Chapter 11

Applying EQUIP for Educators in Secondary Education

Kevin van der Meulen & Cristina del Barrio

Autonomous University of Madrid, Spain
Introduction

Educators do not only promote the academic or intellectual development of children and adolescents, but also their personal and social development, either in daily interaction with them as in curricular format. In school settings, these professionals—e.g., teachers, educational psychologists, school counselors—might look for tools in order to succeed in those paths of education. Nowadays, they are able to choose among a large and diverse amount of implements, which reach from social skills teaching, that might be carried out by a professional who is invited by the school in a specific time period, to extensive whole school approaches, aimed at both the individuals in the school as the institution itself. During the last decades, in many countries in America, Europe, Asia and Oceania there has been an increasing awareness of peer relations problems that exist in schools, as for example bullying and social exclusion. This has led to the development of a wide range of intervention programs, including peer support systems (see for example del Barrio et al., 2011; Cowie &
In this chapter, we will focus on the *EQUIP program for Educators* (DiBiase, Gibbs, Potter & Spring, 2005), a program that can be used by professionals to work with students in schools. First we will outline its goals, structure and use. We then will refer to our Spanish version of the program (DiBiase, Gibbs, Potter, van der Meulen, Granizo & del Barrio, 2010), the adjustments we made to the program contents and our ideas on its application in schools. Secondly, we will concentrate on how *EQUIP for Educators* (EFE) might be useful to promote positive peer relations in the classroom. In that sense, it could have its effects on preventing peer victimization taking place between students, either in overt interactions or aiming at the exclusion of interaction of a peer student. Thirdly, after referring to earlier conducted studies on the effectiveness of EFE that were carried out in Canada (DiBiase, 2010) and the Netherlands (Van der Velden, Brugman,
Boom & Koops, 2010), we will explain about our experiences with the program in Spanish Secondary Education, and the results we’ve obtained so far. Finally, this will bring us to some observations on the use and evaluation of EFE and related suggestions for the future.

1. EQUIP for Educators. Goals, structure and use of the program with adolescents in secondary school

_EQUIP for Educators_ is an adapted version of the original _EQUIP_, a treatment program for juvenile offenders teaching them to think and act responsibly using a peer-helping approach (Gibbs, Potter & Goldstein, 1995). The educational version is not intended for treatment of young people, but rather to prevent them from future anti-social behavior. According to McGinnis (2003; cited en DiBiase _et al._, 2005), although a small part of a student population in a school might already be showing at-risk behavior (15% moderate; 5% more intense and chronic), and will therefore need secondary or tertiary prevention, most students (80%) need primary, universal prevention as they might
only be showing externalizing problems occasionally. At-risk behavior should not only be understood as direct anti-social behavior, as for example direct physical aggression towards others. Less obvious, *indirect* hurtful behavior towards others, as for example indirect social exclusion (ignoring) is also a type of maltreatment (Del Barrio, Martín, Almeida & Barrios, 2003), and should therefore be considered as at-risk behavior and be included in prevention programs for young students. In both cases, the behavior can be conceptualized as harming others through the violation of important moral or social norms (Barriga, Morrison, Liau & Gibbs, 2001). EQUIP for Educators is dedicated to both primary and secondary prevention in an educational context and aims at remediating developmental delays in moral judgment, self-serving cognitive distortions and deficiencies in social skills. It is a *psycho educational* program, which refers to the teaching and training of skills, knowledge, and mature awareness required for competent daily living (DiBiase *et al.*, 2005). EFE consists of about 35 sessions, to be applied in a group of students and involves three components: 1) anger management and self-serving cognitive
distortions correction, 2) social skills for balanced and constructive social behavior, and 3) social decision making, implying mature moral judgment. Students who are in need of a psycho educational training have a positive potential, however, they have certain limitations or problems that can keep them from putting their potential in practice. EFE aims at working on these problems among at-risk students, which have been called “the three D's”: developmental delays in moral judgment, self-serving cognition distortions and social skills deficiencies which are interrelated (DiBiase et al., 2005). So, the aim of the program is explained here as remediating these delays, distortions and deficiencies that can be found in at-risk students. However, it should be taken into account that EFE is also aimed at entire populations, thus as primary prevention (Institute of Medicine, 1994). Therefore, in this case, it should be defined with the appropriate terminology, such as teaching and helping adolescents to develop and increase their skills and knowledge (Van der Meulen, del Barrio & de Dios, in prep.). In ordinary secondary education, it could be expected that part of the student population does not show at-risk behavior, cognitions or
emotions. However, the program also aims at equipping them, in order to prevent them from showing this negative or risk full behavior, feelings and thinking for themselves and others in the future. No remedying needs to take place, but an education has to be offered for a healthy and positive development. On the other hand, the use of positive terms seems important in order to emphasize the program’s possibilities to reach and take advantage of the adolescent’s potential, while he or she is developing him or herself.

