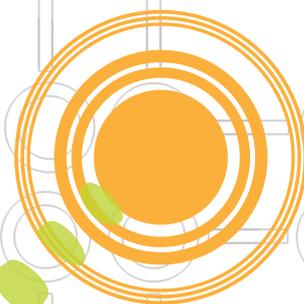


Vasileios D. Oikonomidis – Elias E. Kourkoutas
Editors

University-School partnership

Creating communities of learning



University of Crete
Rethymno, 2015



European Union
European Social Fund



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS
MANAGING AUTHORITY

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EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

University-School partnership:
Creating communities of learning



Employment and Career
Structure



University of Crete



Students Internship Office

Vasileios Oikonomidis – Elias Kourkoutas

Editors

University-School partnership: Creating communities of learning



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This edited book includes the proceedings of the conference “*Paid Practicum in University Departments of Education*”, Rethymno, 15-16 October 2012. The publication of this book was financed by the Internship Program of the University of Crete, which was implemented by co-finance by Greece and the European Union, under the Operational Programme "Education and Lifelong Learning". NSRF 2017-2013.

ISBN: 978-960-9430-13-5



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PREFACE

The internship program in Higher Education is a learning process aiming at linking education with the productive sector. As a learning process it adds to the students diverse experiences and familiarization with the environment in which they will be exposed after the end of their studies, when they will be asked to use the theoretical knowledge and particular skills in their jobs.

It is true that in Greece the idea of an internship (practical training) course or program within the study program of a university department was initially emerged in educational studies, as it became obvious that for the new teachers a prior experience in teaching or communicating with the young students is necessary for their efficiency, immediately after their introduction to the classes of students in their schools. Practical training in the medical sector and internship in engineering were also common practices in Greek universities in the 1950s and 1960s but the idea was not introduced to the mentality of the universities' educational strategy before the end of the 1990s when the Ministry of Education decided to strengthen the idea of internships at the universities, supporting it with an operational program partially funded by the European Commission. This support resulted in the creation of firm links between the universities and the productive sector and most of the departments added the practical training program in their programs. This new idea was well received by university students too, as they soon understood the importance of an internship for their future carriers. At the same time owners or principal officers and employees of enterprises or companies understood that working with

young university students even for a short time, is beneficial for their work as well, as the new skills and ideas brought by the students if appropriately implemented in the production process or even in their everyday routine, would have only positive overall effects.

The University of Crete was among the first universities in the country that adopted with enthusiasm the idea of student internship and most of its departments were involved actively in the relevant Ministry of Education actions. Today, the University of Crete is considered among the leading Greek universities in students' practical training activities and many innovative ideas and good practices originate at the departments of the University of Crete and are spread throughout the country. In this respect, the University of Crete organized two major events aiming at bringing together the experts in higher education practical training to discuss experience gained, and future trends and disseminating the conclusions to all interested parties.

This volume is the fruit of the coordination work of two excellent colleagues Profs. Vasileios Oikonomidis and Elias Kourkoutas who worked hard over the last years to organize the practical training activities among the students of the two departments of the School of Education namely the Departments of Primary and Preschool Education. Among their activities aiming at promoting the theoretical and applied research on practical training in education, was the successful Conference on **University-School partnership: Creating communities of learning** they organized in Rethymnon in 2012. Many experts in practical training associated with educational programs came to Crete and discussed their study results or experience. The book of proceedings edited by Vasileios Oikonomidis and Elias Kourkoutas, includes extremely interesting presentations of these experts and I am sure that it will bring an added value to the activities of our colleagues involved in the practical training of young teachers, as the links between education and society and the early involvement of the young students in the understanding of these links, is of primary importance for the success of the educational system.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Ministry of Education for the continuous support of the internship (practical training) program for the

Greek Universities and to my colleagues Profs. Vasileios Oikonomidis and Elias Kourkoutas for the excellent coordination of these activities in the School of Education of the University of Crete. Many thanks also to the participants of the Conference on **University-School partnership: Creating communities of learning** and to the authors of this volume. Their contribution in making the practical training of young students a real innovative and fruitful process, is highly appreciated.

February 2015

Professor Michael Taroudakis
*University Coordinator of the Internship Program
at the University of Crete*

INTRODUCTION

TEACHERS' PRACTICUM: AN ATTEMPT FOR UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP THROUGH THE LEARNING COMMUNITIES' MODEL

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The connection between University and Society is very important for the development of both of them. Society, depending on its needs for scientific knowledge, research and education, establishes and supports universities and the University offers its research achievements and new scientists in the service of society. However, apart from this general connection and interdependence between University and Society, many are the cases of closer collaboration through concrete actions: The Society finances and supports specific actions of the University and the University provides Society with qualified scientists, projects, services, and other actions.

An area that is considered to provide many opportunities for the collaboration between University and Society is the Practicum (Internship) courses and programs for university students. During these courses, university students work and research in specific places and institutions of the society, relevant to their field of study at the University (Hoban, 2007). It is considered that university students relate scientific knowledge acquired during their university studies with practical application in the social context. This relationship is mutually beneficial for both the University and Society: I) The Universities (students, teachers, courses) have a feedback from the linking between theory and practice and from the application of scientific knowledge in the social context in which knowledge acquires valued application. II) The Society is strengthened, supported by modern scientific knowledge achievements in various aspects of scientific, technological and professional life and is assisted in addressing several of its needs and problems.

Among universities, the Departments of Education search and study the treatment and education of man, and educate prospective teachers. Departments of Education consider that the Practicum is the prime course for the connection of scientific pedagogical knowledge cultivated at the University with the educational reality that exists in the Society. Thus, through Practicum trainee student teachers have the opportunity to have a first contact with the school culture, to combine scientific knowledge with the actual context of its application, to know better the issues and needs of the educational process and, through this course, to appreciate their knowledge, to have their feedback, to improve, to reconstruct their knowledge and practices, in order to offer more and reliable solutions to society (Gorodetsky, Barak & Harari, 2007; Freese, 2007; Kiggins, Cambourne & Ferry 2007). On the other hand, the school (teachers and pupils) have the opportunity to learn new ideas, new scientific evidence related to education, to experience through the application of new ways of teaching and addressing the educational reality issues, to renew scientific and professional knowledge, to modernize educational practices (Puitnik & Beijaard, 2007). In cases where experienced teachers take a more active role in Practicum, e.g. as

mentors (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Frydaki, 2013), the interactions between university and school are more intense and meaningful.

Within the framework of the Practicum, with the active involvement of university teachers, university student teachers, school teachers, community agencies concerned with the school (e.g. parents' association, Municipality etc.) can be established *learning communities* or *communities of practice* (*practice communities*) (Phelan, 2007), linking institutions (university - school) which have strong educational and social participation in the system of production and dissemination of knowledge (Milingou, 2013), but often appear as different worlds that coexist in the same society (Beck & Kosnik, 2002) without sufficient contact and collaboration between them (Bullough et al., 2004; Mamoura, 2013). In learning communities, participants work together as a research team to achieve learning goals, to tackle problems and to develop themselves personally, professionally, socially (Frydaki, 2009; Kiggins et al., 2007). Learning communities have a variety of forms depending on the participants (institutions and persons), the priorities set, the work undertaken, the procedures followed and do not get one and only form (Frydaki, 2009). Key features of the learning community is the joint definition of the objectives, tasks, processes, cooperation through dialogue, joint action plans, joint assessment, the potential to change objectives and procedures when required (Frydaki, 2009). In a learning community, participants engage in authentic real-world settings, collaborate and construct knowledge with peers and experts, engage in joint activities and problem solving, receive support from experienced collaborators (Mouza, 2007).

As part of the Practicum, the learning community which is established between university and school may take the form of a community of practice (Zellermayer & Munthe, 2007), in which all participants creatively interact and gain benefits: The university professors often visit the Practicum schools, discuss with experienced teachers-mentors of the student teachers, define together the student teachers' practicum framework, shape together the boundaries and intervention practices of mentors, organize brief trainings for the mentors, plan, monitor, discuss and evaluate together with mentors and their students the Practicum

of student teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000) and all together solve by common actions any problem arise (Abouson, 2007; Freese, 2007; Mamoura, 2013). This process leads to acquire common experiences and to develop strong relationships between academics, teachers, student teachers and pupils. The benefits are obvious: student teachers have a significant help for their professional socialization, experienced teachers and caregivers on education have an opportunity to reflect on their formed professional educational concepts and practices and to renew or to revise (Zeichner, 1996, 1999; Frydaki, 2013; Kiggins et al., 2007; Reid, 2011). Within this context it is obvious that the first contact and familiarization of student teachers with professional career places are achieved under the best possible conditions and teacher education acquires school-based education characteristics (Buitnik & Beijaard, 2007). Schools benefit because they obtain their own teachers continuous professional development, curriculum innovations, knowledge through research, troubleshooting and school improvement (Snoek, Uzerli & Schratz, 2008). In a such framework for collaboration schools transform themselves into communities of practice (McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). In these cases, the university and school collaboration is more than a simple placement of university student teachers in school buildings without no other substantive changes in school programs, philosophy or policy (Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008). For this reason Snoek and his colleagues (2008) argue that all schools should cooperate with universities, so that all schools should be able to benefit from this kind of partnership. The essential partnership between universities and schools must drive to "inter-organizational undertakings" (Teitel, 2003; Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008). If the institutions (e.g. universities and schools) which collaborate in a learning community share some common cultural and ideological beliefs and they are ready to act on specific targets (Mavroskoufis, 2009), if they take into account the aspirations, the purposes and the needs of each partner, and if they implement a flexible planning of partnership adjusted to their needs and conditions, then the learning community can work better and offer more to everyone and all the partners could gain the most benefits from this partnership (Gorodetsky et al., 2007; Snoek, et al. 2008).

In the university Departments of Education, particularly in those directed to primary education, the Practicum is an important aspect of their courses in all the countries and in Greece (Arrends, 2009; Karras & Wolhuter, 2010). Under the Paid Internship Program for Students, funded by the European Union during the period 2007-2014, participated the most of the Departments of Preschool and Primary Education of Greek universities, planning another, non obligatory for their student teachers Practicum course, parallel to the Practice Teaching which is obligatory for obtaining the university degree. The Department of Preschool Education and the Department of Primary Education of the University of Crete not only participated by organizing new courses for this Paid Internship Program, but they also had the initiative to co-organize a conference ("*Paid Practicum in University Departments of education*", Rethymno, 15-16 October 2012) inviting representatives from other university Departments of Education to present their own Practicum and all together to reflect on ways linking society with the university through the Practicum in Departments of Education. At that conference took part scientists from Israel, Italy, and Great Britain. After the successful conduct of the conference, we began the effort for issuing the conference proceedings. Eventually in this book are involved scientists who were not involved in the conference, so the proceedings of the conference became this edited book.

This book includes texts relating to various aspects of the Practicum and it is divided to two Parts:

Part I: University-School partnership: A contribution to support children with special educational needs includes articles about the impact of University-School partnership on support children with special educational needs.

In the first chapter of this book, Angie Hart, Ceri Davies, Kim Aumann, Etienne Wenger, Kay Aranda, Becky Heaver and Dave Wolff refer to the different approaches to mobilising knowledge in Community-University Partnership contexts which have emerged in the UK during

the past decade. Despite this, detailed accounts of the intricate texture of these approaches, enabling others to replicate or learn from them, are lacking. This paper adds to the literature which begins to address this gap. The case considered here concentrates on one particular approach to knowledge mobilisation developed in the UK context. It provides an account of the authors' involvement in applying the concept, and practical lessons from a community of practice approach, to developing knowledge exchange between academics, parents and practitioners. The authors' approach to knowledge mobilisation explicitly attempts to combat power differentials between academics and community partners, and problematises knowledge power hierarchies. The paper explores the community of practice concept and critically investigates key elements of relevance to developing knowledge exchange in the Community-University Partnership context. Specific themes addressed are those of power, participation and working across boundaries by community of practice members with very different subject positions and knowledge capitals. The paper concludes that Community-University Partnerships can be a useful mechanism for knowledge mobilisation, but have many limitations depending on the specific context in which knowledge mobilisation is being undertaken.

In the second chapter, Angie Hart, Derek Blincow and Helen Thomas offer an overview of Resilient Therapy (RT) and outlines a case study of how it can be used in practice. RT draws on the resilience research base, and has been designed to meet the needs of children in crisis by providing insights and analytical tools that help carers and practitioners build relationships of trust in the hardest of circumstances. RT emphasises Masten's notion of "ordinary magic", and the idea of the "Resilient Therapist" has emerged through practice situations with parents, carers and colleagues, and through work with specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. The core competences of the Resilient Therapist are outlined, with a case example providing an illustration of how RT can be applied.

In the last chapter of Part I, Elias Kourkoutas argue that an increasing number of children coming from complex family backgrounds when enter school are struggling with external and internal barriers that lead

them to develop strong social-emotional, behavioral, and academic difficulties. As for the behavior problems a wide range of them varying in form, persistence, and severity, as well as in prognosis are present within the school context. Such multifaceted behavioral problems reflect enormous variability on psychic dynamics and family backgrounds as well as social-educational trajectories. A high percentage of these children experience compound social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties and/or disorders not effectively dealt with by educational or professional staff and their families. Therefore, these children may progressively experience significant additional problems and psychological symptoms (e.g., socially withdrawn, learning disabilities, depression, etc.) that vary in severity and persistence. They may also have different chances to progress and different pathways toward a more serious mental health disorder over adolescence. Children considered as disruptive or antisocial in a high percentage display serious academic and school problems, mostly characterized by learning difficulties, lack of concentration lack of sufficient motivation, school (emotional) disengagement, and school drop-out in adolescence.

Part II: University-School communities of learning: A contribution to the evaluation of student teachers' Practicum includes articles about the evaluation of Practicum of Departments of Education in three Universities in Greece.

In the first chapter of Part II, Alivizos Sofos and Vasileios Paraschou present the philosophy of the Practical Exercise Program in the Department of Primary Education (D.P.E.) of the University of the Aegean as it was formulated during the pilot program NSRF. Central characteristic of the program is the concept of Mentoring, which was applied in view of an holistic model of stochastic and reflecting exercise of the students. The authors present the path to the formulation of the model of practical exercise through the collection and analysis of empirical data from the participating students about the mode and structure of the practical exercises. While presenting the program

philosophy we present a series of empirical data from the whole time span of the program, which were taken into account for its formulation and according to which the herein analyzed model of practical exercises seems to be improving the overall quality of the practical exercises in the Department of Primary Education both from the view of the students and the other stakeholders.

Persephone Fokiali and Chrysanthi Skoumpourdi in their article highlight the need for preparing students (a) to adapt after graduation to an ever changing labor market, and (b) to use knowledge and skills acquired at the university in professional fields or jobs relevant to their studies, though not always matching exactly with the stereotypical perspectives about their future profession. The chapter focuses mainly on the role that plays in this respect an Internship Program launched at the Department of Early Childhood Education and Educational Design of the University of the Aegean. The chapter consists of a theoretical and an empirical part. The theoretical part deals with two major issues concerning the links between university studies and the labor market. The authors refer, in specific, to (a) some radical changes in the labor market, among which the frequently transformed contemporary working environments and features of occupations, and (b) the Matching Concept, within the frame of which university studies should consider seriously the above mentioned changes. These issues were taken into account in the Internship Program with the aim of helping students to adjust smoothly in professional posts that are related either directly or indirectly to their studies. The empirical part concerns a qualitative presentation of the experience of student teachers from working, within the frame of the Internship Program, in public or private institutions. The focus is to examine how the students have used in the workplace knowledge and skills acquired at the university and whether their familiarization with specific working environments has broadened their prospects for future occupation.

Nektarios Stellakis in his article describes the planning of the Funded Practical Training of the department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education of the University of Patras and presents the evaluation of the first year of accomplishing it by the students and the

receptive kindergartens. He also presents research data, regarding the language activities that were designed and performed by the students, under the supervision and guidance of the kindergarten teachers. Documenting the activities showed that the students used to choose activities mainly for teaching the alphabetic code and the techniques of reading and spelling. Since this kind of practice is only a small part of the official curriculum, it is very important that the students, during the preparation time for participating in this program, want to be deeply informed about the practical training, which indeed enhances the emergence of literacy in preschool education

In the last chapter of the book, Vasileios Oikonomidis & Elsa Chlapana present an assessment of the Practicum at the Department of Preschool Education, University of Crete. They research the views of student teachers who participate in the internship, on issues related to the implementation of the internship and also to the benefits and difficulties arising from it. The authors present the results obtained from the processing of questionnaires completed by trainee student teachers when they complete their internship program about: benefits and satisfaction from the internship program, internship's compatibility with studies, adequacy of studies for internship, problems that participants face in it. The internship at the Department of Preschool Education of University of Crete seems to provide wide and varied benefits to trainees students participating in it, giving them the opportunity to experience other areas of formal and non-formal education beyond kindergarten and to work on other objects beyond the pure teaching.

All chapters of this book demonstrate through a multifaceted and multidisciplinary approach to the contribution of Practicum to the connection between University and Society.

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PART I:

**UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL
PARTNERSHIP:
A CONTRIBUTION
TO SUPPORT CHILDREN
WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL
NEEDS**

1

MOBILISING KNOWLEDGE IN COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS: WHAT DOES A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE APPROACH CONTRIBUTE?

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Introduction

Setting up democratic spaces for knowledge exchange (KE) via Community - University Partnerships (CUPs) is a challenge where, to oversimplify the dynamic, power and authority are often seen to reside

more in academics than community partners. This paper describes and interrogates whether a community of practice (CoP) approach helps develop such spaces. The authors have previously laid out the broad case for CoPs involving university academics and other members (Hart & Aumann, 2007, 2013; Hart & Wolff, 2006). In this paper, the focus is on a specific domain – related to supporting disadvantaged children and families – and some of its key dynamics (Hart, Blincow, & Thomas, 2007a).

The concept of CoPs has a complex, nuanced and theoretical legacy. The notion has been advocated within vocational education as a means to integrate and share academic, practice and research knowledge (Hughes, Jewson, & Unwin, 2007) and has found resonance with social and political theory acknowledging cognition and practice as intimately linked with particular social, political and cultural conditions (Henry, 2012). Simply put, CoPs can be described as communities created for sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise, with a membership committed to sharing knowledge and co-learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Smith, 2003).

This paper explores whether a CoP approach helped develop CUPs at one case study site. Four CoPs in Sussex, England, provide the empirical foci. Three of these were time-limited, with a closed membership of 11–20 members, meeting for 24, 14 and 12 months, respectively, at facilitated monthly 3 h meetings, between 2008 and 2012. They took place alongside an ongoing open-ended CoP advertised as a Forum, to which anyone ‘with a pulse’ and an interest in the domain was invited to attend (Hart, Aumann, & Heaver, 2010). Funding for the CoPs has come from a variety of external and internal grants. Local groups and individuals contribute their time in kind by attending or speaking at events, and conversing afterwards.

The authors of this paper have, between them, spent 1000s of hours observing, participating in and supporting CoPs for CUPs. An amalgamation of the learning that comes from this involvement provides the empirical content for this paper.

The setting up and running of the CoPs have been a close collaboration between academics, practitioners, service users and parents. In each case, the aim of the CoP, which was shared by participants, was to:

- Create a vehicle for KE to embed learning and strengthen the

capacities of both university and community sectors to tackle entrenched inequalities and develop further joint work.

- Offer an opportunity for researchers, academics, students, practitioners and parents, sharing an interest in working with disadvantaged young people, to develop their own areas of work, springboarded by approaches already developed locally.

This paper explores whether or not the CoP approach provides a useful mechanism for achieving these objectives through a consideration of critical incidents that have occurred over the life of the CoPs. The following section on CoPs for CUPs sets out the conceptual terrain in which the empirical material for this article is situated. Developing knowledge mobilisation (KM) through CoPs has many different facets, only some of which can be reported on here. The article concentrates on how CoP approaches can provide opportunities for co-production of knowledge that tackle issues related to power, participation and boundary working – issues often raised in both the theory and practice of CUP working and deemed most relevant in addressing some of the major challenges of using a CoP approach for KM in our empirical context.

The conclusion reflects back on whether or not the CoP approach taken here did help in achieving the aims of the CoPs, and explains some of its limitations in relation to KM for CUPs.

CoPs for CUPs

There is no clear consensus on what a CoP is, with disagreement within the literature over whether the term ‘community’ is even appropriate (see Edwards, 2005; Lindkvist, 2005; Roberts, 2006). Wenger and Snyder’s (2000) description of CoPs as ‘groups of people informally bounded together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise’ (pp. 139–140) emphasises their voluntary origins; people in CoPs want to work together in a way that enables them to ‘share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems’ (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002: 5). Wenger (1998) describes the core features of a CoP as: mutual

engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise. For some, a CoP must be completely organically orientated, whilst others, including Wenger, agree that they can develop through organised processes and outcomes.

Such divergence is indicative of the CoP literature more broadly. The evolution of the CoP approach has resulted in a literature that is fragmented, with inconsistent attention given to core conceptual and practice elements (which is further explored below in relation to the authors' own work). The variation in application of CoPs has resulted in a body of theoretical work that largely has its origins in mono-professional contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Orr, 1990), for example the development of a tailor's identity or the problem-solving practices of photocopier technicians, and offers varying degrees of analysis on the varying conceptual cornerstones of CoPs. This can also be seen in nursing practice concerned with professional identity and expanding professional capacity (Andrew, Ferguson, Wilkie, Corcoran & Simpson, 2009; Garrow & Tawse, 2009; Short, Jackson, & Nugus, 2010), teaching and pedagogy (Evans & Powell, 2007; Kimble, Hildreth & Bourdon, 2008), organisational learning and knowledge management (Bresnen, Edelman, Newell, Scarbrough & Swan, 2003; Coakes & Clarke, 2006; Gilley & Kerno, 2010) and more latterly interpreted into new domains such as virtual spaces (see for example, Dube', Bourhis & Jacob, 2006; Johnson, 2001). What this literature does not address is how working across multiple and often disparate contexts leaves a unique set of problems in relation to knowledge management and the development of democratic learning spaces. Not least because the power/authority dynamics that might act across a community - university boundary generate a relationship between 'othering' and knowledge (Said, 1978). This is not to suggest that such stratification does not act within more homogenous spaces but the production and re-production of practice in different social, political and cultural conditions (Lave & Wenger, 1991) requires more careful attention.

So can an assessment be made of the usefulness of CoPs in such circumstances? The approach taken here is to use the empirical material presented below to identify from albeit uneven coverage those aspects

that are most pertinent to the focus of this paper such as: How is power manifest in these spaces? How are different actors supported to participate in the CoP? What are the identity pressures on actors who operate across boundaries between domains in the establishment of democratic spaces for KE? This paper puts a purposeful focus on practice across domains by drawing on particular elements of CoPs to consider key processes and dynamics in the dialogic spaces that were attempted.

However, the CoP approach is certainly not a panacea to the difficulties of CUP working, which have been discussed in a large body of literature (e.g. Hart, Maddison & Wolff, 2007b; Northmore & Hart, 2011). However, it does provide a particular lens and orientation to relevant issues, and a mechanism for potential knowledge production beyond ones that simply assume translation of propositional knowledge to practitioner and lay communities. To help answer the above questions, a brief overview of this knowledge debate is necessary as power, the first of the themes identified as foci for this article and discussed next, relates to CoP theory.

Power

We look to social theory for concepts of power which provide starting points for an analysis of the empirical work to follow. Foucauldian approaches in particular alert us to archaeologies of knowledge (Foucault, 1969) but also draw attention to the intimate relationship between knowledge and power (Foucault, 1991, 1998) which correlates strongly to the deliberate creation of space in CoPs where forms of heterogeneous power are in process (Foucault in Crampton & Elden, 2007). Foucault is primarily concerned with relational processes where power means ‘a more-or-less organized... coordinated cluster of relations’ (1980: 198) and provides a useful starting point for thinking about how power might be manifest and understood in our empirical work. To do this successfully, consideration must also be given to how knowledge is used, exchanged, managed and contested within CoPs and recognition made of the connections between this and the powers in

process. This is further made critical by the cross-domain nature of CoP participants that drawing on analysis of knowledge production can help us understand. Gibbons et al. (1994) have written an influential account of modes of contemporary knowledge production across a number of disciplines, and how they change over time, leading to the emergence of less ‘traditional’ modes, displaying different characteristics, locations and focuses of production. This trend reflects current but increasingly problematised arrangements that see Mode 1 – considered ‘traditional’, pure, disciplinary, homogenous, expert-led, hierarchical, peer-reviewed and almost exclusively university-based – given primacy over other knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994). This is problematic if one accepts that there is more than one way to ‘know’ and produce knowledge through practice. Gibbons et al. (1994) worked to define a second mode, Mode 2 – considered applied, problem-centred, transdisciplinary, heterogeneous, hybrid, demand-driven, entrepreneurial, network-embedded and often increasingly handled outside higher education institutions.

Yet despite the richness of knowledge types and characteristics that these imply, simple binaries remain between what is considered expert – particularly where technical expertise tends to dominate discourse, displacing broader conversations in which competing perspectives and values might otherwise be explored. (Kinsella, 2002).

Hart et al. (2007b) suggest a mode that meets the specific construction, production and purpose of community2university working. Combining characteristics from the other four categories* they suggest Mode 5 – considered peer-reviewed, applied, heterogeneous, problemcentred, transdisciplinary and change-orientated, with a critical dimension of being ‘co-produced by the university and community’ (Hart et al., 2007b, p. 8). An argument could be made for also embedding Wenger’s notion of knowledge as practice. A practice lens defines knowledge as a practical, situated activity (Gheradi, 2009: 124) rather than a decontextualised reality. Whilst CoPs demonstrate much potential for developing Mode 5 knowledge, the CoP literature has been critiqued for not adequately addressing the concept of power. Fox (2000) suggests that CoP theory tells us nothing about how, in practice, members of

a CoP change their practice or innovate, and this may be limited or dictated by whether or how power relations are addressed. However, absence of empirical illustration does not mean that issues of power are not incorporated. There is considerable attention to power at the level of theory development – the latter half of Wenger’s (1998, 2009) texts provide a sustained discussion of such issues. Cox (2005) argues that CoPs betray origins of anthropology in seeing the community as self-sufficient and somehow improbably insulated from the dynamics and interplays of people’s lives. However, Wenger’s (2009) perspective on power acknowledges that there is nothing intrinsic about a CoP that would ensure power differences are ameliorated, that power can be positive and negative, depending on context, and that trust is a value present in these spaces, which contributes to supporting participant learning.

Participation

Issues of how, why, when and where people participate in communities of practice have been key concerns for CoP theorists. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), people initially join communities and learn at the periphery; the things they are involved in and the tasks they do have more or less immediate connection to the community. After gaining competence they become more involved in the main community processes and move from what is described as ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (LPP) into ‘full participation’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 37). Lave and Wenger (1991) locate learning in the increased access of learners to participatory roles in ‘expert performances’. However, there is also much to be learned from LPP roles. Wenger (1998) argues that learning activities have characteristic patterns, and LPP allows participants to view the whole enterprise. LPP demonstrates that CoPs can provide equal opportunities for participants to learn, that ‘experts’ come from a range of positions and, regardless of professional or other background, learning about the domain practice takes different people different periods to develop. Learning is, thus, not seen as the

acquisition of knowledge by individuals so much as a process of social participation.

Lave and Wenger (1991) further elaborate on the issue of where people participate in their discussion of boundary working. It is to a discussion of this theme that the article now turns, before exploring the case study material in relation to CoP theory.

Boundary working

Roberts' (2006) position that knowledge aligned with predispositions of a community, which supports the identity and practices of its members, is more likely to be adopted than knowledge that challenges identity and practice, provides a focus for debate in the CoPs literature. However, attention to what happens on the boundary of people's practices and identities is also seen as a key feature of CoPs, as this is where a great deal of learning takes place (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Individuals within CoPs can spend much time acting, working and thinking at the boundaries between their own knowledge and identities, and those of others. The CoP literature emphasizes ways to manage different perspectives, and help people cross boundaries. This includes the construction of 'boundary objects' (Wenger, 1998: 105) which 'create points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organized' (Wenger, 1998: 58).

A related idea developed by Wenger and Snyder (2000) and Wenger et al. (2002) is 'boundary spanners' – individuals who span different 'worlds'. This role creates connections between people from different organisations, cultures, sectors or localities, brokering and translating varying perspectives, and facilitating the application of ways of seeing and doing across different domains.

Having briefly outlined the conceptual terrain, the paper now considers the empirical data in relation to the issues introduced.

Power

CUPs by their nature rely on knowledge produced under different conditions, and the divide between propositional and experiential knowledge is stark. Using a CoP framework in CUP work ought to address such historic power asymmetries, which do not just exist over the production and validation of knowledge, but are present in real or perceived inequalities over space, professional status, resources and privilege.

