Special issue: Social Pedagogy in Times of Crisis in Greece

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THEORY

PRACTICE

RESEARCH

The current paper researches and discusses primary school principals' views in Greece, regarding the school and student families' communication techniques and relevant practices during the economic crisis, based on the comparison of research findings with corresponding findings from international research. More specifically, it measures the extent to which the principals use communication techniques and practices to communicate with the students' parents, as well as the usage rate of ways to approach active parents, parents who avoid contact with the school, parents who would like more involvement with the school. Moreover, it contemplates how principals' views differentiate depending on their gender, their overall experience in their duties, their experience in their current position, as well as their school's level of communication with the students' parents. The study included 80 participating principals, who served in primary schools of Cyclades (an island group in the Aegean Sea) during the first semester of 2011. The results show that, apart from gender, all the above factors differentiate the principals' views regarding the usage rate of the school's communication techniques and practices with the parents. The findings also depict the frame and the communication limits, which the principals in Greece seek to achieve with the students' parents.

Introduction

School and family communication nowadays constitutes a coherent scientific field, which belongs to the wider area of social pedagogy (Mylonakou-Keke, 2009). Over the last thirty years the necessity for school and families communication has been portrayed internationally through a variety of theoretical and empirical studies, including those that refer to the effectiveness and improvement of school units. The aforementioned studies focus on school, family and community interaction, while emphasizing on the cooperation among those systems, mutual responsibility and the activation of the potential of schools and parents for the students' progress, proper development and wellbeing, aspirations which are also the main objectives of social pedagogy. These studies highlight the necessity for communication initiative by the school through the development of programmes ranging from the briefing and involvement of all families (Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002) up to the model of Syneducation[1] (synergy + education) in which students, parents, teachers and leading members of the local community participate (Mylonakou & Kekes, 2005, 2007; Kekes & Mylonakou, 2006). The majority of the aforementioned theoretical and empirical approaches has been developed in the United States and usually followed the methodology of quantitative research.

Given that the current study applies quantitative research methodology, it is based, in terms of theory and research, primarily on studies that derive from the US. Indeed, it focuses its interest on the role of the school principal, so it leverages those approaches that consider, amongst others, the techniques and practices employed by the principal for school and students' parents constructive communication.

The effective principal: Types and practices of communication between schools and families

Based on these theoretical approaches, as well as on those that have appeared in Greece, communication types between schools and students' families are practically unlimited (Saitis, 2002): Principals use at least two different communication types through different techniques for successful communication (Pashiardis, 2004). Most theoretical studies claim that effective school leaders develop various procedures, both formal and informal, which seek communication and cooperation between school and family. Typical procedures are held normally in school, and principals ensure that they take place at a time that facilitates the attendance of all families. Some of these procedures include organizing meetings with parents, during which principals first inform them about the activities of the school and then invite them to contribute to the effort of improving the school. Another procedure is the organization of training seminars for parents and relevant workshops, aimed at linking different groups of parents who share similar interests. Moreover, in the context of informal procedures principals use, among others, e-mail communication with parents and the policy of 'home visiting' in order to develop constructive dialogue with the students' families (e.g. Berger, 2004; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 2001; Mylonakou-Keke, 2009; Schneider & Hollenczer, 2006). Furthermore, a timetable is set by principals, according to which regular visiting days and hours for parents are defined, for briefing them as well as interacting with them (Pashiardis, 2004; Pashiardis & Pashiardis, 2006; Saitis, 2002). Cooperation with the Parent-Guardian Association facilitates the parents' understanding of the school's goals (Kambouridis, 2002). A special room is set aside for parents within the school grounds (Berger, 2004). Apart from the formal channels of communication, complimentary informal social gatherings are held as well (nights out, etc.), which facilitate contact with parents while providing

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[1] See in more detail, thereafter, research in Greece.

the opportunity for acquiring information that might otherwise not have come to the principal's attention. Additionally, those gatherings instill in parents a sense of feeling welcome at school, give the opportunity to those involved to exchange information in an enjoyable way, create a sense of mutual trust and interest, and encourage the families' involvement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Saitis, 2002). Other than that, principals choose to use those means of communication (school website, e-mails, etc.) that are considered to be handier and appropriate for the desired goal, which are then used by students' parents as well. To this end principals carry out research among parents via questionnaires (Schneider & Hollenczer, 2006).