A description of the three components shows us the contents of EQUIP for Educators, starting with anger management and correcting self-serving cognitive distortions (also named ‘thinking errors’), both composing the first component. Techniques for teaching anger management have been developed and described extensively by Goldstein, for example in his book The Prepare Curriculum (Goldstein, 1999) and are an important part of Aggression Replacement Training (ART, Goldstein, Glick & Gibbs, 1998), on which EFE is based partially. It is concerned with several issues. For example, evaluating
and relabeling aggression implies recognizing its advantages and
disadvantages and becoming aware of the immaturity and self-
centeredness of it, and the damaging effect it has on a person. Other
aspects are the understanding of the anatomy of anger, which shows
students how self-talk is a source of anger; how to recognize early
warning signs of anger in your body and what techniques to use to
control it (e.g. slow deep breathing, invoking pleasant or peaceful
imagery) and to think ahead to consequences (for yourself, at short and
long term; for others, first and later). Correcting self-serving cognitive
distortions, included in the same component, implies first of all
learning to recognize, and then how to correct four main thinking
errors, as identified by Gibbs (e.g., 2003). The Self-Centered thinking
error refers to thinking that one’s own opinions, needs, rights, feelings
are more important than those of others, and that wanting and getting
your way in the present (“now”) is more important than its
consequences in the future. Minimizing or Mislabeing means thinking
that your behavior or problems are not as wrong or harmful as they are,
or using labels which are belittling or dehumanizing in relation to
others (Gibbs, Potter & Goldstein, 1995). When you misattribute blame for one’s own actions to outside sources, you are Blaming others (Gibbs et al., 1995). Someone is Assuming the worst when he or she considers a social situation as inevitable or supposes that there are no possibilities to improve his/her behavior, or when he/she attributes hostile intentions to other people (Gibbs, Potter, Barriga & Liau, 1996). According to Gibbs (2003) self-centeredness is a primary thinking error, while the remaining three are secondary thinking errors, arising from an egocentric attitude. These secondary cognitive distortions are related to a person’s intention to reduce stress from the effects of the primary thinking errors; these are rationalizations aiming at neutralizing feelings of guilt.

The thinking errors need to become part of the vocabulary used in the classroom during the sessions, so they can be used throughout the program when doing exercises, but also when observing the behavior of their classmates and teacher(s) in daily school life. Several practices are aimed at raising consciousness on cognitive distortions or
self-centered attitudes implying the exercise of social perspective
taking, as for example reversing viewpoints, writing a story from two
points of view, and analyzing a situation of victimization and its
consequences at the short and long term.

The second component concerns the teaching of *social skills*,
meaning the dealing with difficult interpersonal situations with
balanced and constructive behaviors (DiBiase et al., 2005). These
skills are taught in four phases: modeling the skill, attempting to
perform the skill, discussing the skill – receiving feedback on the
performance and thereby improving it, and further practicing of the
skill in diverse situations, in order to refine and consolidate in into a
generalized habit. With this method, students learn for example to
express a complaint constructively (think ahead about what to say,
make a constructive suggestion etc.), to care for someone who is sad or
upset (pay attention to the signs a person shows, listen without
interrupting), to deal constructively with negative peer pressure (to
think about the consequences in advance, think of the reasons to give,
make suggestions to do instead), to prepare for a stressful conversation (think ahead what to say and how the other person might reply) or to deal constructively with someone accusing you of something (calm yourself down, think if the accuser is right, talk in a calm, straightforward way).

