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Social and emotional learning in the Greek educational system: An Ithaca journey.

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This article portrays the ongoing and ever-expanding journey of the Center for Research and Practice of School Psychology (CRPSP) of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Based on an integrative approach to school community well-being that includes positive psychology perspectives and systems interventions, all activities of the Center focus on a social and emotional learning (SEL) framework that emphasizes strengths and contextual protective factors for members of the school community and other educational settings. Special attention is given to the implementation of SEL prevention programs in times of crisis and economic recession. Furthermore, the incorporation of SEL framework into the general education curriculum as well as in the preparation of psychologists and teachers at undergraduate and graduate level is presented. The role of SEL in building evidence-based interventions is discussed under the scope of multicultural and transnational considerations.

Keywords: social and emotional learning, prevention programs, well-being, multicultural interventions, transnational approach

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Introduction

Social-emotional learning is a fundamental prerequisite for the positive adjustment and the well-being of school community members. It involves children's and adults' acquisition and effective application of the necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills for emotional understanding and management, positive goals setting, empathy expression, positive relationships development and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2012). It has roots in a progressive educational tradition as well as the primary prevention and social competence promotion literature within psychology, and it is centered on promoting children's social and

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emotional well-being (Kress & Elias, 2006). Most of the characteristics that have been used to describe schools that are resilient, effective, or caring communities refer to emotions and relationships among the members of the school community. Furthermore, resilient classrooms promote academic efficacy, behavioral self-control, teacher-student relationships, peer collaboration, and home-school collaboration (Doll, Zucker & Brehm, 2004/2009; Hatzichristou, 2015a). Therefore, it is critical to develop empirically based interventions that promote children's psychosocial adjustment and well-being, and decrease aggression, bullying and antisocial behavior (Hatzichristou, 2015a; Hatzichristou, Polychroni, Issari, & Yfanti, 2011).

The recent emphasis on resilience, effective schools, and social emotional learning are reflected in changes in school psychological practice and service delivery throughout the world (Hatzichristou, 2011a; 2015a). Several SEL intervention programs are implemented in the schools across the world, such as the U.S.A. (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011), Great Britain (Humphrey et al., 2008), Sweden (Kimber, Sandell & Bremberg, 2008), Australia, Canada, Israel, Singapore, and Latin America among others (e.g. Clouder et al., 2013), focusing on the promotion of psychosocial competence, adversity prevention, and adjustment facilitation for students in various settings.

During the last two decades, a relevant evolution has been evident also in Greece (Hatzichristou, 2011a; 2015a; Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou, Lykitsakou, & Dimitropoulou, 2010). The Center for Research and Practice of School Psychology in the Department of Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens became the main developer and coordinator of SEL intervention programs in the country. Social and emotional learning was incorporated in the university curriculum, becoming one of the essential training skills for future psychologists, primary and secondary school teachers and school psychologists. The establishment of CRSPS has helped to link theory, research, training of students, implementation of intervention programs in schools as well as providing a link between university, schools, professional associations, and institutions (Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou et al., 2010; Hatzichristou & Polychroni, 2014).

The purpose of this article is to present the foundation of CRSPS through its multiple phases and to delineate the SEL-based intervention programs that have been designed, implemented and evaluated over these years in various Greek and international settings. Additionally, the incorporation of SEL in the university curriculum is presented, focusing on undergraduate and graduate studies.

Promotion of school-wellbeing conceptual framework in the context of alternative school psychology services

The lack of school psychological services in the Greek public schools presented a unique opportunity and a great challenge for the development of alternative service delivery models (Hatzichristou, 1998; 2002; 2004a; Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2004). First, a conceptual framework was presented incorporating science and professional practice competencies (Hatzichristou, 1998; 2002), leading to the development of a data-based model of alternative school psychological services to address the needs of school communities and other institutions in Greece (Hatzichristou, 2004a). The first three phases of the model contributed to the recording and assessment of the needs of Greek and migrant students, teachers and families regarding school and psychosocial adjustment, as well as their attitudes toward mental health services and professionals.

Furthermore, an evaluation methodology, adhering to the principles of evidence-based intervention science, was designed and implemented in assessing the efficiency of the programs. The empirical data derived from these interrelated and ongoing phases were integrated into a comprehensive prevention-consultation approach, which included a proposal by the first author for the eventual foundation and operation of a university-based center for provision and coordination of school-linked psychological services (Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2004).

The establishment of the CRSPS follows the application of this multilevel model that links theory, research, and practice, and meets the particular needs of the Greek educational system (Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou & Dimitropoulou, 2010). The Center's goals are based on eight interrelated axes: (a) education and training; (b) cooperation between the university, schools, and other local authorities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of primary and secondary level prevention programs and the provision of alternative consultation services in the school community; (c) conducting research; (d) publications; (e) collaboration with national and international psychological associations; (f) consultation with teachers, parents, and students; (g) organization of specialized training seminars and conferences on specific issues; and (h) presentations and lectures in schools and other locations (Hatzichristou, 2011a; 2015c).

