Chapter 6
Assessment of Character Strengths in Children and Adolescents

Tayyab Rashid, Afroze Anjum, Carolyn Lennox, Denise Quinlan, Ryan M. Niemiec, Donna Mayerson, and Fahim Kazemi

6.1 Introduction

For more than a century, psychology has been fascinated with the clichéd question "*what is wrong with you, Johnny*?" Since the dawn of this millennium, positive psychology has seriously urged psychologists to also probe into a much deeper and a loftier question, "*what are you good at, Johnny*?" Psychologists have been asking the former question in copious ways through formal and informal, objective and subjective, and normative and ipsative psychological assessments. The latter question has unfortunately remained unasked, leaving the positive aspects of Johnny largely unpacked and underexplored. A bibliographic database search (as of July 2, 2012) of PsycINFO and ERIC (accessed through CSA Illumina[1]) with scoping search using descriptors *assessment* and *psychopathology* and *children* and *adolescents* covering the period of 2000 through 2012, yielded 24,129 peer reviewed journals

[1]CSA Illumina can be accessed at: http://www.csa.com

T. Rashid (✉) • F. Kazemi
Health and Wellness Centre, University of Toronto Scarborough, SL-270,
1265 Military Trail, Toronto, ON M1C 1A4, Canada
e-mail: trashid@utsc.utoronto.ca; f.kazemi@mail.utoronto.ca

A. Anjum • C. Lennox
Psychological Services, South-West Education Office, Toronto District School Board,
1 Civic Centre Court, Toronto, ON M9C 2B3, Canada
e-mail: Afroze.Anjum@tdsb.on.ca; Carolyn.Lennox@tdsb.on.ca

D. Quinlan
Department of Psychology, University of Otago, P.O. Box 56, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand
e-mail: denise.quinlan@otago.ac.nz

R.M. Niemiec • D. Mayerson
VIA Institute on Character, 312 Walnut Street, Suite 3600, Cincinnati, OH 45202, USA
e-mail: ryan@viacharacter.org; donnam@viacharacter.org

C. Proctor and P.A. Linley (eds.), *Research, Applications, and Interventions for Children and Adolescents: A Positive Psychology Perspective*, DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-6398-2_6,

article whereas only 3,330 articles were found when the descriptor *psychopathology* was replaced with *strengths*. This clearly suggests that we have just started exploring the intact aspects of Johnny and we have a long way to go in understanding what is wrong with Johnny as well as what is strong about him. Our central point, in this chapter, is to underscore the importance of exploring the positive aspects of Johnny without dismissing, minimizing, or avoiding weakness. To make our case, we underscore the shortcomings of a deficit model of assessment for children and adolescents, and define a strength-based assessment and the benefits of exploring strengths. Positive psychology posits that the use of signature strengths – the highest strengths that individuals believe are most core to who they are – is associated with greater well-being and less psychological distress. This notion has been well tested with adults (e.g., Linley et al. 2010; Rust et al. 2009; Mongrain and Anselmo-Matthews 2012; Seligman et al. 2005). However, this assertion has not been widely tested with children and adolescents. Major shortcoming of these studies is that signature strengths, almost exclusively are determined by one self-report measure, (usually VIA-IS [Values in Action – Inventory of Strengths], explained later in the chapter) which ranks top five strengths. We find determination of signature strengths, based on one self-report measure, limiting. Signature strengths of children and adolescents should be assessed considering their context which inherently includes a number of adults including their parents, teachers, coachers, siblings, peers, friends…etc.

We present a new and comprehensive model of assessing signature strengths and evaluate the impact of strengths identification and development on boosting student life satisfaction, well-being, and social skills. Furthermore, practical strategies to use strength in solving problems are also illustrated. We conclude the chapter with applied strategies to assess and build signature strengths of children and adolescents.

6.1.1 What Is a Strength-Based Assessment?

Strengths-based assessment, according to M. H. Epstein (2004), is a measurement of the emotional and behavioral skills, competencies, and characteristics that foster a sense of personal accomplishment, contribute to supportive and satisfying relationships with family members, peers, and adults, enhance one's ability to cope with challenges and stress, and promote one's personal, social, and academic development. Although strengths-based assessment finds a convenient thrust in the contemporary positive psychology movement, it has been part of humanistic psychology tradition (Friedman and MacDonal 2006). Moreover, school psychologists and social workers have long emphasized assessing and working with strengths (Rhee et al. 2001; Laursen 2003; Rapp 1997).

In promoting strength-based assessment we ought to keep in mind that our brains have evolved in such a way that we are better at attending, selecting, discerning, and remembering grudges than expressions of gratitude; criticism than compliments; conflict than cooperation; and hubris than humility (Rashid and Ostermann 2009).

Evidence supports that negatives weigh more heavily than positives of equal value and impact (Kahneman and Tversky 1984; Cottrell and Neuberg 2005). Educational settings from classrooms to playgrounds are not immune from this. Consider the following mini experiment. Below are two vignettes. Approach each one in a particular way: read the description twice, close your eyes and visualize the student, and write down a few descriptors of the student described in numbers 1 and 2:

1. Joey is an 8th grade student and is in his fourth school in 6 years. Joey's concentration is poor, he is described as disruptive and as a procrastinator by most of his teachers.
2. Consider Joseph, also an 8th grade student who is also attending his fourth school in 6 years. Joseph has good personal hygiene, and although he is not very social, he has two consistent friends who describe him as loyal and fun to hang around with. Joseph doesn't particularly enjoy academics but occasionally he is able to focus and complete his assignments without much difficulty. He is a good basketball player and is considered an important member of the school team. Joseph is very good with digital equipment and often helps teachers when they are technologically challenged.

Compare your notes. Your descriptors for these decontextualized vignettes may differ with the former carrying more negatives than the latter. Ironically, these vignette descriptions are of the same student. The vignettes were taken from two psychoeducational evaluations. The first was completed by a school psychologist, trained in a traditional psychopathology model of assessment while the second was completed by the first author. Both assessments were completed within a year. These contrasting vignettes offer important considerations for the assessment of children and adolescents and subsequent interventions. Descriptors organize and simplify the information. If the information is negatively labeled for the most part, the perception of the individual is likely to be formed in an unfavorable way. If a practitioner only perceives the negative traits described in the former vignette (e.g., distraction, procrastination…etc.), this may overshadow several positive traits (e.g., curiosity, loyalty, self-regulation…etc.) of Joey/Joseph – offering a skewed and limited impression of him. Furthermore, negative traits are more likely to reinforce the notion that weaknesses reside inside Joey – minimizing the role of risks and resources embedded within the environment.

A deficit-oriented assessment reduces children and adolescents into synthetic labels and categories of psychopathology. Sophisticated objective and projective measures are used to validate the existence of these categories. These labels have become so pervasive that adolescents may readily fit themselves in these categories before seeking professional help. While labeling may help categorize and organize the world, at the same time, it may oversimplify the rich, nuanced, and idiosyncratic complexities of children and adolescents. In worst-case scenarios, vulnerable adolescents may perceive themselves from an early age as disturbed, anxious, or depressed.

The traditional deficit-oriented assessment is based on the assumption that weaknesses, if remediated, will make children and adolescents happy. Challenging this assumption, Corey Keyes (2009) posits that the absence of symptoms does not

necessarily mean the presence of mental health. Keyes terms the presence of mental health as flourishing, and the absence of mental health as languishing. He has examined the flourishing and languishing of more than 1,200 nationally representative adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 and has found that approximately 38 % of adolescents are flourishing, 56 % are moderately mentally healthy, and 6 % are languishing. The languishing adolescents report more conduct problems (arrests, truancy, alcohol use, cigarette smoking, and marijuana use) while the flourishing adolescents report better psychosocial functioning (global self-concept, self-determination, closeness to others, and school integration). Independent lines of research support Keyes' (2009) findings. Wood and Joseph (2010) recently demonstrated that after controlling for negative characteristics, individuals who score low on positive characteristics will still be at a two-fold risk of developing depression compared to individuals who score high on positive characteristics. Similarly, even after controlling for neuroticism, the prospective relationship between depression and gratitude remains significant (Wood et al. 2008). Positive traits can also act as a buffer between negative life events and psychopathology. For example, Johnson and colleagues (2010) found that positive beliefs about relationship support and coping ability ("resilience appraisals") buffer against suicidality. For people with low positive beliefs, more negative life events lead to greater suicidality. Jane Gillham and colleagues (2011) recently studied the character strengths and depression of 149 adolescents as part of a positive psychology intervention. They found that other-directed strengths (e.g., forgiveness, kindness, teamwork) and self-regulation predicted fewer symptoms of depression through the end of Grade 10. Furthermore, higher life satisfaction was associated with hope, gratitude, curiosity and love of learning. Therefore, the assumption that fixing weaknesses will ensure well-being has been seriously challenged and will continue to be scrutinized in years to come. With that being said, in order to make children and adolescents feel good and worthwhile, hundreds of interventions in educational and community settings are delivered every year. Many of these interventions are based on external validation of the self, which can foster unhealthy levels of self-esteem. Some research has found that externally validated self-esteem tends to be more detrimental than beneficial (Crocker et al. 2003; Lyubomirsky et al. 2006). Rather than seeking external validation, developing character strengths and other strengths, such as talents/abilities, skills, and assets, boosts both subjective and psychological well-being, even when controlling for the effects of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Govindji and Linley 2007). Finally, Bird and colleagues (2012) in a recent systematic review of strength-based assessment noted that use of a strengths-based assessment fosters a positive relationship between the client and the clinician. Therefore, any assessment and intervention that largely rests on deficits presents a skewed picture of children and adolescents. Furthermore, deficit-oriented assessment limits the role of the professional to diagnose and treat symptoms and disorders, and expands the power differential between children and adolescents and the professional.