Finally, the third component, social decision making, aims at promoting students in their development of moral judgment: to equip them with mature moral judgment. Maturity in moral judgment is understood as in the direction of development described by Piaget and Kohlberg. Gibbs (2003) adapted Kohlberg’s model of moral development in reasoning and describes four stages; his model works as the theoretical frame of reference for the EQUIP programs. Stages 1 and 2 imply immature moralities, while at stages 3 and 4, people reason in terms of mutual caring, respect and trust, either on the scale of interpersonal relationships or social systems, thus demonstrating mature morality. In the social decision making sessions, students are provided with a short story illustrating a problem situation, and a list
of related questions: answering implies making a decision on what to do in that particular situation. For example, in Alfonso’s problem situation, Doug, a friend of Alfonso, asks him to show him his answers during a math test, while the teacher is outside the classroom for a few minutes. Should Alfonso let Doug copy his answers? In each of the stories, one or more key values can be identified. In Alfonso’s problem situation this is honesty, other key values are for example respect for property, quality of life or relationship and respect.

It is important for the teachers to become familiar with the session procedures and teaching techniques as described in the program book (DiBiase et al., 2005). During the sessions, the teacher sometimes will work with the whole group (which might consist of 20-30 students), but he/she will also need to break it down into smaller groups, for example working triads, or let the students work individually. Some of the activities can be done orally; other parts need to be completed on paper. Role playing activities, especially in the working triads, are very frequent during the sessions. Educators
also need to get familiarized with two particular teaching techniques: the sandwich style of constructive criticism – a critical comment needs to be preceded and followed by supportive ones--; and the “ask, don’t tell” technique, as characterized by Lickona (1983; cited in DiBiase et al., 2005). A teacher might want to tell the students what would be appropriate to do in a problem situation, or tell a dawdling group they need to pay attention and complain about their behavior; instead he/she should ask the group about it so they become aware of one or another situation and give their own suggestions.

The Spanish version of the program, which was called “EQUIPAR para Educadores” (DiBiase, Gibbs, Potter, van der Meulen, Granizo & del Barrio, 2010) is different from the original version in relation to the examples and problem situations that are used in the components of social skills and social decision making. On the one hand, we (the last three authors) introduced additional situations for the practice of each of the social skills, which we considered as easily recognizable for Spanish adolescents. On the other hand, from the
problem situations that make up the ten social decision making sessions in the original program, six problem situations were taken out: two situations on stealing, one on drug-dealing in town, one on an escape from an institution for boys, another keeping a gun in school and one on a father's drinking problem. These were considered to be very different from adolescent's daily life experiences in Spain (e.g. possession of weapons is very rare in Spain; teenagers under 18 are unable to have a driver's license). We introduced four new problem situations, which were all related to the school setting: two of them are situations of peer victimization in the class, one is on drug-dealing in school and one implies a student-teacher problem. For example, one of the problems related to peer victimization concerns the situation of Juan, who is observing his classmate Miguel being bullied by others, some of them who have been friends of Juan for a long time. Juan would like to stop this situation, but he doesn’t want to lose his friendships either.
For each of the three components ten sessions are required.

However, before starting the curriculum as programmed in the total of 31 sessions (including also one final review session), DiBiase et al. (2005) suggest to teach the thinking error vocabulary to the students, and in a special advance class to go through the "ground rules" that are needed to guide students' interactions during the programs' activities as e.g in discussions. Two of our trainers, Otegui and Pozo, decided to rename these rules as "working agreements", as the term sounds less directive, and they proposed a method for the establishment of the agreements, which we used in the classrooms that participated.

Students themselves should come up with agreements and these should be stated in positive phrases. Finally, an initial session\(^1\) to introduce the program as for example proposed by Jan van Westerlaak (pers. comm. April 7th 2006) is also desirable, in which the following questions should be answered: “What does “equip” mean, and what does a person need to be equipped? If you think of equipment, let’s

---

\(^1\) The initial session can also be combined with the elaboration of working agreements.
imagine you have this backpack. What do you put it when you’re going on a trip? And what if this trip’s called life?” In sum, this means that about four extra sessions need to be added to the original total of 31 sessions. Apart from this, content was added to the sessions in which the before mentioned peer victimization problem situations were discussed, an activity implying a discussion on prefixed aspects of the phenomenon of bullying and social exclusion in schools (it’s definition, types of victimization occurring in the classroom, intervention by classmates, etc).  

