Students' emotional and behavioral difficulties: the role of teachers' social and emotional learning and teacher-student relationships

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This study investigates how teachers' perceptions of Emotional Intelligence (EI), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills, and teacher-student relationships relate to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. We examined teachers and students' perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties and the degree of agreement between them. Ninety-eight elementary teachers from state schools in central Greece completed the Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale (SREIS), the Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale, the Student-Teacher Relationships Scale - Short Form (STRS-SF), and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, teacher version) for 617 students, aged between 6 and 11 years. Three hundred and eight 11 year old students completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, student version). Regression analysis revealed that teachers' perceptions of EI and SEL skills were not related to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, while teacher-student conflictual relationships were mainly linked to these difficulties. This finding was common both to teachers and students' perceptions. We found low agreement between teachers and students' perceptions of these difficulties. We discuss these findings and their implications for research and practice.

Keywords: perceptions, emotional intelligence, social and emotional learning, teacher-student relationships, emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Introduction

The international literature provides rich evidence about the foundational role of Emotional Intelligence (EI), and the related Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in forming positive relationships in schools (Elias, 1997). At the same time teacher student relationships are considered fundamental for students' adjustment at

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schools (Pianta, 2001). However, to date there is a dearth of research combining teachers' perceptions of EI and SEL skills with teacher student relationships and students' behavior. Far less research exists, investigating both teacher and students' perceptions of EI, SEL skills and teacher student relationships. The present paper aims to address both teachers and students' perceptions on these issues and discuss implications for teacher training and practice.

Teacher's perceptions of EI and students' emotional and behavioral difficulties

Although teaching is a profession of "emotional labor" (Hargreaves, 1998, 2001), little work has been established relating teachers' socio-emotional behavior, teachers' relationships with students, and students' behavior. The concept of EI (including the perception of emotions, the use of emotions to facilitate thinking and the understanding of emotions and their management; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) is used to interpret teachers' emotional responses and functioning in their daily classroom interaction with students. It is argued that teachers equipped with higher levels of EI cope with confrontative situations in a more constructive way comparing to their colleagues with lower levels of EI (Jeloudar, Yunus, Roslan & Nor, 2011; Perry & Ball, 2007; Ramana, 2013). Moreover, highly EI teachers form positive teacher student relationships and cope effectively with students' conduct difficulties (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011; Nizielski, Hallum, Lopes, & Schutz, 2012). Based on these assumptions, and taken into consideration the increasing number of aggressive and conduct behavior problems in schools (Stoiber, 2011), we argue for the investigation of the way teachers' EI relate to students' behavior.

Teacher's perceptions of SEL and students' emotional and behavioral difficulties

EI determines individual differences in the implementation of SEL skills, such as recognizing and managing emotions, developing care and concern for others, making responsible decisions, establishing positive relationships and coping effectively with confrontations (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Although teaching SEL skills belongs to teachers' responsibility, there is limited research in terms of teachers' SEL skills (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011). SEL skills can be beneficial for teachers and students' relationships (Gunter, Caldarella, Korth, & Young, 2012). In the present study, we explore teachers' perceptions of their own emotional competences and their association with students' emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Teacher's perceptions of teacher-student relationships and students' emotional and behavioral difficulties

The link between teacher student relationships and students' behavioral outcomes is well established (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Silver, Measelle, Armostrong, & Essex, 2005; Spilt, Koomen, & Mantzicopoulos, 2010), as well as the beneficial role of positive teacher student relationships for children at risk of maladjustment (Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Damme & Maes, 2008; Dominguez, Vitiello, Fuccillo, Greenfield, & Bulotsky-Shearer, 2011; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Spilt, Koomen, Thijs, & van der Leij, 2012). At the same time, conflictual teacher student relationships may intensify students' behavior difficulties (Buyse et al, 2008; Silver et al, 2005). In the current study, we

investigate the link between teacher student relationships and students' behavior difficulties, aiming to address potential predictors of students' difficulties.