Assessment, especially a formal one, is conducted to make important decisions including screening, diagnosing, placing children and adolescents in specialized programs, and providing them with accommodations and modifications. When such

important decisions are at stake, the need for a balanced assessment including symptoms and strengths becomes critical. Therefore, we argue that assessment of children and adolescents should always be a hybrid exercise, exploring strengths as well as weakness. Furthermore with children and adolescents, merely assessing strengths could be considered a positive intervention in its own right (Poston and Hanson 2010).

Positive Psychology, for well over a decade now, has made concerted empirical efforts to advance the science that integrates both strengths and weaknesses. In order to do so, positive psychology researchers realized that unlike the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*; American Psychiatric Association 2000), which numerates a sophisticated classification of disorder, there lacked a common language to describe strengths. Spearheading the first effort to describe a systematic classification of core human strengths were C. Peterson and Seligman (2004), who published the VIA (formerly called the "Values in Action") Classification of strengths. C. Peterson and Seligman (2004) define character strengths as capacities of cognition, affect, volition, and behavior, which constitute the basic psychological ingredients that enable us to act in ways that contribute to our well-being and the well-being of others. They acknowledge that character strengths are morally desired traits of human existence, which are valued in every culture. However, the VIA Classification is descriptive rather than prescriptive, thus character strengths are open to empirical examination. The character of human beings is plural in nature, meaning that character strengths are expressed in combinations (rather than singularly), and are expressed in degrees relative to context. The 24 character strengths in the VIA Classification are subsumed under six broader categories called virtues. Table 6.1 presents the language of character, that is, the 24 core character strengths and virtues, and corresponding descriptions.

6.1.2 Character Strengths and Talents/Abilities

It is also important to distinguish character strengths from talents and abilities. According to Chris Peterson (2006), talents and abilities, such as dexterity, aptitude, athletic ability, or musical talent, are more genetically influenced than character strengths, such as humility and social intelligence. Talents and abilities are also more likely to be associated with concrete consequences (fame, wealth) than character strengths, and people may waste them. In contrast, C. Peterson (2006) argues that character strengths are rarely wasted, that is, kindness, social intelligence, or spirituality are either used or not, but rarely wasted. Character strengths, are morally desirable traits. These are aligned with values but at the same time are somewhat distinct from them. Values are largely located on religious, cultural, and political spectrums whereas character strengths are descriptive traits. Their utility, context, and content is being increasingly informed and constrained by scientific knowledge, as discussed next.

Table 6.1 VIA classification of character strengths

Wisdom and knowledge – strengths that involve acquiring and using knowledge
- **Creativity** [Ingenuity; Originality]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
- **Curiosity** [Interest; Novelty-seeking; Openness to experience]: Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
- **Judgment** [Critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
- **Love of learning**: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
- **Perspective** [Wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; taking the "big picture" view

Courage – emotional strengths that involve exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
- **Bravery** [Valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, or pain
- **Perseverance** [Persistence; Industry; Diligence]: Finishing what one starts, completing a course of action in spite of obstacles
- **Honesty** [Authenticity and integrity]: Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
- **Zest** [Vitality]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly, living life as an adventure, feeling alive and activated

Humanity – interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others
- **Love** [Capacity to give/Receive love]: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people
- **Kindness** [Compassion; Altruism; Generosity; Care]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them
- **Social intelligence**: Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

Justice – strengths that underlie healthy community life
- **Teamwork** [Citizenship; Social responsibility; Loyalty]: Working well as member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share
- **Fairness** [Equity]: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance
- **Leadership**: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen

Temperance – strengths that protect against excess and vices
- **Forgiveness** [Mercy]: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful
- **Humility** [Modesty]: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight; not regarding oneself as more special than one is
- **Prudence**: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
- **Self-regulation** [Self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

Transcendence – strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
- **Appreciation of beauty and excellence** [Awe; Wonder; Elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to arts to mathematics to science
- **Gratitude**: Being aware of and thankful for the good things; taking time to express thanks
- **Hope** [Optimism; Future-mindedness]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

Humor [Playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people, seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes
Spirituality [Sense of Purpose; Faith; Meaning; Religiousness]: Knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

Peterson and Seligman (2004)

6.1.3 What Good Are Character Strengths?

Good character is what parents look for in their children, what teachers look for in their students, what siblings look for in their brothers and sisters, and what friends look for in their peers (Park and Peterson 2009). Character is critical for lifelong optimal human development. Good character is not simply the absence of deficits, problems, and pathology but rather a well-developed cluster of positive personality traits. In recent years, under the rubric of "character education", *good character* is a set of distinct strengths that a person possesses to varying degrees and more importantly they are malleable across the lifespan. For example, among children and adolescents, character strengths of appreciation of beauty and excellence, forgiveness, modesty, and judgment appear to have a developmental trajectory; being least common in youth and increasing over time through cognitive maturation (Park and Peterson 2006a). However, the malleability of character strengths is also dependent upon a number of contextual factors.

Character strengths are strongly associated with several indicators of well-being and inversely related with symptoms of psychopathology. Wood and colleagues (2011) have found that using strengths was associated with decreased stress, increased vitality and positive affect (but not reduced negative affect). Huta and Hawley (2010) have shown that the strengths of zest, spirituality, and appreciation of beauty/excellence are inversely related to cognitive vulnerability; and strengths play a predictive role in improving depressive symptoms. Using character strengths has also been shown to decrease depression and increase well-being in certain samples (Rust et al. 2009; Seligman et al. 2006; Proctor et al. 2011a). Furthermore, using strengths is also associated with better therapeutic outcome (Flückiger and Grosse Holtforth 2008; Larsen and Stege 2010).

Increased use of specific character strengths are associated with fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety (Gillham et al. 2011; Park and Peterson 2008), greater life satisfaction (Gillham et al. 2011), fewer externalizing problems (Park and Peterson 2008), and lower internalizing problems (Beaver 2008). The strength of leadership contributes to helping others and also predicts fewer symptoms of depression (Schmid et al. 2011). Similarly, Bundick (2011) conducted a longitudinal study, which has shown that leadership is positively related to purpose in life and optimism. Richards and Huppert (2011) analyzed data from a 1964 British birth cohort, which began with 563 teens. Children rated as "positive" by their teachers at age 13 or 14 were significantly more likely than those who received no positive rating to report

satisfaction with their work, midlife, and to have stronger social ties. Prosocial behavior, such as volunteering, buffered against emotional exhaustion, while positive emotions increased helping and citizenship.

Character strengths are not only associated with favorable psychosocial outcomes, they also predict well-being, over and above IQ scores. Park and Peterson (2008) found that after controlling for IQ, the character strengths of perseverance, fairness, honesty, hope, and perspective/wisdom predicted grade point average (GPA). In a longitudinal study of 140 eighth grade students, Duckworth and Seligman (2005) found that perseverance and self-discipline, measured by self-report, parent report, and teacher report accounted for more than twice as much variance as IQ in final grades, high school selection, school attendance, hours spent doing homework, hours spent watching television (inversely), and the time of day students began their homework. These findings underscore the importance of character strengths in conjunction with intellectual potential. Corroborating this finding, Lounsbury and colleagues (2009) found that perseverance, along with love of learning, fairness, and kindness predicted college GPA.

In a study of more than 1,200 children, the most curious children ($n = 207$) were compared to the least curious or bored children ($n = 207$). The curious children were more optimistic, hopeful, confident, and had a higher sense of self-determination and self-efficacy believing they were in control of their actions and decisions than the bored children who felt like pawns with no control of their destiny (Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi 2003). These lines of research suggest that character strengths help individuals to build personal resources which help individuals to attain other desirable outcomes (Xanthopoulou et al. 2007).

But how? One hypothesis is that the use of character strengths engenders positive emotions, which broaden thought-action repertoires promoting exploratory behavior that helps individuals create opportunities and goal-directed actions. The mechanisms through which character strengths produce their effects have not yet been identified although it is expected that a number of mechanisms will be involved.

Finally, Seligman (2011), advocating the notion of *positive education* (Seligman et al. 2009), contends that positive traits and states ought to be integrated in the school curriculum because these traits can act as a buffer to prevent depression and many other forms of psychopathologies.

6.2 Assessing Strengths

A number of assessment scales, inventories, and interviews have been developed to assess positive emotions, strengths, meaning, and a host of strengths related constructs. Professionals working with children and adolescents can choose empirically validated instruments to assess specific positive constructs. The most comprehensive positive psychology assessment tool for children and adolescents to date is the VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA Youth Survey). This survey uses 198 items to measure the 24 character strengths and provides children between 10 and 17 with feedback

about their top character strengths, also known as signature strengths. The VIA Youth Survey has established good psychometrics with positive convergence between parent and self-ratings of the 24 character strengths (Park and Peterson 2006a). Table 6.2 presents an overview of some salient strength-based measures. Most measures of psychopathology are expensive and require specific qualification and credentials to administer. In contrast, most strength-based measures, developed by practitioners and researchers of positive psychology, are readily available online without charge. A number of these measures and their respective theoretical frameworks are discussed in detail in books, such as the *Handbook of Positive Psychology in Schools* (Gilman et al. 2009), *Celebrating Strengths: Building Strength-based Schools* (Fox Eades 2008), *Positive Psychological Assessment: A Handbook of Models and Measures* (Lopez and Snyder 2003), and the *Oxford Handbook of Methods in Positive Psychology* (Ong and van Dulmen 2006).