The Program for the Promotion of Mental Health and Learning (PPMHL), the main prevention program that was developed by the CRPSP scientific team, constitutes the onset as well as the core of the Center's interventions. Building upon the principles of positive psychology and systemic theory, and incorporating the conceptual framework of social and emotional learning, the program addresses the basic theoretic concepts of social and emotional learning in promoting resilience, well-being, academic achievement and positive climate in the school setting. Furthermore, it adjusts to the needs of students in the Greek cultural and educational setting, putting an emphasis on normal instead of deviant behavior, and using multidimensional and multi-method assessment (evidence-based intervention) (Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou et al., 2010). In addition, a meta-cultural perspective is adopted that disregards the 'dominant culture' stance and focuses on individual and cultural similarities, building on positive potential, competencies and strengths as a means of enhancing resiliency (Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou, & Lykitsakou, 2006). Another essential component of the program's theoretical conceptual basis is helping school community members to build their resilience and strengthen their coping skills against the distressing effects of economic crisis during recent years (Hatzichristou, Adamopoulou & Lampropoulou, 2014; Hatzichristou, Lianos & Lampropoulou, in press) (Figure 1).

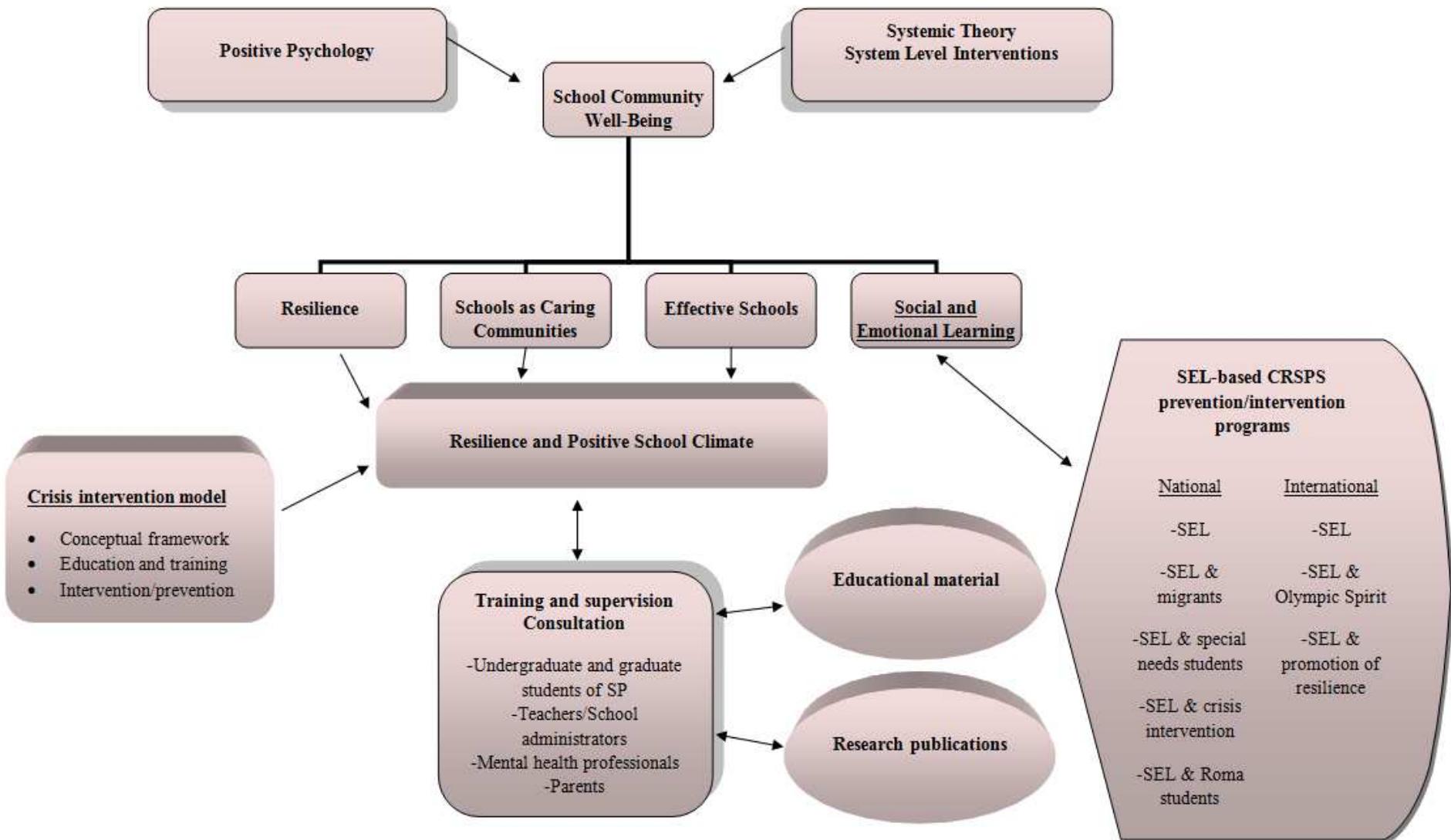


Figure 1. Multi-level Conceptual Framework of Promoting Resilience and Positive Climate in School Community, through SEL-based interventions.