According to DiBiase et al. (2005) EFE is aimed at children, preadolescents and adolescents in grades five through eight. However, bearing in mind the issues that are being treated in the original program, for the Spanish school context, we considered that using the program with children and preadolescents before the age of 13 years would not be appropriate (DiBiase et al., 2010; Van der Meulen et al., in prep.). On the one hand, because of the contents (e.g. problem

2 Methods of these additional sessions do not appear in the Spanish version EQUIP for Educators (DiBiase et al., 2010).
situations) which they might not be familiar with in their daily lives, so they could make other interpretations of it (it could also scare them or their parents). On the other hand, because of the cognitive capacities required for a serious reflection on various elements of the program, e.g. making moral judgments in problem situations, learning social skills as how to cope with group pressure, and others.

2. Using EQUIP for Educators to promote positive peer relations in the classroom

The growing awareness and concern about peer relation problems in schools and the negative effects these can produce in students at short and long term (e.g. Nishina, Juvonen & Witkow, 2005; Schäfer et al., 2004; Matsui, Tsuzuki, Kakuyama & Onglatco, 1996) urges the use of intervention methods and educational programs. We perceived EQUIP for Educators as a compelling program, which could not only be used to prevent adolescents from developing at risk levels of distortional thinking, but also to create a positive classroom climate
and, in this respect, to diminish peer bullying and social exclusion. In the relatively short history of the study on peer victimization in schools, a change towards an understanding of this phenomenon as a negative peer relation within a group context, has become more evident among researchers (e.g. del Barrio, van der Meulen, Barrios, 2002; Bukowski & Sippola, 2001; Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 1996), which actually means that they acknowledge that the dynamics and moral atmosphere in the group contribute to the incidence of peer victimization, and that the phenomenon has to be understood on a group level, i.e. implying several roles as bully, victim, bystanders, helpers etc, but also as a frame in which for example people’s labeling as insider, outsider, popular etc. can be understood. Part of the secondary school students, especially the older ones, identify a bullying or social exclusion situation in this way and refer to group processes in their causal explanations (Del Barrio et al., in prep.; Van der Meulen, 2003).
The moral atmosphere or culture in a group (e.g. classroom) or institution (e.g. school) has an impact on the behavior that students display in that context. Moral culture refers to the norms, values and meaning systems which regulate social interactions in moral situations, as shared by its members (Power, Higgins & Kohlberg, 1989). The relation between the perception of the moral atmosphere in a school and norm transgressive or pro-social behavior has even been found to be stronger than between moral competence and these kinds of behavior (Høst, Brugman, Tavecchio & Beem, 1998; Brugman et al., 2003). Similarly, Salmivalli and Voeten (2004) found that at the class level, group norms are related to students' behavior in bullying situations (e.g. bullying others, assisting the bully, reinforcing the bully, defending the victim, or staying outside bullying situations). Thus we could state that, for a student in deciding what to do, it is important to think how the others in the group would think about it. Bystanders, for example, might want to intervene to stop the bullying, but be scared to do so because he/she would violate the norms of the group. In our opinion, it is important to raise conscience on ongoing
group processes in the classroom, and EFE could be used for that, as the group behavior's is being discussed during the program sessions (Van der Meulen, Granizo & del Barrio, 2010; Van der Meulen et al., in prep.). In the analysis of real and hypothetical conflict situations as for example Juan and Miguel’s victimization situation, students themselves talk about issues as participant roles, behavior, pressure, etc.