Students' perceptions of emotional and behavioral difficulties

One limitation that occurs in studies investigating students' behavior is the use of only one rater, the teacher. Although valuable in itself, information provided by teachers cannot replace the information provided by students. In fact, research suggests that students are fairly accurate as to how they perceive their behavior (Maag & Rutherford, 1986). One consistent finding of the studies on links between teacher-students' relationships and students' behavior adjustment is the strong association between expectations of the nature of relationships and the result of students' attempts to adjust to school. These studies though place emphasis on teachers' reports regarding students' behavior (Hughes, 2011; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2003; Meehan et al, 2003; Ladd & Burgess, 2001), rather than on students' reports of their own behavior. Moreover, although they agree on the significance of positive teacher-student relationships in minimizing conduct students' problems, they do not examine teachers' emotional functioning as potential indicator of positive teacher-student relationships. Thus we argue that any information on students' perceptions of their behavioral difficulties, and on the way these difficulties are associated with teachers' social and emotional competences and teacher-student relationships will add to our understanding of classroom emotional environment.

In addition, research has shown that there is little agreement between teachers and students' ratings of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Although there are studies that suggest that there is an association between teachers and students' perceptions of their behavior (Maag & Rutherford, 1986), most studies report that there is only a moderate to low similarity between the two (Gresham, Elliott, Cook, Vance & Kettler, 2010; Jeloudar et al, 2011; Mantzicopoulos, 2005; Spilt et al, 2010).

The present study

The first aim of the present study was to investigate how teachers' perceptions of their own EI, as well as their own competence in implementing SEL relate to their perceptions of teacher-student relationships and students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. As findings based solely on teacher self-reports may suffer from bias (Wubbels, Brekelmans, & Hooymayers, 1992), we also drew on students' perceptions of their own behavior difficulties. Thus the second aim of the study was to explore whether teachers' EI and their competence in implementing SEL relate to teacher-student relationships and students' behavior, as reported by students themselves. If we measure both teachers' and students' perceptions of student behavior, this will hopefully produce a more reliable picture of teacher-student relationships.

The research questions addressed in our work were as follows: How do teachers' perceptions of EI, SEL, and teacher-student relationships relate to students' emotional and behavior difficulties according to teachers' perceptions? How do teachers' perceptions of EI, SEL, and teacher-student relationships relate to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties according to students' perceptions? In the light of our review of previous research, we hypothesized that teachers with higher EI and SEL would report closer relationships with students and would be less likely to report emotional and behavioral difficulties in their students. As far

as we are aware, there is virtually no evidence regarding students' reports on the matter. On the basis of probable similarity to the results derived from teacher-based studies, we hypothesized that students might report fewer behavior problems with teachers high in EI, SEL implementation and positive teacher-student relationships. At the same time, one of the most consistent findings in rating scale research with children is the modest agreement between teachers and students in the domains of social skills and problem behaviours (Gresham et al, 2010). In view of the research results up to the present, we would also expect there to be only minimal agreement between teachers' and students' perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Due to lack of similar studies in Greek teachers –to our knowledge- the present study will be descriptive in nature.

Method

Participants

Ninety-eight state elementary teachers from 43 schools of central Greece participated in our study. Elementary teachers teach students aged 6 to 11 years old (students with emotional and behavioral difficulties attend mainstream schools). Participants completed the questionnaires on a voluntary basis. Twenty-eight participants were male (28.6%), 70 were female (71.4%), the average length of experience as a teacher was 5-9 years (22.9%). Teachers were asked to complete questionnaires about themselves and their students (2–5 students of their class, due to time constraints), randomly selected by them (out of 18–25). In sum, 617 questionnaires were completed, for 304 male (48.8%) and 313 female (51.2%) students, mainly from the fourth (128, 23.7%) and sixth (134, 24.8%) grades of elementary school, aged 9 and 11, respectively. Subsequently, a smaller sample of 35 teachers (18 male, 51.4% and 17 female, 48.6%), teaching the sixth grade of elementary school (47.9%), were randomly selected from the initial pool of teachers. These teachers asked their students to complete questionnaires about their behavior (this choice was made because the self-report behavior measure could be completed by children 11-17 years old). Three hundred and eight students (approximately 8 or 10 students drawn from each class, 154 male, 50% and 154 female, 50%, aged 11 years old) completed a questionnaire on their emotional and behavioral difficulties, within school hours.