Educational materials for three age groups (preschool, primary and secondary education) have been developed and published, including the conceptual framework, eleven thematic units, and the students' activities book (Hatzichristou, 2011b; 2011c; 2011d). Each booklet contains literature review, practical guidelines for the implementation of the program, and two-level classroom activities (basic-advanced) with specific goals, implementation guidelines and discussion suggestions for each age group. The thematic units are: (i) communication skills; (ii) emotion recognition, expression, and management; (iii) self-concept and self-esteem; (iv) coping strategies; (v) conflict resolution; (vi) school and diversity in culture; (vii) school and diversity in families; (viii) school and students with special educational (ix) social skills; (x) learning/study skills; (xi) crisis intervention in the school community. The material has reached three editions, which have been also revised (Hatzichristou, 2004c; 2008, 2011b; 2011c; 2011d revised).

PPMHL Development: Levels of Intervention

The first level of implementation of PPMHL corresponded to schools' resources and feedback from the needs assessment evaluation of previous pilot implementations of the program. Initially, PPMHL was implemented by members of the scientific team of the CRPSP (the first author, experienced school psychologists, and PhD candidate in school psychology). During the following years, graduate students of school psychology and teachers were trained to implement PPMHL under the supervision of the CRPSP scientific team. The graduate students attended university courses on primary and secondary prevention, models of consultation, and promotion of children's mental health in school environments. In addition, they received specialized training in the implementation of PPMHL in the classrooms and regular supervision from the CRPSP scientific team throughout the implementation. In addition, a network of the participating schools was developed to facilitate sharing ideas and experience and to disseminate the program to other teachers in the school community. At the end of each academic year, parents, students, and teachers participated in a closing ceremony in which PPMHL activities were presented (Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou et al., 2010).

The model for PPMHL implementation by teachers, instead of CRSPS team members, produced a greater impact, to the extent that the intervention became a 'school matter' (Hatzichristou, 2002). Consequently, at a second level a new system-wide intervention was implemented entitled 'Program for the promotion of school community well-being' (PPSCW). PPSCW included two axes of intervention: (a) the implementation of PPMHL by teachers in their classrooms; and (b) the promotion of resilience in the school community and the development of broader school networks. Teachers are trained to use the problem-solving model in order to develop action plans for enhancing the sense of community in the schools (Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2004), evaluate critical domains of resilience, set priorities and goals, and take specific actions in response to the particular needs of their school. Coordinators (educators and administrators) from each school participate in regular consultation meetings with the scientific team of the CRPSP to share ideas and possible solutions. Initially the intervention teams participated in the implementation of the interventions on a volunteer basis and later on in the context of EU projects.

Assessment and Research Methodology

The CRPSP developed a multilevel assessment model including (a) process and outcome evaluation; (b) pre-, post-, and during the program assessment; and (c) control group comparison. Data are collected by different instruments (qualitative and quantitative), methods (questionnaires, diaries and logs, personal reports from teachers) and stakeholders (teachers, school administrators students, parents) during PPMHL supervision, activities and work projects. In addition, program efficacy can also be examined by comparing first-to-second years of intervention or experimental-to-control groups. These data constitute valuable feedback for program improvement and refinement (Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou et al., 2010).

Teachers complete PPMHL measures at the beginning and at the end of the training, while students complete measures at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. Meanwhile, in the course of the program seminars a process evaluation procedure is followed, allowing the scientific team to receive valuable feedback for the continuation and tailoring of the intervention to the specific needs. Student control groups of other classes of the schools are also included, in order to evaluate the impact of the implementation in the same setting. Every project evaluation process is conducted by an independent evaluation team using a mixed method assessment design, adjusted to the special characteristics of each project. The independent evaluation team members are involved in the assessment process, but not in the implementation procedure.

The following section presents a brief description of the development, implementation and results from the evaluation of the most prominent CRSPS interventions is presented (Table I).

Considering adversity from a ‘metacultural’ perspective

The CRPSP was responsible for the development, implementation, and evaluation of the domain of psychosocial support for migrant and remigrant students and their families (Hatzichristou et al., 2001). The basic concept focused on similarities and differences of cultures and individuals (common needs and adversities) and considered the positive potential, competencies, and strengths as a means of promoting the well-being of systems and individuals (Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou et al., 2010).

Planning began with goal-setting, selection of participants (schools, teachers and students) and organizational decisions about the intervention (content, schedule). The project contained four thematic units: communication skills; emotion recognition, expression, and management; self-concept and self-esteem; diversity and cultural sensitivity. Since the program was implemented in schools with a high percentage of migrant and remigrant students, the promotion of intercultural understanding and communication was particularly emphasized.