The assessment of character strengths in very young children has also been attempted by use of parent ratings. Park and Peterson (2006b) conducted a content analysis of parents' written descriptions of their children between the ages of 3 and 10 ($n = 680$). The parents' descriptions had an average of three VIA character strengths mentioned in each description. They explain that prior to this study, there were no investigations of character as a multidimensional construct among young children (below age 10). Another component of this study was to investigate correlations with happiness. The researchers framed the parents' instructions to note the child's personal characteristics and individual qualities (e.g., "What can you tell us so that we might know your child well?"), and encouraged parents to tell a story that captures what the child is all about. The prevalence of character strengths were as follows (highest prevalence listed first): love, kindness, creativity, humor, curiosity, love of learning, perseverance. Some character strengths were significantly correlated with happiness; these strengths included love, zest, and hope.

6.3 Building Strengths

There are a very limited number of interventions that build character strengths in a comprehensive way. Most interventions target one or two specific strengths, for example, gratitude (Froh et al. 2009; Flinchbaugh et al. 2012), optimism (Gillham et al. 1995), and hope (Pedrotti et al. 2008). Few systematic interventions have been completed that have explicitly attempted to build positive traits in children and adolescents. Proctor, Tsukayama and colleagues (2011) examined the impact of *Strengths Gym*, a character strength-based positive psychological intervention program, on adolescent life satisfaction, positive and negative affect, and character strength-based exercises in the school curriculum. Adolescents ($n = 208$) who participated in the program experienced significant increases in life satisfaction compared to adolescents ($n = 101$) who did not participate.

Table 6.2 Salient strength-based measures

		Psychometrics	
Measure	Strength-based subscales	Internal consistency	Concurrent validity
Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC; Reynolds and Kamphaus 1992, 2004)	Respondent: Parent, Teacher, Self	Alpha coefficients ranged from .80 to .90	Correlations between the BASC Teacher form and the Teacher Report Form (TRF) competence subscales ranged from .52 to .82
	Parent and Teacher forms: Adaptive scale, items that measure Adaptability, Leadership, Social Skills, and Study Skills		Correlation between the BASC Parent form and the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach 1992) competence subscales ranged from .40 to .68
	Self-report form: Adaptive scale includes items that measure Relations with Parents, Interpersonal Relations, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance		Correlations between the BASC Self form and the Youth Self report competence subscales ranged from .15 to .39
Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS; M. H. Epstein and Sharma 1998)	Respondent: Primary Caregiver, Self (BERS-2; M. H. Epstein 2004)	Alpha coefficient = .98	Correlations between BERS subscales and the TRF competence subscales ranged from .29 to .73
	All forms: Interpersonal Strengths, Affective Strengths, Family Involvement, School Functioning, Interpersonal Strengths	Test-retest = .99 Inter-rater reliability ranged from .83 to .98	Correlations between BERS and SSRS (Gresham and Elliot 1990) Social Skills correlations ranged from .46 to .73 and Academic Competence ranged from .50 to .72
California Healthy Kids Survey-Resilience Youth Development Module (RYDM; Constantine et al. 1999)	Respondent: Self	Alpha coefficients ranged from .55 to .88	Correlations between RYDM and the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (Huebner 1994) ranged from .43 to .66

	Externally-situated strengths (e.g., the presence of caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities to participate in meaningful activities) and internally situated strengths (e.g., social competence, autonomy, sense of meaning, and purpose)	The exception to this was the Meaningful Participation in the Community subscale, which had "low reliability and new items were [subsequently] written to be assessed in the next phase of the field test" (Constantine et al. 1999, p. 7)	Correlations between RYDM and the Extended Life Orientation Test (Scheier et al. 1994) were .56
Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner 1994)	Respondent: Self Satisfaction in multiple domains; Family, Friends, School, Living Environment, and Self	Coefficients between .72 and .85 2 and 4-week test-retest ranged from .70 to .90	Family domain correlated .62 with BASC Parent scale. Friends domain correlated .56 with Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Scale (Cassidy and Asher 1992). School domain correlated .68 with Quality of School Life Scale (Epstein and McPartland 1976). Self domain correlated .62 with General Self-Esteem scale of Self Description Questionnaire-I (Marsh 1992)
School Social Behavior Scale-2 (SSBS-2; Merrell 2002)	Respondent: Self Social Competence included items that measure Peer Relations, Self-Management/Compliance, and Academic Behavior	Alpha and split-half reliability coefficients ranged from .96 to .98	Moderate correlation between SSBS-2, CBCL, and TRF

(continued)

Table 6.2 (continued)

Measure	Strength-based subscales	Psychometrics	
		Internal consistency	Concurrent validity
Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham and Elliott 1990)	Respondent: Parent, Teacher, Self All forms: Social Skills Scale includes items that measure Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, and Self-Control Teacher form: Academic Competence Scale measures reading and mathematics performance, general cognitive functioning, as well as motivation and parental support	Alpha coefficient ranged from .75 to .94`	Moderate to high correlations between SSRS and SSBS-2, BASC (Teacher, Parent, and Student Self-Report forms), Teacher Rating Scale (Harter 1985), Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (Piers and Harris 1984), Walker-McConnell Scale of Social Competence and School Adjustment (Walker and McConnell 1995)
Children's Hope Scale (CHS; Snyder et al. 1997)	Respondent: Self Assesses children's dispositional hope. Measures problem solving and decision-making abilities.	Alpha coefficient ranged from .77 to .88	
Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6; McCullough et al. 2002)	Respondent: Self Measures the disposition to experience gratitude.	Alpha coefficients ranged from .82 and .87	Positively related to optimism, life satisfaction, hope, spirituality and religiousness, forgiveness, empathy, and prosocial behavior. Negatively associated with depression, anxiety, materialism, and envy

Short Grit Scale (Grit-S; Duckworth and Quinn 2009)	Respondent: Self	Alpha coefficient ranged from .73 to .83 Alphas for consistency of interest subscale ranged from .73 to .79 For Perseverance of Effort subscale, alphas ranged from .60 to .78
Positive and Negative Affect Schedule for Children (PANAS-C; Ebesutani et al. 2011)	Respondent: Parents	Alpha coefficient was .85 for reduced 5-item PA scale and .88 for original 12-item PA scale.
	Yields Positive Affect (PA) and Negative Affect (NA) scales that are used to identify children with anxiety and mood problems	For NA, alpha coefficients were .82 and .90 for 5-and 12-item scales, respectively
Clifton StrengthsFinder 2.0 (StrengthsFinder 2.0; Asplund et al. 2007)	Respondent: Self and Informant Report Yields top five "Signature Themes", and "action items" for development and suggestions about how subject can use their talents.	Satisfactory test-retest reliability values.
Child and Youth Resilience Measure-28 (CYRM-28; Ungar and Leibenberg 2009)	Respondent: Self Used as a screening tool to explore the resources available to youth that may bolster their resilience.	Alpha coefficient ranged from .65 to .91 for 28-item test.

(continued)

Table 6.2 (continued)

Measure	Strength-based subscales	Psychometrics	
		Internal consistency	Concurrent validity
VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA Youth Survey; Park and Peterson 2006a)	Respondent: Self Measures 24, universal character strengths and provides a rank-order of strengths from most to least endorsed.	Alpha coefficients ranged from .72 to .91 for each of the 24 character strengths.	Results converged with teacher ratings of the 24 character strengths. There was agreement between self-reported behaviors (the 24 strengths) and abstract judgments (summary self-ratings). Four strengths (hope, love, zest, and gratitude) were robustly linked with life satisfaction. End of year GPA (grade point average) was predicted by the strengths of perseverance, fairness, gratitude, honesty, hope, and perspective. Student popularity was connected with leadership, fairness, self-regulation, prudence, and forgiveness. In terms of the four subscales of the SSRS, cooperation was most linked with fairness, gratitude, honesty, social intelligence, teamwork, and perspective; assertion with the strengths of leadership and zest; empathy with the strengths of love and kindness; and self-control with the strengths of perseverance, prudence, and self-regulation. For the CBCL, the strengths of hope, zest and leadership correlated with less internalizing problems; and the strengths of perseverance, honesty, prudence, and love correlated with fewer externalizing problems

Over the past 5 years, we (Rashid and Anjum) along with our graduate students have devised and refined three strength-based interventions, which first assess and then systematically attempt to build strengths in children and adolescents.

6.3.1 Signature Strengths

According to Seligman (2002), each person possesses several signature strengths. These are strengths of character that one owns, celebrates, and (if he or she can arrange life successfully) exercises every day in school, work, play, and recreation. Seligman suggests the following possible criteria for a signature strength:

- A sense of authenticity ("this is the real me").
- A feeling of excitement while displaying it.
- A rapid learning curve as themes are attached to the strength and practiced.
- Continuous learning of new ways to enact the strength.
- A sense of yearning to act in accordance with the strength.
- A feeling of inevitability in using the strength, as if one cannot be stopped or dissuaded from its display.
- Invigoration rather than exhaustion when using the strength.
- The creation and pursuit of fundamental projects that revolve around the strength.
- Intrinsic motivation to use the strength.

Seligman's formulation of a good life entails using your signature strengths daily in the main realms of one's life, such as work, love, and play in order to achieve an authentic sense of well-being and happiness (Seligman 2002). Seligman's formulation has been empirically tested. T. D. Peterson and E. W. Peterson (2008) found using one's signature strengths leads to decreased likelihood of depression and stress and an increase in satisfaction. Linley and colleagues (2010) have also found that using signature strengths helps in making progress towards goals and meeting basic needs for independence, relatedness, and competence. Seligman et al. (2006) found using signature strengths among young adults decreased symptoms of depression and increased life satisfaction. Mongrain and Anselmo-Matthews (2012) have found similar results. However, the use of signature strengths to improve well-being or decrease psychological distress has only recently begun to be explored among adolescents (e.g., Proctor, Tsukayama et al. 2011).

In the non-adolescent studies noted above, the individual's signature strengths were determined by their top five scores on the *VIA Inventory of Strengths* (VIA-IS; Peterson and Seligman 2004). Replicating these studies with children and adolescents in a school setting, we explored another way of determining one's signature strengths.

