

# Chapter 14

## A Multilevel Approach of Promoting Resilience and Positive School Climate in the School Community During Unsettling Times

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### Introduction

The evolution of school psychology internationally varies considerably depending on educational system, demographic characteristics, economy, geography, and other unique features of each country (Farrell, Jimerson, & Oakland, 2007). In many countries school psychology is at its early stages of development while in other countries the provision of school psychology services has been established. Despite differences regarding the roles, functions, and responsibilities of school psychologists worldwide, school psychology remains the applied field of psychology that can contribute greatly to the lives of children, parents, and teachers. Special emphasis has been given to prevention and intervention programs in the school communities that promote learning and positive development of all children and meet the psychosocial needs of children at risk.

This chapter describes the development of a multilevel approach of resilience building in the school community in times of economic crisis. This approach was developed within the context of an alternative model of provision of school psychological services and includes the implementation of intervention programs aiming to promote resilience and positive school climate.

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## Alternative Model of School Psychological Services

In the last decade, the field of psychology has rapidly expanded in Greece, and a great deal of effort has been put into promoting the discipline of school psychology. The evolution of school psychology was related to the establishment of independent departments of psychology, the development of graduate programs in school psychology, and the inclusion of new legislation that created positions for psychologists in the public special schools and the Centers for Diagnosis, Assessment, and Support, the provision of psychological services in the schools by Community Mental Health Centers, the increase of the relevant literature in Greek, the establishment of university centers of school psychology, and the development of alternative models for the provision of school psychological services (Hatzichristou, 2004, 2011a; Hatzichristou, Polychroni, & Georgouleas, 2007).

Hatzichristou (1998) has proposed an integrative framework that synthesizes and expands the following principles: (a) the scientist–practitioner model for school psychology; (b) a systemic (i.e., social, cultural, ethnic, national, ecological) approach to assessment and intervention practices; (c) the evolving roles and functions of school psychologists in research, practice, and training; and (d) a systemic approach to professional development and identity of school psychologists. This integrative conceptual framework led to the development of a data-based model of alternative school psychological services that links theory, research, and practice to provide an array of services including assessment, psychological consultation, prevention, intervention, crisis counseling, research, training, supervision, management, and advocacy (Hatzichristou, 2004, 2011a).

The data-based model of alternative school psychological services was developed in four phases. The *three* first phases of the model documented the needs of Greek students, teachers, and families, as well as their attitudes towards mental health services and professionals. In Phase 1, an empirical database was developed to describe the profiles of school adjustment and performance of “average” Greek students. In Phase 2, the profiles of at-risk students with unmet needs were described, and in Phase 3, profiles were developed of the particular needs of specific school districts in communities where various intervention programs were being implemented. Throughout the years, each phase was enriched by new research domains and additional goals.

In the *fourth* phase, the empirical data derived from the first three phases of the model were integrated into a comprehensive prevention-consultation approach that led to the foundation of the Center for Research and Practice of School Psychology (CRPSP) in the Department of Psychology at the University of Athens. The main goals and activities of the CRPSP are (1) promotion of university–school–community partnerships and collaboration; (2) education, preservice and in-service training for graduate students, school psychologists, teachers, and parents; (3) scientific research and publications; and (4) development, implementation, and evaluation of multi-level interventions in the school community. Within this context a number of prevention and intervention programs have been developed and implemented in

different educational and cultural contexts for the promotion of school resilience, well-being, and crisis management.

During the last years, a special emphasis has been given to the promotion of resilience and positive school climate in schools responding to the increased psychosocial needs caused by the recent economic crisis in Greece. A multilevel approach was developed for enhancing resilience in school communities that provides the conceptual framework for developing appropriate interventions. The dimensions of the proposed multilevel approach are described in the following sections of the chapter.

## **Multilevel Approach of Resilience Building**

### ***Conceptual Framework***

A synthetic approach to school community well-being has been proposed by Hatzichristou, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou, and Dimitropoulou (2010). This approach has emerged from the current trends in psychology and school mental health that stress the need to shift away from a focus on individual problems to a focus on positive psychology perspectives and systems interventions that emphasize students' strengths and contextual protective factors (Biglan, Flay, Embry, & Sandler, 2012). The proposed synthetic approach to school community well-being incorporates theoretical concepts and practice models from *resilience*, *effective schools*, *schools as caring communities*, and *social-emotional learning literature* (Bickel & Beaujean, 2005; Doll, Zucker, & Brehm, 2004; Esquivel, Doll, & Oades-Sese, 2011; Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Kolar, 2011; Kress & Elias, 2006; Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001, 2011; O'Dougherty & Masten, 2005; Sergiovanni, 1994). According to the authors by integrating these theoretical components in system-level interventions, schools can enhance resilience and promote a positive school climate at all levels. Effective schools that promote a positive school climate function as caring communities and provide not only opportunities for learning but also for the development of positive relationships are important protective factors and contribute to the promotion of resilience (Blum & Libbey, 2004; Masten & Reed, 2002). *Resilience*, *effective schools*, *schools as caring communities*, and *social-emotional learning* are the basic components of the proposed model and are considered as essential prerequisites for the promotion of school well-being.

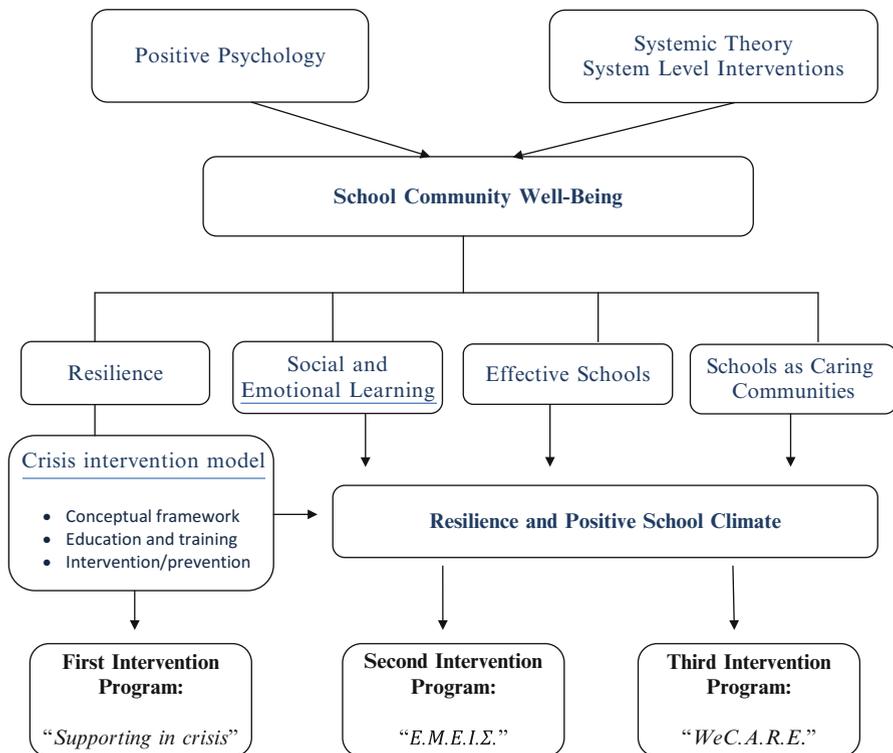
This conceptual approach was further developed in an effort to design intervention programs that respond to the immediate needs of the school communities during the Greek economic crisis. A special emphasis was given to a multilevel resilience promotion (individual, classroom, and school level) that can have an important protective effect against life adversities. Within this systemic perspective, teachers can potentially be directed away from a deficit orientation frame to one that recognizes student strengths and contextual protective factors (Morrison, Brown, D'Incau, & O'Farrell, 2006).