Effective principals also use certain practices, both for their own and their school's communication with parents in general. First of all, all students' parents are contacted at the beginning of the school year, given that such prompt action constitutes a preventive measure regarding conflicts, misunderstandings and negative relationships development (Matsaggouras, 2003). Parents are informed of the school's expectations and mission and the principal's vision of the school (Pashiardis, 2004; Pashiardis & Pashiardis, 2006). The message regarding the parents' responsibility for their children's educational achievements and their increase due to the parents' involvement in school is thus conveyed. Principals try to convince parents of their role as 'partners' of the school (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Pashiardis & Pashiardis, 2006) and encourage them to participate in volunteering for school projects, in associations, councils and committees (Parent-Guardian Association, etc.), so that they are given the opportunity to express their views on educational issues, provide ideas for the school's plans and projects, inform other parents with credibility, etc. Free access to the school is given to the parents in order for them to feel welcome, so that they can offer help and support (Babalis & Kirkigianni, 2011; Epstein, 2001; Pashiardis, 2004; Pashiardis & Pashiardis, 2006). Principals are always present and available to parents for any information. Active parents, with skills in computing, graphic design, journalism, marketing, etc. are encouraged to become involved in the school's communication team in order to enhance interaction with the families. Through research, evaluation, etc., principals seek to be informed of the families' views, values, needs and interests on several subjects, while checking the quality of documents sent to the parents by the school (Schneider & Hollenczer, 2006). They promote constant and constructive communication between teachers and parents. They interact with them through various techniques, such as the words 'we' and 'us', thus conveying messages of mutual responsibility for their relationship. Principals also cater for the teachers' professional development, as far as the parent-teacher communication is concerned, which enhances their interaction (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Nevertheless, according to the findings of relevant research in Cyprus, principals do not seem to facilitate parent-teacher communication (Georgiou, 2000). The majority of principals tend to hold parents and not teachers responsible for the fact that the former do not visit school as often as they should, while only a small percentage of the principals refer to other factors, for most of which parents are also to blame (inconvenient work timetable, etc.). However, school leaders should acknowledge that the process of building positive relations with parents is initiated by themselves as well as the teachers (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999) and that an increase in parents' involvement constitutes a positive contribution to children's learning and progress, and to the school's own evaluation, effectiveness and improvement (Andreadakis, 2004). This increasing parental involvement can be achieved and become effective with the implementation of the model of syneducation, as shown by relevant research in Greece (see below).

International research

These theoretical approaches regarding the techniques and practices applied by principals for the school's communication with the students' parents are also supported by research. However, relevant research is limited and fragmented, since, as already shown, they are part of broader

research fields, specifically those that examine school and family relationship, parental involvement in school, and the effectiveness and improvement of school units.

Internationally, relevant research, as previously mentioned, has been conducted mostly in the United States and has followed the methodology of quantitative research, as in our work. For that reason, the current study is based on the relative theory and research. Those studies indicate that, in schools promoting parental involvement programmes as well as in schools located in areas of high socio-economic status, principals apply various techniques and practices for school and family communication. For instance, Reeves's (1994) study shows among others that primary school principals employ parental involvement programmes, establish regular visiting days for parents at school, support children's learning at home, promote parent-teacher meetings, parents' involvement in parent-teacher associations and voluntary help by parents in the classroom and the library. A study by Rogers (1994) indicates that principals of primary schools located in areas of high socio-economic status provide, among others, parent training programmes and seminars, encourage teachers' visits to students' houses, cooperate with community services for the support of students and their families, encourage parental participation in councils, associations, boards and the school management in general, develop programmes for parents volunteering at school, ensure regular and quality communication between the school and the parents of all students. Additionally, male principals mostly promote community involvement in the school's operation, whereas female ones put more emphasis on communicating and cooperating with the families, supporting them and encouraging their involvement in voluntary activities, associations, committees, boards and the school's decision making. In Clifford's study (1995), the sampled principals supported, among others, engagement activities that have a positive influence on students' performance in school, such as meetings with parents, offering help to parents for supporting school homework, written communication between the school and families, and training programmes for parents. One such programme was based on parents' needs and aimed to increase their ability to work with their children. Research by Berstein (2003) concludes that primary school principals who encourage the involvement of parents and the community in their schools plan, among others, relevant training activities for teachers and parents, develop programmes of parental engagement, encourage the participation of family and community members in the school's decision making, set aside a special room within school grounds for parents and community members, and create a team consisting of members of the school, parents and the community, which facilitates the engagement process. Sedlack's (2003) research in schools as those mentioned above portrays that the principals employ effective means, techniques and communication practices with teachers, parents and community members. They promote to the community the school's vision, mission and priorities. They encourage parents' involvement in their children's education, their volunteering in school, their participation in the decision making process, and the school's cooperation with community members and authorities for the students' performance enhancement. Being always present and available to parents, mostly to those of lower socio-economic levels, they manage to achieve informal meetings with them, and provide a direct solution to their problems. New students are being welcomed to school, while providing students' families with information on engagement techniques, activities and opportunities provided to their children. Mitchell's (2006) study concludes that the principals in schools with a high degree of parental involvement offer their personnel support for developing engagement activities. They promote innovative school-family communication strategies, such as use of mass media, parental involvement in the school's and classrooms' decision-making process, and educate the teachers in techniques of interactive communication with parents. Finally, it is essential to note that similar results have been found by Epstein (2001), after many years of research in schools of all levels in the United States, regarding the types and activities of parental involvement.