After the initial awareness workshops and seminars were conducted, classroom intervention took place once a week on a designated day and during a designated academic period and included classroom discussions and other activities (e.g., group or individual activities, role playing, and games). In the first session, children discussed the program rules and signed a classroom ‘contract’. Then, three or four sessions (during a month) were dedicated to each theme and a final session was spent on the program closing. Teachers participated in four additional seminars (one per month), during the implementation period. The evaluation design included use of student control group.

Results of the PPMHL evaluation provided evidence for significant positive effects and benefits for both teachers and students. Most children seemed to benefit in expressing their feelings, improving their communication and their relationship with their classmates, realizing and accepting their strengths and weaknesses, and improving their academic performance. Furthermore, children with low peer acceptance or those from different cultural groups reported significant benefits in the acknowledgement and expression of unpleasant feelings (Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou et al., 2010).

Promoting resilience, well-being and positive climate in the school setting

CRSPS in collaboration with the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute implemented PPMHL in many schools in Cyprus for eight consecutive years (2001-2009) (Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou, Vlami, & Tsouris, 2010). The program in Cyprus included five thematic units: communication skills; emotion recognition, expression, and management; self-concept and self-esteem; coping strategies; and conflict resolution. Similar to the Athens project, intervention followed the same process: training of the educators, implementation of the activities in the classroom and closing of the program and systematic evaluation. A third level of intervention included the utilization of the model of ‘Resiliency Wheel’ (Henderson & Milstein, 1996/2008) as a methodological tool for the promotion of resilience and well-being in the school community. In order to foster the six basic factors that contribute to the promotion of resiliency in schools (i.e., prosocial bonding, clear boundaries, life skills, caring and support, high/positive expectations, and opportunities for participation), the participants proposed action plans, disseminated the program's goal to key stakeholders, produced web-based program material, and developed a network of schools functioning as learning communities (Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou, Vlami et al., 2010).

Positive effects on peer communication, emotional expression, self-awareness and academic achievement were noted. Results also indicated that intervention at a system level has the potential to produce extended and dynamic effects on school climate and sense of community (Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou, Vlami et al., 2010).

Psychosocial and learning support of culturally-diverse children

During the school years 2011-2015, CRSPS in collaboration with the Center for Intercultural Education of the University of Athens implemented an EU-funded project titled ‘Education of Roma Children’. The Roma are the largest ethnic minority in the EU with more than 10 million members, mostly concentrated in the Balkan countries. Among all the European populations, they are considered at greatest risk of being poor, uneducated and unemployed. Roma children often accumulate a number of social and individual handicaps, while their inclusion in the education system is considered a challenge (UNESCO, 2010).

Within this context, CSPSP undertook the task of developing and implementing a multilevel intervention program (Psychosocial and Academic Support), in order to promote resilience and provide psychosocial support to the members of the participating schools. A criterion for the selection of the schools

was the number of Roma students in the schools (percentages ranged from 20%-80%) (Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2013; Hatzichristou et al., 2015).

The primary goal of the program was to facilitate access to education for Roma students as well as to support school communities, through promoting intercultural understanding, communication and collaboration. The specific goals of the intervention program were: (a) needs assessment at an individual and system level; (b) mental health promotion of the members of the school community; (c) promotion of a positive school climate and establishment of intercultural understanding in schools; (d) facilitation of school adjustment of Roma and non-Roma students; (e) provision of consultation to faculty members and teachers at a school level. In addition to psychosocial interventions, the program included academic interventions in order to support students with learning difficulties (Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2013).

An important aspect of the project was the implementation of SEL intervention programs. Since one of the main goals was to promote social and emotional skills for all students, PPMHL was introduced in all the participant schools, with a special emphasis on diversity issues. All life skills that were addressed inside the scope of the program (i.e. communication skills, emotional management, self-esteem, conflict resolution, crisis intervention etc.) were viewed under a multicultural perspective, incorporating the different values, attitudes and needs of the target group into the intervention design. Furthermore, secondary intervention SEL programs were designed and implemented, addressing specific issues for each setting deriving from needs assessment procedures (e.g. conflict resolution, social skills training etc.). School psychologists, in collaboration with teachers, implemented both primary and secondary prevention programs.

School psychologists were supervised in groups by experienced school psychologists on a weekly basis primarily for the purpose of discussing cases and developing counseling and consultation skills. In addition, short-term seminars were held, for the purpose of further training psychologists in consultation service delivery and to enhance multicultural-related skills with an emphasis on Roma population.

In order to monitor the services provided, a detailed database was developed and constantly updated by the school psychologists (Hatzichristou, Lianos & Lampropoulou, 2013; Hatzichristou et al., 2015). According to our findings resulting from the evaluation of the school-based psychological services, the program was effective and well-accepted by all participants, both students and teachers. The majority of the teachers were highly satisfied by their collaboration with school psychologists, as it helped them improve their skills in class management, deal with students' conflicts, and manage various learning and adjustment difficulties. Furthermore, the teachers identified more respect from their students towards peers and the school, as well as a higher level of belonging as members in the school community. Students reported that after the implementation of the program their behavior towards Roma students improved, they communicated and collaborated better with their peers, and managed to express themselves in a better way. Especially the Roma students experienced care, respect and kindness among their fellow students and that the students intended to influence positively the behavior and the actions of others (Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2012; Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2013; Lampropoulou & Hatzichristou, 2013; Hatzichristou et al., 2015).

