

Greece

Country Overview

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Country name

Greece

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Introduction

Under the coordination of the Center for Research and Practice of School Psychology (CRSPS), in the Department of Psychology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece has had a considerable boost in the promotion of implementing socio emotional learning (SEL) programmes when following the example of other countries around the world, implementing SEL programmes in Greek schools since the beginning of the 21st century. This research unit became the main developer and coordinator of SEL intervention programmes in the country. The strategy for a systematic implementation of SEL in the Greek educational system was to implement the programme in the university's curriculum for the professional training of psychologists and teacher's, thus providing these professionals with the necessary skills to implement SEL based intervention. From that point, SEL interventions flourished across different educational institutions (Hatzichristou et al., 2010; Hatzichristou & Polychroni, 2014; Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016).

Development

Beginning in the early 21st century, the gradual implementation of SEL interventions followed the general development of school psychology services in Greece. These services, created and implemented on a data-based, multi-level, and evidence-based framework, focused on addressing the needs of the entire school community, and worked closely with CRSPS on implementing the programme Promotion of Mental Health and Learning (PPMHL) in schools across Greece. As a response to the country's recent socio economic difficulties, this programme combines concepts from positive psychology, systemic theory and SEL to promote resiliency, coping, well-being, academic achievement and positive climate in the school setting (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016)..

In this context, a wide range of educational materials (including conceptual framework, thematic units and activities books) for preschool, primary and secondary education were created, developed and published to support the implementation of SEL based/focused interventions (Hatzichristou, 2011). The SEL related thematic addressed in the programme are:

communication skills;

emotion recognition expression, and management;

self-concept and self-esteem;

coping strategies;

conflict resolution;

school and diversity in culture;

school and diversity in families;

school and students with special educational;

social skills;

learning/study skills;

crisis intervention in the school community. (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016)

The development and consequent implementation of the PPMHL was designed to address the very real issues and necessities of children in educational/school contexts that were found after assessing their resources and collecting feedback from a pilot experiment of the programme. The implementation of PPMHL occurred across several years, firstly by experienced school psychologists, supported by specialists from university, and in the subsequent years by school psychologists and teachers, trained specifically in the programme's framework and methodology. At the same time, a network of participating schools was created to support and facilitate sharing ideas, experiences and resources to disseminate the programme and SEL focused interventions to other teachers and school communities (Hatzichristou et al., 2010).

The extension of PPMHL to teachers, and its implementation in school and class contexts, created a bigger impact than initially expected. Overtime, SEL focused interventions became a recognized necessity, and a regularly discussed issue in schools. Generalised attention from the educational community developed into a system-wide, SEL focused programme, namely the programme for the Promotion of School Community Well-Being (PPSCW), which included two main axis of intervention: a) implementation of PPMHL by teachers in classrooms, and b) promotion of resilience in school community and broader school networks. The basis of this broader programme was to train teachers to use the problem-solving model. The use of this model fosters the development of action plans to enhance a sense of community in the schools, evaluate critical domains of SEL, such as resilience, and set priorities and goals with the objective of implementing specific actions in response to the particular needs of each school (Hatzichristou & Lampropoulou, 2004).

Assessment

The implementation of the referred SEL intervention programmes included a multilevel assessment model which included process and outcome evaluation, as well as regular or continuous assessment (pre, midterm and post testing), and control group comparison. To this end, data was collected by different instruments (qualitative and quantitative), methods (questionnaires, diaries and logs, personal reports from teachers), and stakeholders (teachers, school administrators, students, parents) (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016).

The assessment procedure implied that teachers respond to PPMHL measures at the beginning and at the end of the training, while students' data is collected at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. Meanwhile, throughout the course of the programme, a process evaluation procedure was implemented by a scientific team from CRSPS, with the objective of improving and tailoring the programme to the specific needs of the school community. Assessment also included student control groups (other classes from the school), in order to evaluate the impact of the implementation in the same setting.

Intervention

It's important to note that most of the SEL based intervention programmes in the Greek school system are not early childhood and preschool specific. They are more of a systemic approach/model, designed to be adapted and adjusted to school community needs, primarily in preschool. Which means that intervention programmes are designed, mainly for K4-5 and onward.

Fuelled by several years of social and economical crisis in Greece, several SEL focused intervention programmes were created and implemented, namely with the coordination of the CRSPS. One of these programmes was Connecting For Caring (C4C, 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 multilevel project includes intervention programmes in Greek schools that:

- target the entire student population;
- intend to enhance resilience and self-esteem;
- strengthen social-emotional skills; and

develop a positive school climate and supportive environment in the classroom and the school (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016).

Three school-based intervention programmes of C4C have been designed, implemented and evaluated: (a) the Supporting in Crisis programme; (b) the E.M.E.I.S [Ενδιαφερόμαστε (Care) - Μοιράζομαστε (Share) - Ενθαρρύνουμε (Encourage) – Ισχυροποιόμαστε (Empower) – Συμμετέχουμε (Participate)] programme; and (c) the International programme WeCARE.

The Supporting in Crisis programme 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; Masten, 2011). The programme aimed to support and strengthen students' and teachers' resilience and well-being at an individual, group and school community. At the same time, the programme sought to explore the needs of teachers and students that emerged during the economic crisis in Greece. The structure of the programme included: (a) three specialised 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 promote resilience at an individual and group level; and (c) the development of educational material.

The E.M.E.I.S. programme was implemented in schools across Athens. The main objective of the programme was the development of a positive school environment, to reinforce individual and group resilience, as well as to promote and develop internal strengths, motivation and skills. At the same time, another important goal of this programme was to offer teachers an opportunity to strengthen their own resilience to be able to support and empower the students by addressing the intense needs for psychological support. This programme included teacher training, development of structured classroom activities, supervision, and a closing ceremony. The programme focused on the following five thematic units: (a) resilience and positive school climate promotion; (b) crisis management in the school community; (c) coping with stress; (d) social skills, conflict resolution and bullying; and (e) teacher burnout. The activities were implemented at an individual, classroom and school level (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016).

The International programme WeC.A.R.E. is an online, international teacher training and classroom intervention programme that aims to enhance the students' psychological well being, build resilience, foster team-spirit, and create a global support network of educators, school psychologists and students. Participating classes are divided into 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, where each island station constitutes the platform for each of the modules of the programme, namely: (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 occurs through an interactive electronic platform and includes: (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 programme effectiveness (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016).

Social and Emotional education in School: programme for the promotion of mental health and learning in the community, is a programme focused on developing communication and peer relations, acknowledgement and expression of unpleasant feelings, and improvement of academic achievement. It was applied to students and teachers of K5-6 and upward, as well as in special schools, in Athens (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016).

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