Research in Greece

In the Greek area, relevant research activity that focuses on school principals is not particularly large. Georgiou's research in Cyprus (1996) reveals a constant conflict between principals and Parent-Guardian Associations. The Parent-Guardian Association is not involved in the decision making process for educational issues and matters of everyday school life, even though its decisions form a powerful pressure lever. Parents do not actively participate in the school's administration. Only some, in small communities, are involved as volunteers in various non-educational school activities (Georgiou, 2000). Research by Saitis, Feggari and Voulgari (1997) demonstrates that the majority of primary school principals and their schools communicate to a satisfactory level with the students' parents (Saitis, 2002). Research conducted by Pashiardis (1999) in schools in Cyprus, reveals, among others, that those principals who were found to be effective are familiar with interacting constructively with students' families and support an 'open door' policy. Some create opportunities for parental visits at school, organize parental meetings per class, organize parents in assisting the school etc. (Pashiardis, 2004). Stravakou's research (2001) demonstrates, among others, that principals cooperate with the Parent-Guardian Association frequently and effectively, however failing to inform its members of school documents concerning parents. They encourage teachers to cooperate with students' families, they do not organize training programmes for parents and teachers, while believing that school's problems are resolved through dialogue, briefing and cooperation with all involved parties (Stravakou, 2003a). In another research by Stravakou (2001), principals do not appear to cooperate frequently with the Parent-Guardian Association. However, they regard as important the teachers' training on issues related to school and family (Stravakou, 2003b).

The problems that emerge from these studies seem to be able to be addressed when applying the model of Syneducation [synergy + education – the term 'syneducation', coined in 2005, comes from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Mylonakou & Kekes, 2005) and has great conceptual difference from the term 'co-education']. Syneducation (synergy + education) has been defined as the acquisition of a common educational experience, simultaneously and in collaboration in an interactive learning environment, by people of different ages (such as students, parents and teachers) and different knowledge, experiences, interests and/or socio-cultural level, (Mylonakou & Kekes, 2005; Kekes & Mylonakou, 2006). The syneducation model is a newly emerging interdisciplinary research field which complements the usual social pedagogical practices of adult and child education and combines methods, practices and processes that come from formal, informal and nonformal education. The syneducational programmes that have been conducted in Greece among students, parents, teachers and leading members of the local community (policy-makers) were mainly based on the methodology of qualitative research, specifically collaborative action research (ibid.; Mylonakou & Kekes, 2007).

The syneducational programmes in Greece resulted in the creation of a strong and effective communication network between these systems of school, family and community who participated in them. Participants in syneducational programmes – parents, students, teachers, principals and community representatives – showed a step change of their personal involvement in the programme through changing perceptions, attitudes and behaviours and undertaking new responsibilities. There was namely a displacement from an initial state, before someone participating in the syneducational programme or when he was still in the initial stage of the process, where he could be indifferent and aloof. Gradually, through the 'syneducation spirit', the degree of involvement was increasing to active participation, passing through situations where he was becoming an observer, a participant, a partner, a co-creator, a critical analyst and could reach the state of the multiplier. Acting as a multiplier the participant in the syneducational programme felt the need to communicate, disseminate and share with others the knowledge and experiences gained in the syneducational group, but also to involve others in the whole process of school, family and community communication (Kekes & Mylonakou, 2006).

Research related to poverty and the economic crisis

Apart from the above theoretical approaches and research, research activity in relation to poverty and economic crises in general, although it is limited in our country, has revealed that, in all countries of the world, those 'ostracized' from the educational system are, in particular, children of poor families since these families, especially those headed by poorly educated parents, are unable to exercise appropriate investment practices in this direction (Babalis, 2013; Chrysakis, 2005; Kavounidi, 2005; Tressou, 1998). Diversifying the investment practices of poor and wealthy families for the education and training of their children is not considered a product of different ambitions, aspirations and expectations. The poor want to invest in education, but they cannot. Relevant research activity has also shown that school failure has more devastating effects on the children of the poor than it has on the children of wealthy families (Babalis et al., 2014; Chrysakis, 2002 & 2005; Bougioukos, 2008), and that it is not only the economic factors that perpetuate poverty, but also social and political factors, such as lack of social power and social prestige of parents (Giddens, 2009), as well as difficult access to the customer system (Bougioukos, 2008). In conclusion, the research highlights that, for various economic, social and political reasons, there is an accumulation of low educational level and a reproduction in space and time, intro-race and intra-race, which acts as a very basic factor perpetuating–poverty, which the educational system fails to reverse (Chrysakis, 2002; Bougioukos, 2008).