Fostering development, adjustment and support during crisis and recession

For almost a decade CRSPS has organized a number of building awareness seminars and workshops regarding crisis management in the school community. Additionally, a crisis preparedness and intervention model has been proposed that incorporates key SEL components and resilience factors, and leads to the development of action plans for responding and providing support in a crisis situation (Hatzichristou, Issari, Lampropoulou, Lykitsakou & Dimitropoulou, 2011; Hatzichristou et al, 2012). Over the years this model has been implemented in a number of crises on a local and national scale (e.g. wildfires in Peloponnese, H1N1-flu crisis).

Recently, a new crisis has emerged (i.e. economic recession) that affects the whole Greek population, both substantially and psychologically. Responding to the current situation and with the generous donations of esteemed organizations (Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Maria Tsakos Foundation, Elpis and SolidarityNow), CRSPS in cooperation with the Society for School and Family Consultation and Research, developed *Connecting For Caring* (www.connecting4caring.gr), a multilevel prevention, awareness-building, education and intervention project, that uses a holistic approach to foster positive development, adjustment and support of children and adolescents in school and family settings. This project aims to combine scientific knowledge, research and practice in order to provide useful knowledge and promote best practices for teachers, parents, administrators, mental health professionals, as well as promote best practices for children and adolescents. The optimal goal of this project is to launch a national and international school network of resilient schools in these stressful times (Hatzichristou et al., 2013).

This multilevel project includes intervention programs in Greek schools that: (a) target the entire student population; (b) intend to enhance resilience and self-esteem; (c) strengthen social-emotional skills; and (d) develop a positive school climate and supportive environment in the classroom and the school. Three school-based intervention programs of C4C have been designed, implemented and evaluated: (a) the Supporting in Crisis program; (b) the E.M.E.I.S [Ενδιαφερόμαστε (Care) - Μοιραζόμαστε (Share) - Ενθαρρύνουμε (Encourage) – Ισχυροποιούμαστε (Empower) – Συμμετέχουμε (Participate)] program; and (c) the International Program WeCARE.

Supporting in Crisis Program. The theoretical background of this intervention program focused on crisis prevention and intervention with a large attention on the economic crisis, and promotion of resilience in school communities (Doll et al., 2004/2009; Masten, 2011). Supporting in Crisis was implemented in the peak of the economic crisis in Greece (January-May 2012) and was designed as a response to the immediate needs of teachers and students (Hatzichristou et al, 2012).

The program aimed to support and strengthen students' and teachers' resilience and well-being at an individual, group and school community. At the same time, the program sought to explore the needs of teachers and students that emerged during the economic crisis in Greece. The structure of the program included: (a) three specialized training seminars for teachers, to raise awareness on the effects of economic crisis, how to respond to the students' immediate needs, and to promote resilience and coping strategies; (b) structured classroom activities that promoted resilience at an individual and group level; and (c) the development of educational material. The teachers received personal booklets for each student for the

implementation of the activities, as well as special educational material, in order to advance their knowledge in the theoretic concepts of the program.

The results from a needs assessment process showed that teachers and students were in need for support and especially teachers were in need for guidance on how to support their students and how to promote psychological well-being and resilience in their classrooms. Findings from evaluation of the program showed enhancement of self-esteem and initiative-taking for teachers and students, as well as improvement on students' relationships and school bonding (Hatzichristou et al., 2014).

The E.M.E.I.Σ. Program. The Program was implemented during 2012-13 school year in schools in the broader area of Athens. The main aim of the program was the development of a positive climate in the school environment in order to reinforce individual and group resilience, as well as to promote and develop internal strengths, motivation and skills. At the same time, an important goal of this program was to offer the teachers an opportunity to strengthen their own resilience and support and empower the students, by addressing the intense needs for psychological support that have emerged from the current economic crisis in Greece.

The theoretical background of the program integrated the literature on resilience research (Doll et al., 2004/2009; Henderson & Milstein, 1996/2008), positive school climate (Blum & Libbey, 2004), and crisis intervention (Brock & Jimerson, 2012; Brock, Sandoval & Lewis, 2001/2005). Students and teachers developed their own school/classroom resilience profile, using a methodology based on the resiliency wheel and the classmaps design (Doll et al., 2009). The E.M.E.I.Σ. program included specialized teacher training seminars, development and implementation of structured classroom activities, supervision, and a closing ceremony. The program included the following five thematic units: (a) practical model of resilience and positive school climate promotion-identifying values and goal setting; (b) crisis management in the school community; (c) coping with stress; (d) social skills, conflict resolution and bullying; and (e) teachers' burn out. The activities were implemented at an individual, classroom and school level.