Procedure

Following teacher and students' information about the aims of research, consent by students, parents and teachers was obtained. Measures' administration took place during class hours, with no time constraints. Teachers had to provide students pseudonyms, which were used in both teachers and students' questionnaires regarding students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, so that participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of any information they provided.

Instruments

Teachers' perceptions

Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale (SREIS). The Self-Rated Emotional Intelligence Scale (SREIS; Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006) was used to measure teachers' reports on EI.

The SREIS is based on Salovey & Mayer's (1990) ability-based model of EI, and includes: a) a perception of emotions subscale (4 items, *e.g.* 'I recognize the emotions people are experiencing from looking at their facial expressions'), b) a use of emotions subscale (3 items, *e.g.* 'when making decisions, I listen to my feelings to decide if the decision feels right'), c) a understanding of emotions subscale (4 items, *e.g.* 'I have a rich vocabulary to describe my emotions'), and d) a management of emotions subscale: 8 items, 4 relating to management of one's own emotions (*e.g.* 'I have problems dealing with my feelings of anger'), and 4 items relating to social management of emotion (e.g. 'I have strategies for improving other people's moods'). The response scale ranged from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*). The SREIS was translated into Greek, and then re-translated into English. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with robust maximum likelihood estimation indicated one factor model, as the best fit with our data. The model fit indices were: X^2=100.095, df=86, p=.050 (p$\geq$.05), SRMR=.063 (<.080), CMIN/df=1.270 (<2), CFI=.947 ($\geq$950), RMSEA=.050 (<.080). The internal reliability of the total perceived emotional intelligence scale was .84.

Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale. The Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers & Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012) was used to measure teachers' perceptions of SEL skills. Two subscales were used in the current study: a) *SEL comfort*, with regular implementation of SEL practices in the classroom (*e.g.* 'I am comfortable providing instruction on social and emotional skills to my students') and b) *SEL commitment*, to improving SEL skills (*e.g.* 'I want to improve my ability to teach social and emotional skills to students'). Teachers' ratings ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scales were translated into Greek, and then re-translated into English. A CFA with robust maximum likelihood estimation provided validity for the two-factor measurement model. The model fit indices were: X^2=21.607, df=18 p=.250 (p>.05); SRMR=.0738 (<.060); CMIN/df=1.200 (<2); IFI, TLI, CFI>.980; RMSEA=.045 (<.080). Cronbach alpha reliabilities are given in Table I.

Student-teacher relationships scale (STRS-SF). Teachers' perceptions of teacher-student relationships were measured with the Student-Teacher Relationships Scale-Short Form (STRS-SF, Pianta, 2001). STRS-SF includes 15 items taxinomized into two subscales: The *closeness* subscale, with 8 items measuring teacher's feelings of warmth, affection and open communication with a student (*e.g.* 'I have an affectionate, warm relationship with this child'), and the *conflict* subscale, with 7 items, measuring teacher's feelings of negativity with a student (*e.g.* 'this child easily becomes angry with me'). Responses are given on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*definitely does not apply*) to 5 (*definitely applies*). The factorial validity of the STRS-SF in the Greek educational context has been demonstrated by Tsigilis and Gregoriadis (2008). Cronbach alpha reliabilities for this study are given in Table I.

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for teachers. Teachers' perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties were measured with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman, 1999). In the present study we administered the four scales of SDQ, with five items each, generating emotional and behavioral problems: '*Hyperactivity Scale*' (*e.g.* restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long), '*Emotional Symptoms Scale*' (*e.g.* often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful), '*Conduct problems Scale*' (*e.g.* often fights with other children or bullies them), '*Peer Problems Scale*' (*e.g.* rather solitary, tends to play alone). Each item can be marked as 0, "not true", 1, "somewhat true", or 2, "certainly true". Higher

scores indicate more difficulties. In the Greek version of the questionnaire, population validity information comes from the teacher version (Bibou-Nakou, Stogianidou, Kioseoglou, & Papageorgiou, 2012). The internal consistency values are presented in table I.

Table I. Reliability indexes, means and standard deviations of the outcome and predictor variables.