Doll et al. (2004) define resilient classrooms as those having the following characteristics: academic efficacy, academic self-determination, behavioral self-control, caring and authentic teacher–student relationships, ongoing and rewarding relationships with classroom peers, and strong home–school collaboration. According to Doll and colleagues (2004), it is important for students to have a voice and give feedback on how they perceive themselves as learners as well as how they perceive their relationships with teachers and classmates. This voice is provided by the classmaps survey, which is a classroom-based tool in order to develop the classroom profile based on students’ perceptions. Classmaps can also provide teachers with helpful insight regarding the overall classroom climate and indicate specific areas of focus for improvement. Teachers present the results of the classmaps survey in the classroom followed by a discussion regarding what needs to be changed and how this can be done. This classroom-based tool (classmaps survey) provides students an opportunity to actively participate in the process of classroom improvement. Hence classroom’s improvement is everybody’s responsibility and all the members of the classroom are actively involved in the process of change.

At a school level, Henderson and Milstein (1996) have described six basic factors that contribute to the promotion of resiliency in schools and that constitute the “Resiliency Wheel.” These factors are: (a) prosocial bonding, (b) clear, consistent boundaries, (c) life skills, (d) caring and support, (e) high/positive expectations, (f) opportunities for participation. These areas aim at reducing risk factors but at the same time promoting protective factors. Teachers can apply the resiliency wheel using specific tools and following specific methodological steps in order to design, develop, and implement specific action plans for promoting resiliency at a school system level.

The application of the conceptual approach for promoting school community well-being also integrated the basic dimensions of a crisis intervention model within a comprehensive promotion of resilience and positive school climate in the school communities (Hatzichristou, Issari, Lykitsakou, Lampropoulou, & Dimitropoulou, 2011). The crisis intervention model includes the following specific domains: (1) *Conceptual framework* that consists of three basic approaches: (a) Promotion of resilience and well-being (Hatzichristou et al., 2010), (b) Children’s reactions to crises (Hatzichristou, Lampropoulou, & Lykitsakou, 2006), and (c) School-based crisis interventions (national and international level); (2) *Education and training, Publications and Collaboration—Partnership of SP*; and (3) *Interventions—Prevention—Promotion of school community resilience and well-being* (Hatzichristou et al., 2011).

The interventions described at the following sections were developed based on the described multilevel approach that combines the important parameters of the school well-being model with the dimensions of the crisis intervention model (Hatzichristou et al., 2011) placing an emphasis on promoting resilience and positive school climate (see Fig. 14.1). This multilevel approach was the basis for designing intervention programs that addressed the particular needs of the school communities that aroused as a result of the continuous economic crisis in Greece.



**Fig. 14.1** Conceptual framework: multilevel approach of promoting resilience and positive climate in school community during unsettling times

### ***Practical Level***

*Connecting for Caring Project.* Responding to the current Greek crisis situation, the CRPSP of the University of Athens in cooperation with the Society for School and Family Consultation and Research developed Connecting for Caring (C4C), a multilevel prevention, awareness-building, education, and intervention project with the generous donation of Stavros Niarchos Foundation. This project is based on a holistic approach to foster positive development, adjustment and support of children and adolescents in the school and in the family. This scientific-based project is based on current international and Greek literature and 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, but also for school age and adolescent children. The optimal goal of this project is to launch a national and international school network of resilient schools in these stressful times.

This multilevel project includes the following domains of action: (a) *Intervention programs* in Greek schools that target all the student population and intend to

enhance resilience and self-esteem, strengthen social–emotional skills, and to develop a positive school climate and supportive environment in the classroom and school-wide (Hatzichristou, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d). The two first school-based intervention programs were: The “*Supporting in Crisis*” program and the “*E.M.E.I.Σ*”<sup>1</sup> program. The intervention programs include specialized teachers’ training seminars and classroom intervention; (b) *International intervention programs* and interconnection of schools in Greece with schools in other countries. The “*International We C.A.R.E. program*” is the first intervention program that was developed and implemented with the participation of teachers and students from six different countries; (c) *E-learning programs* (distance learning) and *Webinars for teachers and parents*; (d) *A school network* in Greece and in other countries that facilitates communication, collaboration, sharing of knowledge and experiences of teachers and students, as well as support and promotion of effective practices; (e) *Database of articles* on children’s and adolescents’ development and adjustment for teachers, parents, children/adolescents, as well as mental health professionals; (f) *Research and publications* that evaluate the process and effectiveness of the implemented programs and promote evidence-based practices; (g) *Scientific publications* for teachers, parents, and mental health professionals with the goal to promote awareness-raising and scientific knowledge, and (h) *Organization of scientific events* in Greece and in other countries.

*First Intervention Program: “Supporting in Crisis” Program.* The first program developed as part of the Connecting for Caring project is the “Teachers’ training and intervention program for the psychological support of children in the period of economic crisis (Supporting in Crisis).” This intervention program 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. Thus, 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; Hatzichristou et al., 2010, 2011; Masten et al., 1999; Masten, 2006, 2007). An extensive literature review on economic crisis and mental health, family relations, and education was completed (Chang, Gunnell, Jonathan, Tsung-Hsueh, & Cheng, 2009; Economou, Madianos, Theleritis, Peppou, & Stefanis, 2011; Harper & Jones, 2011; Thacher & Manktelow, 2007; Uutela, 2010; WHO, 2011). However, the distinct characteristics of the Greek economic crisis, an ongoing crisis that affects all the population, made it difficult to apply the current crisis intervention models. Thus, an effort was made to implement a culturally competent crisis response that accounted for the particular features of the Greek economic crisis with an emphasis on fostering resilience at a system level.