As argued, however, in the development of young people and the reduction of the phenomenon of poverty and social exclusion contributes, among others, the connection of educational practice in the classroom with the local community and activity and the family involvement in school, combined, indeed, with the various structures of time, skills, vigor and cultural capital of every parent and with the different structure or format of each family (Chrysakis, 2005; Guthrie, 1999; Swadener, 1999).

Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to examine the views of primary school principals in Cyclades[2], Greece, regarding the school and student families' communication techniques and relevant practices. The research questions that were set regarding the aforementioned purpose are as follows:

- To what extent do the principals use various communication types and practices, so that their school's communication with students' families is developed, facilitated and reinforced?
- Are their views differentiated, and to what extent, based on their gender, their experience in managerial positions in general as well as in their current one, and the level of their school's communication with students' parents?
- Are their communicative types of approach differentiated based on the categories of the involved parents?

Methodology

Sample
Eighty (80) Principals from primary schools in Cyclades, Greece, participated in the current research, of which forty three (43) are men (percentage 53.8%) and thirty-seven (37) are women (percentage 46.3%). A significant amount of the participants (46, or percentage 57.5%) has up to

[2] Cyclades are located in Greece and are an island group in the Aegean Sea.

four (4) years total working experience in managerial positions, while the remaining thirty four (34, or percentage 42.5%) have no less than five (5) years of total working experience as principals. Moreover, fifty six (56) principals have been in that position for up to four (4) years (percentage 70%), while the remaining twenty four (24, or percentage 30%) have been in that position for no less than five (5) years.

Data Collection Instrument

A questionnaire was designed based on relevant theoretical studies, while following thorough discussions with primary school principals (Andreadakis & Vamvoukas, 2005), since 'a questionnaire's scientific value depends on both those constructing it and those using it' (Tsiplitaris & Babalis, 2006, p. 79). A pilot questionnaire was administered to five (5) school principals. Based on their responses and recommendations, the form and content of the questionnaire was finalized (Bell, 1997; Javeau, 2000).

The questionnaire in its final form consists of two parts. The first part includes closed questions that refer to the participants' gender, the number of years of working experience in managerial positions, and the years of work experience in their current position. The second part comprises categories of questions examining the principals' views regarding: (a) the degree of their school's communication with the students' parents, (b) the extent to which certain communication and cooperation types are used between the school and the students' parents, (c) the extent to which certain communication and cooperation practices are used between the school and the students' parents, (d) the extent to which different types of approaching active parents are used, (e) the extent to which different types of approaching parents who avoid contact with the school are used, (f) the extent to which different types of approaching parents who would like their involvement in school are used and (g) the extent to which different communication types with parents are used, when an issue or problem regarding school arises. The answer to each question is given based on a five point Likert scale ranging from 'non-existent' to 'very much'.

In particular, the statistical analysis of the data in question (c) depicted the existence of the following two (2) factors: parent-teacher informing practices and school-family communication practices/techniques. Cronbach's alpha (a) value fluctuated at a completely satisfactory level, that is .70 for the school-family communication practices/techniques factor and .67 for the parent-teacher informing practices factor (Kaiser, 1974; Kline, 1994; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006; Tinsley & Tinsley, 1987; Tucker et al.,1969).

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to eighty (80) principals working in the primary schools in Cyclades, during the first semester of 2011, by e-mail and in person, as well, according to the deontology rules that apply to educational research.

Limitations of the study

Although the present research was carefully prepared, there were still some unavoidable limitations. First, only the principals' views were taken into account, without covering the perspectives of others, such as parents, students, etc. Moreover, this research was conducted only on a sample of principals who were working in Cyclades, an island complex in Greece, and not in big cities. Furthermore, data collection was based on a self-reported questionnaire. Finally, a review of the literature concerning contextual factors, such as school size (i.e. how many parents do principals have to communicate with) or whether their communication differs with parents of entry students compared to families of older students, was not within the scope of the present study, which emphasizes on the human characteristics (of principals and parents) that might affect their choice of communication techniques.

Results

Descriptive findings

In Table I, a high degree of communication between school and students' parents is depicted, since a high percentage of principals (96.2%) chose the responses 'Average', 'Much' and 'Very Much'.

Table I. *Means (M), standard deviations (SD), frequency (f) and frequency percentage (% f) of school's communication degree with students' parents*

	M/SD	Non-existent f – % f	Little f – % f	Average f – % f	Much f – % f	Very Much f – % f
School's communication degree with students' parents	3.95/0.76	0–0.0	3–3.8	16–20.0	43-53.8	18-22.5

Table II shows that the most favorable types used by the principals for their school communication and cooperation with students' parents are: cooperation with the Parent-Guardian Association, parents' regular visiting days and hours to school, as well as non-scheduled meetings with parents, while the least used types are syneducational programmes and visits to parents' houses.

