

# Managing and Leading in Early Childhood Education: A Study of Heads of Centers in Greece

Eleftheria Argyropoulou  
University of Crete, Rethymnon, Greece

This paper presents ECE (early childhood education) Headteachers' perceptions of their managing and leading roles, as well as their attitudes towards their professional careers as leaders in an EC (early childhood) educational organization. This research, as a case study, collected data from EC Headteachers in Greece. The case study found that, despite local/national level particularities, many of the common elements and issues for discussion raised by the Greek EC Headteachers participating in the study were similar to those reported in studies from other national contexts.

*Keywords:* ECE, kindergarten Headteachers, management, leadership

## Introduction

This paper studies the managing and leading perceptions of ECE (early childhood education) institutions' heads, in Greece. The research was conducted only in state institutions for young children 4-6 years old (called kindergartens, or "Nipiagogeia", in Greek), which outnumber by far the private ones (97.6% state to 2.4% private in 2008) (OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), 2011b).

Previous research (Argyropoulou, 2011a; Argyropoulou & Hatira, to be published in 2014) indicated that the ECE heads in Greece are more satisfied with their teaching role than with their managing and leading roles, the latter being considered a necessity coming with seniority in the job. Hence, the purpose of this paper is two-fold: (1) To identify EC (early childhood) Headteachers' specific attitudes towards their management and leadership roles; and (2) To seek evidence as to why these attitudes were caused and how they have affected EC Headteachers' career paths and personal attitudes.

### The Early Childhood Education in the Greek Context

At the macro level, the Greek educational system, which includes EC, is characterized by heavy centralization both in its organization and the delivery of knowledge (Argyropoulou, 2011b; Tsatsaroni et al., 2011). More specifically, Greece is the third country in the OECD scaling in terms of educational centralization (OECD, 2011a, indicator D 6.1). The average centralization rate for the Greek educational system is 78% (OECD, 2011a, pp. 509-510). The percentages for Greece are shown in Table 1.

Decision-taking is split at several levels only in the domain "organization of instruction". This means that the Head and the Teachers Board are responsible for the implementation of the curriculum, the grouping of students, the day-to-day students' attendance, and their assessment, according to the existing regulations.

Another significant characteristic of the centralized context is the bulk of the legislative regulations

(Andreou & Papakonstantinou, 1994). At the school level, the Headteacher is accountable for the implementation of the educational law in all four domains mentioned above. Thus, the Head has the minimum of autonomy to take decisions for the school (Papakonstantinou, 2012).

Table 1

*Degree of Centralization in the Greek Educational System (Data: 2009-2010)*

| OECD D 6.1 domains          | Decision-taking level |          |       |        |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|----------|-------|--------|
|                             | Central               | Regional | Local | School |
| Planning and structures     | 100%                  | -        | -     | -      |
| Personnel management        | 75%                   | 25%      | -     | -      |
| Resource management         | 84%                   | -        | 8%    | 8%     |
| Organization of instruction | 56%                   | 32%      | 11%   | 11%    |

The EC area covers two distinct age groups, 0-4 years of age, called EC care, and 4-6 years, called ECE. The field of EC care is under the auspices of the Ministry of Labor, Social Security, and Care and includes institutions of both private and public sectors. Institutions of the public sector are usually run by the municipalities within a framework of decentralized social care activities.

ECE is in the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education. Institutions of ECE are state schools, called kindergartens, and they consist of two classes: 4-5 and 5-6 years old. There is a specific curriculum (Integrated Interdisciplinary Framework for Study Program) for both years 4-5 and 5-6. Emphasis is placed on the children's transition from the kindergarten to the primary school. Moreover, specific care is taken for children with SEN (special educational needs), immigrant children, and children of ethnic minorities. In regard to SEN, an inclusive strategy is used, allowing special children to be educated in the same environment with the rest of children. Only severe SEN cases are taken care in specific SEN kindergartens. In 2006 (Law 3518/21.12.2006), the 5-6 years was made compulsory.

State kindergartens are rather small-size schools with no more than 60 pupils. Most of them offer full-day programs. In urban and sub-urban areas, they often include a SEN class. Thus, the total number of staff in a state kindergarten may vary from two to five members. However, there is only one class with only one teacher in remote kindergartens, in rural, mountainous, or small-island areas. These are called "one-teaching position kindergartens".