*Goal of the program.* The “Supporting in Crisis” program aimed to support and strength students’ and teachers’ resilience and well-being at an individual, group, and school community level through out-of-classroom and in-classroom structured

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<sup>1</sup>Ενδιαφερόμαστε (Care)—Μοιραζόμαστε (Share)—Ειθαρρόνουμε (Encourage)—  
Ισχυροποιούμε (Empower)—Συμμετέχουμε (Participate).

activities. At the same time, the program sought to explore the needs of teachers and students that emerged during the economic crisis in Greece. Specifically, the goals of the thematic units of the program were: (a) to provide knowledge concerning crises and children's symptoms and needs/ways of psychological support, (b) to strengthen teachers' resilience and well-being in times of economic crisis, and (c) to strengthen students' resilience and well-being through structured activities in their classrooms.

*Structure of the program.* The "Supporting in crisis" program included: (a) specialized teachers' training seminars; (b) development and implementation of structured classroom activities that promoted resilience at two levels—at an individual level aiming to enhance student's and teacher's resilience and at a group level promoting a resilient classroom (students and teacher); (c) development of educational material/booklet; and (d) needs assessment and evaluation of program effectiveness.

*Description of the program's thematic units and implementation.* The "Supporting in crisis" program included three specialized training sessions and a closing ceremony and implementation of structured classroom activities. The first introductory training seminar focused on the impact of the economic crisis on families and school communities, the crisis symptoms and needs of children and adolescents, and provided guidelines for children's support (Hatzichristou, 2012). The goal of this session was to build awareness of teachers on the effect of the economic crisis and how to respond to the immediate needs of their students.

The following two specialized training seminars focused on (a) promotion of resilience at an individual and system level and (b) coping and intervention strategies for teachers and schools. Specifically, the first part of the second training seminar included a presentation on resilience definition and promotion in classrooms and schools as a whole group. In addition, teachers were introduced the classroom activity that they would implement for a month. The first activity, which focused on the individual level, asked students to set and evaluate personal weekly goals as well as to identify their personal strengths or other factors (e.g., persons) that helped them to achieve them. They also received a personal booklet where they wrote down their answers on a weekly basis. In the end of the activity, students shared their goals in small groups and later as a whole class. Teachers also engaged in the same goal setting, completed their personal booklet, and shared their responses with their students. This activity aimed to strengthen students' and teachers' resilience at an individual level (personal resilience). This activity was selected because the process of setting and achieving goals has been found to act as a protective factor at a personal level (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). The second part of the seminar involved a special designed experience-based activity for the teachers in small groups in which they recalled personal stories of resilience.

The third training seminar consisted of a presentation on coping strategies for stress as a whole group as well as the classroom activity of this unit. This classroom activity, which shifted focus to the group level (classroom—students and teacher), asked students to work together as a class and set classroom goals, evaluate them weekly and identify the factors that assist them to achieve them. At the end of each week, students evaluated as a group whether their classroom had succeeded its goals. Similarly, students evaluated the weekly classroom goals by completing a

classroom booklet. Involving students to this activity promoted their feeling of autonomy, competence, and participation and helped them to realize their responsibility in achieving the classroom goals (Doll et al., 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 1996). In small groups, teachers received supervision of the implementation of the classroom activity of the previous unit (personal goals) and participated in an experience-based activity for the teachers that asked them to identify individual and group activities as a school that addressed the following six factors of resilience that had been identified by the literature review of resilience promotion: (a) Relationships, (b) Responsibility/Participation, (c) Values/Expectations, (d) Setting goals, (e) Self-esteem/Recognizing abilities, and (f) Recognizing positive elements. This activity aimed to help teachers identify empowering factors in their personal and professional work that can be a source of support in difficult times. In the closing ceremony, teachers presented examples of the implementation of the activities in their classrooms in an effort to promote best practices.

Building on the literature of resilience promotion in school communities (Doll et al., 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 1996), the goal of the thematic units and their activities was to empower individual and environmental factors of resilience and to strengthen coping of teachers and students during this stressing period of their lives.

*Educational Material.* During the training seminars, the participant teachers also received educational material that included directions of the specially designed and structured classroom activities with specific goals and implementation process concerning practical matters (i.e., time of implementation), as well as special considerations and modifications depending on students' age. Teachers also received personal booklets for every student and teacher, and classroom booklets. In addition, special educational material was provided to the teachers in order to advance their knowledge in the theoretical concepts and units of the program in the format of articles and small booklets. A special booklet on the psychological support of children in crisis situations was written and given to the participant teachers (Hatzichristou, Kati, Georgouleas, Lykitsakou, & Ifanti, 2012).

*Participants.* Three hundred and forty-four elementary and kindergarten teachers (K-6) from Athens and surrounding areas and ten graduate students of school psychology participated in the introductory seminar that was conducted in order to inform teachers about the program and to receive their applications for participation. One hundred and thirty-eight teachers from 29 schools (3 kindergartens, 24 elementary, and 2 special education schools) serving approximately 3,000 students were selected to participate in the subsequent three training sessions and implementation of the intervention program based on specific criteria (e.g., number of teachers per school, high-need schools).

*Assessment Process.* The assessment process consisted of two phases, the needs assessment phase and the evaluation of the program:

(a) *Needs assessment.* The needs assessment process was conducted at an individual and at a system level during the academic year 2011–2012 before the implementation of the intervention program. In the research 227 teachers participated

from kindergartens and primary schools from all school districts in the area of Athens and some surrounding regions. For the needs assessment phase, teachers filled in (a) a questionnaire regarding the effects of the crisis in their schools with close and open-ended questions, (b) the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) in order to evaluate the perceived stress that teachers were experiencing, (c) the School as a Caring Community Profile (Lickona & Davidson, 2001) in order to evaluate to what extent teachers perceived their schools as communities that cared and supported their members, and (d) open-ended questions regarding the existing difficulties in their schools (e.g., What are the main difficulties that you are facing in your classrooms and in your schools?).