	Mean	SD	alpha
Predictors Emotional Intelligence (**SREIS**)	3.63	.50	.84
SEL Beliefs (SEL Beliefs Scale)			
Comfort with SEL implementation	4.03	.69	.87
Commitment to improving SEL skills	4.32	.69	.81
Teacher-student relationships (STRS-SF)			
STRS closeness	3.19	.72	.76
STRS conflict	1.45	.75	.90
Emotional and behavioral difficulties (SDQ)	(teachers' ratings)		
Emotional	.88	.67	.65
Conduct	.81	.74	.74
Hyperactivity	.88	.67	.79
Peers	1.26	.83	.60
Emotional and behavioral difficulties (SDQ)	(students' ratings)		
Emotional	1.40	.62	.60
Conduct	1.28	.54	.47
Hyperactivity	1.43	.75	.60
Peers	1.02	.66	.60

Notes: SREIS, SEL Beliefs Scale, STRS-SF and SDQ (for teachers) ratings of 98 elementary teachers and 617 elementary students, and SDQ (for students) ratings of 308 sixth grade students.

Students' perceptions

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for students. The self-report version of the SDQ can be completed by children and teenagers aged 11-17 years. In the present study we administered the four scales of SDQ, with five items each, generating emotional and behavioral problems: '*Hyperactivity Scale*' (*e.g.* I am restless, I cannot stay still for long), '*Emotional Symptoms Scale*' (*e.g.* I am often unhappy, down-

hearted or tearful), *'Conduct problems Scale'* (*e.g.* I fight a lot. I can make other people do what I want), *'Peer Problems Scale'* (*e.g.* I am usually on my own. I generally play alone or keep to myself). Each item can be marked as 0, "not true", 1, "somewhat true", or 2, "certainly true". Higher scores indicate more difficulties. In the Greek version of the questionnaire, population validity information comes from the self-report version given to students (Mavroveli, Petrides, Shove, & Whitehead, 2008). The internal consistency values are presented in table I.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using regression. Teachers' ratings of EI were entered in Step 1 of the regression models, teacher SEL belief variables were entered in Step 2, and teacher-student relationship variables were entered in Step 3. The process was repeated using students' perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties as the predictor, in addition to teachers' perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. We did not have sufficient teachers from individual schools to use nested models. Some teachers, because of time constraints, completed a student behavior questionnaire only on one student, whilst others completed questionnaires on several students. We therefore summed up the scores of teachers' perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Results

Descriptives. Table I gives descriptive statistics for the reported variables. Commitment to improving SEL skills was rated most highly by teachers (*M*=4.32, *SD*=.69). This is in line with the findings of previous research, in which the majority of teachers reported that they teach SEL, whether or not required to do so by the curriculum (Triliva & Poulou, 2006).

Table II gives the correlations between predictor and outcome variables, for the 98 elementary teachers and 617 students of the six grades. Self-rated teacher EI was positively associated with teachers' closeness in teacher-student relationships. Teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence were not significantly associated with teachers' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Teachers' SEL beliefs were also not significantly associated with teachers' emotional and behavioral difficulties, with one exception, namely, the low but significant correlation between teachers' commitment to improving SEL skills and students' hyperactivity. On the other hand, teachers' perceptions of closeness in relationships were low, but significantly related to students' conduct, hyperactivity and peer difficulties, in the direction that we had anticipated: that is, there were lower ratings of closeness between teacher and students related to higher ratings in students' difficulties. Teachers' perceptions of conflict in teacher-student relationships presented moderate and significant correlations with students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, again in the direction that we had anticipated, namely, with higher ratings on conflictual relations between teacher and students being related to higher ratings in students' difficulties.

Table II. Summary of intercorrelations for teachers' scores on the SREIS, Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale, STRS-SF, and SDQ.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Emotional intelligence (SREIS)									
SEL beliefs (SEL Beliefs Scale)									
2. Comfort with SEL implementation	0.56**								
3. Commitment to improving SEL skills	0.19	0.25*							
Teacher-student relationships (STRS-SF)									
4. STRS closeness	0.38**	0.24*	0.13						
5. STRS conflict	0.07	-0.03	0.01	-0.02					
Students' EBDs (SDQ for teachers)									
6. emotional	-0.08	-0.05	-0.00	-0.02	0.35**				
7. conduct	-0.14	-0.08	0.09	-0.08*	0.56**	0.50**			
8. hyperactivity	-0.12	0.01	0.23*	-0.12**	0.53**	0.54**	0.69**		
9. peer	-0.18	0.01	0.11	-0.16**	0.23**	0.51**	0.33**	0.36**	

Note: SREIS, SEL Beliefs Scale, STRS-SF and SDQ (for teachers) ratings of 98 elementary teachers and 617 elementary students.