Next, we will briefly discuss three intervention studies, which identified signature strengths of children and adolescents. For these studies, we used the following measures:

- **VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth** (VIA Youth Survey; Park and Peterson 2006a) is a 198-item self-report inventory of strengths that measures the 24 VIA strengths on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 ("Not like me at all") to 5 ("Very much like me"). The VIA-Youth scales have demonstrated good internal consistency (with alpha's ranging from 0.72 to 0.91).
- **Children's Depression Inventory** (CDI; Kovacs 1992) is a 27-item self-report measure that assesses the affective, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms of depression with a score range of 0–52.
- **Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) or Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS)** (Gresham and Elliot 1990, 2008) contains 79–83 items and has teacher, parent, and self-report versions. It has a Social Skills Composite score with the following subscales: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, and self-control, and a Problem Behavior Composite, which includes subscales of: externalizing, internalizing, and hyperactivity. For study one, we used SSRS and for study three we used SSIS. For both studies, we used parent and teacher report.
- **Conners 3** (self-report version; Conners 2008) is a widely used measure to assess hyperactivity and attention deficit. Only positive and negative impression scales were used for intervention two.
- **Students' Life Satisfaction Scale** (SLSS; Huebner 1991) is a 7-item self-report measure that assesses students' overall life satisfaction.
- **Positive Psychotherapy Inventory – Children Version** (PPTI; Rashid and Anjum 2007) is an 18-item self-report measure that assesses positive emotions, engagement, and meaning.

6.3.1.1 Intervention One

In our first study,[2] we randomly assigned Grade 6 students to a strength-based well-being group or to a control group. Our sample was 41 % female with a mean age of 11.77 ($SD = .68$). The intervention group, after the orientation session, completed the VIA Youth Survey (Park and Peterson 2006a) in a group format. The subsequent eight sessions focused on how to use signature strengths in various domains, and a description of these exercises is given in Table 6.3. Students also undertook a personal project in which they were asked to think of becoming a better person, that is, nicer, kinder, more socially attuned, more curious, more creative, more grateful, more industrious and so forth (see examples for several character strengths in Appendix 6.1). The students' parents and teachers in both groups were provided the feedback about their signature strengths and were asked to notice and record any behavior changes they notice weekly on a sheet provided. In addition, they also completed the SSRS at the beginning and end of the intervention.

[2]Conducted in compliance with the Research Services of the Toronto District School Board.

Table 6.3 Strength-based assessment and intervention

Topic	Description
One	Students introduce themselves through a concrete story/narrative, which depicts them at their best. Facilitator guides them by modeling and personal narrative. Students identify their two problem areas to work through this group
You at your best	**Homework**: Students write or express "You at your best" through art, story…etc
Two	The 24 character strengths are introduced through film clips, narratives, and stories; problem areas are further refined in concrete terms
Character strengths	**Homework**: Parents/Guardians are asked to identify the student's top five signature strengths
Three	Students complete VIA Youth survey online
Signature strengths	**Homework**: Students discuss their strengths and identified problems with parents/guardians
Four	Students are coached in use of signature strengths in solving problems and design a Signature Strength Action Plan on paper through narratives, graphics, or pictures
Signature strengths in action	**Homework**: Student draw a solution map connecting each identified problem with a strength, ways to use it and its consequences
Five	Students are taught how to recognize character strengths of others in the school including peers, teachers, support staff, and also at home with their family members, friends and significant others
Signature strengths of others	**Homework**: Students draw a family map of strengths
Six	Students are coached in depth about the use of character strengths in solving problems
Signature strengths in problem solving	**Homework**: Progress on signature strength action plan with emphasis on solving problem initially identified
Seven	Students are given examples and discuss the overuse and underuse of their signature strengths
Overuse and underuse of strengths	**Homework**: Progress on signature strength action plan
Eight	Students do a brief presentation about progress, outcome of their signature strengths project; feedback from parents and teachers is incorporated
Signature strength action plan presentation	Parents are invited to come in person to support their child's presentation or are asked to send their feedback about progress/changes they noticed. Ways to maintain positive behavioral gains are discussed

After the first orientation session, the children completed the VIA Youth Survey online in a group format. Some students experienced difficulty in completing the 198-item measure, finding it long and repetitive. However, eventually, students in both groups were able to complete the online measure in the school's computer lab. Each participant was encouraged to imagine himself or herself as a better person at the end of the intervention by undertaking a signature strength project. In the following three sessions, the children were extensively coached about ways of using their top strengths, also known as *signature strengths* and devised a practical behavioral project. Legends, real-life narratives, and popular films, such as *Pay It*

Forward, Billy Elliot, Forest Gump, Life Is Beautiful, and My Left Foot, illustrated the use of strengths. Movies have been shown to offer powerful exemplars of each of the 24 character strengths in action (Niemiec and Wedding 2008). Parents and teachers in both groups were requested to complete the SSIS before and after the treatment. From sessions three to seven, participants were extensively taught about a strength-based, problem-solving approach which entailed understanding and appreciating the context and fit between situation and intended use of the character strength. Table 6.4 presents some sample strategies of using strengths in solving specific problems. In the final session, each of the 11 participants described their experience using their signature strengths. One participant, who had experienced bullying, utilized her social intelligence to team up with a friend and perform a small skit illustrating the impact of bullying. The skit was so well done that the school principal asked the student to perform the skit at a school assembly. Another student, who constantly argued with her mother, utilized her gratitude and started expressing her thanks towards her mother – even for small favors. Another student whose signature strength was not self-regulation, nonetheless, used it to stop saying impolite and unkind words towards his younger sibling. As children discussed their use of signature strengths within the group, we noticed a synergistic contagion, which motivated other group members.

Furthermore, gratitude and savoring were addressed through specific exercises. Overall, this was an 8-week intervention with each session lasting 1 and 1/2 h. The control group completed pre- and post-intervention measures and also completed the VIA Youth Survey online. At the end of the intervention, both groups did not change on measures of depression and student satisfaction but significant differences were found on the well-being measure (PPTI) with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.90$) and the social skills measure (SSRS), on the parent version, but not on the teacher version (Cohen's $d = 1.88$). This is consistent with the results of the individualized positive psychotherapy pilot (Seligman et al. 2006). At a 6-month follow-up the gains were maintained on the well-being measure with slight but not statistically significant decline. However, the two groups did not differ on the social skills measure (SSRS) (parent version).

6.3.1.2 Intervention Two

The promising results of the first intervention encouraged us to replicate the intervention. However, in order to assess the experimenter bias (first and second author being closely affiliated with the development of the Positive Psychology Center, University of Pennsylvania, during their postdoctoral residency), we decided to train two graduate students to run a similar intervention at an inner city neighborhood. This presented an elevated level of behavioral and emotional challenges. To address these, we slightly changed the exercises in the intervention (Table 6.3) adding an exercise called Negativity Bias. Among the measures, we dropped CDI, as it was expected to be a nonclinical sample, but given the behavioral challenges, added two subscales of the Conners 3 (positive and negative impressions),

Table 6.4 Using strengths in challenges and in solving problems – some illustrations

Character strength	Challenge	Strategy
Zest, vitality, enthusiasm: Student is energetic, cheerful, and full of life	Student does not show interest with other students (e.g., does not talk much, share or participate much in group activities, has few friends)	Encourage student to do at least one outdoor activity weekly such as hiking, biking, mountain biking, mountain climbing, brisk walking or jogging
Persistence, industry, diligence and perseverance: Student finishes most things, even when distracted, and is able to refocus to complete task	Student gives up easily, has difficulty finishing tasks and performs assignments carelessly	Help student identify factors that diminish their interest in the assignment, and help students monitor their progress to incrementally overcome difficulties
Self-regulation and self-control: Students gladly follows rules and routines	Student behaves impulsively, without self-control, lacks time-management skills, and is disorganized	Help student be aware of the time of day when they are most productive. Ask them to remove distractions and utilize this time in tasks requiring mental and physical organization rather than mundane tasks
Forgiveness and mercy: Student does not hold a grudge and forgives easily those who offend him/her	Student holds grudges, exaggerates minor offenses of others, and does not accept sincere apologies	Identify how holding a grudge affects student emotionally. Help student picture themself as offender and remember times when they offended someone and were forgiven
Hope and optimism: Student hopes and believes that more good things will happen than bad ones	Student is preoccupied with their failures and shortcomings, and is overly negative	Coach student to focus on their strengths, and find positive aspects of bad things that have happened to them
Humor and playfulness: Students is playful, funny, and uses humor to connect with others	Student responds inappropriately to friendly teasing (e.g., jokes, name calling)	Encourage student to engage in light-hearted gestures and playful activities with a good-natured attitude
Social and emotional intelligence: Student manages themselves well in social situations and has good interpersonal skills	Student does not socialize appropriately with peers and does not respond appropriately to nonverbal cues from others	Encourage student to watch others how they make and maintain connections, rather than seeking friends, student can seek experience which bring together like-minded people together
Teamwork and citizenship: Student relates well with teammates or group members and contributes to the success of the group	Student is very competitive, will not let others take turns, and cannot stand to lose in a game	Help student identify their motivation for completion and help create a motivational climate focused on doing their best, not to achieve external rewards. Coach student to cultivate reciprocity and to promote cooperation

(continued)

Table 6.4 (continued)