Compared to answers from control groups (non-participant classrooms in the same schools), analyses showed that after the implementation of the program, the intervention group demonstrated higher levels of psychosocial adaptation, resilience and positive school climate both at an individual and group level. These results were indicative for both students and teachers. The efficacy of the program was found to be higher in more vulnerable groups of students, such as those who were experiencing intense economic difficulties in their families and those who had lower school achievement (Hatzichristou et al., 2013; Hatzichristou, Lianos, & Lampropoulou, in press).

International Program WeC.A.R.E. This international program is an online, international teacher training and classroom intervention program that aims to enhance the students' psychological wellbeing, build resilience, foster team-spirit, and create a global support network of educators, school psychologists and students. During school years 2012-16, schools from 13 countries have participated in the program, while a first pilot phase was conducted in English with the participation of teachers and students from schools of Greece, U.S.A. and Belgium (Hatzichristou, 2015b; Hatzichristou et al., 2013). Participating classes are divided in groups of two or three from different countries. Together, they make an online sailing journey

inspired by the ancient Greek ‘Journey of Odysseus,’ passing through a series of islands-stations (e.g. island of Polyphemus). Each island station constitutes the platform for each of the modules of the program.

The thematic areas of the teachers’ training and classroom activities focused on: (a) identifying values and goal setting and building resilience; (b) emotion recognition, expression, and management; (c) coping with stress; (d) understanding diversity; (e) closing project. Training occurred through an interactive electronic platform and contained: (a) five teachers’ training seminars; (b) development and implementation of classroom activities in schools and joint projects; (c) use of an online interactive educational game (Sailing for Caring); (d) development of an international school network; and (e) process and outcome evaluation of program effectiveness.

The evaluation of the program entailed the application of a multilevel evaluation model in terms of content and process, as well as effectiveness (Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou et al., in press). The results from the content and process analysis regarding the implementation of the program in the classrooms revealed important benefits both at an individual and system level. More specifically, teachers reported that after the intervention there was significant improvement in most dimensions concerning class climate and school relationships. The teachers also recognized that students seemed to cooperate better with their peers, respect and support each other more. With regard to students, when evaluating the activities of the Program, they felt that they were significantly supported to identify and express their own feelings, improve their social skills and interpersonal relationships, create a positive school climate in their classes and enhance their intercultural skills (Hatzichristou, 2015a; Hatzichristou et al, 2013; Hatzichristou et al., 2014).

Disseminating SEL principles in community settings

A SEL intervention program was designed, developed and implemented in a small group of children attending the Municipality of Athens' summer camp in Agios Andreas. Furthermore, staff members received consultation on group issues and psychosocial adjustment by a school psychologist/member of the CRSPS scientific team. This program was based on a previous relevant program we have implemented in an international summer camp with students from different countries in Malesina in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and constitutes an example of intervention in community settings.

Incorporating SEL framework in the national curriculum

The significant influence of social and emotional domains on learning, school success and psychosocial adjustment has led many educational systems internationally to develop social and emotional curricula for the systematic teaching of social and emotional skills in schools (Durlak et al., 2011; Humphrey et al., 2008; Kimber et al, 2008). The increase in learning and psychosocial problems of children and adolescents in the school environment, but also the emergence of new challenges for the future emphasize more than ever the need for innovation and change in the Greek educational system as well. The introduction of School and Social Life curriculum in the general educational curriculum was developed at the context of a EU-funded project for revision of the school curricula by the Institute of Education Policy (former Pedagogical Institute), under the scientific direction of the first author. The School and Social Life

Curriculum aims at strengthening the resilience of individuals (students and teachers) and systems (group, class, school) at a primary prevention level and providing new skills and knowledge to the students' necessary for their school and future life.

The overall aim of the School and Social Life Curriculum incorporates the basic principles on improving competencies for the 21st century at European level and European cooperation in education. Based on the above, the School and Social Life Curriculum aims at promoting: (a) overall positive development of students and physical and mental health well-being; (b) skills and values necessary for a successful life in modern society; (c) constructive communication climate, collaboration, good relationships in the group, acceptance of diversity, and encouraging creativity and innovation; (d) a different, holistic approach to learning with features of critical thinking, active participation and commitment of students, personal responsibility and action for the acquisition of knowledge and of the learning objectives; (e) prevention and reduction of phenomena such as dropping out of school, social exclusion and violence in schools; (f) the sense of community in school environment that enhances learning and school linking with the life of the community.

Four thematic units with their respective subsections are included in the School and Social Life Curriculum, including Basic Themes, Expected Learning Outcomes and indicative class Activities for primary and secondary school students (Hatzichristou, 2011e). More specifically, the School and Social Life Curriculum includes the following thematic units/modules with their respective subsections: (a) *Communicate,... I express myself*. This module aims to teach children skills associated with interpersonal and intrapersonal communication, recognition, expression, and dealing with feelings, anxiety and shaping positive attitudes and feelings about self; (b) *We live together*. This module aims at teaching skills that help children to achieve positive social outcomes, manage effectively their conflicts, to accept diversity and to create and maintain functional interpersonal relations; (c) *Care about myself*. The aim of the module is to empower students, so they can autonomously and responsibly make decisions related to their personal health and safety; (d) *The school as a community*: We live together and support each other. This section includes the 'Our own school' and 'School' and the 'Internet subsections'.

