<u>**Postscript**</u>

Poulou, M. S. (2017) Students' emotional and behavioral difficulties: the role of teachers' social and emotional learning and teacher-student relationships. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, **9 (2), 72-89.**

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. The paper suggests new insights into the interpretation of students' adjustment at school, and underscores the importance of teacher-training in helping teachers to develop personal and professional skills.

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

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POSTSCRIPT

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   This postscript describes studies which address teachers' personal and professional characteristics, teacher-student relationships and students' social and emotional skills, in an attempt to investigate

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potential predictors of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Based on preschool, primary and secondary teachers and students' perceptions, the studies indicated that teachers' perceptions of emotional intelligence, social and emotional skills implementation, and teaching efficacy were indirectly linked to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, through teacher-student relationships. The paper suggests new insights into the interpretation of students' adjustment at schools, and underscores the importance of teacher-training in helping teachers to develop personal and professional skills.

The increasing number of students who engage in aggressive, noncompliant and resistant behaviors in schools (Stoiber, 2011) highlights the need to investigate which teacher or classroom characteristics make adjustment on the part of students easier. This postscript describes studies which address teachers' personal and professional characteristics as potential predictors of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties.

In an attempt to address potential personal and professional teacher characteristics contributing to students' adjustment, the previous paper by this author focused on teachers' perceptions of their own emotional functioning. Although teaching is a profession of 'emotion labor' (Hargreaves, 2001), there is surprisingly limited research establishing the link between teachers' emotional functioning and teachers' behavior (Korthagen, & Evelein, 2016), or students' behavioral outcomes (Rae, Cowell & Field, 2017). The concept of Emotional Intelligence (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 interactions with students. It is argued that teachers equipped with higher levels of EI cope with challenging situations in a more constructive way when compared to their colleagues with lower levels of EI (Jeloudar, Yunus, Roslan & Nor, 2011; Perry & Ball, 2007; Ramana, 2013). Highly EI teachers form positive teacher student relationships and cope effectively with students' behavior difficulties (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012; Nizielski, Hallum, Lopes, & Schutz, 2012).

Furthermore, EI determines individual differences in the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) competences, 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). SEL can be beneficial for teachers and students' relationships (Gunter, Caldarella, Korth, & Young, 2012). Although teaching SEL falls primarily under the teachers' responsibility, there is limited research on teachers' SEL competences (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011).

In a study of primary teachers' perceptions of their own EI and SEL competences, such as perceptions of confidence in, and commitment to, implement social and emotional learning, it was revealed that teachers' perceptions of their EI, and the implementation of social and emotional learning, were not directly linked to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties (Poulou, 2017a). In fact, these perceptions were directly linked to the relationships they develop with their students, which in turn predict students' behavior, thus underlining the importance of teachers' emotional involvement for the establishment of positive relationships in classrooms (Brackett et al., 2012). This finding also emerged when students' perceptions were taken into account in the same study. In fact, research provides ample evidence for the strong association between teacher-student relationships and students' emotional and behavioral difficulties

(Birch & Ladd, 1997; Ladd & Burgess, 2001; Silver, Measelle, Armostrong, & Essex, 2005; Spilt, Koomen, & Mantzicopoulos, 2010). It is argued that teachers' emotional support act as a protective factor to students with emotional difficulties (Buyse, Verschueren, Doumen, Damme, & Maes, 2008), and at the same time buffer students' difficulties (Dominguez, Vitiello, Fuccillo, Greenfield, & Bulotsky-Shearer, 2011).

Similar studies on preschool teachers and students' perceptions extend previous research on the associations between the quality of teacher psychological characteristics and teacher-student interactions (Brown, Jones, LaRusso, & Aber, 2010; Poulou, 2017a). Poulou (2017a) found that teachers' perceptions of personal skills such as EI, and professional skills such as confidence and commitment in implementing social and emotional learning, were important predictors of the quality of teacher–student relationships. These factors however, have not received an equal amount of emphasis in describing teacher–student relationships. Teachers' professional skills played the most prominent role in explaining teacher–student relationships, in comparison to their personal skills. This finding was also evident in the investigation of both teachers and students' perceptions about teacher-student relationships (Poulou, 2017b).

Poulou (2017c) also examined the significance of teachers' professional skills in predicting healthy teacher-student relationships. The study investigated elementary teachers' perceptions of teaching efficacy, in addition to perceptions of EI, and implementation of social and emotional learning, as predictors of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Teachers who reported high levels of implementing SEL practices also reported high levels of teaching efficacy in classroom management and student engagement, in agreement with Collie, Shapka and Perry's (2012) study, in which teachers who were confident in teaching SEL showed greater teaching efficacy. Our findings further suggest that the emotional components of teacher-student relationships, in conjunction with teachers' professional skills, account to some extent for the minimization of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties.