EQUIP for Educators is said to focus on the preparation of a receptive interpersonal social climate in the classroom, in order to teach and encourage students to think and act responsibly (DiBiase et al., 2005). Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that the individual’s progress in adequate mental processes is not the only goal. As we have argued, a positive social class climate should be aimed at by itself for its influence on the individuals’ behavior in that context. Methodologically, both aims coincide, as it is through the contributions of the group that the individual makes progress, and positive group processes add to a positive climate.
On the other hand, positive peer relations in the classroom might be at risk because of self-serving cognitive distortions or low moral motivation in students, and anti-social behavior including bullying and excluding behaviors in the classroom might appear and also remain present in the group. Gasser & Keller (2009) proposed that children who bully others might be well aware of moral rules but lack moral motivation. An important element of moral motivation is the tendency to interpret a moral transgression in moral terms. So bullies might perceive a bullying behavior as non-moral but for example as a conventional standard in their peer group. On the other hand, Gini (2006), using Bandura’s theoretical model on the construct of moral disengagement (e.g. Bandura, 2002), found that children who participate in victimizing situations, either as bullies, assistants of the bullies or reinforcers, are more ready to show moral disengagement mechanisms, for example minimizing the effects’ of the bullying behavior or displacing responsibility. In one of our qualitative studies (Del Barrio et al., in prep) on the understanding of peer victimization in schools with the narrative instrument SCAN-Bullying (Del Barrio,
Almeida et al., 2003), cognitive distortions were found in children’s and adolescents’ causal explanations of the phenomenon. For example, a boy (13) is referring to the thinking error of minimization when he explains “I think he does it just in order to pretend being funny. Not to hurt anybody, but to let the others know how funny he is” (Van der Meulen et al., 2010). As a consequence, we suggest that interpreting bullying situations in the right terminology, i.e. moral terms and correcting self-serving cognitive distortions or moral disengagement mechanisms might contribute to a reduction and prevention of victimization between peers.

3. Application of EQUIP for Educators and results: empirical studies and qualitative data

So far, the prevention version of the EQUIP program has been empirically tested in three different countries: Canada, the Netherlands and Spain. DiBiase (2010) investigated the effects of the program as a form of secondary prevention in Canada, in a selected group of
students who were at risk for externalizing behavior problems. DiBiase found that these students, after receiving the EQUIP program, had gained both positive social and moral judgment skills. However, no changes were observed in relation to their anger management skills.

Both in Spain and the Netherlands, applications of the EQUIP for Educators program as a type of primary prevention were investigated. In the Netherlands, Van der Velden, Brugman, Boom & Koops (2010) studied the effectiveness of EFE in ordinary secondary schools containing a high proportion of students who could be labeled as at risk for antisocial behavior. Their findings showed that the students going through the program reported a more negative attitude towards antisocial behavior and a lower level of self-serving cognitive distortions after its completion, in comparison to the students in the control group. The effect on self-serving cognitive distortions was found to remain stable over a period of 9 months. Van der Velden et al. also interviewed teachers who worked with the program in the schools, and of those who were questioned, 85% certified the program as being
successful in positively influencing thinking and acting of students. However, with respect to the prevalence of antisocial behavior and moral judgment, no differences in change were found between the experimental and control groups.

In Spain, the EFE program was applied in classrooms with students between the ages of 13 and 17 years of age in Spanish ordinary secondary education schools (3rd and 4th schoolyear in the Spanish education system) (Van der Meulen et al., in prep.). The trainers were both master students in psychology and researchers who received an extensive training by a professional Equip trainer from the Netherlands. We gathered periodically to comment on the progress of the program implementation. Two methodological aspects were considered to be essential for a successful implementation of the program. In the first place, we emphasized the need for a real active participation by all students, and in the second place, offering many opportunities of experiencing realistic problem situations albeit hypothetical (by means of role playing). Moreover, when real problems
in the class or school would occur, then these should be analyzed within the frame of the program, thereby making a connection between the components of the program and real life problem situations.

We started working with the program in two different state secondary schools in the Madrid area. A pilot study was conducted with two experimental and two control classrooms, and quantitative results showed a significant decrease of self-serving cognitive distortions in one of the two groups in which EFE was applied (Van der Meulen et al., 2010). One of the reasons for this finding might be the difference in support obtained from the school for the application of the program. It is important that students perceive that the adults in the school (teachers, counselors, etc.) find EFE a positive contribution to their education. In terms of classroom climate, students receiving the training did not report to feel better and more secure in the classroom afterwards. However, students of the group that reduced their thinking errors perceived their class as less united than before the intervention. We explained this finding not as an impairment of the
class’ moral climate producing less pro-social and more anti-social behavior, but as a higher level of students’ individuation processes necessary for their development, which might be caused by a higher awareness of the existing differences between them (Blasi & Glodis, 1995).