Teachers' perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties

Emotional difficulties. Table III shows results from the regression of teachers' perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties regarding teachers' EI, SEL beliefs and teacher-student relationships. Specifically, in Step 1, teachers' perceptions of EI were not significantly correlated with students' emotional difficulties, as is indicated by the beta weight. In Step 2 teachers' perceptions of EI, their degree of comfort over implementing SEL practices and commitment to improving SEL skills were entered. These variables were not significantly correlated with students' emotional difficulties. Step 3 provided evidence that teachers' perceptions of teacher-student relationships added a small, but statistically significant increment to the variance explained (R^2=0.12). Within this set, teachers' perceptions of conflict with their students significantly predicted students' emotional difficulties. This result suggests that teachers' perceptions of conflict made a small but significant contribution to the variance explained by the model, over and above the contribution of teachers' of EI and SEL perceptions.

*Conduct difficultie*s. As regards the model predicting teachers' perceptions of students' conduct difficulties, we get a similar picture to that of students' emotional difficulties. As is clear from Table III, Step 3 provided evidence that teachers' perceptions of conflict added a statistically significant increment to the variance explained (R^2=0.49), clearly suggesting that teachers were more likely to report students' conduct difficulties, when they reported more relational conflict with them.

Hyperactivity. As is apparent in Table III, teachers' perceptions of commitment to improving SEL skills made a significant contribution to teachers' perceptions of students' hyperactivity in step 2. Thus, teachers who perceived themselves more committed to improving SEL skills were more likely to report hyperactivity in their students. Teachers' perceptions of their own EI and their comfort with the implementation of SEL practices did not appear to be significant contributors. When teachers' perceptions of teacher-student relationships were entered in Step 3, commitment to improving SEL skills remained a significant contributor, but teachers' perceptions of conflict with students appeared to make the most powerful impact on teachers' perceptions of hyperactivity. Step 3 showed that teachers' perceptions of closeness and particularly of conflict added a statistically significant increment to the variance explained (R^2=0.48).

Peer difficulties. As is clear in Table III, neither teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence and SEL beliefs or teacher-student relationships were found to be significant contributors to teachers' perceptions of students' peer difficulties.

Students' perceptions of emotional and behavioral difficulties

Table IV gives the correlations between predictor and outcome variables, for the 35 sixth grade teachers and 308 six grade students. As Table IV shows, students' perceptions of emotional and behavioral difficulties were not significantly related to teachers' perceptions of EI, and SEL beliefs. In fact, teacher-student closeness was significantly correlated to students' perceptions of emotional difficulties in a positive direction. That is, when teachers' gave higher ratings when evaluating teacher-student closeness, students' gave higher ratings when evaluating emotional difficulties, indicating a lack of agreement between teachers and students' perceptions. Moderate, but significant, correlations were found between teachers' perception of conflict in relationships and student perceptions of emotional and behavioral difficulties, indicating that higher ratings in conflict in teacher-student relationships were related to higher ratings in students' perceptions of their behavior problems. Finally, teacher and student ratings regarding emotional and behavioral difficulties presented low but significant correlations (Table IV).

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Table III. Regression results for students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, according to teachers' perceptions