Practitioner and parent membership always outweighed that of academics in our case study CoPs; however all CoPs were co-organised by an academic, hence the potential for privileging Mode 1 knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994). Consequently, from the start, it was considered important by the convenors for facilitators to support the expression of CoP members who might feel subordinated and attention was paid to creating dialogic space. One way was to ensure that the CoPs were facilitated by community workers rather than academics. Another was to ensure that numbers were distributed so that parents or workers from any sector were not attending alone. However, there is no clear evidence that this approach was better than having an academic facilitator or distributing the CoP membership differently.

It is hard to disagree that equal distribution of stakeholder groups would go some way towards members feeling powerful enough to contribute, and it is in the spirit of CUP work to provide opportunities for different members to lead. For Wenger (1998) such engagement transforms ‘communities, practices, persons, artefacts through each other’ (p. 175). And in this regard, engagement is an interesting dimension of power: it affords the power to negotiate our enterprises and thus to shape the context in which we construct and experience and identity of competence’ (Wenger, 1998: 175).

In the first CoP, parents were involved in domain-related training with the convenors prior to joining the CoP, and were very able to contribute and make use of the experience. This contrasts with the experience of parents in the third CoP who neither knew each other, nor had any prior involvement with the convenors, and were consequently slow to speak out.

Deciding the most appropriate venue for CoPs to meet is also relevant here. University facilities were used, largely to reduce costs, but also to help make university campuses more accessible and, in the eyes of some participants, to elevate the activity. However, again, the latter may have unintentionally reinforced the primacy of Mode 1 knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994) and academic knowledge capital.

The CoPs were trying to work to Mode 5 knowledge and with the exception of the peer-reviewed element, there are clear examples of where this was achieved: one academic in the first CoP asked a parent member to undertake domain-focused teaching with her on a university course module, a small group of members from different stakeholder groups collaborated to improve a particular practice and a number of 'buddying-up' partnerships co-delivered projects work together.

Despite attempts to prompt discussion and create a space where knowledge-bases were explicitly talked about and given equal status, it was difficult to engage the CoPs in dialogue about power differences. With the exception of individuals with traditional managerial responsibilities, there was reluctance from members to identify themselves as more powerful than others, and a preference to align themselves, irrespective of their role, with inclusive, respectful practice. This may of course have been a feature of this particular 'social care' domain.

Such connections back to participants' experiences outside of the CoP space bring us to consider the realities and interconnections of people's identities, experiences and actions that relate both inside and outside of the CoP. One way of framing these dynamics is to draw on Bourdieu's concept of 'field' in which 'to think in terms of field is to think relationally' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 96), with individual actors' positions in a field determined in part by the actor's 'habitus' and capital (social, economic and cultural) (Bourdieu, 1984). Fields mediate the relationship between social structure and cultural practice and frame a social arena of struggle over the 'appropriation' of certain types of capital and are constructed according to underlying 'norms' or principles. And thus, as in relation to Foucault, actors are able to take up positions of both dominant and dominated in relation to the exchange of capital.

Many workers explained that they were nervous about revealing what they might not know in front of ‘service user’ – parents. However, parents (less so the foster carers) feared making themselves vulnerable by being too open. Academics were often less forthcoming about their expertise than expected by facilitators. Finding creative ways to encourage the sharing of perspectives on power is potentially of great importance, because power differences do express themselves throughout the life of CoPs. For example, in the first CoP, parents were at times so busy giving voice to their experience that it was difficult for others to disagree or offer an alternative view for fear of appearing to disrespect their contribution and academic rivalries surfaced occasionally. Sometimes individuals unintentionally silenced other CoP members with their eloquence which, however, was not always reflective of an individual’s status outside the CoP. Members of one time-limited CoP were awestruck by the contributions of a parent, despite parents often perceiving their own identity as the most precarious and low status.

One of the notable elements in each of the four CoPs is that there were many such occurrences that disrupted conventional narratives of how people are perceived and the positions they play in society. These can surprise people and ‘trick’ them into questioning their own, often long-held and unconscious, knowledge hierarchies and practices. CoPs can be places that allow people to perform and to come across in different ways. This is a key potential of CoPs for supporting KE in contexts like CUPs where knowledge hierarchies are historically embedded, and straightforward challenge does not always work. Given this potential, and the fact that continuity and trust are features of social learning spaces (Wenger, 2009) that help to minimize formal organizational power differentials to allow experimentation and KE, it seemed important that the time-limited CoP meetings took place regularly each month, and early meetings focused on building group safety and cohesion. In the main, continuity and trust were fostered in each of the time-limited CoPs; however, sometimes the differences were too great. For example, one particularly uncomfortable CoP meeting saw participants with conflicting interpretations of a practice

situation unable to resolve their varying perspectives, and on another occasion members disagreed about whether to focus on the domain or the group dynamic, leading to doubts amongst some about whether or not to continue. In the fourth ongoing open CoP, the capacity for joint enquiry into practice despite differences in power positions seems high. Now into its third year, this CoP has created a culture of exchange by providing a platform for academics, practitioners, parents, young people and service users, to present and discuss issues related to the domain. This may be related to actors now adopting different positions in a field of power and knowledge capital which may be affected by the transformative nature of engagement in learning and social practice that Wenger identifies.

Convened by academics and practitioners, it successfully engages individuals from very different perspectives. This may have come about because it functions as a broader holding space with no rigid membership and no commitment requirements; people come when they please. While this can make developing depth problematic, it does provide a space in which many people are engaged and confident to speak out, in keeping with Mode 5 knowledge production. On the other hand, this CoP may be operating well as a KE vehicle because it is overtly advertised and organised by the university, so that participants assume the quality on offer will be of a 'high educational standard'.

Coleman and Dionisio (2009) argue that if translation works well, the new configurations of knowledge that arise are less likely to reproduce simply the concepts and concerns of historically asymmetric relationships. Atalas (2006: 82) sees this kind of process as one involving 'alternative discourses' which leads to the reconstruction of social discourses that involve the development of concepts, categories and research agendas relevant to local conditions. In this way, greater scrutiny is given to themes of knowledge and power and how the politics of knowledge affects the framing and dynamics of mobilisations, as well as the deployment of information in struggles over meaning and interpretation (Leach & Scoones, 2007).

Power differentials then clearly exist in these CoPs and despite a number of different arrangements across our four examples they

are difficult to challenge directly. The action of power in process in these spaces can both deter practice at the same time as validating the enterprise. However, our case studies illustrate that the nature of these CuPs does demonstrate ways in which power differentials can be accommodated and moderated if trust between members is cultivated. Such an abandonment of historical 'archaeology' (see Foucault, 1969) which this engenders can have significant consequences for how to approach, understand and give rise to new discourses that may be incubated within the CoPs considered here.

Participation

Lave and Wenger (1991) talk of a CoP process where members learn at the periphery and gradually move closer to the core as they gain confidence to fully participate. All four of the CoPs in this case study set out to include members with diverse perspectives and roles. Individuals' different but equally legitimate expertise was openly acknowledged from the start, and as discussed above, exercises were developed to assist members to identify and share what they had to offer. However, it was surprising to notice how frequently members held back. Not allowing enough time for group trust to develop might partly explain this reticence. Introducing a common goal for a particular standard of practice may have aided participation, although this would have risked causing anxiety for less-confident participants. No ideal standard was set for what constituted a fullfledged domain-competent practitioner. Therefore, there was no specific identity that CoP members were honing through participation, or measure to gauge full participation in the practice of the CoP. Acquiring sufficient understanding of working with socially excluded children and families, and being able to pass that on to others, was the informal benchmark.

In the three time-limited CoPs, a range of participation opportunities was created by the facilitators. For example, individuals, pairs or small groups of CoP members had signed up to the expectation that they would plan a project involving the application, critique and/or

development of the CoP learning in relation to their own practice, which they then presented to the group, seeking constructive critique and input. Members reported this activity as giving them the impetus to develop in-depth understandings of the domain, and, for some, to innovate ideas for dissemination and/or development.

However, a minority were resistant to participating in these expert performances, and seemed to put little effort into their presentations. Inverting Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of LPP discussed above, facilitators identified what might be termed 'Illegitimate Peripheral Participation'. CoP members participating in this way gave little to the group and were, in the facilitators' opinion, superficial in their work. For them, it seemed that mutuality, one of the key features of a CoP, was lacking. There is little in the CoP literature that helps to explain or creatively manage the group dynamic that this can generate.

While all three time-limited CoPs discussed and agreed group rules, only one CoP explicitly discussed how members might fail in their duty to the collective whole and although most established clear expectations of members at the start, sanctions that held others accountable were not absolutely applied. The convenors hoped that the CoPs would self-manage over time as trust grew. It was never considered that core members might drift to the periphery. In applying a CoP approach to CUP working, what counts as illegitimate, as well as legitimate, peripheral participation, how much illegitimacy can be tolerated and what it means for the core if there is drift to the periphery are all concerns. An awareness of LPP potentially enables CoP organizers to relax over different modes of participation, and establish different kinds of spaces accordingly. For example, the fourth CoP has an open and wide membership, and there is no obligation to attend every time. Given that this CoP takes less effort to organise, the convenors are more tolerant of peripheral participation in all its forms than in the time-limited CoP.

The other key issue regarding participation in CoPs concerns the domain knowledge level of the CoP members. In the first CoP, members were learning about the domain as they engaged with it and each other, which might explain the slow pace with which members embraced

the work and critiqued the theory and practice. On the strength of this experience, planning for the second and third CoPs was adapted to include training sessions at the start, to ensure members held a similar level of domain knowledge before future meetings. This seemed to aid participation; members joined in discussion more quickly and produced similar levels of outputs, despite the duration of these CoPs being half the time of the first.

The time-limited CoPs enabled participation by creating opportunities for members to express anxieties about being in a group with mixed membership. In the third CoP, most of those involved held only one worker identity and some were concerned that they may not fully appreciate the parent perspective. In another CoP, some practitioner members held no parenting experience and were worried that they may be viewed as 'fraudulent' when trying to examine ways of supporting children and young people. Parents expressed concern that having never embarked on formal study, they would not be able to 'keep up', and were intimidated by the presence of academics, whilst some academics expressed concern that their knowledge-base may not be relevant to others. Such perspectives give rise to questions of how the 'gaps' between these positions may lessen and that these different knowledge positions can begin to recognise each other.

Thus far, this article has considered the practices of people with singular identities. The following section concerns a mode of enabling and sharing learning that can be seen by focusing on working at the boundaries of people's practice, including by those with more than one identity relevant to the domain.

Boundary working

One of the key attractions for adopting a CoP approach is its promise for bringing different perspectives together to consider a common problem, with the aim of finding solutions. Working at the boundaries of people's practice, boundary spanning different worlds and creating boundary objects were all clear features of this CoP case study.

It is not hard to imagine how bringing parents, academics and practitioners together to examine working practice might create considerable rethinking or realignment of views and practice application, as Lave and Wenger (1991) predict. However, the complexity and level of activity at the boundaries was quite surprising. Two types of boundary activity were observed. First, members were working across boundaries inside the time-limited CoPs as they communicated and learnt about each others' approaches; second, they were also working across boundaries outside the CoPs, as they engaged in discussion or tested learning with colleagues and family contacts who were not CoP members. This second outside boundary activity generated an unexpected demand on the time-limited CoPs that is not mentioned in the CoP literature. The CoPs and, probably more accurately, the domain with which they were working, grew in popularity as members interacted outside the CoPs, and generated interest and enthusiasm with outsiders, who wanted to be involved in some way. Requests for information, seminars, training, advice, consultancy, etc. increased to the point that creating a fourth open CoP was considered one way of helping to manage demand. However, while the fourth CoP is well attended, it only goes part of the way towards this end. As mentioned earlier, some CoP members have felt able to give talks and workshops, and convenors look out for people to take on this function. However, most do not get involved, because they have other priorities or fail to acquire appropriate understanding of the domain to match the requests received.

This CoP case study confirms Lave and Wenger's (1991) view that boundary spanners are particularly important in CoP work. Individuals who can bridge different worlds because they have experience of them all can help manage differences positively. For example, in the first time-limited CoP a few members with parent identities were sceptical about the value of getting involved; however, noticing that at least two individuals were both academics/practitioners and parents demonstrated the capacity to cross and incorporate different worlds, and generated a sense of trust and validity for parent members. Interestingly, Roberts' (2006) belief that knowledge aligned with predispositions of a community, which supports the identity and current practices of its members, is more likely to be

adopted than knowledge that challenges current identity and practice, was confirmed in this study. The very essence of these case study CoPs was designed to challenge usual practice by drawing on and incorporating different ideas and approaches. The CoPs brought different perspectives together to consider ways to support socially excluded children, and while the three stakeholder groups held in common an interest in the problem, they lacked a shared identity or practice. In hindsight, more thought could have been given to the role of boundary spanners in this regard. In the first time-limited CoP, one individual held all three stakeholder identities and when it came to task and role, some other members of the CoP expressed a resistance to blending identities and practices – they wanted this individual ‘boundary spanner’ to remain congruent with one identity or another, and not overlap them.

Curiously, the CoP made less demands on the other two CoP members who were both parents and practitioners and less conflicted about their roles. It may well be that what was observed was the CoP’s high expectation of the academic identity, and their preference to protect its dilution with other practices. If knowledge that challenges current identity and practice is what is sought, then the presence of boundary spanners seems crucial, although it may be here that the tension involved in adopting new knowledge gets located; boundary spanners risk absorbing the frustrations and anxieties of the CoP.

The presence of boundary spanners was not always one of challenge. Individual boundary spanners were observed as key agents for creating straightforward links between different worlds. In the second time-limited CoP, one member was both a practitioner and a parent and translated theoretical concepts into everyday practice language and tools that others then adopted, and vice versa practitioners realigned their thinking and practice as a result of gaining access to another world via the boundary spanners’ contribution. In all three time-limited CoPs, a number of practitioners and parents engaged in joint project work which was facilitated by at least one boundary spanner.

In the first time-limited CoP, Wenger et al.’s (2002) positive spin on ‘boundary crossing’ (p. 153) was accepted because of the potential for people to look afresh at their own assumptions and create new

‘landscapes of practice’. However, this was not always easy to achieve. The largest perceived mismatch in the practices brought to the CoP was during recruitment, where some felt they would not learn enough from others with a different practice-base to make it worthwhile joining, and the less convinced academics or community partners were uncertain about prioritizing extra time and resources to work in this way. Little attitudinal shift occurred for those individuals who started out with such reservations when they joined the CoP.

Additionally the presence of boundary spanners did not aid boundary crossing in all areas. For example, even though an academic was also a practitioner and a parent in the first time-limited CoP, it was extremely difficult to persuade non academics to read the literature. Instead, non-academic members relied on academics to translate the research-based messages for them, and considered this their particular offering. Consequently, thought was given to different ways to encourage reading, and in the second time-limited CoP members agreed to share out and summarise journal articles, with time allocated for discussion. People were further helped to cross boundaries that might have traditionally kept them apart by the construction of boundary objects. Having examined the CoP literature, considerable focus was given to co-creating things together as a way of developing learning and bridging differences – a shared language and terminology, materials and resources related to the domain, and ways of thinking that helped individuals connect with each other. Although this did not always work, it was useful for developing shared identities and practice. Often it was in the doing and making that more seamless boundary crossing was witnessed. For example, the first time-limited CoP drew on arts-based methods to construct a communal tablecloth representing members’ individual understanding of the work; the second time-limited CoP facilitated members buddying to produce games to use in different settings by practitioners, parents or students, and the third time-limited CoP designed and tested exercises to disseminate their learning to their respective staff teams.

It would have been helpful to have given more thought to the critical role of boundary spanners and how to use their experience to bridge differences. Plus, to avoid group confusion, it would have helped to

have been alert to the range of identities held by individual boundary spanners, in order to know which identity, practice or blend was being addressed.

Conclusion: the contribution of a CoP approach in mobilising knowledge for CUPs

The tentative conclusion of this paper is that the CoP approach has gone some way towards supporting mobilisation of knowledge for CuPs. A number of the original ambitions of the programme have been realised. For example, various stakeholders groups did come together and continued to meet, despite their differences. This fulfilled the convenors' goal of adopting a CoP approach to CUP work to establish working groups that cut across organisational and status boundaries. Furthermore, the largely affirmative findings of the small evaluations that have been conducted, and are currently ongoing (e.g. Aranda, 2011), suggest that those taking part have exchanged knowledge and realigned their thinking and practice in the process.

Support for the role of CoPs in CuPs can also be found by returning to the two original CoP objectives outlined in the introduction. All CoPs went some way towards creating a vehicle for KE that embedded learning and strengthened the capacities of university and community sectors to tackle entrenched inequalities and develop joint work. Knowledge was exchanged between very different stakeholder groups who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to share expertise and perspectives. CoP members freely chose to be involved and were eager, albeit sometimes nervous, to 'give and take' across knowledge boundaries. Further joint work between some is ongoing.

Regarding the second objective, the CoPs offered an opportunity for those involved to develop their own areas of work, springboarded by approaches already developed by the authors of this paper. As members planned project work to present, read the relevant literature in some cases, attended meetings, debated ideas or disseminated their learning to those outside of their CoPs, they developed further understanding

of the domain and either affirmed their existing knowledge – building confidence and skills in the process – or acquired new knowledge.

The confusion in the CoP literature regarding CoP formation may prove a hindrance for their development in CUPs. The authors of this paper were originally attracted to the notion of organic formation – drawing in anybody who wanted to learn to solve particular issues together – yet, saw the need for cultivation too, a confusion which may explain why they failed to give sufficient attention to technical pedagogical issues, such as learning styles and teaching techniques. For the authors, a key goal of choosing to facilitate the CoPs was to lay appropriate foundations for a ‘level playing field’ in relation to whose knowledge counted. They wanted the experiential knowledge of parents to be taken as seriously as that of a worker, and for both knowledge-bases to be as valued as those of academics. However, they did not fully appreciate the need for a ‘knowledge’ foundation level to be shared within the CoPs. This was partially rectified after the experience of the first CoP, when they decided to move the ‘formal training’ element to the start of the next two CoPs.

It is clear that on reflection, the authors were mixing free-flowing and cultivated styles. Hence, they were over-optimistic about how much self-managing CoP members would do. Whilst many had passion for learning about and developing the domain, they valued the holding spaces created, and the dedicated time and training input from the convenors and from external speakers. The glue that holds CoPs together is the activity they undertake, which provides opportunities for the creation of shared knowledge, often impacting on people’s lives and workplaces and needing careful support from CoP facilitators. Whilst there is much self-direction in CoPs, it seems unrealistic to expect them to flourish as CUPs without this.

Perhaps an organic self-forming and self-organising approach is more suited to CoPs focused on very new domains of interest. The CoP theory includes such an option and could be attractive to those wishing to create spaces that enable members to determine their own learning, welcoming dynamic group challenges that ensure that learning relates to real-world experience. However, there is little in the literature that points to how to create these spaces in practice (Hart et al., 2011).

The authors of this paper remain unclear about how CoPs assess or decide effectiveness of solutions or competency. In this case study, only one CoP set out to establish clear expectations at the start; however, it never occurred to the authors, or to CoP members, to set a standard by which to assess learning or competency. Even if this had occurred, some members may have balked at the idea of implementing standards, given some would fail. The potential for an academic to ensure that developments adhered to the general evidence-base was discussed; however, this was never followed through, for fear of over-privileging the propositional knowledge-base and introducing traditional assessment and testing arrangements counter to valuing experiential knowledge. Wenger and the early CoP theorists identified this issue by acknowledging that people learn differently, with different competencies and capabilities. For example, Wenger (1998) saw maximising learning capability as requiring all sorts of transversal processes that cut across dimensions. But this notion remains undeveloped. Perhaps a further limitation of a CoP approach in the KM context is that the approach emerged through participant observation on largely mono-professional practice, rather than in the context of bringing together diverse participants. Hence, although theory supports the approach taken in the four CoPs, there is little in the way of empirical material and practice development texts to help move the technical aspects of KM forward.

Nonetheless, this paper concludes that CoPs may be valuable arenas in which to develop further KM approaches. We have used them explicitly to create spaces where people can take non-traditional positions. Within these spaces, individuals can draw on different starting points to define and develop democratic learning spaces for knowledge production and mobilisation.

Notes

*Mode 3 knowledge is dispositional and transdisciplinary, whilst Mode 4 denotes knowledge that is political and change-oriented (for further discussion of Modes 3 and 4, see Hart et al., 2007b).

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2

RESILIENT THERAPY: STRATEGIC THERAPEUTIC ENGAGEMENT WITH CHILDREN IN CRISIS

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Introduction

Whether we like it or not, many children today will be growing up with multiple disadvantages. Despite our best efforts some children start off life on a trajectory of abuse, neglect or suboptimal care where an unequivocal time for early removal from such contexts is never resolved. Ensuring that families receive the benefits to which they are entitled, providing good family support and working collaboratively to alleviate poverty and inequalities are all helpful approaches to remediating the disadvantages children face. For other children who cannot stay at home there is accelerated decision-making, which moves them early on into adoptive placements with rigorous permanency

planning (Harwin, Owen & Forrester, 2001), a not uncontroversial solution. However, there will always be some children for whom decision-making is complex and protracted, and still others who are not being appropriately cared for by the social care system. These include children with special needs and disabilities who, as studies have shown, can routinely go unsupported (Audit Commission, 2003; Department for Education and Skills, 2003; Mukherjee, Beresford & Sloper, 1999). The domestic situations of a number of these children, whether at home with their birth parents or in the care system, may remain in crisis. In the context of the United Kingdom, these children are often referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Yet their problems are often seen as too difficult to engage in therapy. Many young people come and go through the professional system, with a series of brief and broken attachments that regularly mirror their domestic experiences.

In response, the authors have designed Resilient Therapy (RT), an outcome-focused strategic approach to meet the needs of just such children. Masten defines resilience as “a class of phenomena characterised by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001: 228). RT methodology strategically harnesses essential therapeutic principles and evidence-based mechanisms to find the best ways of helping children and young people “bounce up” when life is particularly tough. The authors refer to “bounce up”, rather than “bounce back” quite deliberately: many children have rarely, if ever, been anywhere worth bouncing back to.

There is a synergy between the goals of RT and our model of delivery. This approach is intended not only to help children be more resilient, but also practitioners to work more resiliently with them. RT also has major systemic implications for the way we organise and deliver services. RT is inter-subjective. The explicit aspirations, experiences and actions generated by RT happen between people. The intervention is designed to improve children’s functioning and can be applied by individual workers, parents and young people in many different contexts. RT emphasises fighting health inequalities on both an individual and dynamic systems level.

RT is designed to be used with children and families in many different contexts, implying that application in frontline work has to be pragmatic and adaptive to many different situations. Furthermore, Resilient Therapists care as much about imaginative strategic management of therapy as they do about micro-therapeutic interventions in the moment.

This paper focuses on applying the principles of RT to the interactions of workers or volunteers involved with abused or neglected children, including children with special needs, on an individual basis. Here, the term “therapeutic practice” is used fairly loosely to describe the work of any adult in a helping relationship with disadvantaged children (for a full discussion of the authors’ conceptualisation of “therapist” and “therapeutic”, see Hart & Blincow with Thomas, 2007).

RT draws from resilience literature, from workshops undertaken in the authors’ community of practice with colleagues and parents of children in difficulty, and from embedded knowledge, tested in “tacit” practice situations. This “tacit” practice is derived from the authors’ own child and family work in specialist CAMHS together with our experience of running resilience workshops with parents of children with special needs. One of the authors, Angie Hart, is also the parent of three children adopted from the care system. RT also encompasses the psychiatric, social work and family therapy work of our collaborators (Hart et al., 2007). Application of tacit knowledge has led to the development of new concepts not as yet articulated within the research base. These are presented as coherent elements of RT.

This paper outlines the core competencies of the Resilient Therapist; namely, accepting, conserving, commitment and enlisting. In RT, these four principles are called the noble truths. The contents of what the authors have termed, in their work with parents and young people, the magic box are then outlined. Each section is represented as a compartment or remedy rack. There are five such compartments: *Basics*, *Belonging*, *Learning*, *Coping* and *Core Self*. A range of “ordinary magic spells” is generated from each rack. To illustrate the utility of this approach in action, a typically complex CAMHS case

is also presented. Belinda's case study portrays an example typical of the authors' CAMHS work. The paper concludes with reflections on the practice implications of RT for work with the individual child.

Tricks of the Trade: The Resilient Therapy Magic Box in Action

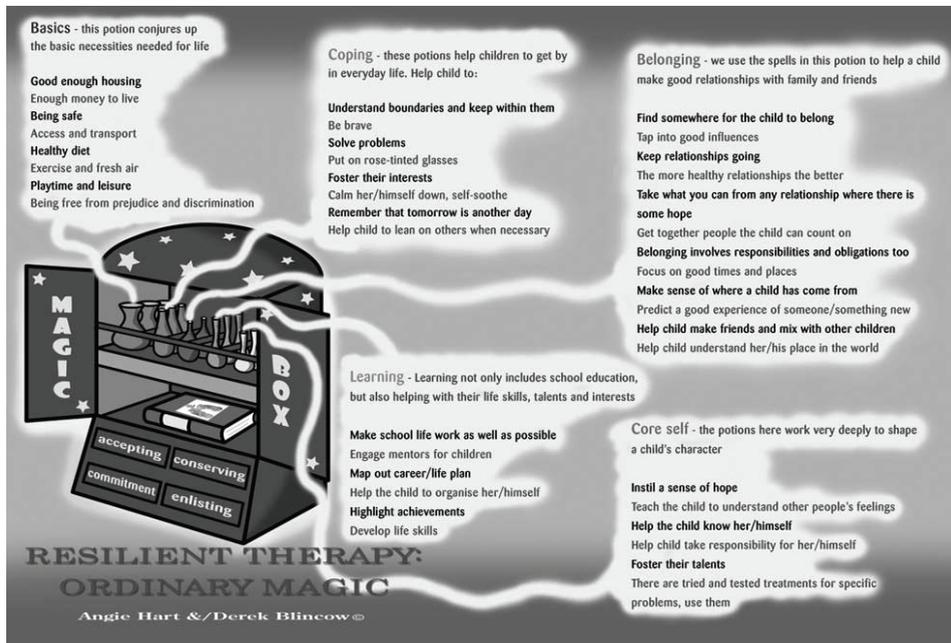
Following Masten, the RT *magic box* makes explicit the kind of "ordinary magic" that needs to happen to foster resilience in children. It encourages practitioners to work with imagination and creativity. This section gives a brief overview of what goes into the *magic box*, illustrating its application by drawing on a practice example (Belinda).

The Magic Box

There are five main conceptual arenas in the magic box (see Figure 1). For some audiences these conceptual arenas have been termed "remedy racks". The racks are *Basics*, *Coping*, *Belonging*, *Learning* and *Core Self*. As with all the categories, most of the "potions" generated from this remedy rack are conceptualized as direct applications of the research base.

Basics, *Belonging* and *Learning* include strategies and practices for use in working directly with clients but also involve therapists strategically linking with, and reaching out, to others. For example, *Belonging* is about helping children create better relationships. There is much evidence that *belonging* has been shown to be a key factor in resilience development. Some researchers even go so far as to argue that belonging lies at its very heart (Fonagy, Steele, Higgitt & Target, 1994). *Basics* does what it says on the bottle. It addresses the most basic necessities needed in life. *Learning* not only includes working on effective schooling for children, but includes helping them with their life skills, talents and interests.

Figure 1. The RT Magic Box. Note: text accompanying the illustrations has been written in a style that parents endorse.



While the authors have drawn extensively on the research base, there are also some strategies and practices that have been developed uniquely through RT. A key one here is “take what you can from any relationships where there is some hope”, referred to elsewhere as “hopeful attachments” (Hart, 2005). “Hopeful attachments” are people who care about the young person, but are not necessarily the people most involved with young people. Furthermore, they may themselves need considerable support to make the relationship work. RT is pragmatic and realistic about fostering “hopeful attachments”, recognising that in family contexts of great emotional and psychological fragility these relationships might in themselves need therapeutic nurturing. A further component of this potion in the *Belonging* compartment is that of predicting a good experience with someone or something new. Such optimism, expressed in practice, is about linking clients with other people and setting them up to have a good experience.

Core self and *Coping* each present a set of micro-therapeutic “spells” designed largely for working directly with individuals, possibly in

collaboration with cotherapists. The major difference between the two is that *Core self* focuses on working at an interpersonal level, while *Coping* provides children with strategies for managing better in the moment, rather than waiting for some deeper personal transformation to occur. Of course there is some overlap between the two, and like all the categories they are to some extent heuristic.

Case Example: Belinda*

Belinda is 10 years old and living in her 10th foster home in a year, the current one being 40 miles away from the CAMHS clinic she has been attending nearly all her life. Belinda lived with her mother, Louise, until she was three years old. Following severe emotional and physical abuse from Louise's husband, Belinda and her two half-sisters were removed from their mother's custody. After two years in care, Belinda returned home to Louise, who had by then moved in with another man. A year later she was rejected by Louise, who kept her two sisters. Belinda has been in foster care ever since and her latest referrals for an emergency psychiatric assessment (symptoms of dissociation) came from her current foster carer and her social worker. Their concerns centre on her "acting like she's someone else (she sometimes calls herself John), severe depression, self-harm, unmanageable behaviour at school and in the foster home, and constant forgetfulness." At the time of referral, she had just been excluded from her mainstream school where she received full-time one-on-one support. Her case is allocated to a family therapist, Jane, and a psychiatrist, Penny, who work together in the same clinic.