After the pilot study, a second study was initiated (Van der Meulen, Granizo, Rodriguez & Juanes, 2009; Van der Meulen et al., in prep.) with students of eight classrooms of three state secondary schools who went through the program, and five control groups. In relation to self-serving cognitive distortions, only in one of the eight experimental groups a significant decrease of thinking errors was found, while no changes were observed in the remaining groups. On the other hand, also in one control group a significant decrease was found, while a second group increased their level of distortions in the period between pre and post-testing, although the last change was not statistically significant. However, it needs to be taken into account that levels of cognitive distortions were low in all participating classrooms.
A comparison of HIT profiles (Barriga, Gibbs, Potter & Liau, 2001) showed that 78% of the students in the experimental groups and 89% of those in the control groups should be labeled as “normal”, contrary to “borderline” or “clinical” at pretest. It could be that changes should be expected more among youngsters showing at risk levels of self-serving cognitive distortions.

A first analysis on part of our data (5 experimental and 4 control groups) in relation to peer victimization showed minor changes in bullying and social exclusion incidence (Van der Meulen et al., 2009). However, victimization rates at both pre- and posttest were rather low in the participating classrooms, which corresponds to the decreasing incidence in those school years and ages in comparison to the (pre)adolescents in the first two years of secondary education, as reported in the Spanish national survey (Del Barrio et al., 2008) and those of other countries (e.g. Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

In relation to students’ behavior when observing victimization situations in their classroom, we checked the proportions of students in
each classroom who indicated their own reactions to bullying situations according to the possibilities they had to consider (e.g. “I join the bully”; “I talk to the victim”) at pre- and post-test. Variations of 10% or more in these proportions, showing both increases and decreases were found equally in the experimental and control groups. However, most of students’ perceptions of their classmates’ reactions altered in all experimental groups between measuring moments, but very few in the control groups (implying alterations ≥10%). The proportion of students who perceived other peers as for example “rejecting the bullies”, “doing nothing but declaring later they should do something” or “trying to stop it” had increased in some experimental classes, or decreased in others, while proportions stayed mostly the same in the control groups. These results might show an increased awareness of those who received the EFE training on how their classmates react to peer bullying.

In semi-structured interviews we checked students’ opinions about the program’s working methods and the effectiveness of the
program. Students evaluated EFE’s methodology positively. They described working in a group format as satisfactory, so they share their opinions “because each of us thinks differently, we don’t all think the same. I think it is because in other classes they don’t give us that opportunity” (boy, 16). Also the role-playing activities received appraisal, as for example expressed by these two girls, both aged 17 years: “That theatre doing thing (...) That helps a lot. –With what does it help? To express myself better (...) to open up”; “You read this and you put yourself in the role and you think about it. –You put yourself in that situation? Of course!”.

Participants also referred to results they obtained from the EFE, sometimes mentioning a session that taught them a specific content or technique, as for example this girl (16) in relation to a social skill session: “When we had this class on how to help a friend who feels bad, I used to give advice, and now I learnt I shouldn’t do that (...) I used to try and help them, and no, it’s like trying to let them pour their heart out without you participating, you just need to listen to them.”
Others refer to anger management: “Not to get angry so many times
(...) I control myself many times” – How? Thinking of the consequences.”
(boy, 16). “Maybe I get angry at somebody, and think before I start
talking in case afterwards I would regret it and I think more about
what I do and all” (girl, 13). Still others refer explicitly to arguments
they have with their parents and what they do: “I think a lot about the
thinking errors and how I can control myself” (girl, 15) or the boy (16)
who mentions he just doesn’t “get angry that often any more with his
parents”.