Note: Ratings of 98 elementary teachers for 617 students

Variables	emotional			conduct			hyperactivity			peer		
	β	t	Sig(p)	β	t	Sig(p)	β	t	Sig (p)	β	t	Sig(p)
*Step 1												
(Constant)		4.28	.00		4.12	.00		3.43	.00		3.34	.00
emotional intelligence	-.14	-1.05	.29	-.20	-1.57	.12	-.08	-.64	.52	-.09	-.67	.50
adjR^2	.00			.02			.01			.01		
	>.05			>.05			>.05			>.05		
*Step 2												
(Constant)		3.69	.00		3.25	.00		2.20	.03		2.52	.01
emotional intelligence	-,15	-.91	.36	-.23	-1.50	.13	-.20	-1.29	.20	-.12	-.76	.45
comfort	-.00	-.02	.98	-.01	-.07	.94	.06	.41	.68	-.02	-.14	.88
commitment	.046	.31	.75	.14	1.03	.30	.29	2.12	.03	.16	1.13	.26
adjR^2	.03			.01			.04			.02		
p	>.05			>.05			>.05			>.05		
ΔR^2	.03			.01			.03			.01		
*Step 3												
(Constant)		2.73	.00		2.28	.02		1.21	.22		2.16	.03
emotional intelligence	-.08	-.51	.61	-.18	-1.51	.13	-1.11	-.95	.34	-.05	-.34	.73
comfort	.01	.11	.90	.02	.20	.83	.11	.98	.32	.00	.01	.98
commitment	.00	.04	.96	.09	.88	.38	.22	2.21	.03	.14	1.02	.31
closeness	-.05	-.36	.71	.00	.01	.99	-.10	-1.02	.30	-.15	-1.08	.28
conflict	.47	3.67	.00	.69	7.02	.00	.63	6.33	.00	.23	1.70	.09
adjR^2	.01			.49			.48			.03		
p	<.05			<.05			<.05			>.05		
ΔR^2	.05			.48			.44			.01		

Table IV. Summary of intercorrelations for sixth grade teachers' scores on the SREIS, Teacher SEL Beliefs Scale, STRS-SF, and sixth grade teachers and students' SDQ.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Emotional intelligence (SREIS)										
SEL beliefs (SEL Beliefs Scale)										
2. Comfort with SEL implementation	.53**									
3. Commitment to improving SEL skills	.17	.19								
Teacher-student relationships (STRS-SF)										
4. STRS closeness	.34*	.26	.13							
5. STRS conflict	.03	-.02	.02	-.03						
Students' EBDs, SDQ (teachers' ratings)										
6. emotional	-.03	-.17	-.27	-.06	.35**					
7. conduct	-.17	-.06	-.15	-.16**	.47**	.35**				
8. hyperactivity	.03	.06	-.06	-.19**	.47**	.39**	.63**			
9. peer	.21	.04	.14	-.13*	.21**	.48**	.29**	.23**		
Students' EBDs, SDQ (students' ratings)										
10. emotional	.16	.22	.19	.14**	.13*	.17**	.05	-.00	.27**	
11. conduct	.02	-.08	-.09	.00	.23**	-.00	.27**	.15**	.07	
12. hyperactivity	.04	.28	-.07	-.03	.17**	-.05	.28**	.21**	.07	
13. peer	.14	.08	.13	.08	.16**	.13*	.02	.00	.47**	

Note: SREIS, SEL Beliefs Scale, STRS-SF and SDQ (for teachers) ratings of 35 sixth elementary teachers and 308 sixth elementary students.

Emotional difficulties. Teacher perceptions of their own EI did not appear to contribute significantly to student perceptions. Contrary to our expectations, teachers' perceptions of comfort in implementing SEL practices contributed positively to students' perceptions of emotional difficulties. As anticipated, teachers' perceptions of conflict with teachers turned out to be a significant contributor to students' perceptions of emotional difficulties, in step 3 (Table V).

Table V. Regression results for students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, according to students' perceptions