Contrary to what happens in primary and secondary schools, kindergarten Heads' selection criteria are based on seniority. This means that the person with the most years in service in the kindergarten is appointed as head (by the LEA (Local Educational Authorities)). Each headship term lasts four years and the nominee has the right to be re-selected many times, provided he/she is the senior in the centre.

EC Headteachers' roles and responsibilities are similar to those in any type of school. In case of one-teaching position schools, the only teacher is also the head of the kindergarten, performing all administrative tasks along with their teaching tasks. EC Heads in Greece keep on teaching even during their headship (A typical day of a Greek state kindergarten is provided below) (see Table 2). Kindergarten Heads receive minimal training for the post.

ECE professionals are mostly women (99.04%, well above OECD average which is 97%), according to the Ministry of Education Statistics (2008). They graduate from special university-level, four-year, initial teacher training schools called Departments of Pre-school Education. Up to 1982, EC staff used to attend only a

two-year kindergarten teachers' training school called the Pre-school Academy. The rationale behind the transition from the two-year to the four-year university level training schools was "raising the pedagogical background and the professional level of the kindergarten teachers in order for them to meet the increasing demands of their profession and to get to know the rich research body in their field of expertise" (Law 1268/1983, Presidential Decree 320/1983). As university graduates, the ECE professionals hold ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) (2011) Level 6 qualifications. To enter the teaching profession, they have to sit a competitive nationwide examination.

Table 2

*A Typical Kindergarten Class Timetable*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Morning session<br>(main teaching session)             | Typical kindergarten program  |
| 8:00-8:15  | Children's reception  |
| 8:15-9:00  | Free activities   |
| 9:00-12:00   | Organized/planned activities  |
| 12:00-12:15  | Children depart   |
| Afternoon session<br>(expansion of morning activities) | Only for full-day kindergartens   |
| 12:15-13:00  | Lunch and rest (The morning teacher cooperates with the afternoon teacher to coordinate the activities) |
| 13:00-16:00  | Afternoon activities  |

### Literature Review

Two major themes are discussed in this paper: managing and leading in early years and ECE Heads' constraints during performing their roles and responsibilities.

As the external school environment changes dramatically, an attempt is made to pass from principalship to leadership. The recent tensions in the Western and/or Europe in the field of education subsume management into leadership (OECD, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; Leading Ahead; EPNoSL), although the two sets of roles remain distinct: Management is more closely associated with maintenance of current operations while leadership involves steering organizations by shaping other people's attitudes, motivations, and behaviors (Bush & Glover, 2003). A bit earlier, Dimmock (1999) had provided a distinction between school management, administration, and leadership: Management involves routine maintenance of present operations, administration has to do with lower order duties while leadership includes "higher order tasks designed to improve staff, student, and school performance". The OECD report (2008a) concluded that the above elements "are so closely intertwined that is unlikely for one of them to succeed without the others".

The international organizations reports have been based on literature and research from decentralized (UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and USA) systems (Leithwood & Day, 2007; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Woods, 2005; Moos & Johansson, 2009; Yukl, 2002). In these texts, school leadership appears as an "umbrella" term covering both managerial and leading domains, competences, and skills.

However, the understanding of leadership in the Greek educational context is differentiated. The Greek equivalent word is largely used for the persons on top of the Ministry of Education or anyone with political power in the field to design policy and take decisions. Although the content meaning of the word remains the same, that is, the power and/or role to shape behaviors, performances, and attitudes, leadership is considered the highest order task attributed to ministers, politicians, or successful entrepreneurs (Mpourantas, 2005). The

conceptualization of leadership in western literature is new to the Greek school context. The notion has been introduced quite recently through the recommendations of international organizations (i.e., OECD, 2011b) and the participation of Greek members to European network and projects (Leading Ahead; EPNoSL). But, leadership is still difficult to understand in regard to the roles and responsibilities of the Greek Heads. The Greek system is characterized by bureaucratic stability and belongs to what is called “the back to the future bureaucratic system” scenario by the OECD (2008a)<sup>1</sup>.