The results showed that in relation with the crisis the main effects identified by the teachers were (a) children's difficulties to participate in school activities (57 %), (b) increase of intrapersonal problems (41.6 %), (c) less pocket money (38.9 %), and (d) increase of interpersonal problems (33.5 %). They also reported an increase in job loss for students' families and they pointed out that schools face severe problems regarding infrastructure (65 %) and building maintenance (46.4 %). Finally, collecting food and clothes was one of the most common actions organized by the school communities (54.7 %). The situation was similar regardless the area or the school district and it became apparent by teachers' words that the economic crisis has affected all the members of the school community. An interesting finding was increased stress expressed by teachers since 77 % reported high level of stress while 22 % reported a moderated stress level. The analysis of the open-ended questions revealed that teachers' main difficulties at a classroom level were: (a) problems regarding students' social and emotional issues, (b) conflicts between students, (c) students' learning difficulties, (d) difficulties regarding cultural, social, and economic diversity among students, and (e) difficulties relating to classroom resources. The difficulties at a school level were: (a) cooperation and communication among colleagues, (b) school and family cooperation, (c) school resources, (d) diversity school population, and (e) difficulties regarding students' psychosocial adjustment.

Based on the findings, it was evident 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 resiliency in their classrooms.

- (b) *Evaluation.* The program evaluation entailed the application of a multilevel evaluation model in terms of content and process, as well as the effectiveness. The results from the content and process analysis regarding the application of the program in the classrooms revealed important benefits both at an individual and at a system level. Teachers as well as students managed to enhance their self-esteem and their ability and to take initiatives through the implementation of individual and group goal setting and self-awareness activities and projects. The participation in the group activities empowered the relationships among students, among teachers, and between students and teachers, and created a positive climate in schools. In general, the program managed to cater for the

social and emotional needs of students and teachers, as these were defined by the needs assessment process, and to contribute to the promotion of resilient classrooms and schools. Finally, it should be mentioned that the pre- and post-analysis of the data received by teachers' answers on the SCCP scale showed a statistically significant increase for the means on the factors "*Friendship and Sense of Belonging*" [that evaluate the extent that students feel like members of the school community and that they belong in their schools according to teachers' opinion (M.S.pre=3.14 and M.S.post=3.34,  $t(77)=-2.27$ ,  $p<.05$ )] and "*Students' Respect*" [that evaluate the extent that teachers feel that students in their schools respect, accept, and care for each other (M.S.pre=3.25 and M.S.post=3.49,  $t(54)=-2.51$ ,  $p<.05$ )] after the implementation of the program. The findings show an improvement on students' relationship and on school bonding which are vital elements of a resilient classroom.

*Second Intervention Program: The "E.M.E.I.Σ." Program.* The "Teachers' training and intervention program for the promotion of a positive school climate and resilience in the school community (E.M.E.I.Σ)" was the second program of the Connecting for Caring project developed and implemented during the 2012–2013 school year (October to May) in schools from the capital city of Athens and surrounding areas. The "E.M.E.I.Σ." program was oriented mainly to the promotion of resiliency since the findings from the evaluation of the "Supporting in Crisis" program and the needs assessment revealed the need of school communities to enhance their resilience through a school-based intervention program. At the same time, as the financial crisis in Greece continued, an effort was made to design and implement a recovery response intervention program that helps teachers, students, and all the school community to proactively build their resilience and strengthen their coping skills against the distressing effects of these challenging times.

Thus, the theoretical background of the program integrated the literature on resilient classrooms (Doll et al., 2004) and resilient schools (Henderson & Milstein, 1996) with positive school climate (Blum & Libbey, 2004). Specifically, the methodology of classmaps and resiliency wheel were included for resilience enhancement. Initially, the classmaps questionnaire was included in the needs assessment phase and the analysis results were taken into account for the organization of the program. Secondly, the initial activities of the program adapted a synthetic version of the resiliency wheel that included values and goals at an individual and system level and features that students liked in their classrooms and schools and things that they would like to change. Students and teachers had to develop their own school/classroom resiliency profile using a methodology coming from the resiliency wheel and the classmaps design (see Table 14.1). Through this process, teachers and students discovered their strengths and weaknesses, they redefined their values, and they reset their goals turning them into action plans. It should be mentioned that the findings from the earlier program ("Supporting in crisis") and the resiliency factors that were revealed were incorporated in the resiliency wheel there for the class had to express values and goals. An important dimension for promoting classroom resiliency is monitoring and evaluating classroom's course by students themselves

**Table 14.1** Plan of “E.M.E.I.Σ” program implementation in the classroom for kindergarten and elementary teachers

Teachers’ training program and intervention for the promotion of a positive school climate and resilience in the school community (E.M.E.I.Σ)			
Thematic unit	Content	Examples of classroom activities	Recording (students)
Beginning of our journey	Becoming a team	Odysseus and his company	<b>“My personal goals”</b> (It should be completed before the first meeting, after the initial presentation of the program in the classroom)
	Values of our classroom	Our classroom’s luggage	
	Goals of our classroom	Where is our ... Ithaca?	
The island of Calypso	Emotions	One emotion ... Many situations	<b>Personal Booklets “Mythical journeys”</b> (at the beginning and the end of each thematic unit)
The island of Polyphemus	Stress management	I help myself—I help my friends	<b>Chart with the classroom goals</b> (at the end of each theme)
The island of Phaeacians	Social skills	The unsociable Mr. Mayor	
Scylla and Charybdis	Conflict management bullying	Everybody knows ...	
Our Ithaca	Closure-review	Closure-review	

(Doll et al., 2004). Therefore at the end of each thematic unit, classrooms have to conduct their own evaluation using graphs in order to see how well they performed in relation with their initial goals and what they can do to improve their performance.

*Goal of the Program.* The goal of the “E.M.E.I.Σ.” program is the development of a positive climate in schools in order to reinforce the individual and group resilience as well as the promotion and development of internal strengths, motivation, and skills in the school environment. Additionally, this program offers to the educators an opportunity to strengthen their own resilience and, at the same time, to support and empower students in the classroom. An important goal is also to develop a broader supportive network for the school community by covering the intense needs for psychological support, which have emerged from the current economic crisis.

The thematic units of program aim (a) to develop an intervention program that promotes positive school climate and resilience in the school environment, (b) to identify and strengthen the values pertaining the classroom and the school unit, (c) to process the social–emotional reactions in crisis among members of the school community, (d) to promote coping and stress management, (e) to encourage the development of self-improvement strategies in children, and (f) to comprehend and manage the patterns of aggressive behavior in the school environment during difficult times. In all its stages the program promotes the reinforcement of protective factors while at the same time tries to reduce the risk factors; the final outcome is to enhance the academic and psychosocial competence and well-being.

