you will live in a better world where everyone's rights are protected.
- **Social responsibility**: thinking that it is important to take care of yourself and others, to do your best, to give everyone a fair go, to protect everyone's rights to be free, to be honest, to do what you say you are going to do, to treat others with respect, to act responsibly and to understand, include and be tolerant of others.

5. Resilience means when faced with difficult and challenging situations and people, being able to: (a) stop getting extremely angry, down or worried, (b) controlling your behaviour when very upset (not fighting, not running away), (c) calming down within a reasonable period of time, and (d) bouncing back to work and play. Rational ways of thinking that develop resilience:

- **It's not the end of the world**: thinking it's not the worst thing that could happen to you.
- **I can stand it**: thinking that, while you don't like it, you can stand it.
- **Accepting myself**: not thinking badly about yourself when you make a mistake.
- **Taking risks**: thinking that it's good to try something new even though you might not be able to do it; preferring but not needing to be successful all the time.
- **Being independent**: thinking that it's important to try new activities and to speak up even if your classmates think you're silly or stupid; preferring but not needing approval.
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Coping skills that develop a young person's resilience:

- finding something fun to do
- solving the problem
- finding someone to talk to
- changing negative to positive self-talk
- relaxing
- exercising.

Method

Sample

In late 2005, an invitation was sent to all primary schools in the state of Victoria, Australia, that announced an opportunity for a limited number of schools to participate in the You Can Do It! Education train-the-trainer program for 2006. Key selection criteria included: (a) school was not already using a social and emotional learning program, (b) school would make available two representatives to receive training in YCDI throughout 2006, (c) school principal was able to attend the second training session mid-way through the school year, (d) school was prepared to make YCDI a priority initiative in 2006 and 2007 and to make available sufficient staff development time so that school representatives having attended the training would be able to train all staff in YCDI at various times and in various settings, and (e) schools from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds should be represented in the final sample.

Two representatives from 12 schools attended the YCDI train-the-trainer program during 2006. However, it became apparent during this period that five of the schools were not fully aware of the extent of the training and commitment that was required for effective implementation of YCDI. While these schools were permitted to continue to attend training sessions, they were not included in the final sample. A sixth school underwent a change in school leadership in the second half of 2006 and as its commitment to the YCDI initiative greatly decreased it was eliminated from the final sample.

Participants were students enrolled in the remaining six primary schools in which You Can Do It! Education was implemented. Three of the schools were located in different areas of metropolitan Melbourne, Australia, while three schools were from rural areas. Students attending the six schools were demographically diverse and representative of different cultural and economic backgrounds. Data provided by these students were compared to data provided by students enrolled in six schools that did not implement YCDI. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development identified six non-YCDI schools to act as 'matched schools' that were similar to the six YCDI schools based on their socioeconomic ranking. The socioeconomic ranking of participating schools, which was based on the community's financial ability to support a local school, indicated that three of the schools were above the state average socioeconomic ranking and three were below the state average.

All participating students were in Grade 5 during the first assessment reported here, which took place in 2006. There were 349 students in the six YCDI schools (52.1% male), and there were 208 students in the six control schools (53.8% male). One year later, when the students were in Grade 6, assessment data were again collected.

Outcome measure

Students completed a 52-item self-report measure called the (Student) Attitudes to School Survey (SASS: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2006) at the end of 2006 and 2007 school years. This SASS is administered on an annual basis by the Department of Education to all students in Grades 5 to 12 in the state of Victoria with summary reports being provided back to schools at the beginning of the following school year. The SASS consists of 11 scales that fall within the following three domains of student attitude: student wellbeing (student morale; student distress), teaching and learning (teacher effectiveness; teacher empathy; stimulating learning; school connectedness; student motivation; learning confidence) and student relationships (connectedness to peers; classroom behaviour; student safety). The items on the SASS measure students' perceptions of their wellbeing (e.g. 'I feel energised at school', 'I feel stressed at school'), aspects of their teachers' behaviour (e.g. 'My teachers are well prepared'), and relationships (e.g. 'I get on really well with my classmates', 'I have been teased in an unpleasant way recently at my school').

Each scale consists of three to seven items. For each item there are either five or seven response options (there are five for the student morale and student distress scales and seven for all other scales). All items were scored in a positive direction (e.g. high student morale and low student distress). Analysis of data used in this study revealed that each scale had high internal consistency with alphas ranging from .80 to .90 ($M = .85$).