The indirect role of teachers' personal and professional skills in students' psychological adjustment to school through teacher-student relationships was further supported when teachers' perceptions of the three levels of education (preservice, elementary and secondary education) were taken into account (Poulou, 2015a). SEM analysis confirmed a hermeneutic model of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, integrating teachers' personal skills, such as EI, teachers' professional skills such as implementation of SEL and teaching efficacy, and teacher-student interactions (Figures 1, 2, 3). As expected, teachers' perceptions were significantly different according to the educational level. Preschool teachers gave higher ratings on EI, SEL and positive relationships with their students than their colleagues in primary and secondary education levels. Secondary school teachers gave higher self-efficacy ratings in terms of their efficacy in classroom management, than their colleagues in preschool and primary education. Research provides evidence for the quality differences in teacher-student relationships in terms of students' age, reporting more conflict in teacher-student relationships with older students (Saft & Pianta, 2001).
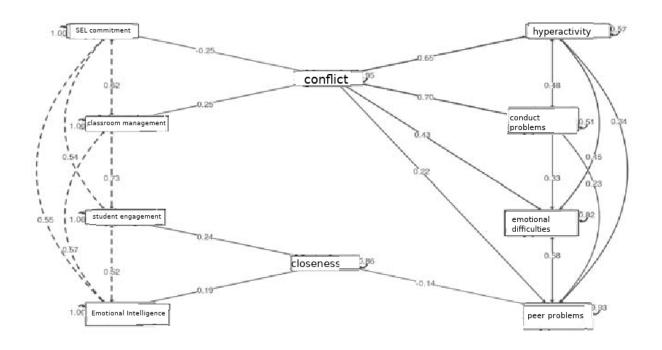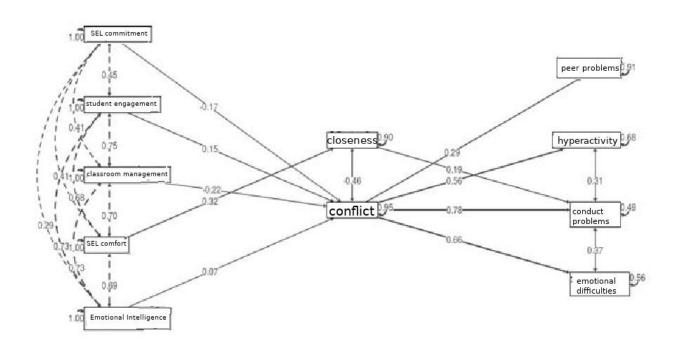
Figure 1. Hermeneutic model for preschool teachers

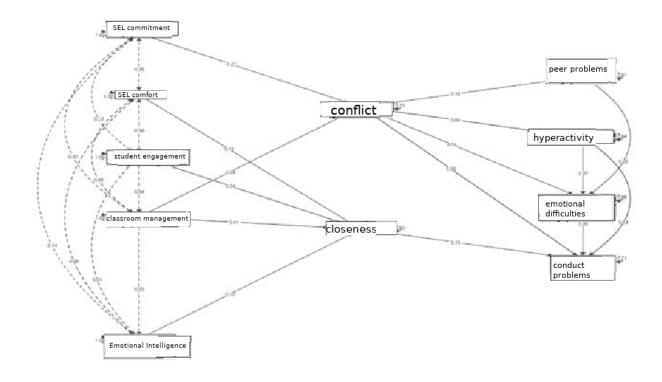**Figure 2. Hermeneutic model for primary school teachers**

Figure 3. Hermeneutic model for secondary school teachers

In general, the argument is made that teachers' perceptions of EI, SEL and self-efficacy are related to the development of positive teacher-student relationships. This link appears to be stronger in preschool teachers' perceptions, highlighting the importance of teacher-student relationships in preschool education (Pianta, 1999; Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman, 2003). With regards to secondary school teachers, teacher-student relationships seem to be related to teachers' perceptions of professional skills rather than their perceptions of EI. In turn, teacher-student relationships are related to teachers' ratings of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, with conflict in teacher-student relationships being the prominent predictor of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties in all three levels of education.

The studies above provide evidence for the importance of teachers' emotional functioning and professional competences to classroom interactions and students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Social and emotional difficulties however, are also influenced by students' own characteristics. Students are shaped by their classroom environment, but they themselves have an effect on the environment (Sutherland & Oswald, 2005). This raises the question whether it is the teachers or the students' behavioral and emotional competences which are most responsible for students' behavioral adjustment at schools. Data based on 962 primary school students' perceptions indicated that students' social and emotional skills were found to be more of a determinant of their behavior than teachers' interpersonal behavior, although both teachers' interpersonal behavior and students' social and emotional skills were significantly linked to emotional and behavioral difficulties (Poulou, 2015b). A similar study which examined how preschool teachers' perceptions of their own EI were differentially related to their perceptions of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties based on students' social skills, indicated that higher scores for teachers' perceptions of EI, and

students' social skills were related to lower scores for students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Teachers' perceptions of EI were important in predicting students' emotional and behavioral difficulties, especially in the case of students who lack social skills (Poulou, 2017d).

From the studies above, we concur that teachers' emotional functioning in conjunction with students' development of social and emotional skills, account to some extent for the minimization of students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. The studies provide greater insight into the possible mechanisms by which teachers and students' perceptions of social and emotional competences may relate to students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. They suggest that teachers' perceptions of EI, SEL, and teaching efficacy could be considered as potential teacher-based factors in the development of positive teacher-student relationships and students' behavior adjustment. Enhancing teachers' personal and professional skills could promote good teacher-student relationships, prevent relational conflict, and address students' emotional and behavioral difficulties. Since teachers' perceptions can affect the implementation of SEL programs (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn, & Downer, 2012), researchers, practitioners, and policymakers should take a particular interest in assessing these perceptions, and the ways in which they integrate with teaching practice. These findings also underscore the importance of teacher-training in helping teachers to develop personal and professional skills, helping teachers to develop their own personal social and emotional competences that help them to focus on teacher–student relationships, and their students' social and emotional skills as well.

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