*Structure of the Program.* The “E.M.E.I.Σ” program included: (1) specialized teacher training seminars; (2) development and implementation of structured classroom activities. These activities were implemented: (a) *at an individual level* for each student, where the goal is to strengthen and support each child, (b) *at a classroom level* with the goal to create a positive climate and strengthen/support of all the classroom members including the teacher, and (c) *at a school unit level* with the goal to promote resilience and a positive climate to all members of the school community; (3) development of educational material/booklet; (4) promotion of a school network through an electronic platform; and (5) needs assessment and evaluation of program effectiveness.

*Description of the Program’s Thematic Units and Implementation.* The thematic units of the program were the following: (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. Each thematic unit included a specialized training session that presented the theoretical background/framework of the unit and especially designed and structured activities that teachers implemented weekly in their classrooms. The classrooms activities involved a journey in a series of “islands-stations” inspired by Ancient Greek Literature and Mythology (e.g., “The journey of Odysseus”). Each “island-station” represented each of the thematic area (module) and addressed the goals of each unit (two to three activities per module; See Table 14.2).

The first training seminar introduced the participant teachers to the theoretical constructs and applications of resilience, positive school climate, school engagement, life values, and goal setting. Additionally, teachers were presented the classroom activities of this unit that prepared their students for teamwork in their journey with the “E.M.E.I.Σ” program. In this module, teachers and students identified the values of their classroom and engaged actively in goal setting individually (personal goals) and as a group (classroom goals). The values of each classroom formed the values of the school at large. At the end of each thematic unit (island), students evaluated whether they had achieved their personal and classroom goals as well as the new knowledge and skills they acquired from the activities in their classroom. Classrooms were also encouraged to design special graphs of their classroom progress in the program towards the achievement of their goals (See Appendix 1).

The second training seminar focused on crisis management in the school community, the crisis symptoms and needs of children and adolescents, and provided guidelines for children’s support. A special emphasis was placed on the long-term reactions and needs of children since the programs were implemented a year after the beginning of the economic crisis. The classroom activities of this unit involved the first stop of their journey in the island of *Calypso*. After students were introduced to the mythical stories of this island, they participated in activities that helped them to identify and express their emotions as well as to deal with difficult emotions (See Appendix 2).

The third training seminar included a presentation on stress and coping strategies for students and teachers. Teachers participated in relaxation body activities that

**Table 14.2** Values and goal setting of the “E.M.E.I.Σ.” program (worksheet for teachers)

	Assessment (class profile)		Goals
	Positive aspects (what we like in our class)	Difficulties (what we would like to change in our class)	
Domains of resilience	Values		Reinforcement of positive behaviors
Development of positive social bonds		Relationships	Reduction of negative behaviors
Provision of care and support	} Opportunities for meaningful participation	Limits and discipline	
Clear and consistent limits		Learning	
High expectations		Positive oriented behaviors	
Social skills			

aimed to help them deal with their stress but also provided ideas of how to incorporate these activities in their classroom practice. The journey of the classrooms continued in the island of *Polyphemus* where students engaged in activities that aimed to help them to cope with stress and anxiety in their everyday lives (See Appendix 3). The theoretical framework of the fourth training seminar focused on social skills, conflict resolution, and bullying in the school communities. Enhancing social skills promotes positive behaviors and prevents aggressive behaviors in schools. Classrooms and schools that have a positive school climate and function as a caring community can act as important protective factors for promoting resilience. Firstly, students participated in classroom activities of the island of *Phaeacians*. These activities aimed to promote social skills in students (See Appendix 4). Secondly, students travel to the island of *Skylla and Charyvdi*. The classroom activities of this island targeted conflict management and bullying in schools (See Appendix 5).

The fifth training seminar presented information on teachers' burn out especially in crisis and coping mechanisms. At this point, the journey of the classrooms reached its end and students prepared for the closure of the program in their classrooms. Students reviewed their goals and accomplishments during the implementation of the program. Teachers and students also had the opportunity to choose one of the suggested activities (such as exchanging wishes that they had written in balloons) in order to complete their journey.

The training seminars also involved supervision of the program implementation in classrooms by the scientific team and especially designed experience-based activities for the teachers in small groups. The experiential activities created an opportunity for teachers to process and comprehend the concepts that were presented in the theoretical part, as well as to be better prepared to implement the suggested classroom activities. The program also included a closing ceremony where teachers presented examples of the implementation of the activities in their classrooms in an effort to promote best practices.

*Participants.* One hundred and twenty-five teachers and 3,200 students from 38 primary schools (1 Kindergarten, 17 Elementary, 4 special education schools) and secondary schools (16 Junior high schools) in Athens and surrounding areas participated in the "E.M.E.I.S" program during the 2012–2013 school year (October to May).

*Educational Material.* During the training seminars, the participant teachers received educational material that included the specially designed and structured classroom activities with specific goals and implementation process. The classroom activities were designed for three different age groups: Kindergarten to Grade 2, Grade 3 to Grade 6, and Grade 7 to Grade 9 (Hatzichristou, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d). In addition, special educational material was provided to the teachers in order to advance their knowledge in the theoretical concepts of the program. Students also received personal booklets where they evaluate their progress, knowledge, and skills from each thematic section.

*Promotion of a School Network Through an Electronic Platform.* Teachers also had the opportunity to share their work through the use of an electronic platform ([www.connecting4caring.gr](http://www.connecting4caring.gr)). Each participant school selected a teacher who acted as the school coordinator and was responsible for uploading the material from the program implementation in his/her school. In addition, the school coordinator had access to the shared work of the other schools. The inclusion in the program of the electronic platform facilitated communication, collaboration, sharing of knowledge and experiences of teachers, as well as support and promotion of effective practices through a school network.