Character strength	Challenge	Strategy
Open-mindedness: Student thinks through and examines all sides before making a decision. Is not reluctant to change mind	Student is rigid, and inflexible. Does not adjust well to changes such as new settings, teachers, peers and situations	Ask student to adopt the perspective of the "other side" in an argument in which they are inflexible or have strong opinions
Gratitude: Student expresses thankfulness for good things through words and actions	Student takes good things in life and well-intentioned acts of others for granted	Encourage student to reflect on the positive things that have happened throughout their day before going to bed. Discuss with student some of the things they are most grateful for
Modesty and humility: Student does not like to be the center of attention and prefers others to shine	Student lacks modesty, draws attention unnecessarily, and overrates one's qualities and achievements	Coach student to an accurate, realistic estimate of their abilities and achievements. Have student write statements acknowledging their imperfections and how they make them human
Perspective/Wisdom: Student often is the source of advice for peers and often settles disputes among peers	Student does not learn from mistakes and often repeats them. Lacks deeper understanding of moral and ethical issues. Is unable to apply knowledge to practical problems	Help student become open to experience. Encourage students to be adventurous, curious and inquisitive about different things. Encourage students to find the purpose and motivations of their past decisions
Capacity to love and be loved: Student shows genuine love and affection through actions	Student withdraws by isolating himself or herself or appearing uninterested. Other student do not accept student	Help student communicate care in small ways to those who are interested in them and to be honest and transparent with their friends
Fairness, equity and justice: Student stands up for others when they are treated unfairly, bullied or ridiculed	Student behaves inappropriately in specific situations and does not demonstrate sensitivity or care towards those who are different	Encourage student to reflect how she/he would like to be treated, in situations he treats others unfairly

along with the PPTI, and the SLSS. The participants were a convenience sample of students in Grade 6, an intervention group ($n=21$) and a control group ($n=22$). The intervention was administered by two graduate students in school psychology. Both students were trained and supervised by the first author. The classroom teacher was present during eight, weekly (60 min) sessions. Some students have had difficulty completing the 198-item VIA Youth Survey, and since this population was an inner city school with students with academic and behavioral challenges, this concern was

heightened. One student, a proficient reader at her grade level, gave up at item 181 stating that she didn't care about exploring her strengths. Unfortunately, the online server didn't save the results. She was eventually able to complete the measure at her home. Similar challenges were experienced with other students who lost concentration as the test progressed and some became disruptive. Given the experience of the intervention group, we altered the intervention and the control group was not administered the VIA Youth Survey. They only completed the remaining measures aforementioned. Both groups did not differ on any of the outcome measures. However, participants' degree of enjoyment in the intervention group was significantly related to how much they perceived what they learned from the group ($r = .63$, $p < .001$). A 6-month follow-up showed similar trends. However, by teacher anecdotal report, several students in the intervention group started discussing strengths and their problem-solving skills improved.

We compiled several findings from our first two interventions. First, an 8-week long, stand-alone intervention of character strengths-based well-being, when delivered by experienced professionals, yields better results. Second, an 8-week period might be too short to produce a significant and meaningful impact. Third, teachers' active involvement in both of our first interventions was missing. Classroom teachers needed to play an important role in these interventions. Fourth, outcome measures needed to include impact of intervention on teacher reported academic performance and the intervention needed more integration within the school curriculum. Fifth, it was felt that more active parental involvement was needed to help children ascertain and use their character strengths at home. Finally, and most importantly, the VIA Youth Survey's length of 198 items posed a challenge to disengaged students at the onset of intervention.

6.3.1.3 Intervention Three

Part One: Development and Validation of a Brief Measure to Assess Signature Strengths

To address the aforementioned challenges, we made the classroom teacher the focal point of the intervention. The teacher was first trained on the VIA Classification through a detailed manual which included detailed descriptions of the 24 character strengths, their links with well-being, and behavioral methods to build character strengths in school settings. The classroom teacher was then asked to establish links between character strengths and the curriculum, and he offered useful tips in this regard. For the third intervention, we did not use any structured exercises as done in interventions one and two (Table 6.5). Given the challenges we faced in having students complete the VIA Youth Survey, we decided to use a shorter measure of character strengths, still based on the VIA Classification model. This measure is referred to as the Signature Strengths Assessment of Youth (SSAY). Our goal was to create a shorter measure, using the VIA Classification that could distinguish a young person's signature strengths from his/her non-signature strengths. Therefore,

Table 6.5 Integration of character strengths in the curriculum (Intervention Three)

	Description	Frequency
Phase one	Explicit instruction on character strengths, their correlates, benefits, overuse and underuse	Once a week
	Character strengths discussed in community circles	Twice a week
	Student brought up scenarios from their lives, which included conflicts, dilemmas, or a problem that needed a solution. Students were asked to think of someone with the character strengths of kindness or prudence, and consider how that person would solve the problem using one of those strengths. Students also discussed how someone who lacks these strengths would deal with these problems?	
Phase two	Integration of character strengths in the curriculum	Classroom discussion as needed
	An illustration: Students read four novels	
	Discussed character strengths mentioned	
	Homework was done through blogging	
	Students were asked to identify character guided	
	By specific character strengths and how character	
	Strengths of character impacted others	
	Novels: "*Misfits*" (Howe), "*Homeless bird*" (Gloria Whelan), "*Sacred Leaf*" (Deborah Ellis)	
	Community circles continued, students kept on discussing a real life problem and a solution utilizing character strengths	Weekly

we decided to capture each of the 24 signature strengths through three items. The first item, referred as the *signature strength item* was written keeping the aforementioned signature strength criteria in mind so that if it is a person's signature strength, he/she is able to endorse it strongly. For example the signature strength item for love of learning was, "I love spending a lot of time learning from other people (parents, teachers, friends) as well as through books and/or educational media (television, internet, radio)". The second item, referred as the *middle item*, was deliberately written as if it was not a person's signature strength (e.g., love of learning, "I like to learn new things in school and at home"). Whereas the *third item* was a reverse item with the intention that the person reading the item with a specific signature strength such as love of learning, would not endorse it highly (e.g., love of learning, "I learn new things because I have to, not because I love it").

Along with the intervention study, we ran a validation study to explore the psychometrics of the SSAY. The data was collected from three schools in Toronto and from more than 15 schools in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. All students completed the SSAY online, along with the PPTI (children's version) and the SLSS. A total of 2,435 elementary and high school students completed the measure online. Of these, 161 students completed both the VIA Youth Survey and the SSAY. The correlation of 20 of 24 character strengths was significant for spirituality ($r = .66$, $p < .001$), love of learning ($r = .50$, $p < .001$), and forgiveness ($r = .54$, $p < .001$) demonstrating medium to high correlation, whereas

self-regulation ($r = .24$, $p < .001$) and prudence ($r = .27$, $p < .001$) showed small correlations. We also gathered data from a subset of students ($n = 963$) on their self-reported behaviors through single item questions and correlated it with the average of 24 SSAY scores. We found that a high average SSAY is significantly correlated with self-reported academic performance[3] ($r = .35$, $p < .001$). We also found that a low average SSAY score was correlated with watching more television ($r = .20$, $p < .001$), spending more time on the Internet for non-academic purposes ($r = .16$, $p < .001$), and also playing more video games ($r = .16$, $p < .001$). We also found that those who on average ate more meals with their family had more friends ($r = .38$, $p < .001$). In summary, SSAY's psychometrics were mixed, by traditional consistency standards, we found low alphas due to the discrepant nature of item content within each strength scale. However, the measure yielded satisfactory construct validity.

Part Two: Administration of Intervention Three

The participants in intervention three were 59 Grade 6 students from two Toronto elementary schools with a mean age of 11.76 years ($SD = 1.5$). Females comprised 53 % of the entire sample with 42 % Caucasian, 21 % Asian, and 19 % from a Chinese background. One school served as the intervention group while the other served as the control group and only completed pre- and post-measures.

Parents in the intervention group received two workshops on character strengths of children and their role in their child's well-being. In identifying children's signature strengths, we adopted a dynamic assessment approach, which had the following two steps: (1) children completed SSAY online; and (2) their parents, teacher, and one peer (a classmate but not the best friend to control for favorability bias) identified their top five strengths, from descriptions of the 24 VIA character strengths (Table 6.1). This description did not include names of the strengths. A composite was calculated which assigned differential weight to scores, such as the top five SSAY score received a score of 1, five strengths identified by parents and teacher were assigned a weight of .75, whereas strengths identified by a peer were assigned a weight of .5. These scores were computed and the top five scores were regarded as signature strengths. In cases of ties, strengths identified by SSAY were given preference. A detailed five-page feedback report was provided to the teacher and parents (See Appendix 6.1 for a sample feedback report). This feedback was provided prior to the winter break, and children were invited to use their signature strengths as part of a New Year's resolution project. Parents were asked to consult with the first and second author about signature strengths and to be active participants in helping their children devise a personalized Signature Strength Action Project (see Appendix 6.2). Evening workshops and individual consultations after the winter break offered parents the opportunity to discuss their child's

[3] Students were asked compared to their peers, how would they rate their academic performance in general on a scale of 1 = weak to 5 = excellent.

signature strengths. Parents were provided with practical strategies to share with their children the anecdotes, memories, experiences, real life stories, accomplishments and skills, which illustrated their and their child's strengths. This process was overwhelmingly positive as most parents were pleasantly surprised to name a positive trait as a strength. The process was infectious enough that initially 29 of 33 parents in the intervention group consented to participate in the project. However, as the strengths assessments were taking place, three of the four who did not consent initially, requested to join the project.

In the classroom, instead of doing structured exercises that we completed in the first two interventions, the classroom teacher was focused on integrating the strengths in the Grade 6 curriculum, especially in language and arts. The teacher heavily emphasized using character strengths in solving problems. Integration into the curriculum was not a challenge, as the Ministry of Education requires character education in schools.

6.3.1.4 Results

On our primary outcome measures, the SSIS, we found that use of signature strengths improved social skills (the overall composite score), as reported by the teacher, from pre- to post-intervention level with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.12$). In the parent report, the Problem Behavior (overall composite score) also improved from pre- to post-intervention level. We also found significant teacher-reported changes in academic performance, from pre- to post-intervention level. Caution is warranted in interpreting these results – because of logistic limitations, we only administered the social skills questionnaire to the intervention group. On the well-being measure (PPTI) and on student life satisfaction, which was administered to both the intervention and control groups, the two groups did not differ at post-intervention level.