Variables	emotional			conduct			hyperactivity			peer		
	β	t	Sig(p)	β	t	Sig(p)	β	t	Sig(p)	β	t	Sig(p)
*Step 1												
(Constant)		1.86	.07		2.41	.02		1.90	.06		2.37	.02
emotional intelligence	.25	1.41	.16	.14	.74	.46	.11	.60	.54	.03	.020	.83
adjR^2	.03			.01			.02			.03		
	>.05			>.05			>.05			>.05		
*Step 2												
(Constant)		-.30	.76		2.04	.05		2.12	.04		1.51	.14
emotional intelligence	.06	.32	.75	.20	.87	.39	-.06	-.31	.75	.02	.12	.89
comfort	.36	1.81	.08	-.11	-.50	.61	.39	2.08	.04	-.07	-.36	.72
commitment	.21	1.24	.22	-.16	-.84	.40	-.31	-1.87	.07	.15	.80	.42
adjR^2	.10			.05			.18			.07		
p	>.05			>.05			<.05			>.05		
ΔR^2	.07			.04			.20			.04		
*Step 3												
(Constant)		-1.00	.32		1.25	.22		2.49	.02		1.66	.10
emotional intelligence	.00	.01	.98	.19	.98	.33	.13	.78	.44	-.10	-.63	.53
comfort	.36	2.08	.04	-.10	-.53	.59	.41	2.58	.01	-.10	-.63	.52
commitment	.23	1.56	.13	-.10	-.62	.53	-.31	-2.23	.03	.12	.83	.40
closeness	.12	.72	.47	.10	.57	.57	-.46	-2.95	.00	.10	.71	.48
conflict	.42	2.70	.01	.57	3.53	.00	.34	2.44	.02	.63	4.32	.00
adjR^2	.29			.29			.42			.33		
p	<.05			<.05			<.05			<.05		
ΔR^2	.19			.34			.24			.40		

Note: Ratings of 35 sixth grade elementary teachers and 308 sixth grade primary students.

Conduct difficulties. Teacher perceptions of conflict were the only significant contributors to students' perceptions of conduct difficulties (Step 3, Table V). Teachers' perceptions of EI and SEL beliefs did not appear to be significant contributors to student perceptions of conduct difficulties, indicating that teacher-student conflictual relationships are considered to be significantly associated with students' conduct difficulties over and above teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence and SEL competences.

Hyperactivity. Teacher perceptions of their own EI were not significant contributors to students' perceptions of hyperactivity difficulties (Table V). On the other hand, teachers' perceptions of comfort in implementing SEL practices turned out to be a significant contributor (Step 2), which along with commitment to improving SEL skills retained its significance, when teacher-student relationships were entered in step 3. Thus it appears that student perceptions of hyperactivity were predicted by teachers' SEL beliefs and teacher-student relationships over and above teachers' EI. Furthermore, less closeness, and greater conflict in teacher-student relationships are linked to higher ratings of student hyperactivity perceptions.

Peer difficulties. Teacher perceptions of conflict in teacher-student relationships were the only significant predictors of students' perceptions of peer difficulties, implying that conflict in teacher-student relationships may perhaps relate to problems in student relationships with peers (Table V).

Discussion

Research describing the profile of the 'expert teacher' indicated two set of skills: a) teachers' personal skills, and personality characteristics which facilitate teacher student relationships and contribute to students' adjustment at schools, and b) teachers' professional skills and competences required for effective classroom management (Vesely, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). In the current study, we explored these skills concurrently. We investigated the relationships among teachers' perceptions of EI (teachers' personal skills), commitment to and comfort with implementing SEL practices (teachers' professional skills), teacher-student relationships and students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. This paper has addressed a number of important limitations on our understanding of teachers' psychological functioning and competences, teacher-student relationships and students' emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Teachers' perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties

First, the present study has considered in parallel teachers' perceptions of EI, SEL and teacher-student relationships, employing teachers' perceptions to investigate potential predictors of elementary students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Teacher's EI correlated significantly with teacher reports of closeness to students, suggesting that a positive climate of relations in the classrooms is more likely to occur when the teacher has greater EI. This result suggests that EI may enable teachers to establish good working relationships with students. Teachers' comfort with SEL implementation was also an associated factor in teacher-student relationships characterized by closeness, in line with Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) model, which states that teachers' social-emotional competence is important for healthy teacher-student relationships. However, when teacher perceptions of their own EI, SEL and teacher-student relationships were analyzed together as potential predictors of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, it was only conflict in teacher-student relationships which turned out to be the most robust contributor to these difficulties, irrespective of teachers' perceptions of EI, and SEL competences. This finding may suggest that teachers' perceptions of their own EI and their SEL beliefs have an indirect link to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, through their association with teacher-student relationships, in line with Nizielski et al's (2012)

study in Syrian teachers. In this work, the relationship between teachers' perceived EI and student misconduct was mediated by teachers' attention to student needs.