*Assessment Process.* The assessment process consisted of two phases, the needs assessment phase and the evaluation of the program:

- (a) *Needs assessment.* Before the implementation of the “E.M.E.I.Σ. program” a needs assessment research was conducted during the academic year 2012–2013 with the participation of 141 teachers and 683 students from primary and secondary education. Teachers filled in: (a) the needs assessment questionnaire that included close and open-ended questions regarding the crisis effects on the schools, (b) School as a Caring Community Profile-II (SCCP-II) (Lickona & Davidson, 2001), in order to evaluate to what extent teachers perceived their schools as communities that cared and supported their member, (c) Perceived Stress Scale, PSS (Cohen et al., 1983), in order to evaluate the perceived stress that teachers were experiencing, (d) Organizational Commitment Questionnaire—Affective scale (Allen & Meyer, 1990) in order to evaluate how close and committed teachers felt towards their schools, and (e) “Personal Resilience Questionnaire,” (Warner, 2012) in order to evaluate teachers level of personal resilience. Students filled in: (a) the needs assessment questionnaire that included close- and open-ended questions regarding the crisis effects, (b) School as a Caring Community Profile-II (SCCP-II) (Lickona & Davidson, 2001), (c) Classmaps Questionnaire (Doll et al., 2004) in order to evaluate students’ perceptions regarding their classrooms, and (d) a questionnaire regarding social and emotional competence.

*Teachers:* In relation with the crisis consequences, the findings from teachers’ data confirmed the findings from the previous years with the percentages being somewhat increased depicting the worsening of the situation. Teachers’ answers regarding their concerns revealed that at a personal level they are mainly worried about family issues (how to create a family, maintenance of family’s happiness) (40.9 %), finances (39.7 %), quality of life (25.5 %), and the difficult feelings they experience as a result of the crisis (insecurity, pessimism, anxiety, lack of sentimental resources). At a professional level, they are worried mainly for their professional status (losing their job, lack of motivation, salary reduction) (84.4 %) and their unpleasant feelings (pressure, anxiety, stress) (17.7 %). The analysis also showed that teachers are asking help regarding ways to support students and parents during the crisis, to promote children’s well-being and psychological resiliency and to deal effectively with children’s behavioral and learning difficulties.

It should also be mentioned that the results indicated an increased feeling of stress on behalf of the teachers since 48.8 % reported high level of stress and 50.2 % reported a medium stress level. The findings also revealed a somewhat positive attitude and commitment of the teachers towards their schools and a somewhat moderate level of a sense of school community especially for secondary teachers. Finally, the majority of teachers (65.5 %) seem to have a medium level of personal resiliency.

*Students:* In relation with the crisis effects students reported that their families main problem is that they have increased difficulties to cover for the expenses (59 %), while 29.1 % of the students admit that at least one of their parents has lost his job. They report difficulties in participating in school activities such as excursions or cultural activities (50 %) while they report that they have less pocket money (30 %). Their main anxieties and worries are (a) their families' inability to pay bills and current expenses, (b) possible lack of food and other essentials such as clothing, (c) their parents' emotional state, (d) their future, (e) their own negative feelings such as fear, pessimism, and sadness, and (f) change of residence and living status. The results also revealed that students' scores were around the middle of the questionnaires scale regarding their feeling of their classrooms and schools as caring communities and resilient classrooms while most of the factors on the social competence questionnaire were just above the mean score. The most interesting finding was the statistically significant differences that were found for almost all the factors of the questionnaire used between primary and high school students showing the increased need for support that the older students require. This increased need was also evident by the teachers who expressed their agony and their ignorance on how to support their high school students and how to enhance their resiliency.

- (b) *Evaluation.* The complete evaluation of the effectiveness of the program is still in process. However, some preliminary results can be described from the process and content analysis that has been applied on the questionnaires that were given to teachers throughout the seminars and on the students' material from the program activities. The content analysis on the questions posed on teachers regarding the benefits of the program to their students led to the following categories: (1) *at an individual level:* (a) promotion of social skills, (b) expression and management of emotions and stress, (c) change/improvement of behavior, (d) enhancement of self-esteem/self-perception, (e) improvement in learning, (f) goal setting/puzzling; (2) *at a system level:* (a) enhancement of cooperation/promotion of team spirit, (b) improvement of school climate and enhancement of relationships, (c) motivation/goal setting as a team, and (d) acceptance/reduction of conflicts. In addition teachers acknowledged that the goals of the program's thematic units were achieved and placed emphasis especially on benefits regarding relationships, social skills, and climate which are basic prerequisites for the promotion of resiliency in schools. The benefits were especially stressed by those who participated in the program for a second subsequent

school year. It was quite impressive that the categories from the analysis were quite common regardless the classroom, the school, or the educational level revealing the similarities and the common needs of all students and teachers. Finally, a very encouraging shift was found regarding teachers' attitudes, from a skeptic and reserved attitude towards the program to a more positive one. Regarding students, the results showed that they seemed to have a very positive attitude towards the program acknowledging the need for its implementation. Students tended to focus especially on relationships and friendships both in relation with the goals they chose to set and the benefits they stated that they gained from the program implementation. The effectiveness of the program was especially evident by the graphs that were being constructed at the end of each thematic unit revealing the improvement towards the realization of their goals. The emphasis on the relationships and on goal setting and in particular the monitoring of the goal achievement at a group level is an important factor for promoting resilient classrooms (Doll et al., 2004).

*Third Intervention Program: International We C.A.R.E Program.* The third intervention program was developed to promote positive school climate and to strengthen resilience in the school community and to create cultural bridges and interconnection between Greek students and students from the Greek diaspora. The program was implemented between February and May 2013 in primary and secondary Greek schools as well as schools in other countries that include Greek language instruction in an effort to develop a national and international network of resilient schools as a caring community. This distance learning program was offered through an interactive electronic platform and contains teachers' training seminars, implementation of classroom activities in schools, use of an online interactive educational game (Sailing for Caring), development of a school network, and program evaluation. In the initial pilot phase of the program 67 teachers and 1,061 students participated from 32 primary and secondary schools from Greece, Cyprus, the USA, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Ireland.

## **Towards a Transnational Multilevel Approach of Promoting Resilience and Positive School Climate**

In this chapter examples of intervention programs aiming at promoting resilience in schools in times of crisis were presented. In addition a model of school community well-being was described that combined current trends and theoretical approaches in school psychology placing emphasis in positive psychology and systemic perspective. The proposed model considers *resilience*, *effective schools*, *schools as caring communities*, and *social-emotional learning* as important parameters of school well-being and constitutes the conceptual framework for interventions in schools.

This conceptual approach was further evolved incorporating a crisis intervention model as a response to the emerged needs of the school communities during the economic crisis in Greece. The distinct features of the economic crisis led to a need to differentiate the focus of the intervention programs. Specifically, the first intervention program was developed during the initial phase of the economic crisis. The goal of the intervention program was to provide immediate support to the members of the school community. The second intervention program was delivered a year after when the needs of the schools were different and the focus needed to be mainly towards the promotion of resilience and positive school climate. The current crisis intervention models were proven inadequate since they seem to apply to other types of crisis. This led to the evolution of the initial conceptual framework with the incorporation of resilience in crisis intervention pointing out the need to more holistic approaches to such cases.