In the hands of the Resilient Therapist

Mechanisms and positive chain reactions in young people do not just occur by themselves. Resilient Therapists have an important hand in initiating change and ensuring continuation. By using the magic metaphor, we are explicitly recognizing our power as professionals to do the wrong kind of ordinary magic too: we can actually make things worse for children instead of better (Hart & Freeman, 2005). A cursory look at the files of children like Belinda provides clear illustration of this.

How we start working with young people is very important. If we want to make a difference it is essential that we engage with disadvantaged children in a way that fully appreciates the dynamics and details of their everyday circumstances and lived experiences. A core component of RT is what we call *noble truths*. These truths provide principles for practice and continuously inform how we work. The authors have conceptualised these as *accepting*, *conserving*, *commitment* and *enlisting*.

The first two *noble truths*-*accepting* and *conserving*-draw on Rogerian, Winnicottian and psycho-analytic theory. *Accepting* refers to the need for Resilient Therapists to engage precisely where their clients are. *Conserving* is a more complex concept, representing the authors' interpretation of the psycho-analytic idea of "containment" (Brown, Pedder & Bateman, 2000; Winnicott, 2005; Fonagy, Target, Cottrell, Phillips & Kurtz, 2001). The symbolism and metaphor through which the concept is explained relates to ecology and food technology. *Commitment* means staying with a case and remaining alongside clients through their difficulties. In the modern service, which is characterised by fragmentation and "promiscuity" with regards to client contact, this is far easier said than done. Practitioners and organisations have to work hard to make this a reality rather than rhetoric. Finally, *enlisting* refers to the process of establishing and engaging a team around a child with which to work, as well as educating others about the RT approach.

So how do these ideas about *noble truths* work in relation to Belinda? *Accepting* is evidenced by the fact that practitioners in this case were prepared to start at the point where Belinda and her family were, to understand in detail the mechanisms that would facilitate their engagement with any service provision. Jane (family therapist) took the step of setting up the initial appointments over the telephone with the social worker. She assessed that a meeting straight off with Belinda and her carers would have been anti-therapeutic, and would not have assisted in fostering hope for Belinda, a goal of RT. This was because, at the time, Belinda's carers did not seem to be in a position to contain their concerns about her. They needed the opportunity to give voice to their own distress before they could move on to being

recruited as cotherapists in what Jane and Penny (psychiatrist) had identified as key resilient promoting interventions for Belinda.

Regarding *conserving*, care was taken to determine and understand all attachments that, however problematic, could still be beneficial to Belinda. *Conserving* also involves accommodating the high degree of anxiety in the system at this point of referral. Jane made contact with the social worker and foster carer as soon as she could and explicitly stressed to them that she and her colleague Penny, a psychiatrist, were now alongside and would stay involved as long as they were needed.

Resilient Therapists also strategically connect with other “conjurers” (clients, practitioners and others in the network), trying to help clarify the value of a resilience approach. This is the essence of *enlisting*. Thus, in the case of Belinda, Jane and Penny shared their assessments (including Belinda when she became more available to them in a session some weeks later), negotiated a strategy and engaged able others to assist in the use of selected *potions*.

Drawing on the magic metaphor may assist us here. Finding the right *spell* holds an element of trial and error. But as others have argued, factors beyond those laid down in the “spell books” are relevant (White & Stancombe, 2003). The authors find it helpful to remain aware that therapeutic practice with disadvantaged children fuses art, science, organisational culture, monetary resources, policy directive and psychodynamics. Of course the *noble truths* are further guides to us here. For example, Jane and Penny must work with what is acceptable to Belinda and members of her networks.

As previously mentioned, RT is a pragmatic and strategic approach to intervention involving the explicit prioritisation of areas to work on. This approach does not appear at first sight to fit the resilience evidence base, given that, as some have convincingly argued, resilience research lacks theoretical development in understanding which particular mechanisms should be prioritised (Fonagy et al., 1994). Recently, the cultural specificity of individual resilience mechanisms has also been identified (Ungar, 2005).

Despite the conceptual difficulties in knowing absolutely what works for whom and in what context (Carter & New, 2004), we do have

some understanding of what kind of *spells* and *potions* we need in the *magic box*. And we also know that some *spells* or *potions* can be useful for most situations. We agree that the evidence base is not that instructive about whether to try, say, a particular *belonging* potion first and then a particular one from *core self*. *In lieu* of definitive answers that may yet be forthcoming from research, we have to mobilise personal judgement with the available evidence base to help formulate a plan of action in the moment (White & Stancombe, 2003). Therapeutic work with Belinda, as with most disadvantaged children, draws on all five compartments of the *remedy rack* (although in this paper the authors concentrate on *belonging*, *coping* and *core self*), incorporating *noble truths* strategically. In the case of Belinda, *belonging* and *coping* were prioritised for initial engagement, and we will illustrate the use of the *magic box* in relation to them.

Belonging tools were multi-purpose, being used to improve Belinda's mental health by working up what Jane and Penny had assessed as her "most hopeful attachments". Secondly, they were also used to engage tools of *coping*, which were used in collaboration with Belinda's mother, more of which will be explained later.

On assessment, Jane and Penny discovered that Belinda's "hopeful attachments" included her social worker and recreational key worker, individuals who, although exasperated and overwhelmed by Belinda, clearly cared about her and were committed to working with her long-term, particularly if they could engage others to help. They were certainly more stable attachment figures in her life than her foster carer at the time. In explaining their strategic method, Jane and Penny were explicit with these individuals about how important they were in Belinda's life, and shared with them the concept of "hopeful attachments" and how they could contribute to Belinda's progress meaningfully.

In devising a therapeutic strategy with Belinda, Jane and Penny were aware that, although relationships in such birth families are very difficult, young people often end up living near to, or with, members of their birth family. As such, they controversially identified Belinda's birth mother Louise as a hopeful attachment figure too, and encouraged joint therapy with Belinda and Louise in a fairly unusual therapeutic

strategy for young people in foster care. Although the pros and cons of contact between birth parents and their children have been debated at length, these relationships are rarely conceptualised as worthy of sustained therapeutic intervention in themselves (Archer & Burnell, 2003; Hart & Luckock, 2004). Prior to this CAMHS intervention, contact between Belinda and Louise had been sporadic, chaotic and emotionally uncontained, whilst contact with other extended family members was completely cut off. Yet Jane and Penny's initial assessment, to which Belinda's social worker contributed, concluded that Louise and indeed other extended family members were very important to Belinda. If carefully supported, Louise had some capacity to develop a more hopeful attachment with her daughter. Based on their understanding of the research evidence and their practice experience, Jane and Penny concluded that Belinda's depression, conduct problems and disassociative symptoms might well improve if they could engage Louise in structured and carefully supported therapy with Belinda. Careful stage-managed inclusion of extended family members within the therapeutic encounter was also included. Crucially, Belinda herself favoured this approach. Prior to the involvement of Jane and Penny she had not continued with any therapy offered to her.

Jane and Penny's intervention strategy can be understood in RT terms as a pragmatic, future-oriented strategy with the Resilient Therapists to improve the capacity of hopeful attachments as key. Psychotherapy and play techniques (including pool and basketball outside the clinic when therapy became too intense for Belinda or Louise) were used weekly for a year, and thereafter monthly, to help keep Belinda and Louise engage in a more realistic and sustainable relationship. These techniques were also used to help Belinda understand and reflect on her mother's rejection of her from the family home, and to use the idea of the cotherapist in a strategic way to enlist Louise's help in working with Belinda (Hart & Thomas, 2000). The term "strategic" is key here. Of course, it would be clear to most people that Louise was not able to be a mother to Belinda, let alone a cotherapist. And yet elevating her role in this way, at least for the therapy period, helped her engage with Belinda in a helpful manner, particularly by using coping tools. Tools of "understanding boundaries

and keeping within them”, “solving problems” and “calming herself down” were all tackled. So, for example, together Belinda and Louise role-played and video-recorded dramatic scenes depicting some of Belinda’s particular difficulties. Under supervision of the therapist they enacted different characters, offering different solutions to past dilemmas, especially in relation to Belinda’s aggressive outbursts in the foster home.

Joint therapy sessions were supplemented by motivational psycho-educative letters to each of them that emphasised achievements and bolstered attachments. Meetings with others in the network, school visits and Looked After Children Reviews** were also undertaken as part of the RT approach. Crucially, the lead therapist, Jane, drew on the resources of a voluntary agency to provide a dedicated support worker for Louise. This support worker operated under Jane’s supervision as an apprentice to RT. She gradually took over the direct work, maintaining fidelity to the RT approach, employing the *magic box* and *noble truths* as Jane and Penny had taught her.

Application of findings from resilience research suggests that improved self-efficacy for Belinda would in part emerge as a natural by-product of an improved relationship between mother and daughter. However, Belinda’s constellation of difficulties suggested that, in addition to fostering this hopeful attachment, some direct behavioural interventions were necessary. General child and adolescent mental health evidence demonstrates the effectiveness of focused work (Fonagy et al., 2001). Practice accounts of work with children with attachment difficulties, in particular, increasingly emphasise more directive approaches (Archer & Burnell, 2003; Hart & Luckock, 2006; Levy & Orlans, 1998). Belinda needed to understand quite explicitly how and why she was making herself unpopular with others around her, and explore strategies for alternative action. For example, in one therapy session Louise was recruited to role-play with Belinda how she might have acted differently to avoid what turned out to be a volatile meal at her foster home. Louise’s direct help in showing her daughter other ways of behaving helped Belinda understand that there were other strategies she could use in the future.

These examples illustrate how the issue of personal agency is dealt with in relation to disadvantaged young people. Disadvantaged

children are clearly not responsible for their adversity although their actions can contribute to its continuation. RT encourages them to move towards a positive internal locus of control, and to accept a degree of responsibility for personal growth, thereby addressing disadvantage through generating an ongoing counter-dynamic.

Key Challenges for Resilient Therapy in Contexts of Complexity

The above section offers concrete examples of how RT is used in relation to a particular child. The remainder of this paper tackles the case for RT as a wider strategic development.

As previously stated, RT models itself on key concepts from resilience literature and has the explicit aim of improving the odds for disadvantaged children. From a health inequalities perspective, this task is imperative. As current UK policy emphasises, we cannot wait in our consulting rooms for the most needy and vulnerable children to come to us: we have to go to them. They are the ones most likely to experience the poorest outcomes (Department for Education and Skills & Department of Health, 2004). Nevertheless, undertaking therapy with children when their lives appear to be either persistently in limbo, or chronically suboptimal, presents its own challenges. RT practitioners view these challenges in an optimistic light rather than as failings from an ideal that precludes effective work. Working in situations of multiple disadvantage presents challenges to practitioners at four different levels that RT is designed to address.

Practitioners are taxed *emotionally* when engaged in sustained, productive work where they feel there is little hope of positive outcome. When work is often experienced as stressful and demoralising, practitioners may invoke professional defences that leave clients feeling pathologised and blamed (Hart & Freeman, 2005; Menzies-Lyth, 1988). Consequently, work with disadvantaged children often has low status within organisations, meaning that often the least-qualified and worst-paid workers find themselves assigned to work with the most complex children with little support. The desire to superficially process these children

through the organisation, to locate the problem in the child's special need or disability, or to refer them on to other agencies and/or workers can be immediate and intense. So too is the need to ascribe responsibility for the child's future to other agencies. Growing fragmentation of the mixed economy of care in the United Kingdom and many other countries compounds the negative effects of professional defences. In response, RT facilitates productive engagement with children in the moment, rather than having to wait until their lives settle.

Technically, decisions regarding types of intervention and/or potential diagnoses can be problematic when a child's situation seems excessively uncertain or chronically depressing. In all instances, formulating the precise logic behind diagnosis demands therapeutic engagement allowing for carefully thought-through strategies. Some therapists may treat children narrowly in accordance with their professional training rather than looking first to the available evidence base, as RT encourages us to do. For example, the temptation to label children who display some extreme behaviours according to psychiatric categories can be compelling. Yet it is often more productive, albeit very difficult, to determine whether there is a serious mental disorder present or whether symptoms can be understood normatively, as a dramatic response to adversity (Grant, Mills, Mulhern & Short, 2004). Given the long-term implications of labelling children at a young age, treatment implications and loss of focus on context that may ensue, diagnoses need to be applied with caution. It should not be denied that often parents find such diagnoses of strategic use in the pursuit of material resources. Many would argue, however, that a developmental vocabulary of resilience can help practitioners avoid the exclusive search for pathology in accordance with a deficit model of child mental health (Masten, 2001; Wolin & Wolin, 1994).

Practically, resources often fall short of what might be required to begin to adequately address the extent of the problems identified. For example, caseloads are routinely large and over-burdening for government-employed frontline workers. Compounding this problem is the issue of how to get children to and from formal clinic-based therapy in a way that is therapeutic. Such transport can be time-consuming and may necessitate close liaison with birth parents, foster carers, social

workers, a range of related social supports and even taxi firms directly. RT provides a framework within which therapeutic decisions can be most effectively made given the resources available.

Finally, *politically*, engaging with disadvantaged children in crisis can be complex. These children and their families are not always prioritised by services and often have few advocates. Current government policy on services to children and families in the United Kingdom urges us to address health inequalities (Department for Education and Skills & Department of Health, 2004). However, in UK practice both CAMHS and social services have yet to demonstrate a coherent approach to addressing how therapists should best approach the health inequalities debate. Not all practitioners work with what has been described elsewhere as an “inequalities imagination” (Hall & Hart, 2004; Hart, Hall & Henwood, 2003; Hart et al., 2001), in which such professionals become more reflective and responsive to the way they, and others, work with disadvantaged clients. For those that do work in this way, a thorough understanding of the effects of health inequalities is at the heart of their practice, as exemplified by initiatives such as Just Therapy (Waldegrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka & Campbell, 2003). In RT, the context of inequality and social exclusion becomes a specific focus that is worked through in such a way that the therapist is not overwhelmed and eventually undermined by these contextual barriers to successful growth.

Also political is the current redefinition of resilience as more than the traits of an individual. It is important to focus on what can be done by practitioners to enhance resilience for children contextually, irrespective of each child’s personal capacity to overcome adversity. Hence, RT avoids what Masten, Neemann, and Andenas (1994) lament as a potential blaming of individual children for not having “what it takes” to rise above a challenging situation by constantly accounting for contextual factors of each child in a case-by-case approach. Nevertheless, the issue of individual or family traits cannot be ignored. Indeed, from a health-equality perspective it can be argued that children with weak individual capacity for resilience should be prioritised for mental health services. There is also a tension here between acknowledging the merit

of structural explanations for children's adverse situations and helping them to develop their own capacities to move towards better outcomes. In practice, the debate can become polarised, with one view leading us to see children as victims and another making them wholly responsible for their own destiny.

Resilient Therapy as Strategic Practice

As a strategic intervention, RT incorporates Bonn's (2001) three attributes required for strategic thinking: *a holistic systems understanding* of the organization and its environment, recognising the linkages and complexity of the various substructures and relationships; *creativity*, thinking "out of the box" for new ideas and frequent reworking of old ideas and practices; and *a vision for the future*. In relation to strategic thinking, RT methodology also requires a fourth attribute: *understanding what helps children and parents achieve better than expected outcomes and how to operationalise those mechanisms in routine practice*.

Beyond family therapy, the term "strategic" is rarely applied in relation to any therapeutic technique with children. In family therapy, however, there are some potent critiques of a resolutely strategic approach that should be noted. Reimers and Treacher (1995), for example, argue that family therapists' unbridled pursuit of specific goals has meant that ethical issues and any attempts for therapy to be user-friendly were often left by the wayside. The authors agree. However, this should not mean that strategic thinking has no place in our work. For practitioners, social complexity can lead to defensive practice and burnout. Whilst it is important to recognise these aspects of working with disadvantaged clients, it is crucial that we bring positive energy to situations. A strategic focus helps.

Peters' (in Reimann & Ramanujam, 1992) premise of strategic thinking as a method for finding a vision and obtaining perpetual invigoration from that vision is also helpful in the strategic approach of RT. As helpful is Ohmae's (1983) emphasis on the combination of analytic method and mental elasticity involved in strategic thinking, and

Mintzberg's (1994) belief that strategic thinking emphasises synthesis, using intuition and creativity.

A focus on the collective effects of social forces leaves the door wide open for mental health workers, teachers, social workers, parents and other practitioners to participate in the development of resilience in children. Rutter (1990) suggests that therapeutic actions need to focus on steps that reduce negative chain reactions. He argues that protection may also lie in fostering positive chain reactions. Although far easier said than done, attention must then be given to these dynamics in therapeutic planning. Indeed, what may count as trauma for some can prove for others in certain circumstances, resilience promoting (Hart et al., 2007). While some refer to this as post-traumatic growth, we call this inoculated resilience (Hart et al., 2007). RT provides a framework for the customised application of these processes to the individual child.

Practice Implications for Resilient Therapists

RT is reflexive, aimed as much at individual practitioners themselves as it is at disadvantaged children and their families. Consequently the *magic box*, the principles that govern its use and the particular interventions it contains can be seen as working to improve practitioner status and their own resilience in the face of required work and related demands. For example, by putting into practice our *noble truth*, *accepting*, practitioners immerse themselves in the detail of children's lives. For children like Belinda, one look at their files and this seems like a daunting task. The trick is to work out precisely what detail really matters, and then to work with that detail, as illustrated in our case study. Following others (Elizabeth Henderson, Independent Consultant, private communication, 2005), we refer to this as the management of effective detail, and see it as a vital skill in delivering RT. Understanding the right details about a child's life helps us to avoid generalisation, defensive practice and pathologising language.

Similarly, *conserving* means establishing all that is already working for a child and to work with this constructively, and not inadvertently,

through our therapy, undermining what are functional strategies. *Conserving* also means containing our responses and not allowing them to spill over into unmediated reactions. *Commitment*, in our experience has often proved to be one of the most difficult elements of RT for practitioners to embrace, initially, as the concept generates concern over fostering dependencies. Our experience is that *commitment* does the opposite, making real partnerships possible and countering defensive practice.

Enlisting recognises that therapists can rarely change disadvantage by themselves. However, at the same time we need to avoid collaborative confusion and the inertia that can follow from too much ineffective involvement by too many care providers.

Our *noble truths* underpin each intervention. Yet RT is customised, taking into account the complexity and multiple aggravating processes that maintain children's disadvantages. While understanding this, Resilient Therapists need to be fired by an inequalities imagination: there is always something we can do, however dire the situation. In complexity, little things can often make a major difference. Just one new experience for Belinda had the power to open up a completely new horizon for her. We have to be realistic but also hopeful in order to try and try again what we know might work. The relentless pursuit to make a difference is key in RT. Hopeful practice is active work. It also has the effect of boosting our own self-esteem as therapists, conferring an appropriate status to the work as a direct antidote to the more customary detached, defensive and demoralised stance that working with disadvantage can engender.

Conclusion

The above case study offers one illustration of how therapists can use the *noble truths* and *magic box* strategically to apply RT in a specific context. The framework provided by RT helps practitioners design and carry out interventions that enhance resilience in young people. It offers a user-friendly account of evidence-based strategies that can be merged in an application to one specific context. As we have found, the

metaphorical language of “ordinary magic”, “spells” and “potions” appeals to parents and children, going some way towards demystifying the complex language of resilience mechanisms and outcomes. For more information about parental involvement in the development of RT see Hart and Aumann (2007).

The case we have formulated demonstrates RT achieving positive outcomes; however, they are not definitive ones. RT accepts that work with disadvantaged children is often unpredictable and does not always follow as steady a course as we would wish it to. The potential for us to use whatever spells or potions we can to help children bounce up must be constantly held in mind.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to Jon Hingham who provided the artwork accompanying the text. The Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange Project and the Community University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton provided funding for practice development. This work has been undertaken through a partnership between the University of Brighton, UK, The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in Brighton and Hove, and aMAZE, a charity supporting parents of children with special needs. Thanks to Kim Aumann, Dr Alec Grant and Barry Luckock who provided comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and to Chloe Gerhardt for editorial work. Grateful acknowledgement also for the ideas and enthusiasm of the many parents and practitioners who attended the Resilient Therapy workshops co-facilitated with Kim Aumann.

Notes

* To maintain our clients’ anonymity, we have not given any details of a real person on our caseload.

** It is a legal requirement in England and Wales that children

who are looked after by social services be regularly reviewed. Looked After Children Reviews are required to alter care plans (see also DfES/ Looked After Children Division, 2005; <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk>).

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3

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DIFFICULTIES: INNOVATIVE METHODS AND PRACTICE OF SUPPORT WITHIN SCHOOL CONTEXT

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Introduction

An increasing number of children coming from complex family backgrounds when enter school are struggling with external and internal barriers that lead them to develop strong social-emotional, behavioral, and academic difficulties. As for the behavior problems a wide range of them varying in form, persistence, and severity, as well as in prognosis are present within the school context. Such multifaceted behavioral problems reflect enormous variability on psychic dynamics and family backgrounds as well as social-educational trajectories. A high percentage of these children experience compound social, emotional,

and behavioral difficulties and/or disorders not effectively dealt with by educational or professional staff and their families. Therefore, these children may progressively experience significant additional problems and psychological symptoms (e.g. socially withdrawn, learning disabilities, depression, etc.) that vary in severity and persistence. They may also have different chances to progress and different pathways toward a more serious mental health disorder over adolescence. Children considered as disruptive or antisocial in a high percentage display serious academic and school problems, mostly characterized by learning difficulties, lack of concentration lack of sufficient motivation, school (emotional) disengagement, and school drop-out in adolescence.

Most available studies (33 of 38 conducted between 1997 and 2008) have reported negative associations among antisocial behavior and academic achievement, positive social behavior, positive experiences with peers and teachers; although two longitudinal studies suggested that the relationship between antisocial behavior and educational outcome was more complicated than a straightforward causal impact of behavior on academic achievement or attainment (Rosen et al., 2010). It is however strongly supported by most studies that antisocial behavior, and in particular aggression, often alienates friends and peers, reduces overall social competence, and is a risk factor for other emotional problems and delinquency (Rosen et al., 2010).

Schools are important social academic contexts in which children, families, educators, and community members have opportunities to interact, exchange views and ideas, learn, teach, and grow. Schools should become places where all children can freely play, learn, perform, and interact in constructive ways. Children should be taught in educational environments that permit them to fully develop their social-emotional and academic competencies. Furthermore, children at risk or diagnosed with social and/or emotional problems should have easy access to specialized school-based assistance in order to overcome their internal limitations or eventual external barriers. Children with problems who are provided such supportive educational environments are more likely to internalize positive social-emotional and academic experiences. When they are well-supported by caring

and enthusiastic teachers or by specialized professionals, such students encounter less significant risk of developing mental-health problems during adolescence.

Even today in many regular school contexts children with various forms and degrees of innate or acquired disorders/disabilities encounter significant risks and obstacles in their attempts to fulfill personal capabilities, as well as to be adequately included. Some of these students—e.g. students with externalizing disorders—may generate/elicite with their disruptive or defiant oppositional behavior strong negative reactions from their teachers and classmates. In such cases, these children encounter additional risk of being permanently excluded from the social academic processes. Exclusion from schools and school drop-out has been highly associated with serious forms of social-emotional and conduct problems, as well as with marginalized or antisocial pathways in adolescence (Karcher, 2004; Osborne, 2004).

Characteristics of students with social, emotional, behavioral, and school adjustment problems

The taxonomic category of students with social, emotional and behavioural disorders do not represent a singular homogeneous group. The term is used to group a range of more specific perceived difficulties of children and adolescents. These students may be antisocial, aggressive, and disruptive; they may be socially rejected, isolated, withdrawn, and nonresponsive; they may show signs of severe anxiety or depression or exhibit psychotic behavior (see Mash & Wolfe, 2010; Petrovska, 2011). They may vacillate between extremes of withdrawal and aggression, and they nearly always have serious academic problems in addition to their social and emotional difficulties related to lack of motivation and low self-esteem. (Kirk, Gallagher et al., 2006). In addition, approximately 65% of all students with emotional and behavioural disorders have attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), 25 to 30% are identified as having a learning disability (Wagner, Kutash et al., 2005). Students with emotional and behavioural disorder often have

difficulty developing and maintaining appropriate relationships, both with peers and adults (Kauffman & Landrum, 2009). This may be due to the difficulty these students experience in detecting and understanding social cues, such as non-verbal communication and societal norms and expectations. These students' problems are severe, pervasive, and chronic - not minor, situational, or transitory. Students who experience prolonged problem behaviour and lost instructional time are those who are most likely to experience labeling, school failure, and substantially higher than average dropout and exclusion rates (Nelson, Babyak et al., 2003). The devastating cycle of problem behaviour, discipline problems, and exclusion from the learning environment has a long-lasting negative effect on many aspects of their lives.

Social emotional learning programs and specialized support for vulnerable students

Based on such considerations and research data, it has been suggested that the school should broaden its education mission in order to provide more specialized help for students with serious social, emotional, and academic problems (Christner et al., 2009; Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 2006; Erchul & Martens, 2010; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010; Paternite, 2005).

In truth, school social-emotional health investigation has flourished during recent decades in UK and USA, contributing to advancement of theoretical and practical considerations on how to organize better support services within classroom and school context for students at risk for exclusion and psychopathology (Brehm & Doll, 2009; Doll, 2013; Greenberg et al., 2003; Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck, 2005; Hatzichristou et al., 2010; Kourkoutas, 2012; Paternite, 2005). An increasing body of theoretical elaboration and research has been devoted to promote and investigate the effects of new school based programs during the last decade, such as Positive Behavioral Support and Social Emotional Skills training for students with behavioral problems, in combination with resilient classroom based and instructional techniques. Individual,

family, and teachers counseling programs have also been fostered within schools under experimental or practical conditions in order to get insight and evidence in how effective these new techniques. As a result, a huge number of such programs has been implemented within schools, often with limited or ambivalent and contradicting outcomes, regarding their effectiveness on symptom reduction and specially on prosocial behavior advancement, although (Greenberg et al., 2003; Kourkoutas, 2012).

Traditional psychoeducational approaches use to prioritize punitive techniques in order to achieve behavioral control and conformity to rules. Such practices have been largely questioned and criticized (Cheney & Jewell, 2012). They have been criticized not only from an ethical but also from a scientific point of view, on account of their long terms negative effects, as well as in terms of effective behavior as they often promote superficial conformity and not real modification or real improvement of the “problem” behavior (Brendtro & Shahbazian, 2004). According to many studies strict behavior approaches which center on negative or harsh punishments tend to increase the antisocial tendencies and aggressive counteractions (Cheney & Jewell, 2012; Kourkoutas, 2012).

Contemporary educational challenges for schools

If schools focus on behavioral disruptions reduction and on preventing the escalation of antisocial acts a huge effort is required in terms of teachers’ conceptions and attitudes about childhood disorders modification. In reality, a series of important changes are to be achieved at organizational, philosophical, and instructional-pedagogical level; as for example a whole school approach of critical situations that necessitates the whole staff involvement and collaboration, an active commitment of all teachers to the values of inclusive education, the acceptance of an extended teacher professional role, as well as an engagement in a partnership work with other workers and psychologists who can help teachers developing relative skills and design creative

and comprehensive strategies (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; Doll, 2013; Greenberg et al., 2003; Schmidt, 2010; Sharry, 2004). Implementation of innovative classroom techniques and approaches within or out of the official curriculum context is another issue of critical importance/value (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Salend, 2004; Salend & Sylvestre, 2005; Scheuermann & Hall, 2012; Shinder, 2010).

So as to alleviate the students' with social-emotional and behavioral problems academic inclusion, schools should be able to provide adequate services with a well trained educational staff, modifying at the same time the pedagogical goals and academic philosophy with the introduction of innovative curriculum and social-emotional learning programs (Casey, 2012). Such programs could help teachers fostering those students' interpersonal and academic skills, helping them avoid the social-school exclusion and, therefore, the escalation of violence.

In order to be attained such important changes in the school system, further research is required together with the advancement of sophisticated theoretical models that supply teachers a better insight into these students' internal reality and with new paradigms in education and school psychology (Brendtro & Shahbazian, 2004; Kaufmann & Landrum, 2009). More specifically, a paradigm shift is required in the way we conceive and conceptualize both the childhood disorder and the role of the school in dealing with issues related to mental health and academic risk and promotion. An analogous innovative paradigm is the ecosystemic resilient based and inclusive approach which can ensure a holistic and profound view of the child's family, social, and individual reality and the multifaceted and polyvalent role schools have to accomplish (Barbarasch & Elias, 2009; Fraser et al., 2004; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010; Rhodes, 2007; Weare, 2005). Resilient based approaches, as explained below, focus on the following: create a caring classroom climate and enhance positive relationships among students; promote teachers' and students' inner potential and engagement; cultivate shared values and a sense of belonging; enhance student's social-emotional skills. All these have consistently been shown to be related to positive academic and social outcomes among pupils, including those considered at risk of school failure and psychosocial difficulties (Cefai, 2008).