Extending the discussion to the ECE field, Moyles (2006) argued that the definition of leadership and management in early years’ settings is a rather underexplored area (an idea already noted by Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs, 2004) and that there seems to be confusion among practitioners about these roles. However, there have been attempts among researchers to provide some insights on both issues. Management and leadership roles and responsibilities have been defined by various researchers (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2005; Rodd, 2006). For Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2005, pp. 2-3), administration, management, and leadership are distinct “areas” and understanding the content of meaning and purpose of each one of them is fundamental to be an ECE centre Head. In their distinction, administration includes general administrative/clerical work (data collection, statistics, book keeping, and correspondence). In other authors, these tasks submit to the managerial role of the ECE Head (Moyles, 2006). However, there are other texts (Boardman, 2003; Kagan & Bowman, 1997; Jorde-Bloom, 1998, 1992, 1991; Rodd, 1997; Scrivens, 1999) in which the term “leadership” often includes both management and leadership roles. The common feature among all writers is that management is connected with the expected behaviors stemming out from either the statutory framework or the specifications of one’s job description, while leadership has to do with the personal qualities and/or competencies that can inspire and affect others to perform best.

In this paper, the use of the words management and leadership follows the pattern described by Bush, Glover, and Moyles, above. Given the fact that the aspects of management and administration merge into one single word in Greek language, the administrative tasks, as they are described by Dimmock, Ebbeck, and Waniganayake, are subsumed into management.

Regarding contextual constraints, there have been significant attempts to identify EC contextual factors having an impact on ECE organizations and professionals (Nupponen, 2005; Karila, 2002). Most writers focus on the content of leadership in EC settings, by drawing a line between managing and leading roles and responsibilities (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2005; Rodd, 2006). There are certain, but few examples in which attention has been given on how and why the burden of these roles and responsibilities may affect EC professionals during their headship (Rodd, 1999; Boardman, 2003; Nupponen, 2005). Others (Argyropoulou, 2007; Karila, 2002; Rodd, 2006) pointed out that external environment, “macro-level”, constraints, such as the austerity of law, in case of children’s safety and well-being, or the strictness of regulations.

The duality of roles mentioned in certain works (Rodd, 1999) usually refers to the duality of management and leadership roles. In others (Boardman, 2003; Nupponen, 2005; Rodd, 2006), the notion of duality regards the teaching role and the headship role. In these latter, there is an implication about the difference of qualities between teaching and headship. A good teacher does not necessarily mean that he/she can develop to be an effective Headteacher (Catron & Groves, 1999). The transition from managing children to managing both

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<sup>1</sup> Recent attempts to move forward (proposed bill but not passed) take the system from Scenario 1 (bureaucratic system) to Scenario 4 (de-schooling, the extended market model) (OECD, 2008a, p. 21).

adults and administrative work is a difficult task for ECE professionals (Siraj-Blatchford & Manni, 2007). The “burden” of the managing and leading tasks along with the teaching tasks and the children’s safety and well-being responsibilities reduce the Head’s time significantly. Time is conceived not only in terms of managing-leading time and/or increased working hours, but also in terms of personal time that affects personal lives. Although, a number of EC professionals seem to acquire maturity, higher competence, and an ability to combat job-related stress as they progress in their careers (Cheuk, Wong, & Rosen, 2000; Jorde-Bloom, 1998; Mistry & Sood, 2012; Wong & Cheuk, 2005), this is not true for all of them.

Lack of time and job related stress are often interwoven and they become more evident when there is also lack of previous relevant training for the managing and leading roles and responsibilities. Research has repeatedly shown the importance of training as a shaping empowerment and self-developing strategy which is common to all contexts (Aubrey, 2007; Hard, 2005; Rodd, 2006; Stamopoulos, 1998; Thornton, Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken, & Tamati, 2009; Waniganayake, 2010). Thornton et al. (2009) emphasized on the training during the post arguing that “those in leadership roles need to be further supported through the provision of appropriate training and professional development opportunities”. Rodd (2005), on the other hand, insisted that “the early years’ field can no longer afford to regard the preparation of its leaders as an optional extra”.

Given that the understanding of management and leadership is rather different in the Greek educational context, the problem this paper comes to explore is how Greek ECE heads perceive their roles, what their job-related issues of concern are, whether these perceptions vary from those presented in relevant literature, and what the reasons behind these differences are, if there are any.

### **The Research Problem**

This study comes as a follow-up of previous quantitative research (Argyropoulou, 2011a), which attempted to map kindergarten Headteachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards their appointment to management in education positions (LEA officials<sup>2</sup>). The previous research indicated a number of contradictory statements in the subjects’ responses. From these contradictory statements, we isolated the one we thought as the most interesting: “Although kindergarten teachers and Headteachers realize the need to manage the ECE centers themselves and understand the way and the philosophy under which the centers function, they do not wish to undertake managing and leading positions” (Argyropoulou, 2011a).

### **The Research Question**

This study focuses on the following: What is the reason for the reluctance of ECE Heads and teachers to take up or aspire to managing and leading positions?