The practical application of this model is evident in the intervention program “E.M.E.I.Σ.” This program aimed at the promotion of resilience at an individual, classroom, and school level and positive school climate in Greek schools (national level). Particular emphasis was given in the development of a supporting school network among the participant schools. The same conceptual framework was applied in the pilot phase of implementation of the “International Program We C.A.R.E.” with schools from Greece and schools from other countries of the Greek diaspora. The formation of this broader supporting school network (international level) required a differentiation in the content and goals of the program that accounted for the culturally specific needs. The program included teachers’ training, classroom activities, and online interactive game in order to promote positive school climate and resilience in a broader context. The next implementation phase of the program includes an expansion to schools from other countries using the English language. This economic crisis affects not only Greece but mainly other countries as well. This proposed multilevel approach can form the basis for the development of a transnational model of resilience building in times of economic crisis that can be especially adopted and applied in several other educational settings.

Various intervention programs at a school community level in different systems and cultures can be identified. The traditional intervention programs internationally are mainly domain specific (i.e., social–emotional programs, crisis intervention program, resilient programs). Most countries are affected by the economic crisis, which is a global concern for most educational systems worldwide. The distinct characteristic of the economic crisis is the long-term evolving process affecting many areas of family and school life. Therefore the traditional intervention models are not adequate to cover the changing needs of the members of the school communities. The proposed model is multidimensional synthesizing different theoretical domains placing emphasis on different goals depending on the needs of the school community at different stages of the adaptation process of the crisis. This transnational model takes into consideration the common and diverse needs of children and systems (common and culture-specific needs and adversities) and builds on positive potential, competencies, and strengths as a means of enhancing resilience at an individual (student, teacher) and system level (classroom, school).

## **Appendix 1: Thematic Unit A: Practical Model of Resilience Promotion: Identifying Values and Goal Setting**

### **Activities for Grades 3, 4, 5, 6**

#### ***Activity 1: Odysseus and His Company***

**THE LEGEND:** After many years of staying in Troy, Odysseus is making preparations for his return to Ithaca. A team of sailors, who Odysseus trusts for their experience at sea and their loyalty, sail along with him. Odysseus and his companions will have to cooperate in order to succeed in reaching their destination: Ithaca.

#### **Procedure**

In an effort to unite the potential of the class in a team that will cooperate as effectively as possible, we ask the pupils to divide initially into teams of 4–5 persons per team. Every team has to register each member's competencies. These competencies may not be only academic (i.e., he is good at grammar). Every team will unite their multiple skills in a poem/passage and will report to the class its synthesis. Then all the poems/passages are united in one, so EVERYONE's skills are evident in the class. The pupils applaud their team. They congratulate each other on their skills and they decide altogether for the name of the ship that will navigate them in the sea of myths.

**SUGGESTION:** At this meeting where there is mention of the formation of the co-sailors on Odysseus's boat, we can create work teams for our own boat. These teams will secure the best possible course, i.e.:

#### **ESTIA—HEPHAESTUS team**

(will be responsible for maintaining the class clean and tidy)

#### **ATHENA—CHIRON team**

(will be responsible for registering the course of the class keeping notes which will be cited at the meeting upon completion of the "Travel Log")

#### **HERMES—APHRODITE team**

(will be responsible for the transition of requests and thoughts of the classroom as a team to their teacher)

#### **CRONOS—REA team**

(will be responsible for the class security—from accidents or ... quarrelling)

It would be better if these teams would change formation every week. In order to avoid delays from the formation of the teams on a weekly basis, we can define from the beginning who will be in which team and when, and put the program up in the classroom. Every team comprises 4–5 individuals and it is wise for the choice to be made at random—draw—so that everyone gets the chance to work with everyone in the classroom.

### ***Activity 2: “Our Classroom’s Luggage”***

The crew of the ship has by now registered their competencies and it is getting ready to begin the long voyage. Before sailing, though, the classroom suitcase must be prepared carrying the necessary supplies, which will secure the best possible course of the ship in the unknown waters of mythical voyages.

#### **Procedure**

We divide the class into teams of 4–5 students. We tell the class that they must have along in their journey a common suitcase, which will comprise “things” that will strengthen and support the members of the team in order to face probable difficulties that may occur and which will delay their arrival to their own ...Ithaca. We, therefore, request from every team to register those stable elements that each of its members believe they will accompany him/her in his/her life; in the way of making decision, friends, and ways of life. The content of the suitcase must comprise the VALUES that each one holds, from all those or from that one thing he considers important in his life. (See teacher’s leaflet “*Our life: values-goals.*” Only the column on values is to be completed). For the completion of the leaflet, relative instructions are given. All registrations of the teams will be read in class and will be gathered symbolically in one box, in order to form the classroom luggage where the class can, if necessary, refer to in order to pick the “value” that will help them face the difficulties which they may encounter; in this way they will take new “supplies” in order to proceed with their voyage.

### ***Activity 3: Where Is Our ... Ithaca?***

Odysseus, upon the completion of the Trojan war, begins his return voyage to his home town, Ithaca. This voyage lasted 10 years; he faced many difficulties and many pleasant and unpleasant situations. All this time though Odysseus had one goal only, to reach his island, his home, his family.

#### **Procedure**

We ask the class to work in groups of 4–5 people. Every group must write down the things they like in their teams and three to five things they would like to change. The things they wish to change will form the goals of the class, their final destination, Ithaca. What do they wish to accomplish as a team? To have a good time, to help each other, to eliminate fighting, everyone to learn from it, etc. The goals of the teams are registered on the board. The class in a secret or open voting chooses 3–5 goals they want to succeed.

(The goals of the classroom are written down by the teacher in the relevant printed matter that was given at the first training seminar: “*Our class: values—goals*”—we complete the columns Our positive elements/Our difficulties/Our goals). For the completion of the leaflet, relative instructions are given.

We ask from a team to prepare a poster-sign which will be put up in class and will remind everyone the final destination—the team’s goals.

## ***Appendix 2: Thematic Unit B: Identifying, Expressing, and Dealing with Emotions***

### **Activity for Grades 3, 4, 5, 6**

#### **One emotion...many situations**

#### ***Goals***

- Help students recognize various feelings
- Help students understand that the same feeling can be expressed in different situations

#### ***Procedure***

Divide the class into small groups of 4–5 persons. Afterwards every team gets a colored cardboard, an envelope that contains the vocabulary of emotions and a number of drawings that show different situations of our daily lives. The children are asked to glue the drawings on the cardboard and then decide what words, from the ones given, are appropriate to describe the feelings the heroes of the drawings are facing; they can use more than one feeling for each drawing. When the activity is completed, every team will present its cardboard.