Inclusion philosophy and practice differ substantially from the earlier *mainstream* or *integration practices*, in which individual with various forms of (social, emotional, behavioural, or learning) disabilities were placed in segregate environments for educational or behavioural “remediation”, and then reintegrated into mainstream settings, once certain educational and behavioural standards were met (Bambara & Kern, 2005).

These approaches should take in consideration and boost the contextual and individual teachers, family, and children capacities and potentials, as well as to address the same levels risk factors in order to achieve significant and enduring changes in the school and family system (ecosystemic) (Brehm & Doll, 2009; Fraser et al., 2004; Rhodes, 2007).

On the basis of extensive research and clinical findings, it has been deemed that a flexible system of educational and psychological support can help school professionals and teachers to develop meaningful psychoeducational and academic programs (Kourkoutas, 2012; Kourkoutas, Plexoussakis & Georgiadi, 2010). These programs should be, in their turn, implemented in cooperation with parents and other professionals and adequately evaluated as to prove their value and effectiveness (Brehm & Doll, 2009; Brigham et al., 2012; Kaufmann et al., 2012; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010).

Overall, in order to build up comprehensive individualized interventions that fit both to each “problem” child and to the particular school unit dynamics, a series of critical changes should be realized in educational policy in general and in educational psychology theory, research, and practice (Adelman & Taylor, 2007, 2006; Bambara & Kern, 2005; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010). In reality, effectively responding to students’ behavioral problems and antisocial acts yet remains a critical challenge and a serious concern for many educational systems (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012).

A number of school-based mental health programs in the United States and in many other countries are supported by state authorities and are officially implemented within schools. Regardless of their theoretical and practical orientation, some of them are well evidenced

as promoting children's psychosocial well-being and school inclusion, whereas some others are not. Some primarily employ specific psychoeducational techniques while others encompass a variety of interventions including teachers' and parents' support, coaching, or training (see Christner et al., 2009, for an extensive review). Some are part of the curriculum, whereas others represent targeted intervention by external teams in crisis situations or on specific student populations. Some of these programs are implemented by interdisciplinary teams; others are more education-centered and practiced with the contribution of special educators or classroom teachers. Most of these programs are child-centered; others may comprise interventions with parents as well. Some also provide an array of evidence-based psychosocial and biomedical treatments, as for example the Intensive Mental Health Programs (IMHP) (see Vernberg, Roberts, & Nyre, 2008). Such programs may include individual therapy, group therapy, evaluations of medication trials, social skills training, anger management, relaxation, and instruction for resolving problems or conflicts skills. Services for medically fragile children are also coordinated and implemented as needed in specific cases in the context of these programs (Jacobs et al., 2005). The IMHP staff may also provide consistent consultation on the children's behavior across settings, therapeutic needs, and academic progress with parents, guardians, and other service providers in an effort to synthesize therapeutic modalities (Jacobs et al., 2005). Such programs organize service coordination with all other service providers to prevent piecemeal services between agencies (Jacobs et al., 2005).

On the whole, it is suggested that school-based mental health services to be effective should encompass a variety of techniques, strategies, and multimodal methods of intervention. Services should also include strategies for parents and teachers, as well as promote interagency and professional partnership collaboration (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 2006; Turnbull et al., 2006).

A growing body of evidence suggests that for a school-based intervention to be effective, parents and teachers should be actively involved in the case conceptualization of the problem, as well as in implementation of the treatment (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 2006;

Dishion & Patterson, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010; Nastasi et al., 2004; Reddy et al., 2009; Rhodes, 2007; Weare, 2005). School mental health investigation has flourished during recent decades, contributing to advancement of theoretical and practical considerations on how to organize better support services for students at risk for psychopathology (Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck, 2005; Hatzichristou et al., 2010; Paternite, 2005; Roeser & Eccles, 2014).

Contemporary research has revealed a series of basic assumptions that should guide practitioners in the design of school-based psychosocial interventions in order to be effective. More specifically, preventive or intervention programs which attempt to foster the social-emotional competencies of vulnerable children and the emotional and behavioral problems of children at-risk should consider the following principles (Brehm & Doll, 2009; Browne et al., 2004; Dettmer et al., 2005; Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2003, p. 470; Hatzichristou et al., 2010; Merrell, 2002; Nastasi et al., 2004; Ross, Powell & Elias, 2002; Weare & Gray, 2003):

- Schools should be open to and move toward considerable modifications of their organizational and inclusive philosophy, teaching theory, and educational methods in order to achieve the full-inclusion of children with exceptional problems.
- Support and reward positive social, health, and academic behavior through systematic school-family-community approaches.
- Foster a resilient and empowering perspective in school-based consultant and educational practice in order to enable students, parents, and teachers to develop their inherent potentialities and new competences.
- Multi-year, multi-component interventions are more effective than single component short-term programs.
- Competence and health-promotion efforts are best begun before signs of risky behaviors emerge and should continue through adolescence.
- Programming that has multiple elements involving family, school, and community are more likely to be successful than efforts aimed at a single domain.

For several years Elias and colleagues have emphasized how important it is to the healthy development of children to implement processes within schools that integrate the academic with social-emotional learning (Barbarasch & Elias, 2009; Elias et al., 1997; Hatzichristou et al., 2010; Merrell, 2002). Traditional approaches to learning are founded on splitting curriculum learning and knowledge from life learning and knowledge (Schmidt, 2010). In contrast, inclusive education has strongly recommended that educational communities develop partnership practices and a relative ethos that promotes the inclusive culture within schools for all troubled or exceptional children (Dinkmeyer & Carlson, 2006; Koller & Svoboda, 2002; Paternite, 2005).

Schools should link the traditional curricula with innovative educational approaches which emphasize the communities of learning and alternative ways of developing academic and psychosocial skills (Barbarasch & Elias, 2009; Lunt & Norwich, 2009; Merrell, 2002). Association with families, communities, and practitioners to establish and promote inclusive practices is an essential part of the contemporary inclusive education and inclusive psychology philosophy (Befring, 1999; Dyson & Howes, 2009; Kourkoutas, 2012; Rhodes, 2007; Urquhart, 2009). Research data show how crucial is the partnership between parents and schools with the mediation of school-based interdisciplinary teams to face the challenges of prevention and inclusion of all children, including those with manifested social, emotional, and academic problems (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006).

Resilient classroom and skillful well-supported teachers may really foster therapeutic relationships even with the most troubled students. A positive relationship with a supportive teacher in combination with an early specialized intervention, before the children's pathological defense and coping mechanisms become reinforced and crystallized, reduces the risk for the child to enter into an endless cycle of mutual rejection within the school environment (Fell, 2002; Kourkoutas & Hart, 2014; Heller, 2000; Urquhart, 2009; Salend, 2004; Weare, 2000). Therefore, it is urgent for schools to radicalize their inclusive policy and curricula by linking emotional development and teaching skills

with traditional learning and teaching processes. Furthermore, schools should be responsible to create a caring environment to foster students' inner potentials and competencies, as well as to contain their emotional and behavioral disruptions (Hanko, 2000; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010; Urquhart, 2009; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006). For this project to be realized, it is necessary to have teachers who are well-trained and who are committed to the inclusive culture, and willing to collaborate with school psychologists and other professionals. Taking on this perspective does not signify that the educational system and the schools should be transformed in clinical settings; it is rather the opposite. When educational staff is well-supported to face everyday challenges of pupils with social, emotional, behavioral, and academic problems, teachers are less likely to display negative or burn-out reactions. They become more capable of ensuring a positive and strengthening educational environment that is helpful and satisfying for students. If schools are not supported or are incompletely equipped and organized to face new challenges, teachers are more likely to develop burn-out symptoms and be less productive and less caring and supportive toward their pupils. Evidence shows that students with psychosocial problems are better served by school-based interventions than by traditional psychiatric settings (Merrell, 2002). The traditional psychiatric setting usually provides services that are limited to individual treatment without fostering partnership with teachers and schools. As a result, psychiatric settings fail to provide any kind of professional support for teachers and schools; therefore the chances of a holistic comprehensive intervention are reduced. Though many therapeutic interventions out of school are useful for a child with problems, data show that individual treatment based on the medical approach has limited success with school age children (Merrell, 2002).

It seems that teachers who are adequately trained and supported long-term by interdisciplinary teams become more competent to realize the inclusive project. When teachers are adequately trained and coached they are able to manage their students' behavioral problems within classroom and thus avoid referring them to external psychiatric settings (Miller, 2003; Nastasi et al., 2004; Rooney, 2002; Ysseldyke & Algozzine,

2006). In brief, schools should preserve and enrich their educational role by promoting child- and family-centered inclusive practices together with professionals in order to reduce the number of referred students and the secondary effects (pathologizing, medicalization of symptoms, labeling) of this process (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006; Weare, 2000).

Our working clinical educational model within schools is based upon the previously described theoretical considerations. More specifically, on the basis of research and clinical data from long-standing work with “multi-problem” pupils, parents, and teachers, we strongly support the hypothesis of a multimodal ecosystemic model as the most appropriate. A multimodal model which blends educational inclusive practices with specific clinical (group, family, individual) interventions aiming at buffering external and internal risks and promoting children’s, as well as teachers’ and parents’ competencies (Kourkoutas et al., 2015a; Kourkoutas et al., 2015b; Kourkoutas & Giovazolias, 2015).

Overall, to enhance the attainment and the social integration of all vulnerable or emotionally and behaviorally disturbed children, the following strategies identified by research (see Ainscow et al., 2006; Kourkoutas & Chartier, 2008; Lunt & Norwich, 2009; Rooney, 2002; Weare, 2000; Urquhart, 2009; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006), should be present in the school functioning and in the design of interventions:

- careful individual monitoring,
- flexible grouping,
- customizing provision to individual circumstances and strategies to for raising achievement,
- strategies that promote partnership among all involved practitioners,
- focus on academic, as well as on social, emotional processes of students at risk,
- teachers and professionals committed to help and support pupils with difficulties (e.g. wanting to “do the best” for all children) (Lunt & Norwich, 2009, p. 99),
- promote learning achievement and performance together with emotional well-being,
- promote an inclusive ethos within school unit.

Regardless of levels of inclusivity, sensitized schools that foster strategies to become more inclusive may become more effective, though this calls into question “traditional measures of effectiveness, and in particular those associated with government’s drive to raise standards” (Lunt & Norwich, 2009, p. 99). In her turn, Schmidt (2010) raises the question of the extreme instrumental adherence to evidence-based philosophy and practice which may foster a reductionist approach in the effort to implement specialized inclusive psychosocial programs for children with various problems. She also raises the question of the exclusive focus on manualized treatment that reduces the role of practitioners and teachers as well as of each child’s specific symptomatic reactions. This reductionist approach risks promotion of strategies that are “de-contextualized” and less meaningful for teachers and parents. The traditional “expert’s model” is less collaborative in spirit and reduces the possibilities of teachers and practitioners to develop their own skills, as well as to take initiatives based on the specificity of the case (Kourkoutas, 2012; McNab, 2009; Turnbull et al., 2006; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006).

Teachers have an important role to play in the assessment, design, and implementation of mental health intervention strategies targeting various groups of students with problems (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002; Weare, 2000). Noteworthy is evidence showing that the relationship of the teacher with a “problematic” student is a key promoting factor in mental health issues (Bloomquist & Schnell, 2002; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). For instance, Reddy and his colleagues found that for both boys and girls with depressive symptoms, changes in perceptions of teachers’ support reliably predicted changes in both self-esteem and depression (Reddy, Rhodes & Mulhall, 2003). Furthermore, Blankemeyer and his colleagues found, in their study on children’s perceived relationships with their teachers, poor school adjustment to be associated with more negatively perceived child teacher relationships notably for boys than for girls. Moreover, the perceived child–teacher relationship among aggressive children was more favorable among those with high levels of school adjustment than among those who were poorly adjusted at school (Blankemeyer, Flannery & Vazsonyi, 2002).

Additional data show that a positive relationship with teachers may significantly contribute to reducing children's psychosocial difficulties and promote their school adjustment (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Reddy et al., 2003; Pianta, 1999). Moreover, teachers together with school psychologists can essentially contribute to include and successfully educate students with behavioral problems—which seems to be the most challenging population in schools today (Coleman, Weber & Algozzine, 1999; Fell, 2002; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Kauffman & Landrum, 2009; Salend, 2004).

Overall, research emphasizes the need to develop school-based psychosocial programs for the promotion of child and adolescent wellbeing which involve parents, peers, and educational staff (Adelman & Taylor, 2006, 2007; Billington, 2006; Carr, 1999; Fell, 2002; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Rooney, 2002; Ross et al., 2002; Schmidt, 2010; Weare, 2000).

“Supportive supervision” is a term that we have introduced (Kourkoutas & Giovazolias, 2015) to describe the work done with teachers in the context of clinical counseling projects within Greek primary schools. These counseling intervention projects include a wide range of clinical and psycho-educational actions which target a range of cases of “disturbed” or “problematic” pupils. An essential component of these counseling projects is the “working alliance” (cooperation) with teachers which encompasses both the emotional (support) and the coaching aspect aiming at helping them manage the intense emotions they experience when teaching challenging pupils (Fell, 2002; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010). Teachers may become more skillful and aware of the type of intervention their students need when they are supported and trained through such child-specific intervention (Fell, 2002; Hanco, 2001; 2002; Heller, 2000; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010). Teachers need to attain better insight into students' problems in order to overcome their own personal prejudices, as well as their negative emotions regarding “difficult students” (Fell, 2002; Hanco, 2002; Kourkoutas, 2012). By offering a supportive collaborative consultation, specialists may enable teachers to act in more productive ways and avoid being trapped in destructive interactions with “difficult students” (Solomon & Nashat, 2010).

A collaborative consultation approach can also enable teachers to develop further awareness of the inner psychological process of children with conduct problems and the way family dynamics shape their behaviors (Hanko, 2002; Heller, 2000; Kourkoutas, 2012). Notably, in the case of children who come from “coercive families,” it is very common to see these patterns being reproduced with teachers, as these children are prone to elicit intense negative emotions with their antisocial and disruptive behavior. Therefore, it is crucial for professionals to help teachers avoid reproducing the same coercive patterns that these pupils have experienced in their homes. Actually, in such cases, careful and meaningful coaching may be very helpful for teachers to break the vicious cycle of mutual rejection and aggressive behaviors (Fell, 2002; Hanko, 2001; 2002; Heller, 2000; Kourkoutas, 2012).

Regarding the design of strategies to implement within schools, many questions are raised by contemporary research concerning the way policy makers or even researchers and clinicians decide upon the type of intervention for children with problem behaviors. Wherever the medical approach is still dominant, interventions usually do not sufficiently consider ecological variables and complex interactional processes that take place within the school system and affect the development of the disorder. Unavoidably, this theoretical stance leads to a limited understanding or misdiagnosis of children’s underlying dynamics and to over-medicalization of their troubles (Glickens, 2009; Heller, 2000; Schmidt, 2010). As Wampold and Imel (2015) state, “*delivering psychotherapy to children and adolescents is a complex undertaking because of the institutional, political, and social context in which these services are provided.*” Many researchers and clinicians have also begun to question the narrow interpretation of evidence-based philosophy. They are inclined to promote interventions that are comprehensive in nature (i.e. addresses multiple risks and protective factors) and intensive in scope (e.g. includes a variety of settings and school personnel, families, and mentors) (Young et al., 2004, p. 176).

Schools are dynamic, multidimensional, and multi-level settings for development (Pianta, 2006). Consequently they require integrative,

interdisciplinary models of school-based research that promote multilevel co-actions and interventions (Pianta, 2006; Young et al., 2004). School mental health services refer to the broad array of services designed to prevent and treat behavioral and emotional difficulties that may or may not be symptoms of specific mental disorders (Christner et al., 2009, p. 5). In some cases, interventions may be universal and apply to entire schools or school districts, whereas other cases may require targeted or intensive interventions geared toward specific students who are at risk for psychological problems (Christner et al., 2009).

Working in a partnership perspective with mental health professionals who assume an inclusive perspective (see Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010), schools units should manage to build up an inclusive culture and foster an “*emotionally holding*” environment for more vulnerable students or students with special educational needs (Heller, 2000; Urquhart, 2009). Many children who display conduct difficulties can profit from an educational environment that also provides comprehensive services for more serious problems. Without this academic emotional support, vulnerable children’s capacity (including students with conduct problems who live in traumatizing family environments) for positive relationships, emotional growth, and learning is jeopardized by the impact of their anxieties and emotionally defensive behaviors (Urquhart, 2009). Current debates on education primarily focus on children’s academic performance, often to the exclusion of any broader consideration of the child within a psychological and social context (Schmidt, 2010). Such approaches to learning and an extreme adherence to a performance-evaluation philosophy may be associated with a preoccupation to identify eventual pathology in children in the health and welfare sector (Billington, 2006; Schmidt, 2010). In addition, the educational staff’s discourse on students’ deviant and problematic behavior has been highly affected during the last decades by the dominant psychiatric approach which tends to “over-pathologize” children’s conduct problems (Salend, 2004; Schmidt, 2010). Because of the heterogeneity of academic, social-emotional, and cognitive competencies of students in contemporary schools and the presence of many “problematic” cases of children, educational institutions, as well

as professionals, parents, and communities should be prepared to face these challenges by establishing suitable systems of care within schools. These systems could serve the most vulnerable and at-risk students. These structures may, for instance, take the form of interdisciplinary teams encompassing a broader spectrum of interventions focusing on counseling and coaching teachers, training and counseling parents, academically and emotionally supporting “difficult” or “suffering” students, teaching them social skills and problem-solving strategies. Such teams, composed of professionals trained in clinical systemic educational thinking, may foster specific clinical educational inclusive practices for the most vulnerable or challenging students. Working in an ecosystemic risk-resilient perspective—buffering contextual and personal risk factors, promoting and strengthening protective factors and personal skills—these professionals in partnership with teaching staff may significantly contribute to create collaborative communities and inclusive environments within schools. In order to achieve this kind of project and attain these goals, schools, school psychologists, and teachers should go beyond their traditional roles and foster an inclusive culture and ethos. This inevitably signifies a paradigm shift in the clinical school psychology and educational system field (Weist, 2003; Weist & Evans, 2005).

Cooperative learning and collaborative practices as a strategy to promote academic resilience and inclusion at school for students at risk

Many authors have a new educational vision which can contribute to resilient students, promoting their social and problem-solving skills, personal autonomy, self-confidence and trust in others (Barbarasch & Elias, 2009; Cohen, 2013; Doll, 2013; Weare, 2000; Urquhart, 2009). However, to move in this direction is still far off, especially if we think that so far the quality of education is still measured purely on the basis of academic achievement. What still seems hard to believe is that the academic and socio-emotional processes and achievement are not mutually

exclusive, school can be responsible for both if supported by appropriate professional staff. Cooperative learning provides an ideal context for social skill development (Putnam, 2015). It may be a viable way to re-establish the academic and socio-emotional aspects of education, working explicitly with both of these aspects, with due attention to the quality of relationships between all involved persons (Putnam, 2015; Urquhart, 2009). Cooperative group-work requires a coordination of efforts that involve a) getting to know and trust one another, b) communicating accurately, c) accepting and supporting one another, and d) resolving conflicts constructively (see Putnam, 2009, p. 90).

In fact, this method requires students to cooperate by working in small groups so as to achieve good results, both in terms of curriculum and from the point of view of social benefits, based on five basic rules: positive interdependence, individual accountability and positive group interactions, appropriate use of social skills and group reflection. Cooperative Learning is also one of the strategies recommended in the field of inclusion of students with social, behavioral and emotional problems because it offers support during the educational process even to those who cannot learn without help. Therefore, this method seems to be particularly appropriate for promoting resilience in the classroom for all students, but given the complexity of the process, there is a need for teacher support.

Collaboration among all involved professionals and teachers is critical for the understanding and generating of innovative solutions to the challenges of inclusive schooling. In fact, collaboration enables teachers and professionals with diverse expertise to work together as equals with others in the school community and to share decision making to address the challenges in their school (Deppeler, 2012, p. 125). The knowledge and active involvement of every member of the school community is important for problem solving and building understanding (Deppeler, 2012). Indeed, collaboration is essential for developing practices in schools and has been linked to: (a) increased student achievement, (b) changes in teachers' practices, (c) improvement in teachers' individual and collective self-efficacy (Deppeler, 2012).

Stable collaboration and sharing of inclusive values can also lead to the creation of Communities of Practices (CoP) or Professional Learning

Communities (PLC). The benefits of this approach are particularly valuable for developing inclusive practice. The inclusive goals can only be realized when PLCs: (a) include appropriate pedagogical content and expertise, (b) focus on improving student learning, (c) are structured appropriately and are informed by evidence (Deppeler, 2012).

If Communities of Practice (CoP) are successfully conducted, they can promote, among others, active engagement, critical reflection and discussion of common practices, shared learning and values, a culture of openness, trust, and respect and shared responsibility for student learning, evidence and inquiry to inform and improve teaching and learning, risk taking and innovation and collective professional and student voices (Deppeler, 2012). What is more, the CoP approach can allow teachers or professionals from various disciplines and fields to work in partnership across boundaries and improve their knowledge and creativity in finding solutions for students and children with complex needs or difficulties. Teachers have been found to believe that children's problems are due to something within the child. They place more emphasis than school psychologists or counselors on treatments aimed directly at the student, often suggesting the student needs to take responsibility for the problem and solution (Goldstein & Brooks, 2007). Based on research evidence, Goldstein and Brooks (2007) note that the internal attributional style of teachers is reflected in their beliefs about needed classroom treatment and that students' difficulties are caused by something wrong within the child. Teachers tend to attribute lack of progress to students while crediting either themselves or students when progress is made. Yet, teachers high in efficacy tend to de-emphasize home variables in students' success and failure, pointing instead to the instructional program and the teachers' role (Goldstein & Brooks, 2007, p. 6).

When dealing with students with complex needs and difficulties, teachers should be able to clarify visions and targets, articulate theory and plan for implementation, broaden their views about teaching methods and origins of "vulnerable" students' problems, become more reflective and critical practitioners, implement actions, collect and reflect on data that reinforces their students' academic skills and

resilience and establish positive, collaborative relations with colleagues and other experts. In fact, teachers need to be able to interpret the assessment data in ways that are meaningful for them and translate data into meaningful practices with the guidance of school professionals (Sanderson, 2003).

On the whole, classroom teachers should invent ways based on research evidence and their creativity to promote and strengthen the academic-educational resilience of all students (and mostly of students at risk). In order to be inclusive and successfully supportive at the educational level teachers need to get rid of prejudices and stereotyped ideas about their students' problematic behavior or performance and school maladjustment.

The application of the inclusive model to classroom settings brings a real change of perspective characterized by the following dimensions:

- The class as the core of the inclusive process.
- The role of the teacher as a key component of the inclusive and intervention processes targeting children with complex difficulties.
- Collaborative teamwork and a shared framework.
- Meaningful IEPs.
- A positive attitude about the learning abilities of all pupils.
- Teacher knowledge about learning and social-emotional difficulties.
- Classroom focus as opposed to individual focus.
- Multi-level, multi-causal thinking.
- Psychoeducational practices based on values and the spirit of solidarity and collaborative teaching/methodology.
- An innovative, more extensive (e.g. including social-emotional skills, goals) and flexible kind of curriculum and teaching practice.
- Promotion of academic-educational resilience.
- Clear role relationships among professionals.
- Effective use of support staff.
- Family involvement and opening of the school environment to society.

- With the promotion of Alternative Communities of Practice and of Professional Learning Communities: within these contexts teachers and experts can exchange experiences and knowledge, reinforce their collaborative practice and engagement in alternative educational and inclusive visions in order to effectuate permanent changes in school functioning and support “vulnerable” students.

Overall, the “inclusive” model offers a collective educational practice characterized by cooperative actions designed to achieve the educational and social inclusion of children with disabilities (Kourkoutas, 2012). Students at risk or vulnerable students should experience higher levels of educational support from their (“inclusive”) teachers in order to be actively involved in classroom activities, experience more positive relations with other students and the rest of the educational staff and enjoy attending school.

Findings from international research and Greek studies regarding psychoeducational inclusive interventions

In general, teachers everywhere consider that their basic training is not adequate in preparing them to manage challenging behaviors in the classroom. In a series of studies at the University of Crete, teachers reported that they had no awareness of the behavioral techniques which should be implemented to resolve difficult and disruptive behaviors in class, and to treat them (Kourkoutas, Georgiadi & Hatzaki, 2011; Thanos, Kourkoutas, & Vitalaki, 2006). In another study, teachers declared they do not feel confident, but rather they are “anxious” when they are confronted with children who exhibit behavioral or emotional problems (Kourkoutas, 2012; Thanos, Kourkoutas & Vitalaki, 2006). Some teachers make sincere efforts to help children with behavioral problems adapt to the classroom and academic processes. A lack of response or inappropriate response on the part of the youngster can make teachers feel rejected. Teachers can feel irritated and provoked when their efforts bring forth only partial or no results (Munger et al., 1998). A clue to the feelings of teachers brought forth by difficult,

unresponsive students can be found in the various negative consequences administered in classroom. Whatever the means used, and whatever the rationale for the use of various pressure techniques (e.g., peer pressure) and visible warning to the child, in the end all these techniques make use of public shaming, increasing the aversive feelings of the child (anger, rage) as he feels less valued, rejected, and hopeless which leads to additional aggression (Kourkoutas, 2012). The teacher who has been made to feel inadequate and rejected by the child responds with exasperated helplessness by returning the favor.

A clinical supervision program aimed at supporting and coaching (supportive supervision) preschool- and elementary school-teachers who had to deal with “difficult cases of children” revealed a series of interesting findings that offer us a global insight into how educational staff perceives and copes with behavioral problems in classrooms and with students labeled as “challenging” (Kourkoutas & Georgiadi, 2011).

Teachers found the clinical supervision process: (a) very enlightening for understanding the underlying emotional processes and acting-out of children with acute family and behavioral problems, (b) useful to better handle their own difficult emotions and tensions (stress, anger, confusion, ambivalence, withdrawal, implicit rejection, embarrassment, etc.) and gain further awareness of the coercive interactional processes, (b) helpful for elaborating novel techniques based on their own knowledge of the child, (c) important in helping them gain self-confidence and take personal initiative, (d) an instructive training model for personal and professional development that can sharpen teachers’ awareness and self-introspection, allowing them to express and understand their own negative feelings (feelings of inadequacy, confusion, anxiety, stress, anger against parents, colleagues, or school principals, etc.), (e) an indispensable working practice for the contemporary educational system, which may enable teachers to effectively deal with challenging students and to cooperate with professionals (Kourkoutas & Georgiadi, 2011).

One important conclusion of this study, based on in-service teachers’ reports, is the danger of overemphasis given by many school principals, teachers, and parents on managing behavior without attempting to

understand the child's feelings (see also Greenhagh, 2001) and resolve the individual-internal/family dynamic/problems. These problems may continue to impact the child's functioning and reinforce his confrontation of the school context which, in turn, results in the teachers' conviction that this is a "pathological or untreatable child case" (Kourkoutas, 2012). Many teachers reported that negative prejudices or stereotypical and ineffective attitudes their colleagues develop toward their "challenging pupils" relate to their lack of clinical knowledge, their inability to get insight in children's problems, and the lack of experience of positive cooperation with professionals who have been effective in helping them (Kourkoutas & Georgiadi, 2011).

Creating communities of practices and school support

Resilient classroom and skillful well-supported teachers may really foster *therapeutic* relationships even with the most troubled students (Doll, 2013). A positive relationship with a supportive teacher, in combination with early specialized intervention, before the children's pathological defense and coping mechanisms become reinforced and crystallized, reduces the risk for the child of entering into an endless cycle of mutual rejection within the school environment (Baker et al., 2008; Fell, 2002; Kourkoutas, 2012; Heller, 2000; Urquhart, 2009; Salend, 2004; Weare, 2000). Teachers undoubtedly play a substantial role in taking action to prevent students from developing further psychological problems. Of course teachers are not trained to be experts in psychological difficulties and interventions; however they are often involved in intense (personal and professional) interaction with their students; as they spend a substantial amount of time with them, teachers can provide vital information regarding their behaviour and functioning and help professionals designing appropriate interventions (Kauffman & Landrum, 2009). At risk students who can benefit from supportive and non conflicting or rejecting relationships with teachers seem to better recover academically and reengage with peers and learning processes than those without these positive relationships (Kourkoutas, 2012).

Teachers need to be valued in their work with difficult students and employ techniques and strategies that are meaningful for them and are appropriate for the specific educational context they operate (Urquhart, 2009). School counselors should, therefore, focus their efforts on enabling teachers to develop their own skills for intervention and build on their gained knowledge and experience in order to adequately respond to their students' needs (Goldstein & Brooks, 2007; Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2005).