Data were gathered by using four open-ended questions (see Appendix A). Question 1 explores the subjects’ understanding of their post requirements. For question 2, subjects are asked to describe a typical day at the head’s office/post. Question 3 tracks the subjects’ career paths, using three time and competence points: initial, middle, and mature. Question 4 seeks to find out the subjects’ points of view on the benefits of training provision and of suitable training course content for kindergarten Heads.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the statutory framework, any teacher of primary education or ECE, having the required qualifications and expertise, is liable for selection in LEA posts. These posts are: School Head, Director of Education (in one of the 58 directorates of education), or Regional Director (in one of the 13 regional directorates of education in the country).

### Research Methodology

Qualitative methods have been considered advantageous to explore sensitive issues and that is why they have been extensively used on leadership research (Ospina, 2004). The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide textual descriptions of how people experience a given situation or phenomenon and to explain possible causal relationships (FHI (Family Health International)). This paper seeks to understand the complex ECE headship issue from the perspective of the actors involved, rather than explaining from the outside. Hence, it was thought suitable to use a qualitative questionnaire which can provide autobiographical elements and perceptions formed as a result of personal experiences. Open-ended questions were chosen as they have the ability to evoke responses which are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, rich and explanatory in nature (FHI).

Content analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) was preferred for exploring subjects' responses. An inductive analysis (open coding, creating categories and abstracting) has been chosen, as there are no previous Greek studies dealing with the issue. Repeated words, phrases, and paragraph contents were used as the basis to form theme categories and subcategories. Numerical data and supporting excerpts were also provided in certain cases to "maintain the integrity of narrative materials" and to offer an aspect of the "richness of the original data" (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

### Research Tool, Sample, and Ethics

The research tool had been piloted about two months before the actual research. For practical reasons (time, distance), the research subjects were sent the questions and completion instructions and were asked to write down their responses and send them back to the researcher in the provided envelop. The questions were sent to the school address but not to individuals as care had been taken to avoid disclosing the subject's identity, possible embarrassment, and insincere answers. Envelops were posted to 120 schools in the urban and suburban parts of the three areas mentioned (two schools per borough). There was no specific criterion in choosing certain schools.

The sample included 66 kindergarten Headteachers or ex-Headteachers (but still in service as teachers<sup>3</sup>) from Crete, Thessaly, and Athens. These were the areas in which the previous extended research (Argyropoulou, 2011a) had taken place. As this was a follow-up research, it was thought useful to send the research questionnaire to the same school staff of the 2011 research. The sample was less than it had been initially expected, as the participation in the 2011 research came up to 92%. Nevertheless, it was considered sufficient for the research purpose as this research subjects would be identical with some of those in the previous research; consequently, they would share those attitudes that led to the present research question.

All subjects are women, aged 30-55, with an average age of 40-50 years (details are shown in Appendix Table B1). All of them were or had been kindergarten Heads for—at least—three years. Intensive headship training was missing for all subjects.

### Presentation of Findings

Analysis of the data from the open-ended questions led to the formation of six major categories:

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<sup>3</sup> The Greek framework (Law 1566/1985) provides that the school head is "primus inter pares". This provision allows heads to choose to return to their teaching positions after the 4-year headship term is completed.

perception of the managing role, perception of the leading role, reflection on the first day on the job, description of a Head's typical day at work, training for headship, and career progression and personal feelings. Then, each category was subdivided in minor subcategories, where it is possible. Findings are presented in tables and followed by a number of indicative answers.

### Perception of the Managing Role

The most important feature of the answers to this question is the aspect/s the subjects attributed to the managerial role. There is more than one aspect of the role discussed by each subject (see Table 3).

Table 3

#### *Perception of the Managing Role*

| Category 1                      | Subcategory 1.1                                   | Subcategory 1.1.1  | %  | Key elements-expressions used  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Perception of the managing role | Administrative/clerical tasks                     |  | 75   | Official correspondence, school statistics, and bureaucratic tasks                     |
|                                 | The burden of the managing responsibilities       |  | 72   |  |
|                                 | School financial management                       |  | 45   | The greatest part of the tasks and roles   |
|                                 | Organizing, planning, delegating, and controlling |  | 42   |  |
|                                 | External environment                              |  | 40   | Parents, LEA, and local community  |
|                                 | Attitudes and feelings associated with the role   | Children's security, school performance, and provision of supplies | 40   |  |
|                                 |   | Lack of time   | 35   | Time-consuming   |
|                                 |   | Anxiety for school performance                                     | 30   | Anxious<br>Personal fears for possible criticism from LEA officials, colleagues, etc.. |
|                                 | Role dislike                                      | 28   | Boring, difficult, necessary but unwanted, and uninteresting |  |

### Perception of the Leading Role

Some answers indicate aspects of the managing role, but, their frequency is relatively moderate. Some others indicate a confusion regarding the content of both the managing and the leading roles (see Table 4).