The Teacher's Guide for School and Social Life includes the conceptual framework with current theoretical and intervention approaches, and brief description of children's development in various domains (self-awareness, social and emotional competence, physical competence). The aim and methodology of the curriculum and teacher's guide is included with useful remarks on the role of teachers in the implementation of the proposed Projects (for primary and secondary school levels) (Hatzichristou, 2011f).

Incorporating SEL framework in undergraduate and graduate education

Collaborating with the Department of Psychology and the Graduate School Psychology Program, CRPSP contributes to the preparation of professionals to meet their responsibilities of providing assessment, prevention, and intervention services for children and youth by providing the theoretic and practical background for their education. Therefore, all of the axes that constitute the theoretical framework of the CRSPS have been incorporated in already existing undergraduate and graduate courses, as well as in other

courses newly introduced. Especially, SEL theory and its implementation through the various CRSPS projects constitute a major and basic part of the curriculum for school psychologists' training at a graduate level. The PPMHL educational material constitutes a key reading for undergraduate courses in Psychology and Education Departments in all Greek Universities. In addition, influential texts from the international scientific literature (i.e. Brock et al., 2001/2005; Brown et al., 1987/2007; Doll et al., 2004/2009; Gottman & DeClair, 1997/2011; Henderson & Milstein, 1996/2008) have been made available in translation for educational use in Greek universities. Publication booklets from the CRSPS scientific team also provide psychosocial tips on specific crisis situations (e.g., H1N1 crisis, recession) for educators, professionals and the general public.

Furthermore, sensitivity and specialized training workshops are being conducted for various issues of prevention and mental health promotion (i.e. Social and Emotional Learning, Crisis intervention, RTI model, etc.), where, apart from basic school stakeholders (teachers, school administrators, mental health specialists, and parents), faculty members and graduate students participate as well. Students are invited to participate in the teachers' training seminars and in the evaluating studies of the programs by completing master theses.

Conclusion

After two decades of SEL implementation and evaluation, it has been scientifically demonstrated that the effects on school climate and psychosocial adjustment of students is definitely positive (Durlak et al., 2011). SEL plays also an important role in promoting academic achievement (Elias et al., 1997; Elias, 2006). However, despite research evidence and the constant need for social and emotional support, SEL interventions remain "in the periphery of K-12 education" (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 11). This paper illustrates the on-going efforts of the Center for Research and Practice of School Psychology of the University of Athens in promoting the incorporation of SEL principles in the Greek school educational system. The foundation and development of the Center is based on an alternative multilevel model of provision of mental health services in schools that holds at its core the social and emotional learning conceptual framework. Critical to this process is the connection of theory, research and practice, in order to promote resilience and well-being in the school community (Hatzichristou, 2004a; 2011a; 2015b).

From its early beginning, CRPSP has designed, implemented and evaluated several prevention programs, concerning general and diverse school population (i.e. immigrants, remigrants, Roma children, special education students etc) in various settings (classrooms, schools, summer camps). Based on the SEL-focused PPMHL, these programs adhere to the CASEL guidelines in promoting students' social and emotional competence, by following strict implementation and evaluation procedures (CASEL, 2012). Moreover, they are designed to support the varied abilities and enhance learning motivation of socio-culturally diverse students (Learning First Alliance, 2001). The goals of these evidence-based interventions are the promotion of students' self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making skills (Kress & Elias, 2006). SEL as a core component of these interventions brought significant positive changes in students and teachers well-being and promoted resilience of individuals and systems in diverse settings.

Table I. List of SEL intervention programs designed and implemented by the Center for Research and Practice of School Psychology

Project [programs/ year(s) of implementation]	System focus	Target population	Participants (N schools, students, teachers)	Partners	Program outcomes	Location	Relevant Citations
National projects							
Connecting4Caring Project (2011–present); -E.M.E.I.S. (2012–2013) -Supporting In Crisis (2011-2012)	School	Children, teachers	- 125 teachers and 2500 students from 36 primary, secondary and special schools -138 teachers and over 3000 students from 29 K-6 and special schools	Society for School and Family Consultation and Research	Enhancement of self-esteem and initiative-taking, improvement on students' relationships and school bonding, higher levels of resilience, psychosocial adjustment and school climate for crisis-affected and low-achievement students, improvement of cooperation, respect and support, enhancement of intercultural skills	Greece	Hatzichristou, Adamopoulou, & Lampropoulou, 2014; Hatzichristou, Lianos, Lampropoulou, in press;
Education of Roma Children in the Regions of Central Greece, Attica and Southern Aegean (EP Project, 2011–2015)	School, Community	Children, adolescents, teachers, parents	67 K-12 schools, over 2000 students, 315 teachers	Center for Multicultural Education (University of Athens)	Positive teachers-school psychologists collaboration, improvement in class management, students' respect towards peers and school, improvement of behavior towards Roma students	Athens, Greece	(Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2012; Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2013; Lampropoulou & Hatzichristou, 2013)