Therefore, it is urgent for schools to radicalize and strengthen their supportive systems for both students and teachers. Furthermore, schools should be responsible for creating a caring environment to foster teachers' and students' inner potential and competencies, as well as to better respond to their emotional and behavioral needs (Baker et al., 2008; Hanko, 2002; Kourkoutas & Raul Xavier, 2010; Urquhart, 2009; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006). For this project to be realized, it is necessary to have counselling teams that are flexible and integrative in their theoretical thinking and counselling practice in order to better respond to the complex school dynamics and to the heterogeneity of problems and successfully empower the educational staff in their role. It is also crucial to have teachers who are well-trained and who are committed to the inclusive culture and willing to collaborate with school psychologists and other professionals.

An *inclusive partnership counselling* model places particular emphasis on working cooperatively with teachers of at risk students to enhance and reinforce interpersonal and teaching skills. By guiding and supporting teachers, this model places, at the heart of the intervention goal, the improvement of their practices and attitudes towards the "difficult", "problematic, or vulnerable child and the enhancement of their relational skills (Schmidt, 2010; Paternite, 2005; Urquhart, 2009).

Therefore, one of the main objectives of the educational psychologist is to focus on resolving conflicting or hostile relationships between teacher and students. It is, in fact, crucial for professionals who work in an inclusive perspective to help teachers overcome their hostile or ambivalent feelings and prejudices towards "difficult students" and engage with those students in more meaningful and creative teaching

methods. The counsellor's role is therefore pivotal in helping teachers ensure a "holding" and supportive educational environment for students with difficulties; an educational setting that compensates for family or poor school adjustment problems allowing, in this way, vulnerable or "problematic" students to maximize their learning and social-skills potential and achieve satisfactory academic adjustment.

If well supported, teachers can have access to the "*hidden voices*" and problems of children, the (distorted) "narratives" children bring to school, masked and disguised under their symptomatic reactions and problematic behaviours which are usually due to the incapacity of the child to process and verbalize the traumatic or disturbing and often alienating experiences in their family and school life. If well supported, teachers can have access to the "hidden voices" of children, the (distorted) "narratives" children bring to school, masked and disguised under their symptomatic reactions and problematic behaviours which are usually due to the incapacity of the child to process and verbalize the traumatic or disturbing and often alienating experiences in their family and school life. Acting out the problematic experience and the emotional burden associated with it, is a common way for these children to function and survive. In fact, difficult or vulnerable children are less skilful and competent in "working" such feelings through acceptable or prosocial ways. Teachers may also be short-circuited by the intensity of some children's or their parents' indirect and implicit pressures, placing teachers in a position of extreme stress.

In order to achieve such goals, school should care to create communities of practice (CoP), in the sense of flexible interdisciplinary professional teams, which provide teachers with the necessary *space* and *time* to discuss all their difficulties and problems and allow them to report the challenges they are facing when dealing with "difficult" students. Such teams, with the guidance of well trained school counselors, should provide teachers the opportunity to exchange views, beliefs and ideas or report their distress and limitations in order to explore and find the most creative and effective solutions in dealing with the "difficult" or very "problematic" students.

Conclusions

To sum up, early identification and intervention are important influences upon the outcome for children with social, emotional, behavioral and conduct problems (Hughes, Crothers & Jimerson, 2008). Recognizing early signs of conduct and emotional problems and identifying risk factors is an important step in preventing a child's progression to serious conduct and antisocial disorders or depression and school drop-out (Holmes, Slaughter, & Kashani, 2001; Hughes et al., 2008). If early problem behaviors are not addressed, antisocial behaviors are likely to persist when the child becomes an adolescent or an adult (Carr, 1999; Hughes et al., 2008).

Children with social-emotional difficulties and problem behaviors are usually placed in general-education settings. Given that support services may be offered in both the general- or special-educational settings regardless of eligibility status, it is typical that educational professionals in both contexts will be responsible for facilitating these children's education (Hughes et al., 2008). Educational professionals across the elementary, middle, and high school years must be knowledgeable and prepared to identify symptoms and to provide support services (Hughes et al., 2008). Hence, all educational professionals (in both special and general education) need to have up-to-date information on behavioral and conduct problems and with the support of the school psychologist to develop adequate skills and techniques in order to successfully manage them (Blooqmuist & Schnell, 2002; Hughes et al., 2008). Overall, a significant step in preventing the progression from juvenile delinquency and social-emotional problems and adult antisocial behavior is understanding and recognizing risk factors and contributing influences in early and middle childhood (Hughes et al., 2008; Karcher, 2004).

In our inclusive model, a strong emphasis is put on how to help all "problematic" or vulnerable students develop their own resources and skills through various systems of relationships and networks, or specific practices that focus on these elements. Indeed, we strongly believe that inclusion is about genuine relationships, and about the intentional

building of meaningful relationships wherein difference is welcomed and all benefit.

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PART II:

**UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL
COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING:
A CONTRIBUTION
TO THE EVALUATION
OF STUDENT TEACHERS'
PRACTICUM**

4

THE PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PRACTICAL EXERCISE PROGRAM OF NSRF OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION OF THE AEGEAN UNIVERSITY: PATHWAYS, MENTORING, CONNECTION BETWEEN SCHOOL AND LABOR MARKET

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Introduction

The practical exercises constitute an autonomous activity/component in the curriculum of the departments of education. By the term practical exercise we mean a procedure and a specific context of work, during which a training teacher focuses for a certain time frame, through practice in an educational organization (school), utilizing the theoretical knowledge he has acquired during basic professional and academic training, to practical application. This means that in the context of practical exercise

the student focuses to procedures and didactic transformation (procedural knowledge) (Sofos & Kron, 2010), while on the meantime the possession of theoretical (declarative) knowledge is considered as a necessary prerequisite in order to make him/her able to deal with higher level procedures like the analysis of educational field, the relationship between theoretical schemata and the specific educational reality of the school class, the composition of procedures etc. For that reason students are evaluated on the basis of the application of procedures and the didactic transformation (procedural knowledge) and sometimes it is required to present and justify the theoretical choices they made and the approaches they chose. In particular in the context of practical exercises students: a) apply under real conditions teaching skills, b) acquire a broad spectrum of experiences about all the aspects of their future profession, and c) focus on the practical aspect of their studies in contrast to the theoretical academic part of the department's curriculum, aiming to the connection of those two aspects through teaching. Depending on the philosophy and the approach, practical exercises in Educational Departments can focus on:

- the application of theoretical models and methods,
- the familiarization with the professional field of reference,
- the acquisition of professional experience,
- the familiarization with expanded, relative professional fields,
- the employability and opportunity to find an employment,
- the acquisition or practice of skills with the help of experienced professionals by whom the can acquire also inherent knowledge.

Considering the above as a basis and taking into account the views of Argyropoulou (2005) and Papakosta (2010), the term *practical exercise* refers to the whole spectrum of teachers training which involves the methodical transformation of pedagogic and didactic perceptions to varied and alternative acts for the fulfillment of the educational process. Necessary elements are considered to be: a) the familiarization of the students with the conditions in the school environment, b) the realization of the role of the future teacher, c) the understanding of the dynamic relationships between the factors which influence the educational process, d) the utilization of theoretical knowledge, and e) their critical insertion in the experimental teaching act

Practical Exercise in the Department of Primary Education (D.P.E.)

The decision to organize and apply Mentoring in the Department's practical exercises was at first in a trial and pilot setting and then, through constant adaptation, was embodied in the curriculum. Its main aims are: a) the better interconnection between the University, the field of future employment of the students and the training teacher, b) the better understanding by the students of their future professional field through systematic participation in all educational actions, and c) the improvement of the quality of the practical exercise and the meaningful participation of the students through direct involvement, learning in the context of cognitive apprenticeship as well as the counselling and feedback from the student's teachers/mentors.

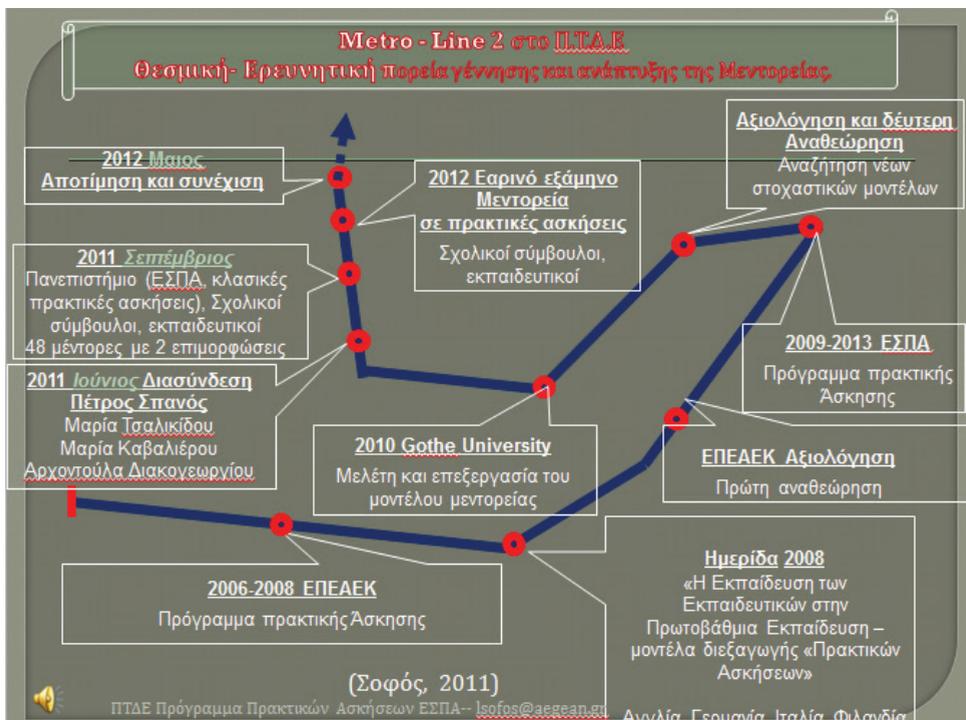
As it is described by the following Diagram 1, the Mentoring model as it was applied by the Department of Primary Education (D.P.E.) is a result of a research project with mediating phases of evaluation and adjustment. The institutional and research background is based on infrastructures such as the EPEAEK program and recently the NSRF program and is strengthened by separate research projects and international cooperation.

Specifically, the evolution of the philosophy of the practical exercise of the NSRF program can be viewed as a path with the following key phases:

1. Organization and completion of the EPEAEK program 2006-2008 during which 73 students participated in the practical exercise (absorbability 93%).
2. Central station was the organization of a meeting with international participation from England, Germany, Italy and Finland in order to investigate on the way of application of practical exercises in the E.U.
3. The results from the meeting led to the revision of the EPEAEK program organization (end of 2008).
4. Following that, took place a focused literature review of the models which relate to Mentoring.
5. Successively an extensive communication with the staff in charge

- of the practical exercises at Goethe Universität in Germany.
6. Then, came in place an adaptation of the program to the specific situation of the D.P.E. and in cooperation with School Councillors, the modified model was applied to the NSRF program of practical exercises.
 7. Following the application, an evaluation took place, resulting in further adaptation of the Mentoring model, whose results were published (Sofos, 2011).
 8. In the end, the model was applied in a part of the existing practical exercises of the D.P.E.

Diagram 1: The phases of evolution of the practical exercises of D.P.E.



In general, the practical exercise at D.P.E. is based on the following assumptions:

1. Practical exercise is every programmed and structured educational activity which brings the student-future teacher in direct touch

with school reality and it refers to all the experiences which the students acquires whether by observing an experienced teacher or his fellow students or by teaching himself.

2. It supports the familiarization of the student with his future professional field and the better understanding of the conditions and preconditions of teaching.
3. It supports the transformation of a series of theoretical methodologies into specific actions (both teaching and other) and pedagogical practices for the organization and realization of the teaching process.
4. It focuses on the systematic and stepwise introduction of the student to the basic sections of everyday pedagogic and teaching action, meaning the analysis, designing, realization and evaluation of teaching processes.
5. Its purpose is to connect theory and practice so that students can apply theoretical models of general and special didactics, can investigate in the way of implementation and reflect on their suitability based on the student's population they have to deal with.
6. Practical exercise is considered as the link between theory and practice in teachers' education focusing both on the intra-school actions and the extra-school ones.
7. It promotes the ability to find employment also in different professional fields.

The structure of the program

According to the latest organization of the practical exercises, basic precondition for a student in order to participate in the program is the successful completion of the first stage of the "traditional" model in the D.P.E. by completing the lesson "School Pedagogy". Successively the program spans over the following phases:

Phase A

It is constituted of three months of practical exercise in different organizations while on the same time following the curriculum of the D.P.E. The time of practice is divided into 2 months of practice in a public or private school and 1 month of practice in a public or private organization like research centers, archives, museums, libraries, educational software production companies etc. The aim is for students to get to know pupils and classes so that they become able to design more focused, both from a pedagogic and from a teaching view, the practice of the next semester, while on the same time, to be actively involved in all the actions of a school and become aware of matters like the yearly educational design, the meetings of the school staff, the meetings with the pupil's parents and so on. On the other hand the practical exercise in an organization can be completed during summer break or at any time during the 7th semester of study, but obligatorily before the start of the teaching part of the practical exercise in the 8th semester of study. In the 7th semester students also participate in the "traditional" program which aims to the design of teaching sessions and the devising of lesson plans in Literature, Mathematics, History, Science and Media Pedagogy.

Phase B

During the 8th semester of study, students carry out their practical exercise in a school, choosing one of the following groups of courses:

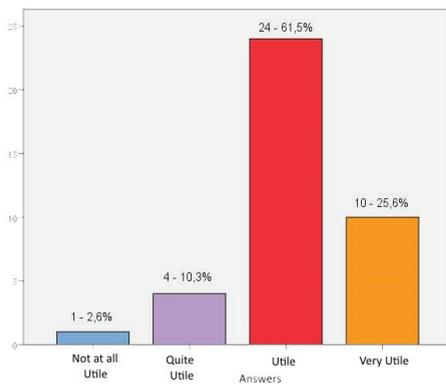
- a. Humanitarian group: Literature, History, Media Pedagogy and the selective courses Bilingualism (in Literature) or Political Education (in History) or Religion or Geography.
- b. Sciences group: Mathematics, Physics, Media Pedagogy and the selective courses Environmental Education or Information Technology
- c. General group: Literature, History, Mathematics, Physics and Media Pedagogy in combination with one of the previous courses or autonomous in the flexible zone.

The formation of the current structure of the program

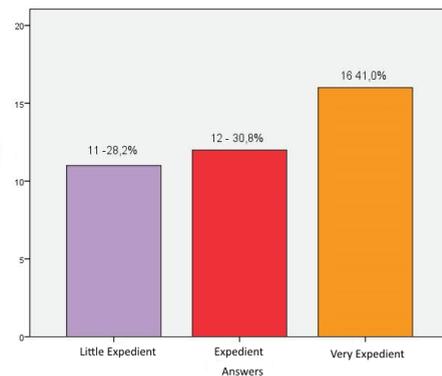
The current structure of the program was shaped with the active participation of all the stakeholders, students, collaborating university professors of the D.P.E, schools and participating organizations and come into form gradually, through constant change. At the end of the first year of the program students were asked to evaluate the special characteristics of the program which were the practical exercise in extra-school organizations and the existence of a councilor from the D.P.E.

Their answers, which are presented in the following diagrams, were taken into account at the second year of the program and mentoring by school teachers was adopted while the duration of the practical exercise in extra-school organizations was reduced from 2 to 1 month.

Graph 1. Utility of practice in extra-school organizations

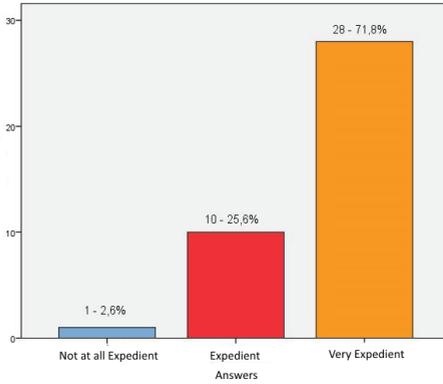


Graph 2. Expediency of the existence of the role of councilor

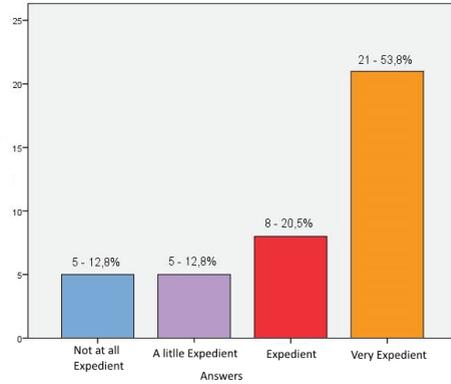


Furthermore, students were asked to evaluate if it would be better if the practical exercises of the 2nd Phase took place in schools with which they are already familiar from the 1st Phase and to evaluate the expediency of acting as assistants of the teacher before the start of the 2nd Phase of their practical exercise.

Graph 3. Expediency of conducting the practical exercise in already visited in the 1st phase schools.



Graph 4. Expediency of working for a week as assistants in the target class of the 2nd phase of practical exercises.



By those answers we can see that the students in their majority considered the more active and more prolonged participation in the schools, as very important fact. Also they seek a more active role in the school environment.

Those results led to the pilot adoption of teachers-mentors from the school staff aiming at the guidance, counselling and support of the students. Furthermore to the increase of the duration of the practical exercises in schools.

On the same time a framework of stable agreements of collaboration with schools and teacher-mentors was pursued aiming to the better coordination and effectiveness of the practical exercises.

This effort resulted in a closer collaboration with 5 schools and a total of 98 teachers from different schools in Rhodes, who were interested in participating in the program as mentors of the students.

At the end of the pilot application of mentoring participating students, university professors, teachers-mentors were asked to state their opinion about the adoption and functioning of mentoring and it was found that all of them considered it as an important addition, identifying as primary advantages the guidance of the students, the strengthening of the collaboration between students and teachers, the access to direct support for the students, the direct help with the transfer of theoretical knowledge to practice, the aid in the design and organization of teaching

and the counselling and support concerning class administration.

The recognition of the importance of mentors led to the adoption of mentoring by the program and its parallel application in the context of the lesson “Design and development of digital learning material for e-learning and distance education in school” in the general program of practical exercise of the D.P.E.

At the same time the final form of the practical exercises was formed and a series of educational meetings with the teacher/mentors was established. The purpose of the meetings was to inform the teacher/mentors about the role and actions of a mentor and their participation in the program.

Taking all those changes into account in the following section the theoretical model of the practical exercises is presented together with the views of the participating students during the academic year 2012-2013.

The Theoretical Model of the Practical Exercises

The model is based on two central assumptions. According to the first, every practical exercise must be carried out in authentic work environments which include elements of progressive design and reflection. In that way they contribute to the perception of the training teacher as a professional who orientates to the research on the quality of his work, enhancing the reflecting character of the professional teacher (Sofos, 2011). According to the second assumption, Mentoring, when applied in an educational setting, is related to the pedagogic and teaching guidance, meaning that it refers both to the communication and the bond between people (pedagogic context) and to aims, content and results produced (teaching context) (Salvaras, 2013).

The Holistic approach of reflective and stochastic practical exercise

The practical exercises of the NSRF program are related to the theoretical framework of the holistic and reflective approach about the inclusion of New Media and IT to the educational process. The organization of the lesson “Design and development of digital learning material for

e-learning and distance education in school”, which is offered during the 7th semester in the D.P.E., is based on this model.

The model consists of 6 dimension which are related in pairs and constitute 3 bipols (didactic transformation – reflection, counselling-mentor, interconnection – on line practice community). Those dimensions are situated one opposing the other in order to make clear that their median constitutes the pedagogically proven approach. In combination they form a reflective and inquiring framework (Sofos, 2011).

Taking into account the typology of the connections between theory and practice and the orientation models of the practical exercises the aforementioned approach is defined at the basis of the following characteristics:

1. The organization of the lesson is such that enables students, through active participation, to develop educational materials for e-learning and use them during teaching. Primary principle is the assumption that the development of professional action and attitude is facilitated when it is situated in certain social settings. The application of specific skills and the transformation of theoretical knowledge into action assumes a framework of application. Learning and the development of pedagogic knowledge and skill as well as the development of professional action happen in the same time through reflective application.

2. The design of teaching and the production of teaching materials are organized based on the theory of Learning Technology by Design. According to this approach basic element is iteration about action and, through reflection, reaction. This means that practicing students reflect both “during action” and “on the action”. In this way they gradually develop a scenario of pedagogic intervention limiting the probability of a solely technical use of didactic “prescriptions”.

3. Because professional development, meaning the learning about pedagogy, is situated in real circumstances, which are thought as a basis for pedagogic reflection, conditions of personal and professional development are formed and at the same time conditions for inquiring on the specific educational situation and subject.

4. The development of personal and professional knowledge and skills in combination with the processing of the specific educational

situation acquires a social dimension, so, the practical exercises create conditions of a community of practice between the stakeholders. The propositions of the students about the scenarios of pedagogic intervention, their presentations, their notes on research journals, the micro-teaching sessions etc constitute a reference point of collaboration and counselling for students, teacher-mentors and responsible university professor. The community of practice between training and active teachers which is mediated by Media is thought as a digital Community of Practical Exercise (e-K.Π.A. (Kostas & Sofos, 2013). E-K.Π.A. is an online collaboration platform bearing characteristics of a social network aiming to the support and facilitation of student's work and their collaboration. Furthermore it constitutes the interpretive framework of pedagogic action and through it's institutional adoption, a vital element of the practical exercises. It creates a social space for: a) the facilitation of participation, as a social act, in the context of a specific professional field, and b) for the participation and collaborative development of pedagogic knowledge, skills and pedagogic action.

5. It helps students develop abilities, skills and attitudes which contain a combination of elements from the models of "theory-action interpretive-dialectic and experimental-analytic". It must be clarified that good knowledge of the scientific content and of the didactic methodologies is a necessary precondition. Vital point is an interpretive disposition of the training teacher towards three directions: a) the development of students, b) their own personal and professional development, and c) the development of the school environment as a working place. Those can be achieved only if the students adopt an inquiring attitude, which, in combination with knowledge on both three directions, can be the starting point for reflective design of educational interventions. Using the typology of practical exercises as a reference point this specific approach is related to academic models, models of support of a teacher as a professional as well as to models of educational reflection which correspond to action research.

In the following section we present thoroughly the characteristics of one of the total six dimensions of the model, this of Mentoring.

Mentoring as counseling, guidance and support

The first reports on mentors are found in ancient Greece (Hänssig, 2010; Sofos, 2011), when Ulysses before leaving Ithaca for Troy asked Mentor to take care of his son Telemachus. Mentor took up the role of father, teacher, friend and councilor for Telemachus while Ulysses was away (Metohianakis, 1999). But as this first conceptual approach on mentoring can lead to misconceptions it is preferred to be viewed in general as a relation between mentor and mentee in order the first to support the latter in the development of certain skills and decision making (Beck, 2003; Sofos, 2013). French author Francois Fenelon in his work “Les Aventures de Telemaque” (1699) presents Mentor-Athena (as goddess Athena took many times the shape of Mentor to advise Telemachus) accompanying Telemachus in his trip, giving him directions and guiding him at the end to his father Ulysses. That way the word mentor in French, and from French to other European languages, and in modern Greek is referred in general to the councilor and friend who acts as a guide. In English we can also detect the derivatives mentoring, mentorship, mentoree/mentee.

The effectiveness of mentoring is based on socially accepted perceptions about the determinant effect a person can have on another person. Furthermore shifting the interest to the relation between student and mentor, mentoring can be explained by “learning by role model” (Kron & Sofos, 2003). Student does not usually learn the whole model but some aspects of the actions and attitudes adopted by the experienced teacher which are meaningful for him (Kron & Sofos, 2007). In its application, mentoring, can be defined as a system of methodical actions which take place in a context of direct, face to face and intersubjective communication between an experienced person and a training person (Hunt, 1986).

According to this approach mentoring is a modern version of apprenticeship while in the same time it contains elements of a reflective review of actions by the students. The trainee learns by the master what to do, how to do it, what attitude he has to have, with which observations he accompanies his work etc. He learns by watching, observing and comparing with all his senses – according to the approach of the master-, but he has to hold in memory this knowledge in order to use it in different situations.

Mentoring as guiding counseling and support constitutes a method of social and educational intervention in which a young person receives the help in some factors or in general in his development by a more experienced, usually more aged not related to him person. (Markou, 2010). It is based on the personal and emotional relationship which evolves between the two persons. In the context of this interaction the more experienced person supports, observes, guides and counsels the younger one as the second tries, through this relationship, to learn, extend his knowledge and integrate into a work environment or a situation.

Definition: *Mentoring is defined as a system of methodical actions which happen in a context of direct, face to face and intersubjective communication (which can be technologically mediated) between a more experienced person and a trainee, aiming to cause learning to the last.*

This definition brings forward the special role of the experienced person. His role is to facilitate the trainee in a certain subject or knowledge field. According to the definition, mentoring possesses all the basic elements of an educational intervention are: a) the more experienced person (teacher or more experienced colleague), b) the trainee, c) the knowledge field, and d) the educational context (form of interpersonal relationship, communication and collaboration climate, the degree of guidance). So, in the core of mentoring lie the educational process and the communication between the two or more participants in the process.

The content, the duration of practice and the way of communication and collaboration, all aim to the development of the proper conditions for the students to develop:

- social skills,
- professional direction (alternative professional opportunities),
- professional skills for the completion of certain tasks (organization of school's library, meetings etc.),
- academic skills (application of methods and reflection about their design and implementation).

On the other hand, participating teachers/mentors take up different

roles depending on the specific needs, like: a) teachers, b) councilors, c) coaches, d) raw models or examples and therefore they must have corresponding experience. Their professional experience has to be characterized by: a) profound knowledge of the rules and of the professional field they work in order to be effective, b) knowledge of the people in the organization, c) knowledge of the methods used for certain tasks, and d) desire to transfer knowledge. Furthermore they have to be competent in relation to: a) matters of strategic design and administration, b) problem solving, c) design and evaluation of lesson plans. Lastly, analyzing their social characteristics, they must be characterized by: a) integrity, b) communication skills, c) self-confidence and optimism, d) friendly behavior, e) ability to inspire, and f) high level of empathy.

Within this interpersonal relationship the mentor acts in a diverse and multistage interaction with the training student and creates a positive psychological climate, creating a dialectic and mutual relationship. Based on those actions five dimension can be distinguished which refer to two different views a) that of the teacher-mentor who provides counselling, feedback and support and b) that of the student (mentee) who observes, reflects, regulates himself and develops skills (Sofos, 2013).

Those dimensions are:

1. Environment of acceptance – ability of personal expression.

The teacher-mentor must create an environment of acceptance with actions that promote communication, collaboration and the creation of a good interpersonal relationship but in the same time providing freedom to the students to create a personal context and content for their teaching.

2. Externalization-observation

Furthermore the mentor: a) externalizes, meaning that he reveals the unspoken background providing the opportunity to the students to observe the hidden aspects of the educational field and of the teaching profession, b) facilitates the students to understand the role of a teacher and its responsibilities, and c) facilitates the connection between theory and practice, and theory and perceptions

3. Reducing guidance – increasing self-regulation

The teacher-mentor externalizes thoughts and processes and asks

the student to apply them, proposes sources of information and assigns tasks to the students.

The students: a) identify and approach their nature, b) reflect on their personal abilities, skills and knowledge and identify the aspects they have to enhance in order to be able to face those new situations, c) devise a work plan, d) apply the actions they have designed, e) evaluates the results of their intervention and strategy, and f) revise their interventions both on a strategic and skills level and on a procedural level.

4. Counselling – Development of pedagogic skills

Furthermore, the teacher-mentor: a) provides counselling and help to the students, b) empowers them so they become capable to implement their plans, and c) provides directions which, among others, are related to the solution of class administration problems.

5. Feedback – reflection

As a final step comes the feedback from the teacher-mentor and the reflection from the students on the process which was followed. This process is bidirectional and focused on the things the mentor and the mentee have experienced and learned. This means that there is a bidirectional dialogue concerning the experience from the practical exercise, the documented feedback and the reflective revision of the educational design (Sofos, 2013).

Results from the research on mentoring

Purpose and research questions

The research was carried out at the end of the academic year 2012-2013 and its purpose was to determine the effectiveness of the model of practical exercises the students participated in. More specifically, we tried to determine:

a) Whether students assess that the model of practicing for two months in a school and one month in an organization contributes to the enhancement of their knowledge about their role and their professional function as teachers.

b) Whether mentoring helped their work during the practical exercises.

c) How they evaluate the practical exercises of the NSRF program compared to the classical practical exercises in the D.P.E.