YCDI train-the-trainer program

Two representatives from each of the six schools attended three all-day training sessions during the 2006 school year (March, June and October). All representatives received a trainers' guide in the theory and practice of YCDI called *The YCDI quality assurance professional development program* (Bernard 2006d). The trainers' guide served as the reference resource that trainers used to conduct professional learning sessions at their respective schools and contained the following sections: (a) the theory and practice of YCDI including general principles and practices for teaching the five foundations and the 12 habits of the mind for success, wellbeing and positive relationships; (b) The YCDI quality assurance framework and audit,[1] (c) professional development activities, (d) action planning, and (e) celebrating YCDI good practices. The trainer of trainers was a university professor with over a decade of experience in supporting schools in the implementation of YCDI.

Guiding the content of the three training sessions was the YCDI quality assurance framework and audit. This audit consisted of a range of 'best practices' for implementing YCDI (based on previous experience and CASEL's 2006 guidelines) that schools in the training program used in planning for the implementation of

YCDI and the conduct of school-based professional learning including: leadership and management practices (responsibilities of school leadership; coordination and management structure; ongoing professional development; resources; assessment and accountability), and school-wide implementation practices (classroom-wide programming; school-wide programming; early identification and intervention; behaviour management; counselling/treatment; parent education). The different practices that appeared in the YCDI audit were discussed and illustrated during each of the three sessions, with participants sharing their own examples of successful and non-successful implementation as the school year unfolded.

Each school formulated and completed an action plan to implement the different YCDI practices. Additionally, towards the end of each training session, school representatives decided the ways in which they would communicate the content of the day's training, including aspects of YCDI theory, and selected good YCDI practices to all members of staff of their school.

The school principal from each participating YCDI school attended session two. The purpose was to ensure that the school principal understood, endorsed and advocated SEL and YCDI for all students when meeting with all members of the school community.

During the final session, each participating school completed the YCDI audit, and identified practices that required further attention for effective implementation and those to be implemented in the second year of the project. During the following school year, there was no further training of school representatives and there was no formalised communication system set up for ongoing support and monitoring of implementation practice.

The investigators are aware that wellbeing interventions of any sort including You Can Do It! Education have the possibility of a negative impact on children's wellbeing. Normally, parental informed consent would have been sought before the commencement of this study, which would spell out the risks involved and the potential for harm. However, as is common practice, schools such as the ones participating in this study do not seek parental permission to introduce to all students a social and emotional learning program such as You Can Do It! Education. The data that was used in this study can be considered archival in that it was already in hand before the study was conceptualised and was made available by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. It was neither possible nor necessary to obtain after-the-fact parental consent.

The main research concern was to determine whether students enrolled in YCDI schools showed greater improvement than the non-YCDI students on their perceptions of their own wellbeing, aspects of teaching and learning, and their relationships with others as expressed on the 11 SASS scales over time (from Grade 5 in 2006 to Grade 6 in 2007). To this end, we ran a MANOVA[2] on the YCDI students, treating time (2006 vs 2007) as the fixed factor and the 11 scales as the dependent variables. This was repeated with the students from the non-YCDI schools.

The (Student) Attitudes to School Survey

Student wellbeing

- Student morale (5 items): The extent to which students feel positive at school (e.g. 'I feel positive').
- Student distress (6 items): The extent to which students feel negative at school (e.g. 'I feel depressed at school').

Teaching and learning

- Teacher effectiveness (5 items): The extent to which teachers deliver their teaching in a planned and energetic manner (e.g. 'My teachers are well prepared').
- Teacher empathy (7 items): The extent to which teachers listen and understand student needs and assist with student learning (e.g. 'My teachers listen to what I have to say').
- Stimulating learning (4 items): The extent to which teachers make learning interesting, enjoyable and inspiring (e.g. 'My teachers make learning interesting').
- School connectedness (5 items): The extent to which students feel they belong and enjoy attending a school (e.g. 'I feel like I belong at this school').
- Student motivation (4 items): The extent to which students are motivated to achieve and learn (e.g. 'Doing well in school is very important to me').
- Learning confidence (4 items): The extent to which students have a positive perception of their ability as a student (e.g. 'I am good at my schoolwork').

Student relationships

- Connectedness to peers (4 items): The extent to which students feel socially connected and get along with peers (e.g. 'I get along with other students at my school').
- Classroom behaviour (3 items): The extent to which other students are not disruptive in class (e.g. 'It's really hard to learn in class, because other students are really disruptive').
- Student safety (5 items): The extent to which students feel they are safe from bullying and harassment (e.g. 'I have been bullied recently at school').

Results

As a check on the extent to which the non-YCDI schools were similar to the YCDI schools,[3] 2004 data from the (Student) Attitude to School Survey obtained from students in YCDI and non-YCDI schools were compared. A MANOVA was conducted and statistically significant differences between the groups on the survey were examined (the survey changed from 2004 to 2006). In 2004 the scales comprising the measure differed both in name and number from those described below. The results were statistically significant ($p < .05$) on four of the twelve scales, with YCDI students scoring higher on two of these four. Students in YCDI

and non-YCDI schools were judged to be roughly equivalent in terms of their attitudes despite the larger number of students attending YCDI schools.