Our results showed that, when assessed from multiple perspectives (self-report, parents, teacher, and peer), the most endorsed character strengths were zest, love, hope, curiosity, honesty, appreciation of beauty and excellence, and forgiveness. In contrast, spirituality, self-regulation, and perspective/wisdom were the least endorsed. Of these strengths, large to medium size correlations were found for love ($r = .57$**[4]), zest ($r = .43$**), and hope ($r = .46$**) and gratitude ($r = .43$**), also were among the top five strengths associated with life satisfaction. Our finding is consistent, with previous findings by Park et al. (2004) who found that love, hope, and zest are consistently related to life satisfaction for individuals across all ages. We also found significant correlations between SSAY scores and at least two informant reports (coded as 1 if a character strength was identified as signature strength and 0 if not) for strengths of curiosity, love of learning, perseverance, love, social intelligence, teamwork/citizenship, forgiveness, prudence, hope, and humor. In other words,

[4] * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

when the child reported (through SSAY scores) that these were their strengths, his/her parents, teachers and/or peers also recognized it. These findings suggest that certain strengths are more visible to those around the individual than others.

In this intervention, we incorporated multiple perspectives in determining the signature strengths of students. Furthermore, in order to help children see the integration of character strengths in their school experience, we eliminated structured exercises and relied on an intuitive integration of the teacher in terms of integrating character strengths in two areas: (a) curriculum and (b) problem solving. To incorporate more parental involvement, the first author conducted two after-school workshops to help parents understand character strengths and to help their children build them further. These workshops were well-attended with more than 80 % of the parents of children involved in the intervention actively participating in the workshops, and many regularly corresponded with the teacher and first author about the various phases of the intervention. Finally, we decided that the intervention would last for the whole academic year (September through June).

6.3.1.5 Summary of Our Interventions

Helping children to identify their strengths and teaching them ways to use strengths in problem solving not only makes them efficient problem solvers but also enhances their well-being. Previous research using the 198-item VIA Youth Survey has found substantial correlation between life satisfaction and hope, zest, and love. Our 72-item measure found similar correlations, suggesting that a shorter measure of character strength yields satisfactory construct validity. In our first intervention, which lasted for 8 weeks, we found significant improvement in social skills, but these improvements were not maintained at the 6-month follow-up. However, our third intervention which lasted for a year, integrating character strengths in the curriculum and also involving teacher and parents closely, yielded significant changes in social skills and teacher reported academic performance as well as significant changes in parent reported problem-solving behavior. It appears that the classroom teacher is better suited to deliver strength-based interventions that are embedded within the curriculum rather than outside professionals.

We also found that our second and third intervention studies did not yield significant pre to post changes on measures of well-being and life satisfaction. It could be argued that the baseline scores on both well-being and life satisfaction were at a level where room for improvement in these scores was limited. In other words, these findings could be attributed to the ceiling effect of these constructs; however, further analyses would needed in order to determine this. Moreover, procedural differences in delivery of the interventions and sociocultural environmental effects may have also had an impact on the results. For example, intervention three relied upon a classroom teacher with whom the students and parents already had an established a relationship and the teacher had the opportunity to incorporate strengths in the curriculum.

We conclude with the following strategies in assessing and building strengths extracted from best practices in the literature and also from our experience in working across three different countries with diverse student samples:

- **Integration**: Integrating measures of psychopathology and strengths is perhaps the most efficient strategy to understand children and adolescents in a holistic and balanced way. One illustration of such an integration is by Greenspoon and Saklofske (2001) who employed measures of subjective well-being (i.e., life satisfaction) along with traditional measures of psychopathology (i.e., self-reported internalizing and teacher-reported externalizing behavior scores on the BASC; Reynolds and Kamphaus 1992). They showed that students with low subjective well-being had significantly lower functioning across psychosocial, academic, and physical health domains. Since most measures of psychopathology have good psychometrics, establishing a relationship with strength-based measures will make the assessment of children and adolescent more comprehensive and will help professionals appreciate the incremental validity of their conclusions by adding these measures.
- **Reinterpreting existing measures**: Given the pervasive use of psychometrically sound measures which assess weaknesses and deficits of children, Wood and Joseph (2010) suggest that one way to assess strengths is to reinterpret these existing measures that contain positive items (often reverse coded). For example, the Conners 3 (2008) is widely used to assess symptoms related to attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, executive dysfunction, learning problems, aggression, and family relationships. The longer version, also contain items such as telling the truth, not telling white lies, fun to be around, sharing feelings, personal interests and achievement with others. Similarly, the BASC-2 (Reynolds and Kamphaus 2004) has items such as paying attention, encouraging others to do their best, communicating clearly, offering help to others, being well organized, making friends easily, working well under pressure, recovering well under pressure, adjusting well to changes, volunteering to help others, setting realistic goals, etc. These items are often reverse-coded. One strategy is to keep positive items as positive suggesting the presence of positive states and traits, rather than their absence. Rather than regarding negatives and positive as separate dimensions, common states such as depression and anxiety could be considered on a continuum with happiness and relaxation or these could form two separate continua.
- **Interview**: Interviews guided by research can also be used to assess strengths. If a professional prefers not to use formal assessment, he/she can use questions during informal assessments or formal psycho-educational evaluations that elicit strengths, positive emotions, and meaning. For example, discuss with children and adolescents what they consider satisfying, their goals, their wishes, their attainable goals, and what they are particularly good at. Other questions to consider include: What activities, tasks, and challenges do they find intrinsically motivating and absorbing? Which accomplishment are they most proud of? Which relationships in school, at home, and elsewhere do they find trustworthy?

Discussing positive aspects openly, explicitly and consciously lays a motivational foundation, which can later be changed into concrete, achievable, and favorable goals.

- **Paragons**: To help children and adolescents discern and identify their own strengths, professionals can use paragons of certain strengths (e.g., Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Albert Einstein, Aung San Suu Kyi, Ken Saro Wiwa), real-life narratives, and popular films (e.g., *Pay it Forward, Forest Gump, My Left Foot*). A professional can use strengths displayed by specific paragons and film characters and discuss with students whether they partly or fully identify with them, which conditions seem to display these strengths maximally, and what might be the consequences of displaying these strengths. A comprehensive list of over 1,000 films from around the world illustrating each of the 24 character strengths can be found in Niemiec and Wedding (2008).
- **Collateral data**: Collateral information from family members, teachers, and peers about the strengths of the child or adolescent can be very useful, as we found in our interventions. It is particularly helpful to assess and identify social and communal buffers for children and adolescents living in neighborhoods ridden with social problems. For example, in addition to inquiring about problems with family members, professionals can also assess attachment, love, and nurturance from the primary support group. Instead of looking for problems related to the social environment, a child or adolescent can be asked to describe humor and playful interactions, connectedness, and empathetic relationships at work.
- **Informal assessment**: Standardized tests may often overlook or hide individuality. While there are advantages of establishing normative common denominators, individuality in this process is compromised. Therefore one strategy is to integrate both standardized as well as informal ways of assessing strengths. For example, inquiring about strengths displayed during challenges and setbacks can provide rich information that may not be captured by a standardized measure. For example, we have asked questions such as: "*Tell me about a challenge you handled adaptively*?" or "*What have you done to overcome a serious difficulty*?" or "*Tell me about a setback from which you learned a lot about yourself*." These lines of inquiry can be customized to adapt to the cognitive and academic level of children and adolescents. Furthermore, standardized questionnaires, which assess resilience can be adapted to an interview format and critical items can be used to initiate discussion. This will also help to conceptualize the cultural context of strengths, which is difficult to capture within standardized measures.
- **Formal evaluations**: Assessment of strengths should be an important part of formal psychoeducational assessment and should be creatively integrated into Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs). Following is an excerpt from one of the psychoeducational assessments completed by the first author, which integrates strengths in a formal evaluation of an 11-year-old boy who was referred for having math difficulties.

  Tyron has good verbal skills including vocabulary, reading comprehension, and decoding. In addition, he is resilient, a good leader, athletic, and playful. His intellectual and character strengths have to be harnessed efficiently to help him overcome significant behavioral

challenges and cognitive difficulties posed by his weak visual and non-verbal skills. Tyron's deductive and inductive reasoning skills – key for acquiring new information – are weak, especially when information is non-verbal such as mathematical calculations, figures, illustrations, and graphs. Therefore, he will benefit from an instructional approach that is explicit and systematic rather than one which is based on a discovery learning type approach. When teaching Tyron any new process or skills, provide slow and step-by-step instructions. Use manipulative and concrete objects to supplement verbal instructions so that he can comprehend concepts thoroughly. Use Tryon's leadership skills to pair him with someone who could benefit from Tyron verbal skills, and in turn, can offer help to Tyron in non-verbal communication. This will likely enhance Tyron's self-confidence and positive interaction with others.