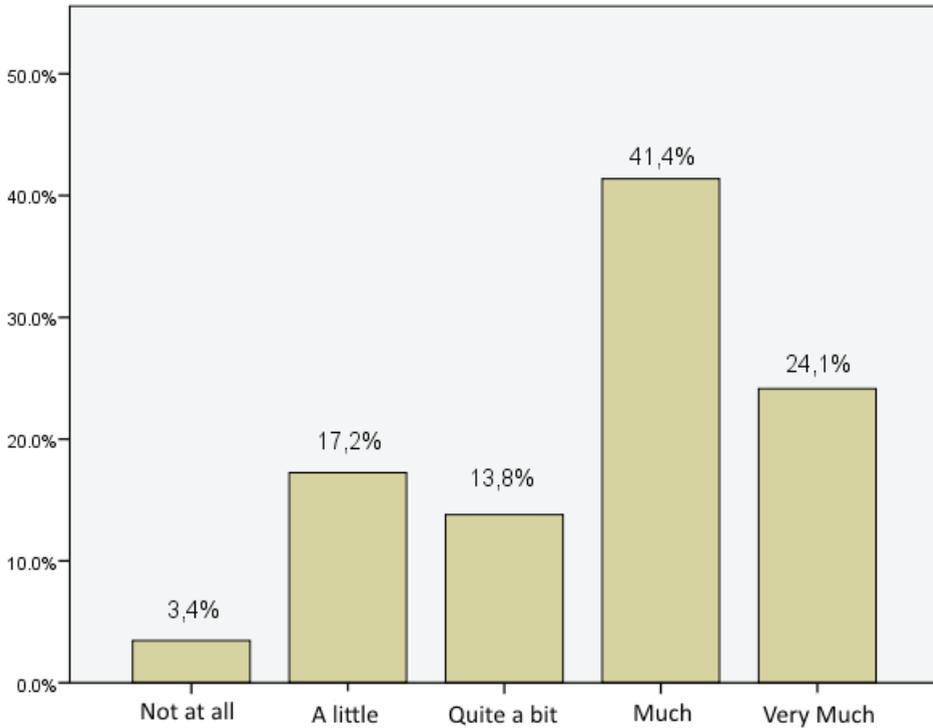
Methodology

The participation in the research was voluntary. The research was conducted using a questionnaire designed to include the three aforementioned dimensions. The questionnaire was sent electronically to the 167 students who participated in the practical exercises after the end of the second phase of the exercises in order to ensure the objectivity of the responses. A total of 30 completed and usable questionnaires were gathered (17,96% of the students that participated). The small participation of the students constitutes the basic limitation of the study but it was anticipated considering that those students had already completed their studies in the D.P.E.

Results

The results from the students' answers about the contribution of the practical exercises to the enhancement of their knowledge about the administrative function of a school (Graph 5) showed that for the majority of them, more than 65%, the practical exercise contributed greatly to that point, while only 3,4% of them assess that there was no contribution.

Graph 5. The contribution of the practical exercise in a school to the better understanding of the administrative function of the school.

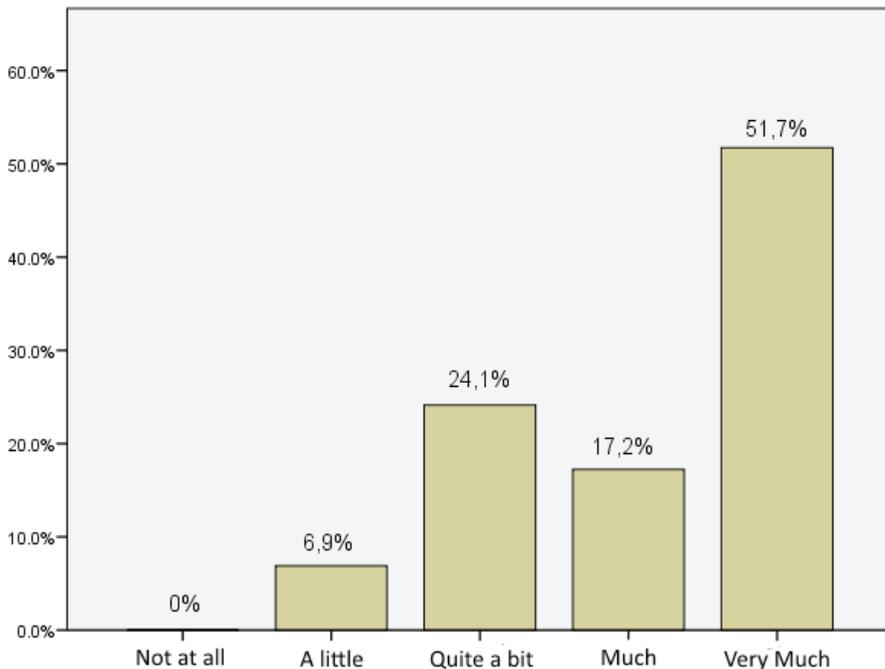


How much does the practical exercise for 2 months in a school contributes to the better understanding of the administrative function of the school in your opinion

The results about the contribution of the practical exercise in the development of a more complete view on the work of a teacher are similar as about 70% of the students responded that the practical exercise they participated in helped the much or very much get a clear picture of the work a teacher does.

It is important to higline that there were no students reporting that the practical exercise didn't help at all in this aspect. The results are presented in the following graph (Graph 6).

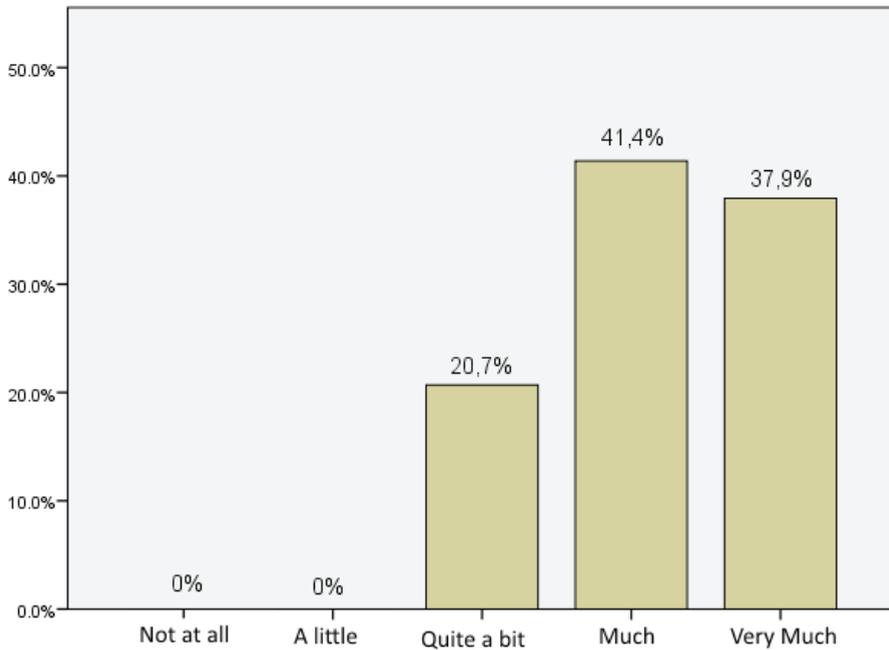
Graph 6. The contribution of the practical exercise in a school to the formation of a complete picture about the different aspects of a teacher's work.



How much does the practical exercise for 2 months in a school contributes to the formation of a complete picture about the different aspects of a teacher's work in your opinion

Furthermore they were asked to evaluate the contribution of the practical exercise on the formation of a more complete picture about the actions which are related to the educational process as a whole. About 80% of them highlined the great contribution of the exercise while the rest 20% recognized a medium contribution (Graph 7). Those results show that primary advantage of the applied model is the enhancement of the student's knowledge and their familiarization with didactic practice and educational process.

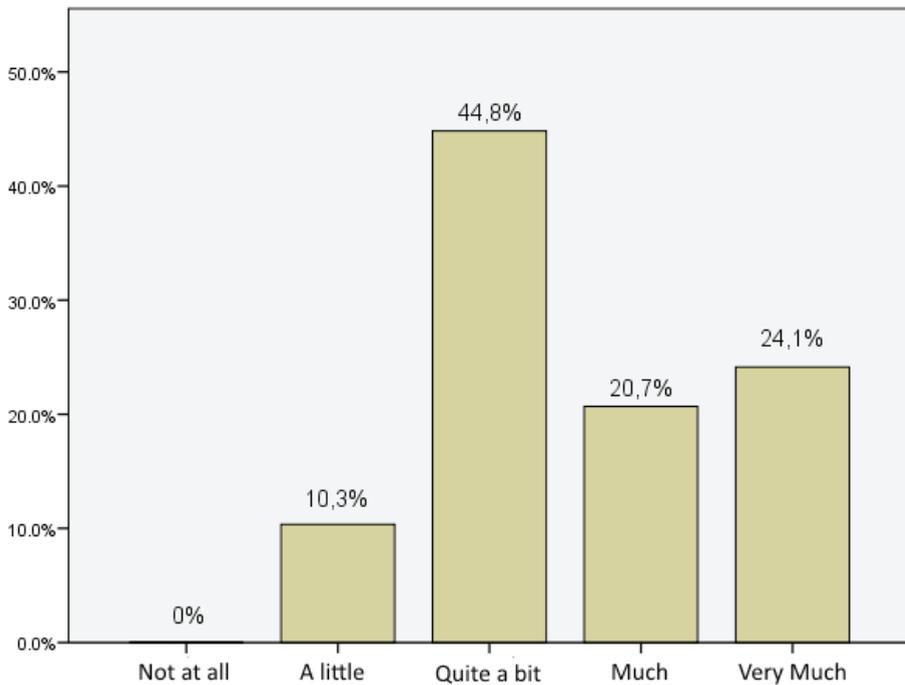
Graph 7. The contribution of the practical exercise in a school to the formation of a complete picture about the range of actions of a teacher which are related to the educational process.



How much does the practical exercise for 2 months in a school contributes to the formation of a complete picture about the range of actions of a teacher which are related to the educational process in your opinion

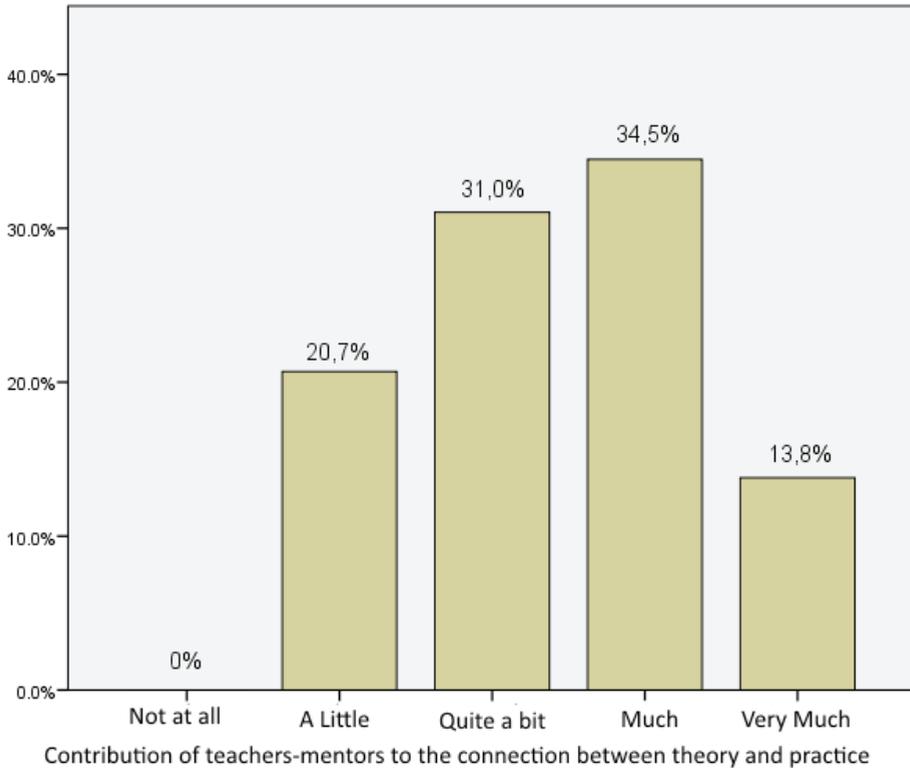
In addition, trying to evaluate the contribution of the prolonged stay of the students in the schools, as we can see from Graph 8, students believe that, through prolonged stay, they gain a better understanding about the special needs of all the classes (about 90% of the answers ranging from quite a bit to very much). This finding is important as the better understanding of the needs of pupils is crucial for the future professional career of a teacher.

Graph 8. The contribution of the practical exercise in a school to the formation of a complete picture about the needs of the pupils of all primary classes.



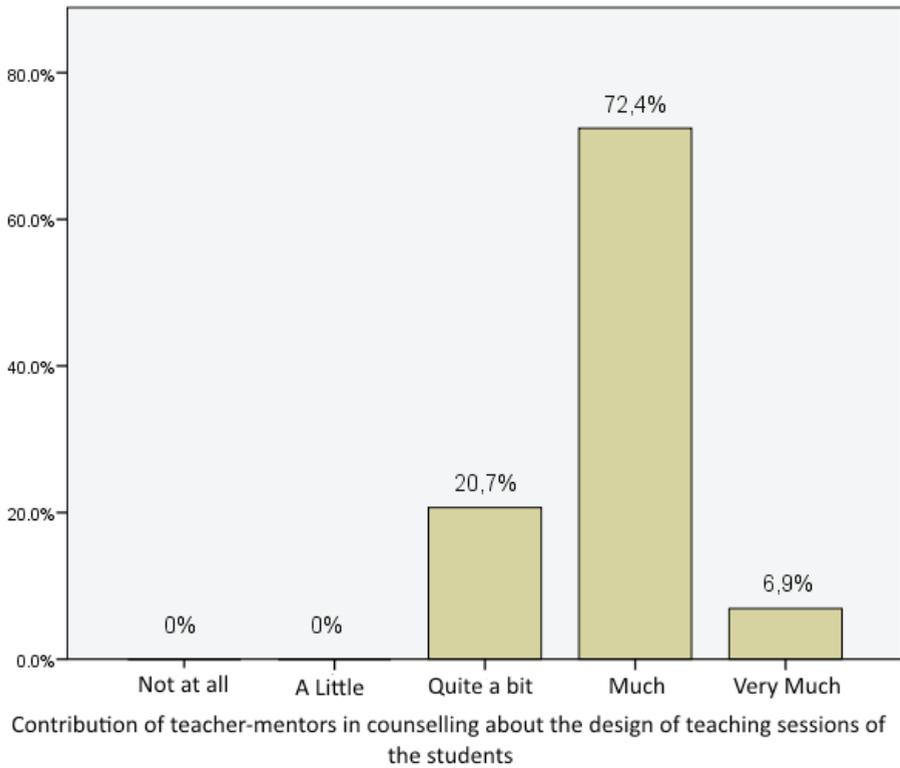
How much does the practical exercise for 2 months in a school contributes to the formation of a complete picture about the needs of pupils of all primary school classes in your opinion

In regard to the effectiveness of the teacher-mentors in an operational level, 48,3% of the students think that mentors helped them much or very much make the connection between theory and educational act, 31% that they helped quite a bit and 20% that they had a limited contribution (Graph 9). Those results show that it is possible that part of the teachers-mentors failed to live up to their role.

Graph 9. The contribution of teachers-mentors to the connection between theory and practice.

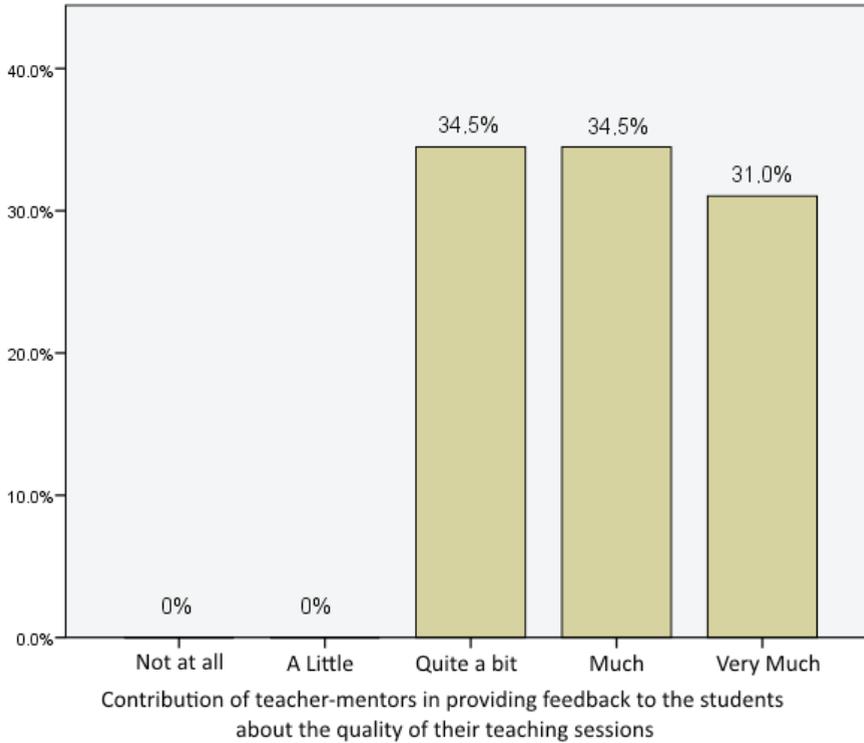
On the other hand, the situation seems completely different when it comes to the counselling from teacher-mentors on the design of the teaching sessions of the students. In this case 79,3% of the students find that teacher-mentors helped much or very much while none of them answered “Not at all” or “A Little”. These results (Graph 10) show that teacher-mentors managed to live up to this role and that their intervention had a great impact on the students.

Graph 10. The contribution of teachers-mentors to the counseling about the design of teaching sessions.



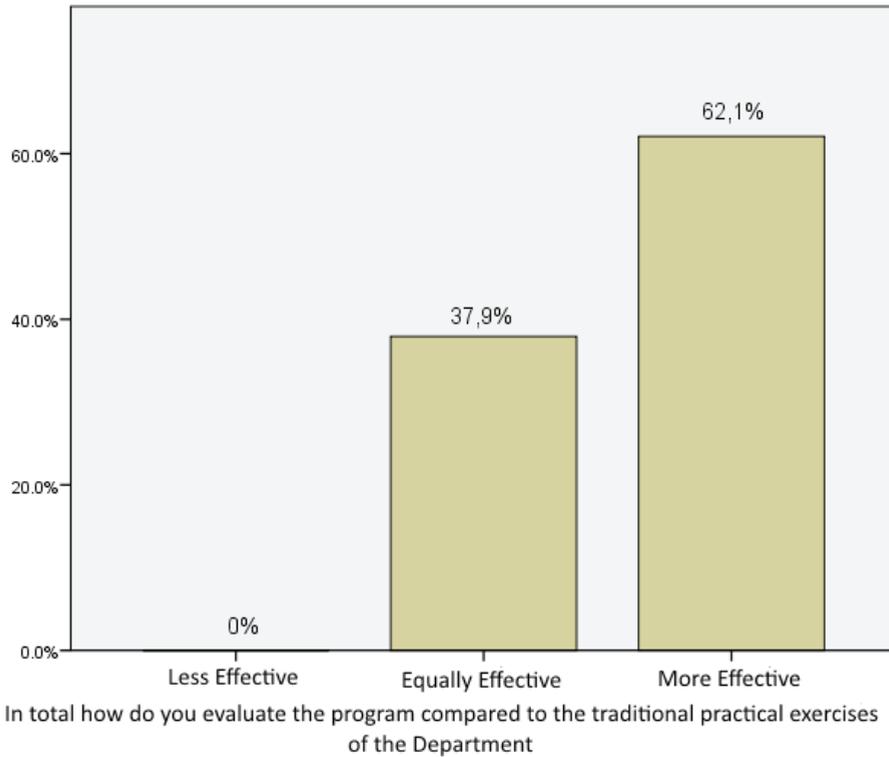
Lastly, all the students seem to evaluate highly the focused feedback they received from teacher-mentors about the quality of the teaching interventions they conducted, something very important in the context of a reflective practical exercise (Graph 11).

Graph 11. The contribution of teachers-mentors in providing feedback to the students about the quality of teaching sessions.



Summarizing their experience from the practical exercises of the NSRF program, students were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the program compared to the “traditional” program of practical exercises of the D.P.E. As we can see in Graph 12 nearly 2/3 think that the applied model was more effective than the “traditional” one, and the other 1/3 find it to be equally effective.

Graph 12. Evaluation of the program compared to the traditional practical exercises of the Department.



Conclusions

The implementation of the NSRF program of practical exercises in the D.P.E. led to important conclusions about the organization and the effectiveness of the practical exercises of the Department and the necessity of restructuring them.

It became obvious that the prolonged stay and involvement of the practicing students in schools and their more active role in all the processes has a positive impact on their familiarization with their future work environment, role and responsibilities.

It is also obvious that the increase of the time span of practical exercise provides students the opportunity to deepen their understanding about the teaching practice. This understanding is further enhanced by the active

role of the actual teachers of the classes functioning as mentors of the practicing students.

At the same time, the implementation of the institution of mentoring seems not only to strengthen the bond between active and future teachers but also to create the necessary context of collaboration and action which enables students to get a clear picture of their future work environment and formulate an authentic framework for teaching practice, administrative practice and school reality.

All the afore mentioned conclusions are clearly depicted by the views of the participating students who, in their majority, evaluated that the structure of the program results in greater effectiveness of the practical exercise compared to the “traditional” program of the D.P.E., managing, through its reflective and inquiring process, through the existence of teacher-mentors and by providing opportunities for diversified work in organizations other than schools, to constitute a more complete framework of practical exercise.

Note

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5

LINKING STUDIES WITH THE SOCIETY AND THE LABOR MARKET. EXPERIENCES FROM AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to highlight the need for preparing students a) to adapt after graduation to an ever changing labor market, and b) to use knowledge and skills acquired at the university in professional fields or jobs relevant to their studies, though not always matching exactly with the stereotypical perspectives about their future profession. The paper focuses mainly on the role that plays in this respect an Internship Program launched at the Department of Preschool Education Sciences and Educational Design (in Greek: TEPAES) of the University of the Aegean.

The paper consists of a theoretical and an empirical part. The theoretical part deals with two major issues concerning the links between university studies and the labor market. We refer, in specific, to a) some radical changes in the labor market, among which the frequently transformed contemporary working environments and features of occupations, and b) the Matching Concept, within the frame of which university studies should consider seriously the above mentioned changes. These issues were taken into account in the Internship Program with the aim of helping students to adjust smoothly in professional posts that are related either directly or indirectly to their studies.

The empirical part concerns a qualitative presentation of the experience of TEPAES students from working, within the frame of the Internship Program, in public or private institutions. The focus is to examine how the students have used in the workplace knowledge and skills acquired at the university and whether their familiarization with specific working environments has broadened their prospects for future occupation.

Changes in the labor market

Very often in economics reference is made to the distinction between the short run and the long run, the former referring to a period over which some factors remain fixed while the latter to one in which all factors are variable. Two important points arising from this distinction are of interest in this study: a) nowadays changes are so frequent that the short term, as defined above, is argued to be very short, if it exists at all, b) the duration of anyone's professional life, so also of higher education graduates, is expected to last at least 35-40 years, i.e. it is so long that, under the contemporary conditions, does not guarantee working permanency (Goos & Manning, 2007). Due to these factors, in contrast to what was happening in the past, university graduates are nowadays expected to join in a labor market in which working conditions, duties, production processes and final products hardly remain constant. Consequently, the probability that, once they are

employed, they will stay at the same organization and/or will do the same things over their working life is near zero. Specifically:

With respect to working conditions, youth unemployment, the rarity of permanent jobs and to some extent the so-called new forms of flexible employment (such as part-time work, distance work, temporary work and so on) are factors that increase mobility among employees, hence also the need for frequent adjustments and continuous re-evaluation and re-confirmation of the graduates' skills and abilities. Within this context, as a supplement to the skills and knowledge they acquire during their studies, university students should learn to cope with changing job requirements and challenges and to be flexible enough so as to adapt easily to new working environments.

In terms of jobs' characteristics: Jobs' features do change frequently over someone's working life. Typical is the example of changes in several jobs' descriptions that the older generation had experienced due to the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Thus, when in the past the introduction of ICT became an urgent need in some jobs, adaptation was not an easy task at all for those who were working for years in a conventional way. Fortunately, during that time tenure and in general permanence in working contracts gave employees chances for a non-violent adaptation. However, if an equally extensive revolutionary change takes place in the future, who can guarantee that employees will be given the chance for a smooth adaptation? The high rate of mobility in the labor market and the temporary character of many jobs increase the risk of unemployment for those who are not prepared to adjust.

As for the final products of several economic fields, it is expected that these also are subject to major changes over a period of 35-40 years. An example can be brought from the sector of education: The development of new forms of education (such as lifelong education, adult education, distance education, e-learning etc.) and the linking of educational sciences with social, cultural and hard sciences produce new challenges and opportunities for graduates of educational departments. Hence, there is no meaning for students of such departments to keep insisting in the stereotypical prospect of becoming teachers with features that

match the old fashioned job's description (Holmes & Mayhew, 2012).

Finally, some general socio-economic trends as well as some development in the sectors' structure of the economy change occupational choices. As an example, the shift of production towards the tertiary sector, the shift from public to private organizations or vice versa and the change in the optimal organizations' size are phenomena that influence occupational decisions (NUS, 2012). Moreover, economic conditions, such as the economic depression that Greece experiences since 2009 and the corresponding rate of youth unemployment, are expected to make graduates more flexible and open in their occupational aspirations.

Labor market and education

According to the Matching Theory, a theoretical framework that has wide acceptance, the success of both the University and the labor market depends on the graduates' absorption into posts that make full use of the knowledge and skills acquired during their studies. Any failure of the labor market to absorb or utilize such skills means lower economic efficiency for the organization and lower earnings for the graduates (Fokiali, 2011; Psacharopoulos, 1999). However, there are many reasons for a probable mismatching, among which well referred are the inappropriateness of existing programs of university studies and imperfect information about the conditions in the labor market (Akomolafe & Adegun, 2009). In our opinion, an additional, highly probable reason for mismatching in the above mentioned continuously changing conditions, seems to be the insistence of university departments to prepare students for specific well pre-described jobs, not allowing for flexibility in their professional expectations and the insistence of graduates to believe that they have been prepared for one single job.

With these in mind, the University, hence also the Greek University, has to face, in terms of quality and effectiveness, the current conditions of demand for higher education as these are developing on a national, European and global level but also the current as well as the future

conditions in the labor market. This is not an easy task. Traditionally, within the context of the Matching Theory, the sustainability of a university was, more or less, guaranteed if the departments: a) were implementing educational programs that provide knowledge and skills demanded by the labor market, and b) were preparing graduates so as to be ready to work in professions that match the object of their studies. However, with the new developments in the labor market in mind, this is not enough. It is the responsibility of the university's departments: a) to prepare its graduates not only with the appropriate knowledge and skills but mainly with the ability to learn, b) to make them ready to fit in a wide range of professions, and c) to enhance their ability to adapt easily in newly developing working environments and in new jobs.

Let's focus in the case TEPAES students. Traditionally by graduating from this Department, the students were expected to work exclusively as teachers in preschool educational units. Though this is still an attractive professional prospect, at present not all of the department's graduates will work as nursery and kindergarten teachers. Demand for such professions is not as high as supply, hence a significant number of TEPAES graduates either will never work at a pre-school educational unit or will find a job in such a unit several years after graduation. So, apart from their direct relationship to pre-school teaching, studies in this department should take into account that the graduates' future jobs could be either indirectly related to preschool education or related to educational planning in general, or even will be a profession whose description is still unclear, if not unknown at the time of graduation.

The strong need for an effective preparation of TEPAES students so far as their inclusion in the labor market is concerned brings changes to the axes of undergraduate studies along two directions: the acquisition of high quality useful academic knowledge and skills on the one hand, and the early acquaintance with possible future workplaces on the other. Through these two channels, it is expected that students themselves revise the attitude that professional success coincides only with the engagement in a very specific occupation, directly related to stereotypical perceptions of what they should do after graduation. At the same time, it is equally expected that employers understand that

skills, knowledge and other qualifications gained at the university match well in a range of jobs , some of which do not coincide literally with the obvious subject of studies.

This mutual understanding is achieved if the Department exposes its profile in the labor market, encouraging students to become familiar with various professional areas and letting employers realize that graduates can be useful in various posts. In this way, the students become aware of the wide range of possible future professions, make a self evaluation of what they can offer in the labor market and proceed in a shaping of their professional choices. Similarly, the organizations get familiar with the university students' skills and knowledge, take advantage of their fresh ideas and may plan their future employment taking into account this experience.

The Internship Program as an instrument of connecting university studies and the labor market

In order to address the need to prepare students for the newly developing aspects of the labor market, TEPAES implements an Internship Program, that is incorporated as optional in the department's undergraduate curriculum. This Program provides attendance of a preparatory course and the placement of students for a limited time in an organization of the private or public sector.

TEPAES Internship Program has multiple purposes: it aims at promoting students' familiarization with the contemporary labor and business environments in the private and public sector. Furthermore it connects the Department with the local community and local economy, contributing to regional development, while, by encouraging female students to try jobs other than educational ones, promotes also gender equality in the labor market. More specifically:

By choosing the Internship Program as part of their studies, TEPAES students, already in touch with the field of teaching, get in touch with other fields as well, such as educational planning, the production of educational material, the production of goods and services associated

with caring and the treatment of children, the field of culture and health, public administration etc. In this way, the Program contributes in widening, modernizing and giving new orientations to the undergraduate studies, increasing the students' expected productivity and quality of human capital. Direct practice of students in real working environments is expected to fill, at least up to a certain degree, the gap between education and the labor market, linking theory to practice. Knowledge of an organization's structure, familiarization with its operational processes, acquaintances made in the workplace, direct contacts with persons in the organization's hierarchy, the development of professional awareness, contribute positively to an easier adaptation in the labor market and can prove helpful in students' future professional life.