Table II. *Means (M), standard deviations (SD), frequency (f) and frequency percentage (% f) of school and students' families communication and cooperation types.*

	M/SD	Non-existent f – % f	Little f – % f	Average f – % f	Much f – % f	Very Much f – % f
Regular parent visiting days and hours	3.83/1.13	5-6.3	6-7.5	11-13.8	34-42.5	24-30.0
Non-scheduled meetings with parents	3.69/0.88	1-1.3	5-6.3	26-32.5	34-42.5	14-17.5
Extra-curricular activities	2.76/1.03	10-12.5	21-26.3	30-37.5	16-20.0	3-3.8
Visits to parents' houses	1.59/0.91	50-62.5	18-22.5	8-10.0	3-3.8	1-1.3
Cooperation with the Parent-Guardian Association	4.12/1.02	2-2.7	5-6.8	7-9.5	28-37.8	32-43.2
Organization of training seminars for parents	2.25/1.19	27-33.8	23-28.8	17-21.3	9-11.3	4-5.0
Syneducational programmes	1.51/0.81	52.5-65.65	17-21.3	7.5-10.65	1-1.3	1-1.25
Informal social gatherings	2.60/1.01	10-12.5	29-36.3	28-35.0	9-11.3	4-5.0

Table III demonstrates more frequent use by principals of *parent-teacher informing practices* and use of *school-family communication practices/techniques* to a lesser extent.

Table III. *Means (M), standard deviations (SD), frequency (f) and frequency percentage (% f) of the factors of the questionnaire's (c) category of questions which concern school communication Practices/Techniques with Families*

	M/SD	Non-existent f – % f	Little f – % f	Average f – % f	Much f – % f	Very Much f – % f
Parent-teacher informing practices	4.07/0.56	0-0.0	0-0.0	10-12.5	39-61.3	21-26.2
School-family communication practices/techniques	2.57/0.64	1-2.5	35-43.8	39-47.5	5-6.2	0-0.0

Comparisons among groups

The results of the multi-variable variance analysis do not demonstrate any gender-related statistically significant differences regarding their views on the above-mentioned two factors (Wilks' Λ = .958, $F_{1,78}$ = 1.685, *ns*, η^2_p = .042), or the degree of use of school's communication and cooperation types with the students' parents.

In Table IV, the results of the multi-variable variance analysis, show statistically significant differences between the views of principals with little experience as such (up to 4 years) and those with greater experience (5 years and more), regarding the factors of the questionnaire's (c) category of questions (Wilks' Λ = .908, $F_{1,78}$ = 3.831, *p*<.05, η^2_p = .192). Further variance analysis (follow-up ANOVAs) of those factors show there are statistically significant differences regarding the *school-family communication practices/techniques* factor ($F_{1,78}$ = 6.263, *p*<.05, η^2_p = .075), while the *parent-teacher informing practices* factor ($F_{1,78}$ = 3.547, *ns*, η^2_p = .063) depicts a tendency of differentiation between the principals' views with little and a lot of experience as such.

Table IV. *Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of the factors of the questionnaire's (c) category of questions, among Principals with little or great overall experience as Principals.*

	Principals with little overall experience as Principals	Principals with great overall experience as Principals
	M (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Parent-teacher informing practices	3.96 (0.57)	4.19 (0.52)
School-family communication practices/techniques	2.42 (0.60)	2.77 (0.65)

In Table V, there are statistically significant differences between the views of the principals with little or a lot of experience as such, regarding the degree of use of school's communication and cooperation types with the students' parents.

Table V. *Means (M), standard deviations (SD) and differences (t-values) among Principals with little and great overall experience as Principals.*

	Principals with little overall experience as Principals M (SD)	Principals with great overall experience as Principals M (SD)	t
To what extent do you use these types for your school's communication and cooperation with the students' parents?			
Parents' regular visiting days and hours	3.63 (1.14)	4.09 (1.08)	-1.811
Non scheduled meetings with parents	3.65 (0.77)	3.74 (1.02)	-.415
Extra curricular activities	2.57 (1.07)	3.03 (0.94)	-2.023*
Visits to parents' houses	1.43 (0.69)	1.79 (1.12)	-1.652
Cooperation with the Parent–Guardian Association	3.59 (1.54)	4.12 (1.32)	-1.615
Organization of training seminars for parents	2.00 (1.10)	2.59 (1.23)	-2.250*
Syneducational programmes	1.28 (0.64)	1.82 (0.90)	3.043***
Informal social gatherings	2.50 (1.03)	2.74 (0.99)	-1.027

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

In Table VI, the results of the multi-variable variance analysis show statistically significant differences between the views of the principals with not much experience in their current position (up to 4 years) and those with greater experience respectively (5 years or more), regarding the factors of the questionnaire's (c) category of questions (Wilks' Λ = .936, $F_{1,78}$ = 2,589, $p<.05$, η^2_p = .064). Further variance analysis (follow-up ANOVAs) on those factors depicts statistically significant differences regarding the *parent-teacher informing practices* factor ($F_{1,78}$ = 4.552, $p<.05$, η^2_p = .056), while, regarding the *school-family communication practices/techniques* factor ($F_{1,78}$ = 2.050, *ns*, η^2_p = .026), there is a tendency of differentiation between the principals' views with not much and a lot of experience in their current position.