- **Integrating strengths into academic performance**: Character strengths can also be incorporated in meaningful ways in existing measures of psychopathology. A school in the New York area has started to do so. School's admiration posits that if you are a parent, wouldn't you want to know how your son or daughter stacked up next to the rest of class in character as well as reading ability.
- **Narratives**: Relatedly, another strategy to elicit and build strengths in children and adolescents is to ask them to share a real story that shows their strengths. This strategy, due to its personalized narrative appeal can connect the professional and the child or adolescent and can build rapport promptly as well as a powerful therapeutic alliance. If children or adolescents cannot come up with a story, they can tell a favorite story which they find inspiring or motivating. Stories can be replaced with poems, songs, fictional characters, metaphors, living exemplars, or paragons.
- **Strengths translated into actions and habits**: The professional should assess whether children and adolescents are able to translate abstract strengths into concrete actions, behaviors, and habits. This assessment is important because in real life challenges rarely come in neat packages with labeled instructions such as, "When feeling down, use zest and vitality." Challenges and hassles often occur amidst a dizzying jumble of emotions, actions, and their effects. The role of the strengths-based professional is to gently guide the student to use their strengths adaptively, to solve their problems adaptively, and to come to know themselves better.
- **Building self-efficacy**: Some children and adolescents, especially those with behavioral concerns may be reluctant to explore or believe their strengths because they have been conditioned to associate negatives about themselves. In such cases, the professional may first work on building the self-efficacy of children and adolescents by using evidence-based strategies such as cognitive-behavioral programs that can help them to believe that they have the ability to change. Once they focus and spend more time on what they are capable off, they will automatically spend less time in thinking about their shortcomings.
- **Family life**: It is of critical importance that strengths are built within the family context. If the adults in children's lives are not aware of the children's strengths, they will not able to coalesce resources to build strengths, skills, and competence. As observed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), "promoting competence in children is more than fixing what is wrong with them. It is about identifying and

nurturing their strongest qualities, what they own and are best at, and helping them find niches in which they can best live out these strengths" (p. 6). Another way to assess strengths in children and adolescents is to explore how they spend time with their immediate and extended family, including time doing recreation (indoor and outdoor games; art and sports activities), household chores, caregiving to a sibling or grandparent, play with neighborhood peers, and time with volunteering.

- **Teacher**: Importantly, strength-based assessment and intervention cannot succeed if the classroom teacher does not believe in it. If the teacher's focus is primarily remedial focused on correcting weakness, he/she will have a mindset that looks for and discovers problems. Teachers serve as role models, if they don't demonstrate acknowledgement and cultivation of strengths, students are unlikely to do so. Working from a strength-based perspective can help teachers to have a huge impact on students, in inspiring them and motivating them because teachers not only teach curriculum but also implicitly teach emotional and psychological well-being. Furthermore, enhancing strengths of students will help teachers to refine their own.

Appendices

Appendix 6.1

Sample feedback report: Signature strengths of your child

1. **Zest, Enthusiasm, and Vitality**: You are an energetic, cheerful, and full-of-life person. You approach most things with excitement and enthusiasm. Nothing is done half-way or half-heartedly for you. You wake up most mornings feeling energized and happy. The enthusiasm and passion you bring to activities often attract others to join you. When you experience something well done, you feel inspired and motivated.

   Balance: Too much zest and enthusiasm can make you overactive and can cause social challenges with peers who may experience you as "intense". On the other hand, if you do not use this signature strength, you will come across as passive and inhibited, maybe even withdrawn.
2. **Love of Learning**: You love to learn new things – in school or on your own. You make very good use of opportunities where you can gain knowledge about skills, concepts, ideas, and facts. You have always enjoyed school and reading. When it comes to learning, you are persistent; even if you get frustrated or distracted, you refocus and don't give up until you have mastered the topic or skill.

   Balance: Too much use of this signature strength may result in less participation in fun extra-curricular activities. Also, overuse of this strength could compromise your social interactions – you could be considered a geek who knows everything but isn't much fun to hang out with. Then again, a lack of "love of learning" may keep you naively uninformed and unaware of many facts of life.

3. **Humor and Playfulness**: It is very easy for you to find opportunities to laugh, be witty, playful, and humorous in most situations. You are known for bringing smiles to other people and making them comfortable. You are also very good at seeing the lighter side of most situations and therefore use humor to take the edge off a stressful situation. Your sense of humor bonds you with others.

   Balance: An overuse of this signature strength may find you expressing playfulness and humor in some situations that require demonstration of other strengths – such as self-regulation or caution. Moreover, use of playfulness and humor during classroom activities may distract you and others, and you may not be able to attend specific details of a challenging assignment. On the other hand, a lack of playfulness and humor may make you too serious and inhibited and it may impact your interpersonal relationships.
4. **Leadership**: You excel at leadership tasks and activities. You are very good at organizing group activities and seeing that they happen. That is why you are the one children like to follow or often prefer that you take the lead. You also make everyone feel included. As a leader, whenever differences or conflicts occur, you are able to resolve these amicably and keep the harmony of the group intact. In fact, you are often able to bring best out of every member.

   Balance: An overuse of this strength may show you as bossy or dominating. A lack of this strength may show overly compliant behavior or lack of necessary independence.
5. **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence**: You are very good at perceiving and appreciating beauty and excellence in many areas of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science. Display of excellence inspires you. You love to incorporate things of beauty in your surroundings. You feel at ease when you are amid art or watching a great performance.

   Balance: An overuse of this strength may not let you be sensitive to those who do not have access to great art or performances and are more concerned with meeting basic needs of everyday living. Also, an overuse of this strength may give other people the impression at times that you are bit snobbish and have an elitist attitude. An underuse of this strength may manifest in naïve ignorance or disrespect of great performances (including in sports) or pieces of art.

Appendix 6.2

Signature strength action project – Years resolution: Using my signature

Dear Child: Visualize what kind of person you would like to be in 2011? Perhaps nicer, kinder, more social, inquisitive, spiritual, courageous, playful, knowledgeable, modest, cheerful and perhaps more engaged…etc. Think and consult with your parents and friends; how you could use your signature strengths to become that person? Briefly describe your plan below. What

(continued)

(continued)
exactly you would like to do? How frequently? What kind of support you would like from your parents and friends in making this plan a success? We would like you to complete this by June 2011. What are some timelines and phases of this plan (beginning, middle and ending)? What would happen if you become that person?

Three things you like (or dislike) about your signature strength profile?
1.---
2.---
3.---

Acknowledgements We are deeply thankful to Carolyn Lennox, Ruth Baumal, Joy Reiter, James Bowen, Tamara Kornaki, Aarti Kumar, Nina Vitopolous, Peter Chang, and Neal Mayerson for their support in the running of the intervention studies.

References

Achenbach, T. M. (1992). *Manual for the child behavior checklist/2-3 and 1992 profile*. Burlington: University of Vermont Department of Psychiatry.

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Asplund, J., Lopez, S. J., Hodges, T., & Harter, J. (2007). *The Clifton StrengthsFinder® 2.0 technical report: Development and validation*. Princeton: The Gallup Organization.

Beaver, B. R. (2008). A positive approach to children's internalizing problems. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 39*, 129–136.

Bird, V. J., Le Boutillier, C., Leamy, M., Larsen, J., Oades, L. G., Williams, J., & Slade, M. (2012). Assessing the strengths of mental health consumers: A systematic review. *Psychological Assessment, 24*, 1024–1033. doi:10.1037/a0028983.

Bundick, M. J. (2011). Extracurricular activities, positive youth development, and the role of meaningfulness of engagement. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*, 57–74. doi:10.1080/17439760.2010.536775.

Cassidy, J., & Asher, S. (1992). Loneliness and peer relations in young children. *Child Development, 63*, 350–365.

Conners, K. C. (2008). *Conners* (3rd ed.). Toronto: Multi-Health Systems.

Constantine, N., Benard, B., & Diaz, M. (1999). *Measuring protective factors and resilience traits in youth: The Healthy Kids Resilience assessment.* Paper presented at the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Society for Prevention Research, New Orleans, LA.

Cottrell, C. A., & Neuberg, S. L. (2005). Different emotional reactions to different groups: A sociofunctional threat-based approach to "prejudice". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*(5), 770–789. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.88.5.770.

Crocker, J., Luhtanen, R. K., Cooper, M. L., & Bouvrette, A. (2003). Contingencies of self-worth in college students: Theory and measurement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85*, 894–908. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.85.5.894.

Duckworth, A. L., Steen, T. A., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Positive Psychology in clinical practice. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 1*(1), 629–651.

Duckworth, A. L., & Quinn, P. D. (2009). Development and validation of the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S). *Journal of Personality Assessment, 91*, 166–174.

Duckworth, A. L., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents. *Psychological Science, 16*(12), 939–944. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2005.01641.x.

Ebesutani, C., Okamura, K., Higa-McMillan, C., & Chorpita, B. F. (2011). A psychometric analysis of the positive and negative affect schedule for children – Parent version in a school sample. *Psychological Assessment, 33*, 406–416.

Epstein, M. H. (2004). *Behavioral and emotional rating scale* (2nd ed.). Austin: PRO-ED.

Epstein, J. L., & McPartland, J. M. (1976). The concept and measurement of the quality of school life. *American Educational Research Journal, 13*(1), 15–30.

Epstein, M. H., & Sharma, J. (1998). *Behavioral and emotional rating scale: A strength-based approach to assessment*. Austin: PRO-ED.

Flinchbaugh, C. L., Moore, E. W. G., Chang, Y. K., & May, D. R. (2012). Student well-being interventions: The effects of stress management techniques and gratitude journaling in the management education classroom. *Journal of Management Education, 36*, 191–219. doi:10.1177/1052562911430062.

Flückiger, C., & Grosse Holtforth, M. (2008). Focusing the therapist's attention on the patient's strengths: A preliminary study to foster a mechanism of change in outpatient psychotherapy. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 64*(7), 876–890. doi:10.1002/jclp.20493.

Fox Eades, J. M. (2008). *Celebrating strengths: Building strength-based schools*. Coventry: CAPP Press.

Friedman, H. L., & MacDonal, D. A. (2006). Humanistic testing and assessment. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 46*, 510–529.

Froh, J. J., Kashdan, T. B., Ozimkowski, K. M., & Miller, N. (2009). Who benefits the most from a gratitude intervention in children and adolescents? Examining positive affect as a moderator. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 4*, 408–422.