Social Emotional Learning in summer camps	Summer camp in Agios Andreas	Staff members, children	Municipality of Athens	Consultation on group issues and psychosocial adjustment, communication and peer relations improvement,	Agios Andreas, Greece	
Tender Tiny-Wing: A Fairytale For Diversity (2007-2009)	School, Community	Special educational needs children	Graduate Program of School Psychology	Raise awareness for the support and integration of children with special needs in the mainstream education	Athens, Greece	(Hatzichristou & Polychroni, 2007)
Social and emotional education in school: Program for the promotion of mental health and learning in the school community (2001-2009)	School	Students, Teachers	130 K-6 and special schools, over 8000 students and 457 teachers	Graduate Program of School Psychology	Communication and peer relations improvement, acknowledgement and expression of unpleasant feelings, improvement of academic achievement	Athens, Greece (Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou, & Dimitropoulou, 2010)
Psychosocial Support at the Context of the Education for Repatriate and Immigrant Students' Program (1998-1999, 2007-2008)	School	Remigrant and immigrant children, teachers, parents	-4 primary and secondary schools, 95 students, 22 teachers, 36 parents (pilot phase) -21 K-9 schools, 554 students, 68 teachers (second phase)	Center for Intercultural Education (KEDA) of the University of Athens & Ministry of Education, Life-Long Learning and Religious Affairs	Communication and peer relations improvement, acknowledgement and expression of unpleasant feelings	Athens, Greece (Giavrimis et al., 2003; Hatzichristou, Gari et al., 2001)

International projects						
Connecting4Caring Project (2011–present): WeC.A.R.E. (2013–present).	School	Children, teachers	202 teachers and over 3000 students from 166 Primary and Secondary schools	Society for School and Family Consultation and Research	Enhancement of self-esteem and initiative-taking, improvement on students' relationships and school bonding, higher levels of resilience, psychosocial adjustment and school climate for crisis-affected and low-achievement students, improvement of cooperation, respect and support, enhancement of intercultural skills	Greece, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA, Australia, and the Netherlands Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou, Georgouleas, Mihou, in press)
Social Emotional Learning in summer camps	Summer camp in Malaisina	Staff members, children and adolescents from various countries	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Consultation on group issues and psychosocial adjustment	Malaisina, Greece	

Social and emotional education in school: Program for the promotion of mental health and learning in the school community (2001-2009)	School, Community	Children, teachers	108 K-6 and special schools, 359 teachers and over 7000 students	Cyprus Pedagogical Institute	Communication and peer relations improvement, improvement of academic achievement	Cyprus	(Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou et al., 2010; Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou, Vlami & Tsouris, 2010)
The Olympic Spirit Through Children's Voices (2003–2005)	School, Community	Children, adolescents	206 teachers and 1700 works of students from 137 K-12 schools	International School Psychology Association	Increase awareness building regarding diversity issues	Greece, Albania, Australia, Austria, Brazil, China, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Italy, Japan, Lebanon, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, the Netherlands, Turkey, U.S.A.	(Hatzichristou, 2004a)

The development of PPMHL, particularly in Greece, attempts to fill in the gap in the provision of school mental health services, by supplying educators and practitioners with a powerful evidence-based tool for enhancing children's success in school and life (Zins, Elias, & Greenberg, 2007). Results on students' social and emotional competence, as well as on academic achievement, are promising, in order to motivate schools in implementing these programs themselves (Payton et al., 2008) or, even further, making SEL a core part of education (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Therefore, now more than ever, it is crucial to advocate the incorporation of SEL theoretical framework in the national curriculum (Hatzichristou, 2011e), in terms of "embracing a vision of schooling in which SEL competencies are important" (Durlak et al., 2011, p.422).

An equally important role plays the training model that engulfs SEL conceptual framework and important guidelines for high-quality implementation and evaluation. The significance of training educators and professionals (at an undergraduate and graduate level) in the principles of social and emotional learning corresponds with a change in the direction of educational and mental health services policies (Hatzichristou, 2014a; 2015c; 2016b). Preparing teachers, school administrators, psychologists and other interested parties for understanding the specific developmental and contextual needs of the school community contributes even more to the promotion of resilience, well-being and positive climate both in schools and communities (Elbertson, Brackett, & Weissberg, 2010).

Finally, during these unsettling times as economic and humanistic-refugee crises arise, the need for acquisition and promotion of life skills for students and teachers becomes imperative worldwide. The development, implementation and evaluation of SEL programs in diverse contexts have provided scientific-based evidence of their effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, approaches like the CRSPS proposed multilevel model can form the foundation for the development of a transnational model of resilience building that can be adopted and applied in several educational and cultural settings (Hatzichristou, 2002; 2011g; 2015b; 2016a). Correspondingly, the application of PPMHL in its various adaptations over the years can function as a basis for the implementation of culturally sensitive prevention programs, focusing on the establishment of school networks and transnational collaborations.

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