#### ***Discussion Points***

- What differences were there among the collages of the teams?
- Can there be different emotions for same situation?
- Is the same emotion always caused by the same situation?

*For example: can we feel angry for a lot of different reasons?*

- What is the importance of recognizing and expressing emotions for us and for others?

*We feel relieved, we communicate better with the others, we can empathize more easily, we understand and accept our emotions, we define our goals better, etc.*

### ***Materials Needed***

Four colored cardboards, four colored envelopes, labels with words that refer to emotions, photocopies with drawings that show everyday life situations, four boxes of pins, eight glue sticks, eight boxes of markers.

## **Appendix 3: Thematic Unit C: Stress Management**

### **Activity for Grades 3, 4, 5, 6**

#### **I help myself—I help my friends**

### ***Goals***

- Help students comprehend strategies and ways that can help them face effectively a situation that creates intensive stress.

### ***Procedure***

We place on the board two children figures made from cardboard (a girl and a boy), Aristides and Melina. We narrate to the pupils a difficult situation that Aristides and Melina are facing (i.e., they lost their beloved puppy). We mention what they did to cope with the situation but without solving their problem in the end (i.e., they start blaming each other). The class is divided into three teams A, B, and C. Each team is asked to “help” its friends to feel better, by suggesting effective ways of coping with the situation. Every team presents their proposals to the class. All proposals are registered on the board, in three columns, so that it is clear which team has proposed what.

### ***Discussion Points***

- For what reason are the children upset?
- How did the two children cope with the situation?
- For what reason did each team propose the corresponding solutions?

*Members of each team will have to “justify” why their proposals will have better results in this case.*

- Which is the most effective way of coping with the particular situation?
- Why are there different proposals?

*At this point, we must mention the way our individual differences, the specific characteristics of every individual, his/her experiences, etc. define the way he/she will handle a situation.*

- What can we do to help when facing a stress-generating situation?

*For example: think of what we can do or ask for help if we believe we cannot cope on our own, so to avoid impulsive reactions, etc.*

### ***Materials Needed***

Two cardboard figures, a boy, a girl.

Sheets of paper, one for every team

## **Appendix 4: Thematic Unit D: Social Skills**

### **Activity for Grades 3, 4, 5, 6**

#### **The unsociable Mr. Mayor**

### ***Goals***

- Help students comprehend the importance of social skills in everyday life

### ***Procedure***

We inform the pupils that their class has been held responsible by the Highest Council of Municipalities and Communities, for the DISORDERCITY. The situation is as follows ...

Mr. Unsociable is the Mayor of the DISORDERCITY. No one in this city says please or thank you. If he does, he will be punished by 10 days in prison in Mr. Eugenius’ prison. No one gives his things to others and if he does, he must pay a fine of 200€ to the treasury of NONSHARING. In case someone disagrees with a friend and does not fight, but simply finds a solution through discussion, he or she is immediately taken to the Peaceful Negotiations Detoxification Center. At the Municipality Council,

Mr. Unsociable has imposed a law that says they must all speak simultaneously. Whoever dares to raise his hand must hold it up for 5 days. It is forbidden to wait in line to be served at the cafeteria which is in the main square with the clock. Whoever dares to wait in line pays his juice and toasted sandwich more expensive!

The class must appoint two committees, responsible for the difficult task of informing the Mayor but also the constituents on the consequences of such a situation. The first team will draw up a letter to Mr. Unsociable and the second will write a memorandum for the people of the DISORDERCITY about what they lose by adopting Mr. Unsociable's instructions.

### ***Discussion Points***

- How difficult is life in an environment where there are no social skills and for what reasons?
- Who benefits in the end when adopting behaviors that include social skills?

*The individual, the class, the school, the neighborhood, the city, the society, since through social skills we all have the possibility to develop as individuals and offer the team we belong to, to society...*

- How do social skills improve the life of a society?

*Politeness, cooperation, management of anger, the will to wait in line, etc. secure to the members of a society a better life, more creative, without distractions from enmities and frustration, in which society we all offer and develop.*

- How many times do we feel as citizens of this DISORDERCITY and what can we do to make it change?

## **Appendix 5: Thematic Unit E: Conflict Management/Bullying**

### **Activity for Grades 3, 4, 5, 6**

#### **Everybody knows....**

### ***Goals***

- Help students realize that aggressiveness towards a schoolmate does not concern only those immediately involved.
- Help students realize that it is important to ask for help when we or anyone else is in danger.
- Help students understand the difference between “ask for help” and “be a snitch.”

## Procedure

We divide the class into three teams and we read to them the following event:

*These last two weeks every time Lyda sits on the bench in the school yard to read George's and Nina's company approach her. George makes fun of her using bad taste jokes and insulting comments. Lyda asks them to leave her alone. Nina laughs. After a while George throws her book on the ground and starts stepping on it. Stratos and Dimos, who usually sit near there, see the incident and continue eating their snack. Zeta and Peter ask the others to stop and leave Lyda alone. The abusive company blackmails all the rest. Mary and Despoina who have been watching the incident decide to inform the teacher about it.*

Every team must answer the following question.

*Who does this incident concern?*

When the students write down their answers the teams report them to the class. A discussion then follows based on the following discussion points.

## Discussion Points

- Who does this incident concern? (*The whole class. Pupils are members of a wider team, their class. Since they are a team, this incident concerns all the students and their teacher*)
- What is the reason this incident concerns everyone? (*Whoever observes, participates, hears, knows, acts by watching a similar incident, he/she is a part. If someone simply watches or reacts or takes some decision does not mean that he is a stranger to this, it concerns all of them*)
- Which part is the most difficult and for what reason? (*The most difficult part is of those who choose to be simple observes and not to get involved—because they know what is happening is not correct but they choose, for their own reasons, to keep a passive position—but also the position of those who react by talking to the abusers or notifying an adult because they may be the target of comments, particularly those who decide to ask for help, since they can be characterized as “snitches.”*)
- What is the difference between “snitching” and “calling for help” (*In the second case, we decide to protect someone who is in danger or faces a nasty situation and we want to help. The unwritten law of “I don't tell” can be applicable only when someone's security and dignity are not at stake*)

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