4. Criticisms and future directions

From our perspective, EQUIP for Educators is a promising
program aiming at both individuals and groups well functioning.
Nevertheless, several aspects related to its application and the
evaluation of its effectiveness could be criticized. To conclude our
chapter, we’ll review some of these; it would be useful to reconsider
these for future implantation of the program.
First of all, in relation to measuring EFE’s effectiveness, it should be taken into account that when the program is intended as a type of primary intervention, additional methods of evaluation might need to be used (Van der Meulen et al., in prep). For example, instead of measuring levels of cognitive distortions of the individuals, students’ knowledge on how to recognize thinking errors and to correct them could be studied. Likewise, it would be interesting to find out if, and how often students do recognize and correct thinking errors of other peers in the classroom. On the other hand, the reduction of negative behavior, as for example the decrease of anger expressions in conflicts with peers or parents, which the students indicate as a positive effect of the program, could be studied by means of diaries or other types of qualitative studies, in order to know which mechanisms are used to control anger and how often, what the nature is of these conflicts etc. Furthermore, effects on the moral atmosphere in the classroom should be investigated.
In addition, the developmental trajectory of the student’s mental processes and the impact of the intervention should be explored over a longer period of time, i.e. there is a need for longitudinal investigations. For example, a “sleeper” effect might be occurring, so that the effects of the training will become visible after a longer period of time. This was suggested by Leeman, Gibbs & Fuller (1993) studying the impact of the treatment program EQUIP in juvenile offenders, who did not find changes in moral judgment immediately after the intervention, and neither by Van der Velden et al. (2010) in relation to secondary school students.

In relation to this, it also seems recommendable to use an extended time period to work through the program. A 10-week curriculum might seem something more compact and manageable for teachers, but in practice, all aspects which students should learn need time to really be assimilated by them. Although DiBiase et al. (2005) suggest to extend the course by additional sessions if that seems necessary, it might not be the lack of sessions, as much as a time to
have experiences that make one become aware of the program’s elements, e.g. when reflecting on the way in which he or she communicated with somebody in a conflict situation, and the consequences this had over a longer period of time.

Although various elements of EFE (e.g. thinking error correction, handling group pressure) seem promising for the prevention of peer victimization, the program as it is now, in our opinion it does not seem to be appropriate for students below the age of 13/14 years. Possibilities should be explored on how to adjust EFE to younger students, experiencing bullying to a larger extent, or how to incorporate these elements in a more specific bullying intervention program.

The extent to what EFE is implemented as originally intended might affect its effectiveness (Brugman & Gibbs, 2010). Helmond, Brugman & Overbeek (2010; cited in Brugman & Gibbs, 2010) specify five indicators of program integrity that can be applied to the EQUIP program: 1) exposure (number, duration and frequency of implemented
meetings), 2) adherence (degree in which the program components are executed as intended), 3) quality of delivery (use of techniques, processes or methods as prescribed), 4) participant responsiveness and 5) program differentiation, which refers to the identification of essential program characteristics that are needed for effectiveness. Among EFE’s characteristics are: a mixed peer group including positive role-models, and sufficient intruding confrontations with one’s own problems. As we have mentioned before, we think it is highly important to analyze real problem situations with the students, so they connect what they’ve learned in the program with their daily lives. So, this would benefit the program’s integrity in relation to program differentiation - students are confronted with their own problems. However, it might affect the aspect of exposure negatively, as the analysis of such a problem with the group might interrupt the session that was planned for that day (and incorporating an extra session is not always possible). However, it seems to be contrary to the program’s goals not to handle the problem, and students could perceive
this ignoring as “the program cannot deal with things like this” (Van der Meulen et al., in prep).

In sum, we think that both the application as the study of its effectiveness could be modified to the extent that we could have a better view on the quality of EFE, which has a lot of potential for being used in secondary school by educators to promote a healthy personal and social development of their students.
References


del Barrio, C., van der Meulen, K. y Barrios, A. (2002). Otro tipo de maltrato: el abuso de poder entre escolares [Another kind of
maltreatment: abuse of power between students]. *Bienestar y Protección Infantil, 1*, 37-69.


Presentation at the XIV European Conference on Developmental Psychology, August 18-22, Vilnius, Lithuania.


cognitive distortions, moral judgment and antisocial behavior.

*Journal of Research in Character Education, 8*, 77-95.

van Westerlaak, J. (April 7th, 2006). Personal communication.