Gender

The MANOVA was first done on male and female students separately to determine whether there were any meaningful differences between them. All MANOVAs were statistically significant ($p < .05$). For the YCDI students, males showed significant improvement ($p < .05$) on seven of the eleven scales, and females showed improvement on eight of the eleven scales. For the students in the non-YCDI schools, males showed significant improvement on one scale, and females improved on two scales. Based on this, we determined that there were not meaningful differences between male and female students. Therefore, in all subsequent analyses, male and female students were combined and analysed jointly.

Total sample

Means and standard deviations for YCDI and non-YCDI students can be found in Table 1. For Table 1, for YCDI schools, all tests' df =1, 691. For non-YCDI schools, df = 1, 462. For YCDI students, the MANOVA was significant (F 11, 681 = 4.72, p < .01) with students showing statistically significant improvements on nine of the eleven scales, namely student morale, student distress, stimulating learning, school connectedness, student motivation, learning confidence, connectedness to peers, classroom behaviour and student safety. For the non-YCDI students, the MANOVA was also significant (F 11, 452 = 2.52, p < .01), with students showing significant improvement on two of the eleven scales: classroom behaviour and student safety.

Individual matched schools

The procedure was repeated for each of the six YCDI and six non-YCDI schools individually. For matched pair #1, the MANOVA was not significant for the YCDI and non-YCDI schools, though there was significant improvement over time on two of the scales for the YCDI school: learning confidence (F 1, 186 = 5.65, p < .05) and school connectedness (F 1, 186 = 4.03, p < .05). There was significant improvement on one scale for the non-YCDI school: student distress (F 1, 123 = 6.11, p < .05). For matched pair #2, the MANOVA was significant for the YCDI school (F 11, 119 = 3.18, p < .01) and for the non-YCDI school (F 11, 102 = 2.20, p < .05). There was significant improvement on four scales for the YCDI school: student distress (F 1, 129 = 5.89, p < .05), learning confidence (F 1, 129 = 9.25, p < .01), classroom behaviour (F 1, 129 = 4.05, p < .05), and student safety (F 1, 129 = 11.60, p < .01). There was significant improvement on one scale for the non-YCDI school: student motivation (F 1, 112 = 4.17, p < .05). For matched pair #3, the MANOVA was not significant for either school, and there were no significant differences on any scales. For matched pair #4, the MANOVA was significant for the YCDI school only (F 11, 66 = 2.23, p < .05). The YCDI school showed improvement on three scales: student morale (F 1, 76 = 6.80, p < .05), student distress (F 1, 76 = 8.48, p < .01), and student safety (F 1, 76 = 7.93, p < .01). The non-YCDI school showed improvement on one scale: classroom behaviour (F 1, 37 = 7.02, p < .05). For matched pair #5, the MANOVA was significant for the YCDI school only (F 11, 66 = 2.68, p < .01). The

YCDI school showed improvement on two scales: student distress (F 1, 76 = 4.92, p < .05) and classroom behaviour (F 1, 76 = 12.65, p < .01). The non-YCDI school showed improvement on one scale: student safety (F 1, 40 = 6.34, p < .05). For matched pair #6, the MANOVA was significant for the YCDI school (F 11, 95 = 2.88, p < .01) and the non-YCDI school (F 11, 100 = 2.30, p < .05). There was significant improvement on two scales for the YCDI school: classroom behaviour (F 1, 105 = 13.94, p < .01) and student safety (F 1, 105 = 17.58, p < .01). There was significant improvement on one scale for the non-YCDI school: classroom behaviour (F 1, 110 = 5.96, p < .05).

Table 1: Mean scores, standard deviations, and significance tests for You Can Do It and non–You Can Do It groups across time

	YCDI schools			Non-YCDI schools		
	Grade 5 (2006)	Grade 6 (2007)	F	Grade 5 (2006)	Grade 6 (2007)	F
Student morale	5.32 (1.12)	5.62 (1.00)	12.94**	5.59 (1.07)	5.53 (1.10)	.38
Student distress	5.46 (1.14)	5.86 (1.04)	23.61**	5.70 (1.18)	5.77 (1.12)	.37
Teacher effectiveness	4.20 (.69)	4.29 (.67)	3.24	4.22 (.61)	4.27 (.67)	.61
Teacher empathy	4.20 (.78)	4.29 (.73)	2.15	4.26 (.69)	4.29 (.70)	.20
Stimulating learning	3.76 (.95)	3.93 (.88)	5.91*	3.92 (.82)	3.95 (.83)	.09
School connectedness	3.97 (.93)	4.22 (.83)	14.23**	4.23 (.82)	4.22 (.83)	.01
Student motivation	4.37 (.72)	4.49 (.67)	5.04*	4.42 (.72)	4.49 (.59)	1.31
Learning confidence	3.86 (.77)	4.11 (.72)	19.59**	4.01 (.71)	3.99 (.67)	.10
Connectedness to peers	4.17 (.80)	4.34 (.66)	9.77**	4.22 (.74)	4.21 (.80)	.00
Classroom behaviour	2.60 (1.13)	2.94 (1.24)	14.50**	2.97 (1.11)	3.31 (1.11)	10.78**
Student safety	3.85 (1.13)	4.26 (.96)	25.90**	4.00 (1.09)	4.28 (.95)	8.92**