Gillham, J. E., Reivich, K. J., Jaycox, L. H., & Seligman, M. E. P. (1995). Prevention of depressive symptoms in school children: Two-year follow-up. *Psychological Science, 6*, 343–351.

Gillham, J., Adams-Deutsch, Z., Werner, J., Reivich, K., Coulter-Heindl, V., Linkins, M., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Character strengths predict subjective well-being during adolescence. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*, 31–44. doi:10.1080/17439760.2010.536773.

Gilman, R., Huebner, S., & Furlong, M. (2009). *Handbook of positive psychology in schools*. New York: Rutledge.

Govindji, R., & Linley, P. A. (2007). Strengths use, self-concordance and well-being: Implications for strengths coaching and coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 2*, 143–153.

Greenspoon, P. J., & Saklofske, D. H. (2001). Toward an integration of subjective well-being and psychopathology. *Social Indicators Research, 54*, 81–108.

Gresham, F. M., & Elliot, S. N. (1990). *Social skills rating system manual*. Circle Pines: American Guidance Service.

Gresham, F. M., & Elliot, S. N. (2008). *Social skills improvement system manual*. Circle Pines: Pearson Assessment.

Harter, S. (1985). *Manual for the self-perception profile for adolescents*. Denver: University of Denver.

Huebner, E. (1991). Further validation of the students' life satisfaction scale: The independence of satisfaction and affect ratings. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 9*, 363–368. doi:10.1177/073428299100900408.

Huebner, E. S. (1994). Preliminary development and validation of a multidimensional life satisfaction scale for children. *Psychological Assessment, 6*, 149–158.

Hunter, J. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2003). The positive psychology of interested adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 32*(1), 27–35.

Huta, V., & Hawley, L. (2010). Psychological strengths and cognitive vulnerabilities: Are they two ends of the same continuum or do they have independent relationships with well-being and ill-being? *Journal of Happiness Studies, 11*, 71–93. doi:10.1007/s10902-008-9123-4.

Johnson, J., Gooding, P., Wood, A. M., & Tarrier, N. (2010). Resilience as positive coping appraisals: Testing the schematic appraisals model of suicide (SAMS). *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 48*, 179–186.

Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1984). Choices, values, and frames. *American Psychologist, 39*, 341–350.

Keyes, C. L. M. (2009). The Black–White paradox in health: Flourishing in the face of social inequality and discrimination. *Journal of Personality, 77*, 1677–1706. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00597.x.

Kovacs, M. (1992). *Children depression inventory: Manual*. New York: Multi Health System.

Larsen, D., & Stege, R. (2010). Hope-focused practices during early psychotherapy sessions: Part I: Implicit approaches. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration, 20*(3), 271–292.

Laursen, E. K. (2003). Frontiers in strength-based treatment. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 12*, 12–17.

Linley, P. A., Nielsen, K. M., Gillett, R., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). Using signature strengths in pursuit of goals: Effects on goal progress, need satisfaction, and well-being, and implications for coaching psychologists. *International Coaching Psychology Review, 5*, 6–15.

Lopez, S. J., & Snyder, C. R. (2003). *Positive psychological assessment: A handbook of models and measures*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Lounsbury, J. W., Fisher, L. A., Levy, J. J., & Welsh, D. P. (2009). An investigation of character strengths in relation to the academic success of college students. *Individual Differences Research, 7*, 52–69.

Lyubomirsky, S., Tkach, C., & DiMatteo, M. R. (2006). What are the differences between happiness and self-esteem. *Social Indicators Research, 78*(3), 363–404. doi:10.1007/s11205-005-0213-y.

Marsh, H. W. (1992). *Self Description Questionnaire (SDQ) I: A theoretical and empirical basis for the measurement of multiple dimensions of preadolescent self-concept. An interim test manual and research monograph*. Macarthur: University of Western Sydney, Faculty of Education.

McCullough, M. E., Emmons, R. A., & Tsang, J.-A. (2002). The grateful disposition: A conceptual and empirical topography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 112–127.

Merrell, K. W. (2002). *School social behavior scales* (2nd ed.). Eugene: Assessment-Intervention Resources.

Mongrain, M., & Anselmo-Matthews, T. (2012, March). Do positive psychology exercises work? A replication of Seligman et al. (2005). *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, *68*, 382–389.

Niemiec, R. M., & Wedding, D. (2008). *Positive psychology at the movies: Using films to build virtues and character strengths*. Cambridge, MA: Hogrefe.

Ong, A. D., & van Dulmen, M. (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of methods in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2006a). Moral competence and character strengths among adolescents: The development and validation of the values in action inventory of strengths for youth. *Journal of Adolescence, 29*(6), 891–909.

Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2006b). Character strengths and happiness among young children: Content analysis of parental descriptions. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 7*, 323–341.

Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2008). Positive psychology and character strengths: Application to strengths-based school counseling. *Professional School Counseling, 12*(2), 85–92.

Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2009). Strengths of character in schools. In R. Gilman, E. S. Huebner, & M. J. Furlong (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology in schools* (pp. 65–76). New York: Routledge.

Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Strengths of character and well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 23*, 603–619.
Pedrotti, J., Edwards, L., & Lopez, S. (2008). Promoting hope: Suggestions for school counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 12*, 100–107.
Peterson, C. (2006). *A primer in positive psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Peterson, T. D., & Peterson, E. W. (2008). Stemming the tide of law student depression: What law schools need to learn from the science of positive psychology. *Yale Journal of Health Policy, Law, and Ethics*, *9*(2), 357. Available at: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1277303
Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. New York/Washington, DC: Oxford University Press/American Psychological Association.
Piers, E. V., & Harris, D. B. (1984). *Piers-Harris children's self-concept scale*. Los Angeles: Western Psychological Service.
Poston, J. M., & Hanson, W. E. (2010). Meta-analysis of psychological assessment as a therapeutic intervention. *Psychological Assessment, 22*, 203–212. doi:10.1037/a0018679.
Proctor, C., Maltby, J., & Linley, P. (2011a). Strengths use as a predictor of well-being and health-related quality of life. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 12*, 153–169. doi:10.1007/s10902-009-9181-2.
Proctor, C., Tsukayama, E., Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Fox Eades, J. M., & Linley, P. A. (2011b). Strengths gym: The impact of a character strengths-based intervention on the life satisfaction and well-being of adolescents. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*, 377–388.
Rapp, C. A. (1997). Preface. In D. Saleeby (Ed.), *The strengths perspective in social work practice*. New York: Longman.
Rashid, T., & Anjum, A. (2007). Positive psychotherapy for children and adolescents. In J. R. Z. Abela & B. L. Hankin (Eds.), *Depression in children and adolescents: Causes, treatment and prevention*. New York: Guilford Press.
Rashid, T., & Ostermann, R. F. (2009). Strength-based assessment in clinical practice. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 65*(5), 488–498. doi:10.1002/jclp. 20595.
Reynolds, C. R., & Kamphaus, R. W. (1992). *Behavior assessment system for children*. Circle Pines: American Guidance Service.
Reynolds, C. R., & Kamphaus, R. W. (2004). *Behavior assessment system for children* (2nd ed.). Circle Pines: American Guidance Service.
Rhee, S., Furlong, M., Turner, J., & Harari, I. (2001). Integrating strength-based perspectives in psychoeducational evaluations. *The California School Psychologist, 6*, 5–17.
Richards, M., & Huppert, F. (2011). Do positive children become positive adults: Evidence from a longitudinal birth cohort study. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*, 75–87.
Rust, T., Diessner, R., & Reade, L. (2009). Strengths only or strengths and relative weaknesses? A preliminary study. *Journal of Psychology, 143*, 465–476.
Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A re-evaluation of the life orientation test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 1063–1078.
Schmid, K. L., Phelps, E. M., Kiely, M. K., Napolitano, C. M., Boyd, M. J., & Lerner, R. M. (2011). The role of adolescents' hopeful futures in predicting positive and negative developmental trajectories: Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*, 45–56.
Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. Toronto: Free Press.
Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York: Free Press.
Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*, 5–14.
Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist, 60*, 410–421.
Seligman, M. E. P., Rashid, T., & Parks, A. C. (2006). Positive psychotherapy. *American Psychologist, 61*(8), 774–788. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.61.8.774.

Seligman, M. E. P., Ernst, R. M., Gillham, J., Reivich, K., & Linkins, M. (2009). Positive education: Positive psychology and classroom interventions. *Oxford Review of Education, 35*, 293–311. doi:10.1080/03054980902934563.

Snyder, C. R., Hoza, B., Pelham, W. E., Rapoff, M., Ware, L., Danovsky, M., et al. (1997). The development and validation of the Children's Hope Scale. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 22*(3), 399–421.

Ungar, M., & Liebenberg, L. (2009). *The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM) – 28*. Halifax: Resilience Research Center.

Walker, H. M., & McConnell, S. R. (1995). *Walker-McConnell scale of social competence and school adjustment*. Belmont: Cengage Learning.

Wood, A. M., & Joseph, S. (2010). The absence of positive psychological (eudemonic) well-being as a risk factor for depression: A ten year cohort study. *Journal of Affective Disorder, 122*, 213–217.

Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Gillett, R., Linley, P. A., & Joseph, S. (2008). The role of gratitude in the development of social support, stress, and depression: Two longitudinal studies. *Journal of Research in Personality, 42*, 854–871. doi:10.1016/j.jrp. 2007.11.003.

Wood, A. M., Linley, P. A., Maltby, J., Kashdan, T. B., & Hurling, R. (2011). Using personal and psychological strengths leads to increases in well-being over time: A longitudinal study and the development of the strengths use questionnaire. *Personality and Individual Differences, 50*, 15–19. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2010.08.004.

Xanthopoulou, D., Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2007). The role of personal resources in the job demands-resources model. *International Journal of Stress Management, 14*, 121–141.