Table VI. *Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of the factors of the questionnaire's (c) category of question among principals with little and great experience as principals in their current position.*

	Principals with:	
	Little experience in the current position M (SD)	Great experience in the current position M (SD)
Parent-teacher informing practices	3.97 (0.54)	4.26 (0.55)
School-family communication practices/techniques	2.50 (0.61)	2.72 (0.70)

In Table VII, there are statistically significant differences between the views of the principals with not much and those with a lot of experience in their current position, regarding the degree of use of school's communication and cooperation types with the students' parents.

Table VII. Means (M), standard deviations (SD) and differences (t-values) among principals with little or great experience as principals in their current position.

	Principals with:		
	Little experience in the current position M (SD)	Great experience in the current position M (SD)	t
To what extent do you use these types for your school's communication and cooperation with the students' parents?			
Parents' regular visiting days and hours	3.68 (1.10)	4.17 (1.17)	-1.789
Non scheduled meetings with parents	3.70 (0.76)	3.67 (1.13)	.138
Extra curricular activities (e.g. artistic)	2.68 (1.05)	2.96 (1.00)	-1.110
Visits to parents' houses	1.50 (0.76)	1.79 (1.18)	-1.116
Cooperation with the Parent-Guardian Association	3.75 (1.46)	3.96 (1.52)	-.579
Organization of training seminars for parents	2.09 (1.10)	2.63 (1.31)	-1.882
Syneducational programmes	1.36 (0.69)	1.85 (0.97)	2.382*
Informal social gatherings	2.55 (1.03)	2.71 (1.00)	-.623

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

In Table VIII, according to the results of the multi-variable variance analysis, there are statistically significant differences among the views of the principals whose schools show a high and a low degree of communication with parents, regarding the factors of the questionnaire's (c) category of questions (Wilks' Λ = .916, $F_{1,78}$ = 3.478, $p<.05$, η^2_p = .084). Further variance analysis (follow-up ANOVAs) on those factors, depicts statistically significant differences regarding the *school-family communication practices/techniques* factor ($F_{1,78}$ = 6.729, $p<.05$, η^2_p = .080), while, regarding the *parent-teacher informing practices* factor ($F_{1,78}$ = 1.717, *ns*, η^2_p = .194), there are no statistically significant differences.

Table VIII. Means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of the factors of the questionnaire's (c) category of questions among principals with low and high degree of their school's communication with parents.

	Low degree of communication	High degree of communication
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*
Parent-teacher informing practices	3.91 (0.58)	4.11 (0.54)
School-family communication practices/techniques	2.25 (0.67)	2.69 (0.60)

In Table IX, there are statistically significant differences among the views of the principals whose schools show a high and a low degree of communication with parents, regarding the degree of use of school's communication and cooperation types with the students' parents.

Table IX. Means (M), standard deviations (SD) and differences (t-values) among principals with low and high degree of their school's communication with parents

	Low degree of communication	High degree of communication	
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*T*
To what extent do you use these types for your school's communication and cooperation with the students' parents?			
Parents' regular visiting days and hours	3.63 (1.30)	3.89 (1.08)	-.850
Non scheduled meetings with parents	3.63 (1.30)	3.70 (0.96)	-.315
Extra curricular activities	2.42 (0.90)	2.87 (1.06)	-1.667
Visits to parents' houses	1.32 (0.58)	1.67 (0.98)	-1.946*
Cooperation with the Parent-Guardian Association	3.32 (1.64)	3.97 (1.39)	-1.710
Organization of training seminars for parents	1.84 (1.07)	2.38 (1.20)	-1.740
Syneducational programmes	1.34 (0.69)	1.56 (0.84)	1.081
Informal social gatherings	2.26 (1.10)	2.70 (0.97)	-1.667

* *p<.05* ** *p<.01* *** *p<.001*

Correlations between the views of principals

Tables X, XI and XII, which show the correlations between the views of principals, indicate that they use many ways to communicatively approach various categories of parents, even when an issue or problem related to the school arises. A statistically significant correlation appeared also between the types of approaching parents systematically avoiding contact with the school, where constant encouragement of their involvement in it and the development of relationships of mutual trust and respect showed a positive correlation (r = .56, p <.001).