Student perceptions of emotional and behavioral difficulties

Second, the present study considers teachers' perceptions of EI, SEL and teacher-student relationships, in an investigation of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, according to students' perceptions. Teachers' perceptions of EI and SEL beliefs were not related to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. The positive association between conflict in teacher-student relationships and hyperactivity confirms previous research to the effect that teachers' relational support may compensate for risks posed by students' aversive behaviors, such as hyperactivity and conduct difficulties (Buyse et al, 2008; Spilt et al, 2010). In fact, when teachers' perceptions of EI, SEL and teacher-student relationships were analyzed together as potential predictors of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties according to student perceptions, teacher perceptions of conflict were the main predictor of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. This was the case especially for peer difficulties, consistent with Birch & Ladd (1997) study, in which children's classroom behavior is linked both to the quality of their relationships with the classroom teacher, and the quality of their relationships with classroom peers.

Congruence between teacher and student perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties

Third, we explored the degree of congruence between teacher and student perceptions of emotional and behavioral difficulties. Despite the fact that there was similarity in teachers and students' perceptions about the role of conflict as the main predictor of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, our study supports the argument that there is only a moderate to low similarity between the two (Gresham, Elliott, Cook, Vance & Kettler, 2010; Jeloudar et al, 2011; Mantzicopoulos, 2005; Spilt et al, 2010). There are a number of possible explanations for these differences in reported perceptions: First, this lack of agreement may indicate that students' perceptions regarding their behavior actually differ from teachers' perceptions. A second possible explanation for the lack of agreement is that teachers' ideals actually distort the self-reports of their interpersonal behavior, irrespective of their actual behavior (Wubbels et al, 1992).

Limitations

There are several limitations to our study. First, it does not allow inferences regarding causal relationships, although directional relationships were demonstrated. Second, teachers who completed the questionnaires did so voluntarily, which may have resulted in a response bias. The third limitation is that although we asked students to give their own perceptions of their emotional and behavioral difficulties, in order to reduce the threat of single-source bias through reliance solely on teachers' self-reports, we received low to moderate reliability coefficients in student responses. The use of mixed method designs, in which data is collected from classroom observations on teachers and students' behavior, would help overcome this limitation. Finally, the study assessed student behavior at only one point in time. Longer-term investigations with repeated waves of data collection are needed to examine how these relationships change over time, or student age.

Implications

Despite these limitations, our study is a first step toward a better understanding of teachers' factors related to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Current thought attributes students' difficulties to the manner in which teachers promote classroom interactions. Our study supports that it is the conflictual relationships between teachers and students, rather the relationships characterized by closeness, which were mainly linked to students' difficulties. It has been already stated that when a classroom climate is characterized by warm, respectful and emotionally supportive relationships, students perform better academically (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012). In a similar line, we suggest that when a classroom climate lacks conflictual relationships, students present less emotional and behavioral difficulties. Interestingly, this finding was common to both teachers and students' perceptions. Furthermore, teachers' emotional functioning and professional competencies were correlated with the quality of teacher-student relationships. It is possible that the minimization of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties is to some extent contingent upon the emotional components of teacher-student relationships. It might be the case that teachers' perceptions of their own EI relate to teachers' classroom discipline strategies employed to deal with student emotional and behavioral difficulties (Jeloudar et al, 2011). This assumption, however, needs further exploration.

Our study has implications for practice and research. As regards practice, results from this study reveal that the quality of teacher-child relationship and specifically conflict, is important for understanding the development of emotional and behavioral difficulties in the classroom. Past studies have found that conflict is a marker of troubled relationship processes, in that it has the potential to increase behavior (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Howes, Phillipsen, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2000; Silver et al, 2005) social and academic problems (Ladd & Burgess, 2001) over time. Children who enter school with higher ratings of behavioral problems are likely to experience greater conflict and less closeness to teachers, and this effect may continue to impact over time on the quality of teacher-child relationships (Howes et al, 2000). We suggest that enhancing teacher social-emotional and teaching competences and skills, both personal and professional, would potentially promote positive teacher-student relationships, and therefore prevent student emotional and behavioral difficulties. As regards research, the study offers some insight into the possible mechanisms by which teacher and student perceptions may contribute to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, in that it suggests that teacher perceptions of EI, and competence in implementing SEL practices are to be considered as potential teacher-based factors in teacher-student relationships and students' behavior.

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