Table 4

#### *Perception of the Leading Role*

| Category 2                     | Subcategory 2.1            | %                      | Key elements—expressions used                               |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Perception of the leading role | Absence of the role        | 90                     |   |
|                                | Cooperation                | 70                     | Cooperative, trustworthy, and helping others                |
|                                | Solidarity                 | 50                     | Feelings of equality, democracy, and justice for colleagues |
|                                | Responsibility             | 45                     | For the operation of the school                             |
|                                | Motivation                 | 40                     | Inspiring, motivating, and initiative taking                |
|                                | Conflict management        | 35                     | Smoothing conflicts, referee, and keeping the peace         |
|                                | Guidance                   | 30                     | Guiding teachers to reach decisions                         |
|                                | Collective decision-making | 20                     | Discussing with teachers and taking decisions together      |
|                                | Model                      | 18                     | Positive = Be the model of task performance                 |
|                                | 1.5                        | Negative = The bad guy |   |
|                                | Confusion of roles         | 1.5                    |   |

### Reflecting on the First Day on a Managing/Leading Post

The subjects recall a variety of memories and feelings, grouped and shown below (see Table 5).

### A Kindergarten Head's Typical Day at Work

The Heads of the sample stated that their time is divided into two parts: their class and their office. They try to deal with the headship duties either before or after their morning class, that is, before 8:00 a.m. or after 12:00 at noon, depending on how much time is needed to perform each task (see Table 6).

Table 5

#### *First Day in the Headship Post*

| Category 3                                      | Subcategory 3.1<br>Memories-Feelings | %   | Justification of given answers             | %    | Key elements—expressions used  |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----|--|------|--|
| Recalling of the first day in the headship post | Positive                             | 7.6 |  |      |  |
|   | Mixed                                | 3   | Coincided with their first day of teaching |      | Happy for their teaching role/their dream came true; anxious and upset for the headship role               |
|   | Neutral                              | 1.5 | Lack of relevant knowledge and experience  | 45   | Cannot recall any memories<br>No idea of Kindergarten management, although it is in their job description  |
|   | Negative                             | 73  | Responsibility increased                   | 28.8 | Unaware of administrative tasks and management strategies, lacking specific knowledge to deal with parents |
|   |                                      |     | Lack of support                            | 10   | From LEA or colleagues   |

Table 6

#### *A Head's Typical Day*

| Head's daily timetable  | Tasks  |
|---|--|
| before-8:00 a.m.  | Read in-coming correspondence.<br>Prioritize managerial activities.<br>Check for absent children and inform the LEA.<br>Deal with urgent matters.<br>Talk with parents if urgent.<br>Check school facilities (building and yard) and sanitary conditions before children come.   |
| 8:00 a.m.-12:00 at noon                                       | Class  |
| 12:00 at noon and on<br>(tasks demanding more time to handle) | Prepare out-coming correspondence and school statistics.<br>Meet the staff to brief them about LEA's circulars, orders, directives, or training seminars.<br>Organize and coordinate teaching activities or prepare teaching material for the following day.<br>Regular parents' meetings.<br>School financial management, order school supplies, and pay bills.<br>Plan open-day activities, school performances, visits, and excursions. |

### Training for Headship

The subjects agree that training would solve a considerable number of problems regarding their roles and they would not have to resort to others for help. They identify lack of training as the main reason for the insecurity, anxiety, and fear feelings, although 14 had some reservations. Moreover, the subjects offer some ideas about the type and the content of training needed (see Table 7).

### Career Progression and Personal Feelings

The subjects' answers present two significant points in their career cycles: the initial, immature, and the present, which, according to their age and years in service, can be either "the competent enough" (middle-aged subjects) or the "mature" (late middle-aged, towards the end of their careers). Middle Point B and Mature Point C present a number of similar features. The differences, on the other hand, are due to the age and the acquired experience (see Table 8).