Table X. *Correlations among the types of approaching active parents*

	Types of approach	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1.	Assignment of leadership roles	1.00	.13	.24*	.21	.34**	.48***	.21	.01
2.	Use of formal communication channels		1.00	.13	.13	.28*	-.09	.02	.10
3.	Use of informal communication channels			1.00	-.11	.08	.31**	-.14	-.15
4.	Briefing for administrative documents				1.00	.19	.11	.39***	.17
5.	Regular communication					1.00	.38***	.55***	.27*
6.	Search for their advice						1.00	.37***	.19
7.	Careful listening of their views							1.00	.30**
8.	Ensue proper receiving of school messages								1.00

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

Table XI. *Correlations among the types of approaching parents who would like their involvement in school, but do not themselves seek cooperation or contact with it*

	Types of approach	1.	2.	3.
1.	Provide more information	1.00	.53***	.17
2.	Encourage their involvement in school		1.00	.48***
3.	Responding to their needs and problems			1.00

*** p<.001

Table XII. Correlations among the communication types with parents, when an issue or problem regarding school arises

	Communication types	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1.	Silencing issue or problem	1.00	-.57***	-.26*	-.29**	-.15
2.	Timely briefing of active parents		1.00	.45***	.46***	.43***
3.	Timely briefing of parents directly interested			1.00	.15	.27*
4.	Briefing of parents who do not consider it an issue or problem				1.00	.62***
5.	Discussion with indifferent parents					1.00

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

Discussion

From the descriptive findings of the research, it seems that a high percentage of principals (96.2%) claim there is a high degree of communication between their school and the students' parents, which is actually compatible with the findings of the research conducted by Saitis, Feggari and Voulgaris in 1997 (see Saitis, 2002), which was carried out in Greece, as well. Most principals do not use *a variety of communication types* to a great extent for their school's communication with the students' families. They limit instead this communication to the necessary meetings with the parents or the Parent–Guardian Association, and they do not encourage different communication types as much as they should, such as extracurricular activities, educational seminars for parents, informal social gatherings, syneducational programmes and visits to parents' houses, thus depicting the extent of communication they seek to achieve with the students' parents. According to theoretical studies internationally (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Schneider & Hollenczer, 2006) as well as in Greece (Mylonakou-Keke, 2009; Saitis, 2002), these communication types not only facilitate and reinforce school-family communication, but also create a climate of mutual trust and at the same time encourage parents' involvement. Research in the United States also shows that in schools abroad, where programmes of parental involvement are implemented, principals promote communication techniques, such as training seminars for parents (Bernstein, 2003; Clifford, 1995; Mitchell, 2006 ; Rogers, 1994), informal social gatherings (Sedlack, 2003) and visits to parents' houses (Rogers, 1994). However, these findings are partly compatible with those of two studies carried out in Greece by Stravakou in 2001 (Stravakou, 2003a; Stravakou, 2003b). Moreover, most principals in the current research do not use to a great extent *various communication practices/techniques with parents*. They place more emphasis on informing parents and teachers rather than on practices and techniques that not only facilitate and reinforce communication between these two environments, but also encourage parents' involvement in school, thus revealing the framework and limits of communication and cooperation they long to achieve with the students' parents. Regarding the low utilization rate of syneducational programmes from the principals of the schools in the sample of our research, we believe that this is due to the fact that, in order for a school to implement a syneducational programme, at least the coordinator of the programme should have before been trained in the philosophy and methodology (collaborative

action research) of syneducation. It is this need for teacher training in the methodology of qualitative research and particularly in the implementation of the model of syneducation that has already been noted (Mylonakou-Keke, 2009).

Studies and research in the United States portray that in schools abroad, which are distinguished by their effective cooperation with parents, principals employ practices that facilitate informing parents and teachers, such as training seminars for teachers regarding school–family communication (Bernstein, 2003; Mitchell, 2006), programmes of parental volunteering at school (Reeves, 1994; Rogers, 1994; Sedlack, 2003), a special room within the school grounds set aside for parents and encouraging the active parents, in order to participate in the school's communication activity with the students' families (Bernstein, 2003). Many of the school–family communication techniques and practices are employed as well. More specifically, parents are informed on the procedure of electing their representatives in associations, councils and boards (e.g. Berstein, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Mitchell, 2006; Reeves, 1994; Rogers, 1994; Sedlack, 2003), on the school's goals and mission (Sedlack, 2003), and on their mutual responsibility on their children's educational achievements (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Teachers are informed of their part in sharing the responsibility for their relationships with the parents (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) and are always present and available for the parents' briefing (Sedlack, 2003; Schneider & Hollenczer, 2006). In Greece, relative theoretical approaches focusing on the principal of the school are not many (Pashiardis, 2004; Pashiardis & Paschiardis, 2006).