Notes: Standard deviations are in parentheses. ** p < .01. * p < .05

Discussion

Three related questions about the implementation of SEL were answered in this study: (1) Would the social and emotional knowledge and skills taught using YCDI and embedded in a variety of school-wide practices influence student perception of

their mental health and wellbeing, their learning as well as their relationships? (2) Would a train-the-trainer approach result in sufficient 'up-skilling' of school representatives to enable teachers at participating schools to implement YCDI effectively so that YCDI would have an impact on student wellbeing? (3) Would there be a positive effect of the YCDI preventive program in the less-controlled, real-world setting of schools?

The results indicated that the YCDI train-the-trainer program had an overall positive effect on students' attitudes and self-perceptions of different aspects of their wellbeing. This finding adds to the burgeoning SEL literature that shows the positive impact of SEL instruction (Payton et al. 2008). Additionally, the results contribute to existing research (Bernard 2006c; Bernard 2008a) that shows that the social and emotional skills specifically taught in YCDI (confidence, persistence, organisation, getting along and resilience) contribute to a variety of positive outcomes in young people.

The positive impact of the YCDI train-the-trainer program was found when the data were combined from all students who attended schools implementing YCDI. In contrast with students enrolled in schools not implementing YCDI, students in YCDI schools showed significant improvements between Grade 5 and Grade 6 on two aspects of student wellbeing: morale and distress. Effects were also found for student confidence and motivation as well as student perception of the extent to which teachers make learning interesting, enjoyable and inspiring (stimulating learning). Additionally, students in YCDI schools showed greater gains over time in their perception of connectedness to their peers in comparison with students in non-YCDI schools. Students in both types of schools showed significant improvements in their perceptions of the classroom and aggressive behaviour of students in their school. Gender did not differentiate the effect of YCDI. Significant effects across all sub-scales of the SASS were found in four of the six YCDI schools, with the other two YCDI schools only showing improvement on some of the sub-scales. Furthermore, YCDI did show differential effects at the level of individual schools. While several YCDI schools showed significant effects over time for student distress, other schools showed effects for student connectedness to schools or learning confidence.

It bears mentioning that interviews with school representatives that followed the training revealed the importance of having their school principal attend the second session. Participants indicated that their principals returned to their schools as strong, vocal advocates for SEL and YCDI, which resulted in a significant elevation of school-wide 'enthusiasm' for YCDI. The role of the school principal in the initial stage of school 'buy in' has been recognised in the SEL implementation literature (e.g. CASEL 2007b).

Limitations of the study

There was no test of the integrity of implementation of YCDI in individual schools. Fidelity of implementation has been found to have an impact on the sustainability of SEL programs (e.g. Elias et al. 2003). The use of a single outcome measure of wellbeing, one based on student perception, limits the interpretation of the positive

results to the level of student perception of their wellbeing. The fact that the SASS is independent from the SEL program used in this study and uses language that is not intrinsic to YCDI is a definite strength of the findings as students were not simply responding to items that were couched in the language they were familiar with as a result of participating in YCDI. No assessment was made of the impact of YCDI on students in lower grades. There was no random assignment of schools that participated in this research. The positive results contained in this study can only be generalised to schools expressing an interest in implementing YCDI. Finally, the social-educational benefits reflected in the magnitude of improvements over time found on the different SASS scales for students attending YCDI schools cannot be determined.

The success of the low-cost train-the-trainer approach used in this study indicates that preventive, school-based mental health programs can realistically be made available to all schools. Many evidence-based SEL programs that were developed and validated under strictly controlled conditions have been funded by large grants from foundations and government. It is encouraging that preventive programs implemented under less well-controlled conditions that are not supported by large grants but merely by the enthusiasm and dedication of school-based practitioners can have positive benefits.

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1 The YCDI quality assurance framework and audit is available upon request.
2 There was no identifying information on which to match students over time; therefore a repeated-measures design was not possible.
3 There were no data available in 2004 for one of the YCDI schools. Therefore, this MANOVA was conducted comparing five YCDI schools with five matched control schools.