At the same time working experience is also educationally useful. The creation of links between the academic studies with the labor market allows students to apply their skills and knowledge in the workplace and gives them the opportunity to practice in real conditions what they have learnt. Hence, it leads to a better understanding of scientific knowledge through its connection with reality and to a further development of the skills they already have. Also, it enables them to acquire additional knowledge from working environments that may prove to be helpful in their future professional and/or educational choices. In this way, a broadening of career prospects is achieved together with the development of professional conscience.

With respect to the Department, the Internship Program facilitates cooperation between TEPAES on the one hand and the local and national economy on the other. The ever changing working environments in the private and public sector, the emergence of new forms of employment and in general contemporary socio-economic developments makes necessary the readjustments of studies, in favor of its graduates' absorption in working environments. Hence, close cooperation of the department with the labor market is necessary and the Internship Program provides communication channels between the two parts.

The organizations that employ on a placement TEPAES students get also a valuable experience from cooperating with the university. For them, placement is a free recruitment solution. The placement

students may prove to have specific skills and knowledge that can benefit the organization. In addition, given that some of the students of the Department are employed on a placement in South Aegean's small islands or isolated areas, the Internship Program serves also developmental and social objectives, contributing to regional development.

Finally, because the student population of TEPAES, as of all preschool education departments in Greece, consists of women in its large majority (over 95 %), the Internship Program, as designed, encourages female employment not only in stereotypically female jobs but also in other occupations, somehow widening the range of occupations that absorb women, thus reducing the gendered horizontal segregation.

The frame of TEPAES Internship Program

The Internship Program is designed based on the agreement of three parts –students, the Department and the public or private organization.

The responsibilities of participating students consist of: a) attending a course titled “Development of Educational and Productive Activities and Practice”, called hereafter ‘Module’, b) working in an organization of the private or public sector, referred to in this work as ‘Placement’, and c) responding to the evaluation requirements.

The Module contains a part that prepares students for the Placement and a part of tutoring for the students that are placed on a job. It includes an introduction to the need for matching university studies and the labor market, the aims and targets of the Internship Program, detailed technical information about the Placement, a general overview on the structure of an organization and the functions of management and a series of tips about the students' behavior in a working environment.

Placement includes working from one to three months (usually two months) in an organization. For the organizations' eligibility the major criterion is that the object of their production is related either directly or indirectly to one out of five educational axes (or sections) that form the fundamental constituents of the Department's undergraduate

curriculum. Namely the sectors are: a) Educational Studies and General Teaching, b) Psychology and Special Education, c) Literature - Language and Culture, d) Sociology – Economics - Policy of Education and Gender Studies, and e) Science and Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The responsibilities of an enterprise or institution that offers one or more places to students are as follows: A person appointed by the organization gets in touch with the participating student ensuring that the trainee acquires the appropriate knowledge about the structure of the organization, gets adequate information about the work he/she is going to do and that the things is asked to do are in accordance with his/her level of knowledge and abilities. Furthermore the appointed person in cooperation with the participating faculty members is expected to help handling any issue that may emerge in relation to the Placement. During the Placement students are given the chance to gain a comprehensive insight into the operation of the institution where they are employed, get incorporated in the work environment and draw on experience as assistants in one or more phases of the production process, including (where possible) the organization's administration. This allows students to apply as much as possible their theoretical knowledge in the workplace and to gain experience from a working environment in real terms. Also it helps them check some of their competences, the level of their productivity and adaptability, the appropriateness of their behavior, the relevance of their skills and knowledge with the job's needs and requirements etc.

It should be noted that the organization has not the obligation of payment and insurance of the trainee. These are provided by the program that is funded by the Ministry of Education (funds from the National Strategic Frame of Reference, in Greek: NSRF).

The Department appoints three faculty members that are fully obliged for the design, coordination, administration and implementation of the program, deliver the seminars of the Module, act as students' supervisors, provide mediation between the student and the organization if necessary and evaluate the students. In responding to their duties they are assisted by members of the administrative and technical staff of the Departments

and cooperate with the University's Structure of Employment and Career (in Greek: DASTA) and the University Research Unit (in Greek: ELKE) the latter being the body responsible for the administration of the Program and the students' remuneration.

The evaluation of the Program is multidimensional, based on the assessment of the views of all participants (students, supervisors and representatives of employment units) as these are recorded in questionnaires specifically designed for this purpose. Lately the questionnaires have been standardized for all the departments of the University of the Aegean that 'run' Internship Programs. In particular the student's performance in TEPAES is multi-criterial including full completion of typical placement requirements, satisfactory response to the job's needs as these are ascertained in the organization's questionnaire, participation in the Module's requirements and submission of a report at the end of the placement period in which they describe their experience.

Methodology and Results: The experience from students' placement in specific fields of employment

The Internship Program performance depends on many factors –the response of students, the variety of organizations that host them during their placement, the number of students that after graduation find a job in the organization where they did their practice and the opinions of the stakeholders. In this work we present the economic branches that seemed to be attractive for placement together with some indicative opinions of students about the experience they have committed from placement. The branches were selected using as criterion the number of students that have chosen to be employed in them. The opinions were selected from interviewing students after completion of their practice.

Health services

The healthcare industry was among the fields that cooperated in the Internship Program. A significant number of TEPAES placement students were employed in private but mostly in public health institutions

of the Ministry of Health and Welfare at central and regional level, as well as in welfare services and child care centers of Municipalities. The job of TEPAES' students in those institutions is associated with educational and administrative responsibilities in various departments and clinics.

The educational responsibilities refer to creative activities with patients either on an individual or group basis. For example, usually pediatric departments of regional hospitals have either an organized library or at least some shelves of books (fairy tales, encyclopedias) and provide painting facilities that give the opportunity to parents or health attendants to entertain children. In some hospitals there are organized places where children are kept busy, watching TV, reading books and painting. Students during their internship program were organizing reading and creative activities in these places, inspired by their modules in language, art and creative education, applying in practice the knowledge they had acquired from their university studies, adapting them to the needs of the specific environments. The children were involved actively in such activities getting knowledge, acquiring cognitive abilities and skills and developing their imagination as well as creative and critical thinking.

The responsibilities of students in the healthcare institutions in some cases was also extended to administrative responsibilities entrusted to them by the central administrative offices of the hospital. Thus, some students have worked as assistants in the protocol office, some dealt with the reception and guidance of patients' relatives and visitors, some helped in the re-organization of play-rooms in pediatric departments and assisted in the implementation of seminars for doctors and nurses in the hospital and in a case they were involved in the organization of the hospital's library. Indicative are the following comments:

“A really creative work. We had to decide for ourselves what to do. The books were lying on the floor in big bunches. We had to place them on the shelves and we have tried to find a way to list and record them. We found some information from the Internet and we made it! Everyone told us what a

good job we did”.

(Maria, placement student in the organization of the hospital’s library).

“I struggled in a bureaucratic place. I had to be careful not to make mistakes in the listings. The routine work is not attractive for me. Probably I would not want to work there, but I am pleased to have gained the experience”.

(Helen, placement student in hospital administration).

In conclusion, TEPAES graduates can offer a lot working in hospitals. They can keep company to patients, especially children, offer them educational services, help them with their schoolwork, but also entertain them with creative activities. They can also help in the administration as well as in the educational and social activities of the hospital’s community, improving the quality of hospital’s culture.

Services of the public sector

The field of public services includes public organizations, structures and services on municipal, regional and central level. A number of TEPAES students were employed in various departments of municipalities such as the Registry, municipal departments of public relations, culture, tourism, sports etc. They have also worked in municipal camps for pupils of primary and low secondary schools. In some services, such as the Registry and the Municipal Protocol, students undertook administrative duties. Their tasks included issuing certificates (such as certificates of birth, marriage, marital status, family status and death, certificates of non-liability of municipal taxes etc.), recording of incoming and outgoing documents etc. In the departments of public relations, culture etc they were responsible for distributing press releases about the municipality and its events, for sending books that had been issued by the municipality to libraries, other municipalities etc., for helping in the organization of municipal festivals and receptions and for checking the completeness of documents of groups of citizens that were applying for specific programs.

Their duties in municipal camps for pupils included the organization of cultural, artistic and educational activities.

“It was a good experience. Many people were coming and going. It's nice to be able to serve”.

(Kathy, placement student at a Citizen Service Centre).

“At first I was given a text to send it to local radio and TV stations. I found that the text could be improved ... I told my boss, trying not to offend anybody. She agreed. At the end, she was just telling me the facts, I was preparing the text and she was doing only a fast checking before distributing it. I felt that I was assisting her a lot. She was so busy!!”.

(Ellie, placement student at a municipal public relations department).

“I worked in “.....”, a municipal structure that deals with the prevention of drugs. At first I was a bit cautious; I didn't want to deal with the problem. But I was mistaken. The unit was very small and friendly and its task was to visit schools and give speeches about preventing drugs. I joined the activities of the staff and helped in the administration but also in the visits to schools. My lessons of children psychology and socialization proved very useful. I am thinking of doing a postgraduate course in a subject related to the delinquent behavior of adolescents”.

(Christina, placement student at a municipal structure of preventing the use of drugs).

“I had to go through very old volumes of the registry. I was trying to think how these people looked like in the old times”.

(Marianne, placement student at Municipal Registry).

In conclusion, TEPAES graduates can offer their services working in various departments of Municipalities, Regional Authorities, as well as on civil services on a central level. They can deal with the

administration but also their skills and knowledge can prove valuable in various departments. They can contribute in improving the image of these departments.

Cultural services

Many organizations in the field of culture were actively involved in the Internship Program and proved to be very attractive for TEPAES students. Thus, a significant number of participants has chosen to be employed in municipal cultural organizations, galleries, libraries and other cultural institutions. In these units they have worked either in the administration or as assistants in activities. Some students have assisted in the design and implementation of cultural events and art activities and, in particular, in exhibitions of paintings, sculptures, pottery, engravings etc. They have also worked as assistants in activities associated with dance and theater, helping in organizing performances and competitions. In municipal cultural organizations they have been involved actively in the implementation of educational programs related to culture. In some organizations these programs were designed in cooperation with the University of the Aegean. In these cases the students were acting as links between the university and the cultural unit and had the chance to apply the methodology and the way of work in which they were accustomed. Important is the case of two libraries situated in small communities that were not operating and the students made possible their re-opening. In one of them they undertook the responsibility to classify books and archival records as well as to inform the residents about the library and promote its activities. In galleries students took an active part in the organization's painting exhibition, contributed to the overall operation, participated in the realization of organized educational programs and games - and also in some cases designed and developed their own. Indicative comments:

“We will never forget our first day there! None of us had any previous working experience but the gallery seemed highly promising for an internship. We went there early, waiting somebody to welcome us but nothing was happening.

Everybody was busy and no-one was available to tell us what to do. While questioning ourselves if we had to abandon everything and quit from the program, we approached an old man who was sitting on a sofa in the middle of an empty room. He looked as desperate as we did but, in our surprise, as soon as he saw us his despair disappeared: 'Are you the girls from the university that I was told they will be my right hand? What do you think of setting in this room my still life paintings?' Suddenly we felt very important and responsible. For two days we worked hard even on technical matters. Certainly we have learned all the steps that are needed for an exhibition. Next evening in the inauguration reception we were in the front office. How proud we felt when we saw our tutor to be among the visitors and to receive merits about us from the master artist!! We felt as if we were the university's ambassadors in the local Society..."

(Despoina, Alexandra and Chrysanthi, placement students at a municipal gallery).

"We worked on art projects . It was easy for us because it looked like what we do at the University. The children were a delight !!"

(Marilena and Georgia, placement students in educational programs of a municipal gallery).

In conclusion, culture is certainly associated with education since it is an axis that is diffused diagonally in all disciplines of educational sciences. Also, the modern approach about museums, libraries etc relies much on interaction and engagement of these institutions with educational programs. Graduates for education departments certainly can offer a lot working in this area.

Education

The branch of education is certainly the one in which traditionally most of the graduates from university Departments of Education are

expected to work. For this reason, a significant part of the curriculum of undergraduate studies is directed towards the preparation of students to gain teaching experience so as to become teachers in preschool educational units, mainly kindergartens. This is why the curriculum includes teaching practices of limited duration in specific courses carried out in nursery schools and kindergartens of the city of Rhodes at three stages. The first stage is limited to monitoring teachings, the second stage consists of teaching specific subjects and the final stage refers to independent teaching in kindergartens. This part of the curriculum is particularly useful for developing teaching skills associated exclusively with their future workplaces.

The Internship Program differs substantially from the practical teaching exercises that the existing curriculum provides. The Internship Program promotes placement of students in pre-school educational units and playgrounds but not for teaching, in any case not for teaching only. The aim here is to get an insight of how the unit works and to have a holistic view of the total of activities that take place, whether educational or not.

More specifically, within the frame of the Internship Program, many students have worked in public and private kindergartens and primary schools, some private elementary summer schools, and in administrative educational services on a regional level. In kindergartens the participants had administrative and educational responsibilities. Their administrative duties included the support of recording of the organizational and operating stations and kindergartens. With regard to educational matters, students have participated in the activities of the unit, occupying children in two age groups (3-4 years and 5-6 years). In some cases they undertook the duty of completing the daily program by performing their own activities. In some other cases they dealt with the exclusive care of children with special behavior. They offered assistance in the classroom, but also outside, in the yard, helping children with their meals, escorting on tours, and helping with transportation to and from the school bus.

In playgrounds they helped to organize the space and offered their support in the preparation of specific events. During these events they were organizing games and activities for entertaining guests and were

supervising young children making sure that the playground rules were obeyed.

In some cases, specifically in a summer school organized by a local folk society in Cyprus, the students were responsible for the dance team, assisted in events that other teams have organized (football, swimming, cycling, basketball, book reading), as well as in free creative activities, among which painting, pottery and singing.

Indicative comments from two students:

“Other things were worrying me and other were the ones that proved to be mostly stressful. Oh no! the educational part not was not difficult. In any case the difficulties were predictable and I could cope with them. The hard part was to control all the kids and take care so as to be safe. Luckily I was not alone”.

(Eva, placement student at daycare school).

“The nursery’ head teacher was an excellent person. This alone is a good reason for working in such an area”.

(Elisabeth, placement student at daycare school).

In general, a TEPAES graduate can offer to the education sector, a lot more than teaching only. As an illustration, they can work in small nursery units undertaking the responsibility of teaching, caring and managing. In remote and inaccessible areas they can offer teaching support to older students after school. They can work in the field of lifelong learning and, more specifically, in adult education/training programs, in special education structures, in the field of educational planning, in the production of educational materials and in the field of educational games and playing activities. Their skills and knowledge may prove to be relevant to enterprises that are producing children's books and other products related to education (such as educational CD-ROM, videos, etc.).

Conclusions – Proposals

In the international literature (indicatively NUS, 2012) Internship Programs are often praised but also criticized for various reasons: they are usually short, remuneration is low, employers do not entrust serious work in trainees who neither create a complete idea for the workplace nor have the chance to show their potential etc. However, the possibility given to students for obtaining even a limited work experience, as a part of their studies, is certainly a positive element that overcomes the shortcomings.

The frame of TEPAES Internship Program was designed in such a way as to strengthen the links between the Department and the labor market, to help students to develop specialized professional skills and achieve professional awareness and evaluate their competence in working environments that match their interests.

From the results so far, the Internship Program launched at TEPAES seems to help students to broaden the range of career choices and to increase familiarization with working environments that perhaps alone would never had met. In these environments, students have the opportunity to check their competencies and apply their knowledge and abilities, forming a realistic opinion about things they can do in the future.

The interviews on which the empirical part of this work is based have shown that students who took part responded well to the demands of the job and were benefited from it. They have shown interest in gaining experience and knowledge and were praised for using their skills and knowledge in workplace, for taking initiatives and for being incorporated rather smoothly in the working environment. In a considerable number of cases their experience helped them to shape (positively but also negatively) their choices for future occupation.

For the Department, the Program gave a chance for promoting its graduates' profile as well as its own social image and acted symbolically as an expression of its willingness to cooperate with the society. By monitoring the students' experiences, TEPAES gained a basic non-material infrastructure for informing its graduates on employment opportunities and careers. At the same time, the annual recording of

private and public organizations willing to participate helps creating a network that reflects the interest of the labor market in recruiting persons with skills and knowledge that TEPAES undergraduate studies offer. This is expected to work as an input that helps the department to adjust its existing curriculum, so that its graduates become ready to meet the labor market requirements. As for the institutions, through the Internship Program they got free assistance by the trainees and in some cases they gained from the students' creative thinking. They also got benefit from opening a channel of cooperation with the university and from getting access to a pool of human capital.

The continuation of the program is expected to help in the development of a systematic cooperation between the university and the society as well as in the establishment of mutual support, followed by an opening of the academic world to the society that allows the transformation of the university knowledge into actions at the benefit of the society.

Certainly an internship program, as the one described above, is not a panacea for the relationship between the university and the society. It is, however, an action in the right direction. For, an extravert, multifunctional university, involved in the society's social and economic life, reflects the willingness of the society to become a knowledge society. Within the frame of cooperation that the Program creates, the society is encouraged to refer directly to the university seeking support in fields that are relevant to the university's objects of studies. The university, on its side, by offering its services, helps in the construction of an interactive network of cooperation with the society. Such an interchange, if continuous, helps in building confidence that the academic knowledge is not produced only for the sake of knowledge but passes out of the university, within the society, in response to specific needs. These conditions work, on the one hand, at the benefit of social institutions, which have at their disposal the university's specialized knowledge and, on the other, at the benefit of the university that gets valuable feedback from the society. This interaction strengthens various forms of relationships between community members, helps in the expansion and modernization of institutions, makes lifelong learning a reality and develops the awareness of the society at the university's capacity.

This framework of cooperation may prove to have impacts on development. The university by definition has the potential to produce and use knowledge and expertise and to contribute in the improvement of the quality of human capital. The society that cooperates with the university is benefited from the interchange between the academic community and social institutions, getting knowledge, offering experience and transforming knowledge into actions. This process is particularly important in the context of a regional society, where the university is, quantitatively but mainly qualitatively, a significant stakeholder that should be active at the society's service. For, there is no justification for idle potentialities or neutral activities on a regional level where all endogenous forces should be directing their actions in support of socio-economic development.

Note:

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6

WHEN THEORY AND PRACTICE “CONVERSE”: TEACHING LANGUAGE IN KINDERGARTEN BY 4TH YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Introduction

All the evidence indicates that “*the quality of the interaction between the child and the kindergarten teacher is the most critical aspect to determine the quality of Preschool Education and Care*” (UNESCO, 2007: 192). For this reason, the initial education of the kindergarten teachers should not include only theoretical studies, but also practical training for a sufficient amount of time and with specific educational goals, which will be supported with the guidance and feedback of expert personnel (ILO, 2013). The higher the standards of the students’ preparation is, the more possible it is for them to create a higher quality pedagogical environment, which will provide better results for the children that will be under their supervision (OECD, 2011). This is why

a very good initial education of the personnel is very crucial and the need of consistent and cohesive programs of professional preparation will assure the quality of Early Childhood Education and Care - ECEC (Elliot, 2006). However, the practical training cannot focus only at the habituation of the future kindergarten teacher with the educational methods and the management of a classroom, but should also aim for the professionalism and the capability to function as a researcher and modulator, through the deliberative analysis of the educational process (Matsagouras, 1998).

Program of Funded Practical Training

Based on the direction of the research of the students, the Program of Funded Practical Training was designed. It began in the spring semester of the academic year of 2011. The planning of this Program foresees the participation of twenty five 4th year University students per year. These students are chosen based on the number of lessons they have succeeded at and on their grade point average. The participants work for four months (February to May) in public kindergarten schools of Patras, which have expressed their interest in accepting the students. The student's educational work is monitored by a scientific group which is consisted of four people and the supporting guidance of the classroom teacher. In the end, the evaluations of the supervisors, the kindergarten teachers and the students themselves, are collected, as well as, the daily school programs and the documentation of the thematic units (projects), which were completed by the students during the period of their practical training.

The Program of Funded Practical Training of the Department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education of the University of Patras appears to be the longest and most demanding, in comparison to equivalent programs of other departments of Preschool Education. However, as it has been already claimed, the already existing practical training does not provide many opportunities for the student to become part of the school life (Table 1). Also, the coordination, from the students'

side, of projects or thematic units was almost impossible. Due to the above, the most constructive solution, that was promoted, is that the number of students that participate in the program lessens. In this way, those that do participate can maximize the time they spend in a kindergarten school.

For the preparation of the students, before the beginning of the Program, five 3-hour labs were organized. Their topic was the organization of the educational program at the kindergarten school, the development of a thematic unit, the ways of managing a classroom and also, the cooperation with the kindergarten teachers and the parents. For informing the teachers, meetings were organized with the presence of education consultants of preschool education of the area. The topics of the meetings were to analyze the role of the classroom teachers, as mentors, and the ways the work of the students can be supported by them.

Table 1: The Practical Training and the Funded Practical Training

Practical Training			
5 th Semester	6 th Semester	7 th Semester	8 th Semester
4 days: 1 activity 1 daily program workshops	4 days: 2 daily programs workshops	4 days: 1 activity 1 daily program workshops	4 days: 2 daily programs workshops
In Total: 8 days of observation, 2 activities, 4 daily programs and preparation workshops			
The Funded Practical Training			
5 th Semester	6 th Semester	7 th Semester	8 th Semester
As previous	a.p.	a.p.	>organization & participation in the attainment of 75 daily programs >coordination of 4 thematic units

The Evaluation of the Program, by the students

As it has already been mentioned, after the completion of the Funded Practical Training, the students were asked to evaluate the program by filling in a questionnaire. The questionnaire was consisted of both close and open questions. According to the results, the majority of the students did not face any specific difficulties. Three students mentioned some problems that had to do with the way of managing the classroom (disobedience of the children, refusal of the children to participate in activities) and two students referred to difficulties during the time of adjustment, which gradually were eliminated. Also, all the students stated that they would recommend the Program of Funded Practical Training at their classmates and that the help that they gained by the kindergarten teacher of the class was very important.

A special interest appears in the answers of the students at the open question “*Do you believe that your participation in the Program of the Funded Practical Training helped you?*” where all the students responded positively with pronounced enthusiasm. Four representative answers follow:

“I believe that it helped me because it gave me the opportunity to see how the kindergarten teachers work in a daily base. I worked with the children of the class for a longer time and thereafter, I am more confident in the way I will approach and help each child individually, and also which of the children can help me to evaluate the activities I do. Moreover, I enhance my educational material and I see the way a classroom is organized, the weaknesses and the improvements that can be done, so I can create a better organized class, in the future, which will be more functional for the children, as also for me.” [24].

“My participation in the Program of the Practical Training, without exaggeration, I believe was the best experience that I had during my studies at the University.” [4].

“With the previous practical training, we went four days, during the semester, (2 days of observing, 2 daily programs) and we could not picture what a kindergarten is. With the Program, I came into contact with the real function of a

kindergarten school, I became acquainted with the profession of a kindergarten teacher and I learned if I wanted to follow it for the rest of my life.” [7].

“... it contributed to my personal feedback about how to react in different kinds of situations, what are my limits and my capabilities.” [17].

Regarding the possibility of improvement of the Program of Funded Practical Training, the students proposed simplifying the bureaucratic part of the Program, the creation of a website, from which they will be able to take ideas and proposals for activities and, lastly, the better connection of the context of the lessons with the educational process.

Furthermore, in the 6th edition of the journal “*i–dasta*” of the University of Patras (http://career.duth.gr/cms/files/i-dasta_6_28022012.pdf), the below text of a student was published:

“During the last year of my studies, I decided to participate in the 4 month Program of Practical Training, which is sponsored by the Ministry of Education. I believed I needed training in the classroom of a kindergarten, of a longer length, in comparison to the one that the Department already provided, and with more challenges. By participating in the Program, I learned many things and I owe this to the supervisor of the program and also to the head of the kindergarten and the teacher of the class. The daily, multilateral and creative communication with the children and with the teachers of the kindergarten, lead to a growth, in the personal level, of the teaching methods, the permeation in the children’s psychology and the gaining of a valuable experience. One of the most important gains was the opportunity to interact and with the parents in the briefing about the thematic units. As my final evaluation, I believe that the Program gives the ability to the participants of a “complete” practice, which contributes to the fundamentals of the future educators. For these reasons, I recommend without a doubt this Program to the students of Preschool Education and I truly believe that its’ continuance is essential.”

Evaluation of the Program by the kindergarten teachers

The evaluation of the kindergarten teachers, who accepted the students in their classes, was also positive. In the closed questions of the evaluation sheets, regarding the punctuality of the working hours, the preparation, the cooperation spirit and the readiness of the students, all the answers were positive. Very interesting was the answer to the question “*if the presence of the students was helpful in the classroom*”. Taking into account the number of students in each kindergarten class, most teachers declared that the presence of a second person in the classroom facilitated their work. In addition, there were other teachers that pointed out other kind of benefits from the presence of the students.

For example, one kindergarten teacher writes:

“I had next to me an excellent and responsible collaborator with unique ideas and activities, enhancing the daily program and facilitating its completion.” [4] and another one notes down “... *I learned new things.*” [12].

The dialogue that seems to have developed, in at least some cases, was interactive and the cooperation was substantial and useful for both sides. It seems that in some occasions they brought new knowledge and gave the opportunity to the teachers to enhance their methods. This aspect opens new potentials to the Program of Funded Practical Training and it would be important to investigate it further in the future.

Designing language activities

Attempting to study the kind of language activities the students chose to complete, with the guidance of the teacher, we focused on the first ten each one noted down in the daily programs through the second month (March) of the Funded Practical Training. We chose the second month because we assumed that the students would be fully active in the class program and the cooperation with the kindergarten teacher would be established. The purpose of the above documentation was to examine the methods of literacy that occur in kindergarten schools and the ways that the proposals of the curriculum for

the language education in kindergarten are utilized. The specification of these issues would be used for the better preparation of the students throughout the next years of continuation of the Program of Funded Practical Training. The activities were divided in three categories that were defined by Curriculum for the development of language activities: a) Oral Communication (speaking and listening), b) Reading, and c) Writing and written expression.

The results of the documentation are recorded on Table 2.

Table 2: Documentation of language activities

Oral Communication	Written language/speech/text	
Speaking - Listening	Reading: text processing	Writing and written expression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<u>Conversations</u> > introduction of a subject & expansion of knowledge: 22 •<u>Enhancement of vocabulary</u> > compound words: 12 > family words: 14 > specific vocabulary: 15 •<u>Phonetic/Phonological awareness</u> > syllable segmentation: 1 >phonetic awareness: 11 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •<u>Acquaintance with different kind of printed language - texts:</u> > Narrative: 63 > Explanatory: 22 > Descriptive: 3 > Guiding >>recipes: 6 >Multimodal texts: >> maps: 4 •<u>Gathering information from different sources (internet):</u> 6 •<u>Lending Library:</u> 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dictated texts – group activity > Narrative: 5 > Letter: 1 > Album: 2 > Poster: 1 •<u>Production (individually) narrative texts:</u> 4 •<u>Alphabetic code – Teaching of letters and letter –sound correspondence:</u> 54 [in many occasions with worksheets]
In total: 75 (30 %)	In total: 108 (43,2 %)	In total: 67 (26,8 %)

Although someone might expect that priority was given to the activities that had to do with oral communication, the reading activities

surpass them. More specifically, in the oral communication, except of the conversations that introduce a new topic or explore the existing knowledge on one (N=22), more than half of the language activities (N=41) have to do with the enrichment of the vocabulary than the phonetic awareness. Usually, the communication activities took place immediately after the morning circle in the conversation corner, by all the students. For reading, the majority of the activities (N=63) are related to, as it is expected, narrative texts. What is difficult to determine, is if the narration was accompanied by questions for the understanding of the text or of other activities (pictorial process, dramatization, writing a story etc.). Secondly come the explanatory texts (N=22), where informational books were usually read. The texts provided further knowledge on the topics the children were already dealing with in the class. For writing, nine texts were written in teams, five of which were narrative. The remaining four had to do with a letter to a cooperating class, a poster/invitation towards the parents and two albums with the material of the thematic unit. Lastly, four, individually made, narrative texts were included. One of them was a comic and the rest were stories written in small handmade booklets. What is amazing, though, is the large number of activities that aim for the realization, by the children, of the technique of writing, learning the letter-sound correspondence (N=54), which in many cases came with work sheets. In the work sheets the children were asked to spot the letter they were learning, to circle pictures in which the name of the drawn subject started from the specific letter and to write the letter in capitals and small.