Group comparisons revealed that the principals' gender does not constitute a differentiating factor of their views regarding the degree of use of types and practices by the school for communicating with students' families. The particular findings are not compatible with those of Rogers's research in the United States (1994), according to which greater emphasis is placed by women compared to men on their school's communication and cooperation with families as well as on communication practices/techniques through which parents' involvement in school's decision making, volunteering activities, associations, councils and committees are encouraged.

The factor relevant to their overall working experience as principals reveals that the more experienced principals (with more than 4 years as principals), use to a higher degree than the less experienced ones, effective types, practices and techniques for their school's communication and cooperation with parents (school communication and collaboration practices and techniques with parents, extra-curricular activities, training seminars for parents, syneducational programmes), probably as a result of the knowledge and experience acquired throughout their long-term performance of their management tasks as principals.

Moreover, the factor related to the service time in their current position, illustrates that those with great experience as principals of the same school (5 years or more) make greater use of effective techniques and practices for the parents' briefing, communication and cooperation (parent-teacher briefing practices, syneducational programmes, training seminars for parents, parents' regular visiting days and hours). *It is therefore crucial that principals remain in the same position for a long period of time, which would allow them to develop a greater school-parent degree of intimacy, trust, communication and cooperation.*

Finally, the factor examining the degree of school communication with parents notes that principals who report that their school has developed communication with parents to a great extent make greater use of effective communication and cooperation types, practices and techniques with the families, including informal communication channels among others, which, according to Christenson & Sheridan (2001), have a complementary role in their communication with the parents, create a sense of mutual trust and interest, and invoke parents' involvement at school (school's communication and cooperation practices and techniques with parents, visits to parents' houses, informal social gatherings, extra-curricular activities, cooperation with the Parent-Guardian Association, organization of training seminars for parents). The aforementioned finding is obviously confirmed by the findings of relevant research in the United States, indicating that in

schools where parental engagement programmes are implemented, which naturally have a high degree of communication with parents, principals employ to a great extent various effective types, practices and techniques for school–family communication (e.g. Bernstein, 2003; Mitchell, 2006; Reeves, 1994; Rogers, 1994; Sedlack, 2003).

The results of the correlations between the variables of the study indicate that the process approach to all categories of parents, even if an issue or a problem arises that concerns school is multi-directional. Principals assign to active parents leadership roles, while pursuing at the same time regular communication with them, seeking their advice and listening carefully to their views. Similarly, the approach of parents who would like their involvement in school takes place both by providing them with additional information as well as by encouraging their involvement in school and by responding to their needs and problems. Simultaneously, the approach of parents who systematically avoid contact with the school takes place by constantly encouraging their involvement in this and by developing relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Moreover, principals who inform active parents timely about a topic or problem regarding school, at the same time also inform those parents timely who are directly concerned about it, as well as parents who do not see it as a problem or issue and discuss with parents not interested at all about it. Finally, principals who inform parents that do not consider the situation that occurred as an issue or problem discuss at the same time with parents who are indifferent to the issue or problem, a factor which probably shows that the availability of certain principals to inform the parents does not depend on their attitude and behaviour. These results are supported theoretically (Schneider & Hollenczer, 2006) and confirm the approach of Pashiardis (2004), according to which, for successful communication to take place, a basic rule is the use of at least two forms or modes of communication by different means. Also they note that communication and collaboration between school and students' families is a multidimensional process, which requires flexibility on the part of the principal, the knowledge and use of multiple modes of communication.

Conclusion

The findings of the current paper clearly portray that contemporary principals of a Greek school, as opposed to school principals abroad, do not use to a satisfactory level certain effective types, techniques and practices for the school's communication and collaboration with the students' parents. Communication is mostly pursued through the Parent-Guardian Association. This brings out the communication and collaboration limits and framework, sought with students' families. However, nowadays, when the need for a school which is open to society seems urgent (Georgiou, 2000) so that education can be transformed and updated (Papanaoum, 2001), principals should be able to grasp the importance of school-family communication and act upon it while overcoming all the hurdles that hinder parents' access to and involvement in the school. They should understand that education, although not a panacea, must take into account the complex relationship between school and society, as it is one of the key points for breaking the vicious cycle of the cumulative impact of poverty and social exclusion and for ensuring social rights and human dignity (Chrysakis, 2005; Tsiakalos, 1999). Therefore, theoretical as well as constitutional changes are essential, which will enlighten principals' work in the subject of school and student families' communication techniques and relevant practices, and in the broader subject of school-family communication, which will encourage such programmes being developed. In this sense, systematic training of students – the future teachers – in the scientific field of school, family and community becomes a necessity.

The findings of the current research contribute towards that direction. However, research activity in Greece regarding the degree of use by principals of such communication types, techniques and practices is particularly limited and fragmented and therefore should be extended. This subject needs to be addressed further, covering aspects of parents, teachers, students and others involved

in schools (e.g. superior and community authorities), while expanding the relevant research to both pre-school and secondary schools.

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