The length of the specific practical training, which surpasses all others, apart from the reading of narrative texts, forces us to examine the reasons that make it the most popular, at least to the educators. The ability of learning written language is connected to two abilities: The ability to decode and the ability to understand oral language (Wren, 2000; Porpodas, 2003). Although in the Curriculum for kindergarten school an intended goal is that “*the children realize gradually that the phonemes, of the spoken language, correspond to letters*” (p. 596). This goal refers to the reading ability and nowhere the systematic teaching

of alphabetic code is recommended. To the contrary, in the Teachers book of Grade 1 of elementary school, it is clearly defined that *“one of the most important goals of the school, at Grade 1 level, is the access of the child at the systematic and inhibited use of the alphabetic system of our language”* (Karantzola, Kirdi, Spaneli & Tsiagkani, 2006:7). Although it is not clearly mentioned, the curriculum for language in kindergarten school is based on the theory of emerging literacy (Tafa, 2001; Giannikopoulou, 2001; Dafermou, Koulouri, & Mpasagianni, 2006; Tafa, 2008; Goti & Dinas, 2009). The term of emergent literacy is used to declare *“a developing extend of knowledge for the written language and a variety of behaviors which start before school and lead to the knowledge of reading, writing, talking ,listening ,watching and thinking”* (Zygouris – Coe, 2001:6) and as it is emphasized *“a broad theoretical state is entailed for the learning of reading and writing (developmental and structural), children from their birth up to 5 or 6 years old and focuses in the informal learning which occurs through the participation of the child in activities at home, at the day care or at kindergarten school”* (Yaden, Rowe & MacGillivray, 1999:2). This is why literacy emerges through the participation of the children in literacy events, which, according to the definition of Heath (1982:93) *“it is all those cases in which a document is a constituent part of the same nature of the interactions and the explanatory elaborations of the subjects that participate in these interactions”*. Therefore, as we have already mentioned (Kondyli & Stellakis, 2010:86) *“any method that falls out of the occasion of interaction and focuses at the traditional teaching of written code, basically cannot be considered as literacy event”* and cannot be considered as a method of improvement of emergent literacy.

Taking into account that the students were not taught neither at the language lessons nor during the practical training or during the preparation seminars for the Funded Practical Training, it is important that we consider if these took place after the advice of the kindergarten teachers. The documentation, which occurred at the beginning of the third semester of the school year, stands for it. At the attempt of the preparation, especially of the children who at the following year will attend Grade 1, it is possible that the kindergarten teachers encourage

the use of such methods. Of course, it is just a hypothesis which although it is promoted by informal observations and conversations, it is worth researching it further. These indications, though, should be utilized throughout the Funded Practical Training and that, in the future, the extent and type of methods that promote the emergent literacy is clarified. Additionally, the increase of preparation seminars for the participants of the Program of Funded Practical Training kindergarten teachers, so they can realize the role that they are called to accomplish as “intermediate” of the literacy (Kucer, 2009), involving the children in literacy incidents and “unfolding” for them these linguistic, cognitive, social and cultural processes that are involved with them. In kindergarten we do not focus on the teaching of individual metacognitive skills (independent model – Street, 1995), which is related to the technique of reading and writing, but firstly we pursue the development of motive to the children and especially those that come from under privileged environments. Even if we accept that the processing of the code is a part of the emergent literacy, we should not forget that it covers a specific part of the range of the various ways of gathering and producing a meaning that are included in it. In every case, working with the alphabetical code must be adapted in the communicational level that is understood by children and not with the adoption of traditional methods, as those that are described in the daily programs of the students.

Limitations

The mentioning of the goals and the brief description of each activity gave this research only a first impression of a part of the language education, and with a quantitative way. For example, the language that is used in free activities or in the activities of other educational field the quantitative characteristics of the activities (for example, if the teams were consisted of a small number of students, if during the readings questions of high cognitive demand occurred, if the activities aimed at fulfilling communication goals), the contribution of the classroom teacher for the creation of the activities is not determined. Of course,

this kind of research would require a ethnographic type of observation, which, if it took place, it would provide the ability of creating a more detailed picture of the language and literacy activities and would allow more considerable annotations for the dialogue and the interaction between the students with the teachers and the children they had under their supervision. In every case, though, it designates important matters which have to do with the preparation and the observation of the students of the Funded Practical Training, possibly not only for their language education, but also for the other educational subject. The goal of the Funded Practical Training is the enrichment of the knowledge the students received during their studies, through their application, as also the development of researching and contemplation abilities. The creation of a kindergarten teacher/mentor team, that would be properly qualified to support the work of the students, would offer towards this direction many benefits. They would not only encourage the gradual integration in the school life, but also by providing them the supplies to design, evaluate and negotiate constantly about what they are doing in the classroom and why, enhancing, in this way, their professional development and autonomy, which is what the Program of Funded Practical Training wants to achieve.

Note

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BENEFITS, CONTIGUITY OF STUDIES AND PROBLEMS IN PAID PRACTICUM OF KINDERGARTEN STUDENT TEACHERS

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Introduction

The Practicum, the training of future professionals in workplace environments, has garnered the interest of modern research, with a variety of terms, such as *internship*, *professional practice*, *vocational practice*, *workplace practice*, which more or less perform the same basic meaning (Hager, Lee & Reich, 2012). The Practicum of pre-service teachers in acquiring school experience is a very important aspect of their education, a key feature of their professional training, especially for teachers of preschool and primary education in all countries (Arrends, 2009; Karras & Wolhuter, 2010; Hatzidimou, 2000; Bikos, 2011). During their practicum student teachers have a

first contact with school practice and gradually increase their time spent in school, the tasks and the responsibilities undertaken in this (Russell, 2007; Edwards & Protheroe, 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The general purpose of Practicum in University Departments which educate pre-service teachers is common: the familiarization of student teachers with the school educational process and their practice in teaching and classroom management (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Research about Practicum has mainly the character of the case study, as it is usually related to student teachers of a single University Department and often is conducted by researchers involved in it. However, these studies have emerged fairly common results, the most important of them are listed below.

Student teachers recognize the importance and the multidimensional benefits of all forms of practicum and wish to increase practice time in schools and cooperation with supervisors (Dasiou et al., 1995; Kyridis et al., 2005; Ntoliopoulou, 2005; Oikonomidis, 2007). According to their views, practicum makes them able to link theoretical knowledge of subjects taught at the University with pedagogical practice developed in the classroom, and familiarize themselves with children of preschool and school age (Dasiou et al., 1995; Ntoliopoulou, 2005; Oikonomidis, 2007). The connection of theory with practice is not so simple (Papadopoulou, 1999; Bikos, 2011; Androussou et al., 2011) and includes the element of reflection by the trainee student teacher (Pollard, 2002; Avgitidou, 2007; Michalopoulou, 2007; Calderhead, 1991). Besides, researchers point out the difficulty of trainee student teachers to link theoretical knowledge with school practice (Dasiou et al., 1995; Ntoliopoulou, 2005; Androussou et al., 2011). The double danger either turn teacher studies into a theoretical approach and, subsequently, disconnect them from school practice either turn them into a practical type apprenticeship, always lurks (Xochellis, 2011; Kiggins, Cambourne & Ferry, 2007; Labaree, 2008).

Student teachers have high expectations about their practicum, but these expectations are not always met. Although is not specified what and how these expectations are formed (Botsoglou, 2003; Dasiou et al., 1995), it is important to know and to take into account them in the

design of practicum (Calderhead, 1991; Olsen, 2008). Relative research findings have showed that student teachers' negative views are related with the lack of sufficient cooperation between students teachers and their supervisors, lack of connecting university theoretical courses with school practice, small duration of practicum, the high economic costs, the demanding tasks of teaching practice (Ntoliopoulou, 2005; Kyridis et al., 2005; Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Oikonomidis, 2007). These findings encountered also in research with student teachers from several countries (Allen, 2009; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Smith, 2000).

The Paid Practicum in the Department of Preschool Education of the University of Crete

The Department of Preschool Education (D.P.E.) of the University of Crete participates in the program of paid practicum since October 2010. The objectives of D.P.E., as defined by the official foundation and recorded in its academic study guide, are the development of Pedagogy, teacher training and tackling education problems (D.P.E., 2013). The course of studies includes lectures, seminars, thesis submission and teaching practice in kindergarten. Teaching practice is obligatory for all students, takes five semesters and is graduated in three (3) levels. During the first level student teachers observe teaching in public kindergartens and during the other two levels student teachers undertake the design, implementation and evaluation of their own teaching in these kindergartens. The Paid Practicum (P.P.) is a part of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) under the Operational Program "Education and Lifelong Learning" that is co-financed by Greece and the European Union. The main bulk of the funding (approximately 80% of the total) is provided for remuneration and social security of student teachers who participate in Paid Practicum (P.P.), and the remaining amount is provided to cover administrative costs of the program. The P.P. is offered to the student teachers of D.P.E. of the University of Crete as an extra not obligatory course, not counted in the 52 required courses for obtaining the degree of kindergarten teacher.

Participation of student teachers

In the P.P. of the D.P.E. of the University of Crete until acad. year 2013-2014 have participated two hundred sixty-seven (267) students teachers, distributed in groups of about thirty-five (35) persons per academic semester. However, requests for participation in each semester were much more than 35. It is noteworthy that the interest of students for participation in P.P. increased every semester and this is certified by both the increasing number of requests and the growing number of students who applied to participate for a second time in the program. This interest is confirmed by the continuous addition of new P.P. institutions and the increase of the number of the trainee student teachers.

Selection Criteria for trainee student teachers

In order to select and settle trainee student teachers in the P.P. institutions we use several criteria: a) the year of university studies (those from the higher years of study are preferred), b) the courses undertaken related to the tasks in the P.P. institutions (e.g. to be selected in a school for supporting children with special needs or learning difficulties, a student teacher should have been successfully examined in special education courses etc.), c) their degrees from their university courses.

Paid Practicum Institutions

In the P.P. course participate public and private elementary schools and kindergartens of Rethymno, Heraklion, Athens, one Municipal Art Museum and three charitable child protection institutions. The number of institutions which show interest in participating in the P.P. course of D.P.E. is increasing, and this is an indication of the awareness of the program. These educational institutions are the kind of workplaces where pre-service teachers attend for a job. Until now there are not objections by any of the participants about selection and distribution of student teachers in the P.P. institutions.

Tasks of student teachers in the P.P. institutions

The tasks undertaken by student teachers during their P.P. were requested by the P.P. institutions and approved by the Supervisors of

P.P., who are University Professors (Faculty of the D.P.E.). These tasks include: support students with learning needs, aiding the integration of immigrant children, aiding the pedagogical work at schools for children with special needs or at integration classes, supporting students in all day schools, planning and carry out creative and artistic activities for children, supporting students in evening homework etc.

Supervision – Support of trainee students teachers

For the supervision of student teachers, five (5) faculty members of D.P.E. are employed in P.P., and each of them takes on the responsibility of specific number of student teachers with specific tasks undertaken in P.P. Supervisors create and distribute to student teachers papers related to their tasks in P.P., collaborate with P.P. institutions, support and guide the student teachers. There is a strong collaboration between supervisors, P.P. institutions and student teachers aiming to the best benefits for the trainee student teachers. In the P.P. program is also employed one secretary, who supports the bureaucratic part of the program.

Time engagement and responsibilities of student teachers in P.P. program

Student teachers are engaged in P.P. for 108 hours during the academic semester (three hours on three days each week for 3 months = 3 hours x 3 days x 12 weeks). The responsibilities of the student teachers towards the Supervisors and the P.P. institutions include:

- a) strict adherence to the period of employment program, as reflected in a special presence form completed with the signature of the P.P. agency,
- b) collaboration with the Supervisor for difficulties in the implementation of P.P., and
- c) writing reports about the tasks undertaken during their P.P.

Purpose and Methodology of the Research

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate students teachers' views on matters relating to the planning of the P.P. program, the implementation of the benefits and difficulties arising from this, and the changes that need to be made in order to improve it. To investigate the aforementioned purpose a case study was conducted about the P.P. program in the D.P.E. of the University of Crete. This study is also included in the assessment activities designed at the beginning of the P.P. program in D.P.E. and the findings can be used as key element for its remodeling and improvement. The data were obtained by the use of questionnaires completed by trainees student teachers. The questionnaire consists of closed and open questions. Closed questions have the form of a five point Likert scale with 0-4 rating ("*Never - Rarely - Sometimes - Often - Always*" or "*Strongly disagree - Disagree - I'm not sure - Agree - Strongly agree*", depending on the question) . In this paper we worked on ninety-eight (98) questionnaires which were randomly selected from all the questionnaires completed correctly from 267 student teachers who participated in P.P. from October 2010 until May 2014. We treated the questions relating to the following sections: benefits and satisfaction from P.P., compatibility of P.P. with studies at the University, adequacy of University studies for P.P., problems faced by participants in P.P. For the statistical analysis of the data we used the statistical package SPSS 17.0.

The main educational features of the student teachers of our research are the following:

a) Fifty two percent (52%) of the participants were attending the fourth year of university study when they involved in P.P., 35% the third year and 13% the second year.

b) Sixty-two (62) student teachers (63.3% percent of the participants) carried out the P.P. in kindergarten, 25 (25.5% percent) in elementary school and 11 student teachers (11.2% percent) carried out the P.P. in another type of institution.

Research results

The results are presented according to the research sections.

Research section: Benefits and student teachers' satisfaction from the Paid Practicum

In this section we study the responses of student teachers about the benefits they had from their participation in P.P. Seventy percent (70.3%) of student teachers answered that they have benefited most, twenty three percent (23.4%) answered that they have benefited slightly and six percent 6.3% of student teachers answered that they have not at all benefited from their participation in P.P. One way ANOVA results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between second, third and fourth year students about the degree to which they benefited from P.P. ($f(2) = 1,153, p > .05$) Statistically significant differences on the extent to which they benefited from P.P. were not observed neither among student teachers who carried out their P.P. in the three different types of institutions: kindergartens, elementary schools, and social institutions ($f(2) = 1,186, p > .05$). About their satisfaction by the institution in which they carried out their P.P., seventy two percent (71.6%) of student teachers felt very satisfied, twenty five percent 25.3% felt fairly satisfied and three percent (3.2%) of student teachers felt little satisfied. One way ANOVA results showed that there were no statistically significant differences neither between second, third and fourth year students ($f(2) = 1,191, p > .05$) neither among student teachers who carried out their P.P. in the three different types of institutions ($f(2) = 1,167, p > .05$) about the degree of their satisfaction.

Research section: Compatibility between university studies and Paid Practicum

Student teachers' views about the compatibility between the P.P. tasks and their university studies and for the adequacy they had from their studies to meet the requirements of the tasks undertaken in the context of P.P are very important data for evaluating several

aspects of the P.P., as the selection of appropriate P.P. institutions, the tasks undertaken, the selection criteria and the allocation of students participating in P.P. institutions. Regarding the compatibility between tasks undertaken in P.P. with their studies, twenty three percent of student teachers (23.5%) regard it as very compatible, fifty percent (50,0%) regard it as quite compatible, twenty four percent (24.5%) regard it as bit compatible and only two percent of student teachers (2.0%) regard it as not at all compatible with the their studies. One way ANOVA results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the views of student teachers neither relevant to the year of their studies ($f(2)= 1,158, p>.05$) neither relevant to different P.P. institutions ($f(2)= 1,191, p>.05$).

Research section: Student teachers' professional adequacy for Paid Practicum

With regard to the adequacy of the participants to respond to the tasks being assigned by P.P. institutions, their responses are similar to those relating to the compatibility between university studies and P.P. tasks. Specifically, twenty four percent of the student teachers (24.5%) felt that they were professionally adequate for the task assigned to them by P.P. institution, forty eight percent (48.0%) felt that they were quite adequate, twenty three percent (23.5%) felt that they were just adequate and only four percent (4.1%) of the student teachers felt that they were not at all sufficient for the task assigned to them. One way ANOVA results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the views of student teachers relevant to different P.P. institutions ($f(2)= 2,761, p>0,5$), but there were statistically significant differences relevant to the year of their studies ($f(2)= 4,816, p<.01$). Tukey HSD Post Hoc Test showed that fourth and third year students felt that they were more professionally adequate than the second year students felt.

Research section: Student teachers' problems in Paid Practicum

Of special interest are the findings about the problems faced by student teachers in P.P. We asked student teachers to record the frequency at which

they faced five categories of problems during their P.P. We can see the results in Table 1.

Table 1. *Frequencies of reports on the problems faced by student teachers in P.P., in total and by category.*

Problems	Frequency										Total	
	Never		Rarely		Some-times		Often		Always			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Bureau-cracy	38	39,2	27	27,8	23	23,7	6	6,2	3	3,1	97	100
Supervisor	88	89,8	5	5,1	3	3,1	1	1,0	1	1,0	98	100
Institution's personnel	81	82,7	7	7,1	7	7,1	2	2,1	1	1,0	98	100
Time of practicum	51	52,0	28	28,6	14	14,3	4	4,1	1	1,0	98	100
Institution's distance from town	71	73,2	13	13,4	8	8,2	2	2,1	3	3,1	97	100

According to student teachers' answers, most of them never or rarely faced problems during their participation in P.P. The problems faced by the student teachers during the course of P.P. are associated mainly with the large bureaucracy of P.P. and with the fact that at the time of carrying out their P.P. student teachers had also to meet in their other obligations as university students. In this research section too, the statistical correlation of student teachers' views with the year of their study and the type of P.P. institution showed no statistically significant differences between subgroups.

Discussion

The results of our study about P.P. of D.P.E. University of Crete are in the line with the results of other similar researches concerning the compulsory student teachers' teaching practicum as a part of their university studies (Allen, 2009; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Smith, 2000; Ntoliopoulou, 2005; Kyridis et al., 2005; Beck & Kosnik, 2001) and highlight the conclusion that student teachers face P.P. with the same seriousness and responsibility with which they face their compulsory teaching practicum (Botsoglou, 2003). Student teachers' responsible attitude toward the P.P. is indicated by the high degree they reported being satisfied and benefited by the P.P. program. These results show in a very clear way the various benefits for the students teachers participating in practicum (Dasiou et al., 1995; Kyridis et al., 2005; Ntoliopoulou, 2005; Oikonomidis, 2007; Ampartzaki, Oikonomidis & Chlapana, 2013). Providing student teachers the opportunity to benefit in multiple ways, constitute the main purpose of the P.P. program.

Regarding the type of benefits, we found from another qualitative type research (Oikonomidis, 2014), that student teachers believe that their main benefits of P.P. are their teaching training, their knowledge about children, a better understanding of the educational process and system, results identified in other similar studies too (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Theodorou et al., 2013; Ampartzaki et al., 2013; Dahlgren, Dahlgren & Dahlberg, 2012; Dasiou et al., 1995; Kyridis, et al., 2005; Ntoliopoulou, 2005; Oikonomidis, 2007). The reported in such low frequencies lack of benefits from the practicum is also found in other studies (e.g. Ntoliopoulou, 2005). In our study this lack of benefits is justified by the student teachers as a result of undertaking in their P.P. institutions tasks which they consider incompatible with their future professional interests (Oikonomidis, 2014). The last conclusion requires both a greater oversight by supervisors in assigning tasks by P.P. institutions to student teachers, and also raises the question whether student teachers consider teacher's role only as a teaching project work and they do not perceive the bureaucratic and other obligations which the teacher's role includes. At least, through the P.P., if it is applied mainly in educational institutions,

as in this case study, student teachers come in contact with the other professional obligations (other than teaching duties) (Hansen Orwehag & Hesselors Arktoft, 2008; Hager, Lee & Reich, 2012) which are not included in compulsory teaching practicum.

The results concerning the compatibility of tasks undertaken by student teachers in P.P. with their studies and their professional adequacy to meet these tasks are interrelated with each other and lead us to two important conclusions: a) both the institutions and the tasks of student teachers in Paid Practicum are compatible with their studies, and b) university studies make student teachers capable to respond to the tasks assigned to them in P.P. institutions. Thus, the selection of the P.P. institutions which constitute the main area for professional employment for D.P.E. graduates and the adequacy of the students to respond to the tasks assigned to them can be an informal but essential criterion for the suitability of the D.P.E. course program. Another research (Oikonomidis, 2014) has shown that student teachers who recognize middle or low compatibility of the P.P. tasks with their studies justify their point of view: a) on the perspective that the tasks undertaken in P.P. institutions such as primary schools or schools for children with special needs, are not taught in D.P.E. courses, where they study subjects on Preschool Education, b) on the view that they identify significant differences between what is taught at the university and what happens in real school life. The biggest incompatibility identified in cases where the P.P. tasks are far from university studies (Oikonomidis, 2014). Wherever the assigned tasks are more compatible with their university studies (e.g. P.P. in kindergartens), student teachers feel a strong adequacy. On the other hand, wherever the assigned tasks are not thoroughly taught in the university, student teachers feel a slight adequacy to respond to them (Oikonomidis, 2014). The result of the survey, according to which students of the fourth and of the third year of studies feel more professionally adequate than the students of the second year is expected: the more university subjects which they have attended, their participation in compulsory teaching practice and their greater maturity for their university studies and for and the teacher's

profession explain this difference. This difference also shows that the courses in D.P.E. are designed in such a way that students from one year of studies to the other improve continuously themselves in terms of knowledge and skills.

Overall, the findings of our study indicate that the courses in D.P.E. prepare graduates to respond adequately to their future work tasks (Oikonomidis, 2007). This means that studies in the D.P.E. take into account the knowledge and skills needed to be a kindergarten teacher and tend to develop them for student teachers. Therefore, the courses of studies appear to be appropriately targeted and specialized to meet the needs of the Kindergarten (D.P.E., 2014). However, we must not forget the fact that student teachers in P.P. have a supportive rather than a leading role: they do not undertake independent tasks, which are undertaken by the teacher of the institution, but they operate under his guidance, so their responsibilities and requirements are not as high as it would be if they undertake entirely the role of the teacher.

References to the problems faced by students in P.P. show that there are many factors that affect its implementation (Kemmis et al., 2012). Problems in the relationships of student teachers with teachers of training institutions seem to occur rarely (Haniotakis, 2011; Bullough & Draper, 2004; Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2005; Ampartzaki et al., 2013) and their relationship is very positive. The role of teachers in schools as mentors for student teachers is highlighted in relevant research (Haniotakis, 2011; Cain, 2009). The positive relationship between student teachers and teachers in the cooperating institutions is more apparent in the P.P. than in compulsory teaching practicum (Oikonomidis, 2014), due to the lack of any form of student teachers' assessment that would affect their university degrees and would work stressfully for them. (Andreou, 2007, 2009; Kyriakou & Coulthard, 2000).

The lack of any problems in the relationship between the student teachers and their supervisors, who have the role to select, distribute, supervise and evaluate the trainees is also reported in student teachers' answers. This is a very positive result, as it shows that, in terms of planning and relations, there are no operational or relational interuniversity factors, that would cause serious problems in P.P.

The problem regarding the distance between some P.P. institutions and student teachers' residence (some institutions are located outside the town) suggests that student teachers have to cover their locomotion cost from their low payment (Oikonomidis, 2014).

The large bureaucracy of P.P., as emanates from its central planning, seems to be one of the main problems reported by the student teachers (Oikonomidis, 2014). Bureaucracy has to do with the several forms that student teachers have to complete and submit (applications, contracts, tasks reports, certificates, attendance, etc.) at different times during their participation in P.P.

Finally, the problems related to the time that student teachers devote in carrying out the tasks anticipated by the P.P. cannot be faced centrally but individually by each trainee with an appropriate planning of the time required for his own P.P. implementation. It has been found too that, generally, the practicum is characterized by a considerable workload for student teachers (Theodorou et al., 2013; Ntoliopoulou, 2005; Kyridis et al., 2005). A key element that one should not forget is that every practice is meant to enhance and not undermine university studies of trainee students.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Key findings of our research are the following:

- The Paid Practicum (P.P.) in the Department of Preschool Education (D.P.E.) of University of Crete seems to provide wide and varied benefits to student teachers involved in it, giving them the opportunity to experience other formal and non-formal education institutions beyond kindergarten and to work on other tasks beyond teaching.
- The major problems faced by the participating student teachers in P.P. are the strong bureaucracy of P.P. and their difficulty to respond concurrently to the obligations derived by the P.P. and their university studies.
- Our research is subject to all the limitations that characterize a case

study. Exactly similar results require same research methodology and the same structure and planning of P.P. in other similar or non-similar university departments. However, we believe that the results of our study are consistent with the relevant research literature, and it is advisable to be considered for the planning and the organization of the P.P.:

This study generated some proposals to search the level and planning of P.P.

- We need to continue research with the completion of the P.P. project and to involve a larger number of trainee student teachers in order to identify specific aspects of those outlined above in relation to the type of P.P. institutions and with the type of tasks assigned to trainee student teachers. Extending the research to student teachers of other university departments will give us more information.
- Several issues will be clarified and new information will emerge by the use of other research tools (interviews, questionnaires).
- It is necessary to extend the research to the staff of P.P. institutions (e.g. teachers, personnel) in order to have an overall evaluation of P.P.
- The continuation of the P.P. program and the incorporation of the improvements resulting from the evaluation will contribute to develop better educational knowledge and skills for the student teachers involved in it and strengthen the University's links with the local community.

The results of the research about P.P. should not be considered fixed and unalterable, but volatile and dependent on the circumstances under which the P.P. is implemented. Curricula of studies in Educational Departments and particular courses about practicum need to be often evaluated, updated and to meet frequently changing operating conditions.

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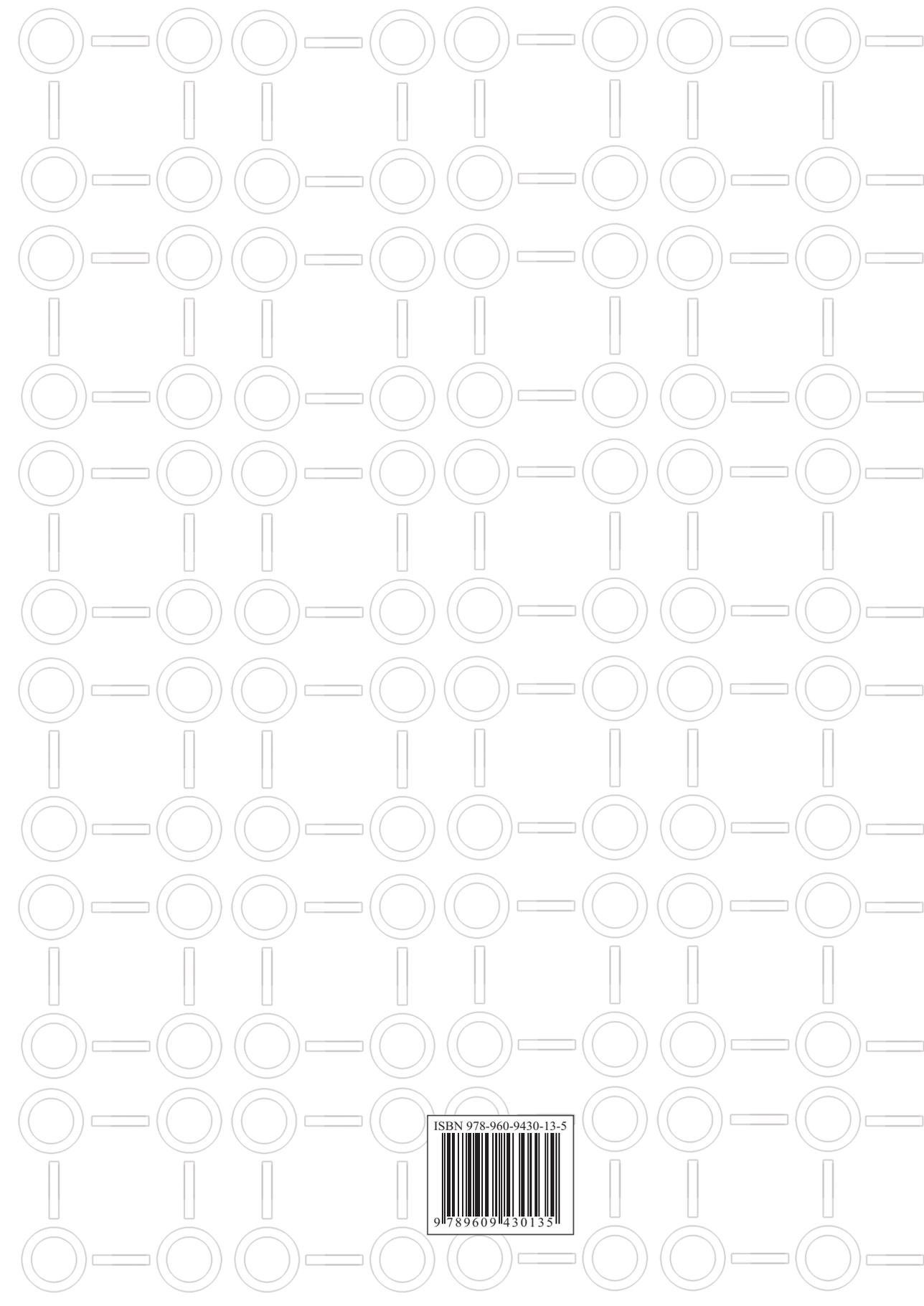
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ISBN 978-960-9430-13-5



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