Table 7

*Training for Headship*

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Training particulars | Suggestions   |
| Type                 | Initial: In-university training   |
|                      | Induction: Short-term pre-appointment training  |
|                      | In-service: Regular short-term post-appointment training                                    |
| Content              | Organization and management of education (general introductory course)                      |
|                      | School management, financial management, and educational law                                |
|                      | ICT (information and computer technologies)   |
|                      | School leadership (interpersonal communication, team or group leading, conflict management) |

Table 8

*Kindergarten Heads' Career Progression*

|                      |                 |                             |   |  |
|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Career cycles        |                 | A: Initial                  | B: Middle                                 | C: Mature  |
| Age                  |                 | 30-40                       | 41-50                                     | 50+  |
| Degree of competence |                 | Low                         | Moderate                                  | High   |
|                      | Experience      | Lack of relevant background | Life/job experienced                      | Life/job experienced   |
|                      | Time management | Lack of time                | Lack of time                              | Lack of time   |
|                      | Training        | No training                 | No training, but some empirical knowledge | Some or no training; Some empirical knowledge of the statutory framework |
| Feelings             |                 | Negative                    | Less negative to moderate                 | Alteration of feelings   |
|                      |                 | Fear                        | Less fear                                 | No fear  |
|                      |                 | Anxiety, stress             | Less stress                               | No stress, but fatigue   |
|                      |                 | Insecurity                  | Less insecurity                           | Secure, but (often) wishing to resign                                    |

According to the perceptions expressed in the given answers, we could represent the subjects' career route in a linear way (see Figure 1), marking the turning points followed by the feelings at each point:

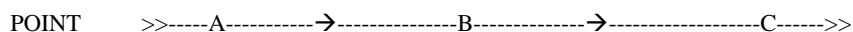


Figure 1. Career points and feelings. Source: Jorde-Bloom, 1998. Adapted and modified accordingly<sup>4</sup>.

This linear representation shows that there is a reverse analogous relation between “competence and negative feelings”: As the competence increases, the initial negative feelings tend to diminish or disappear.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Role Perceptions**

The above analysis put forward some important issues:

(1) Kindergarten Headteachers seem not to have a complete idea of what their managing role entails. Some cases include leading characteristics to the role (cooperation, building relations). They mentioned certain aspects of the role adding how they feel about it;

(2) In their majority, they find the managing role much less attractive than their teaching role, as it involves greater responsibilities, more time at work, and an implicit risk to make mistakes and receive criticism from LEA superiors. Moreover, this extra burden is not rewarded;

<sup>4</sup> Jorde-Bloom (1998) used four career points for each of her subjects in a more extended research. We think that the data we collected allow the formation of only three categories.

(3) Some of the subjects seem to feel “threatened” and try to defend their status. This attitude can be partly justified, as they seem not to understand the content of the role. Consequently, they feel exposed and criticized.

However, the majority of the subjects point out the leading features of the kindergarten environment: cooperation, common decision-making, inspiration, motivation, solidarity, coping with conflict, and equality. The small number of teachers in a kindergarten does not facilitate competitiveness or the willingness to distinguish among others. The ECE general mission “to help children develop in every aspect of their physical, psychological, and mental life, and to keep them safe and secure in the school environment” is collective, shared by all practitioners, and the reason to encourage cooperation and sustenance of a balanced environment in the institution. In other words, the ECE mission offers a “platform” to create and maintain a specific organizational culture.

As for those who do not think they have a leading role, a careful look at their answers reveals that almost all of them work in one-position schools. There are some subjects who state that “they dare not consider themselves as leaders as they may not want to sound arrogant”.

Quite often, there seems to be a confusion of the managing and leading roles resulting from the fact that subjects lack the understanding of the role content for both managing and leading. This confusion seems to be a common issue in various contexts. Thornton et al. (2009) had also ascertained such confusion in their own research. Hard (2005) attributed the confusion of the managing and leading roles to the fact that prospective ECE Headteachers do not receive special training on leadership issues, as it is thought that effective teaching requirements would suffice for headship positions as well. She added, however, that this concept remains “contentious”. Hard argued that “seniority”, expressed by “years in service” (as it also happens in this case), is not enough for an EC professional to assume managing and leading roles and responsibilities. Nevertheless, training for teaching young children is much different than training for managing and leading and EC organizations. Emphasis on the latter would eliminate confusion.

Additionally, role perceptions may reflect a deeper, not explicit, expression of the satisfaction people get from their jobs. In the case of ECE Heads, job satisfaction is related to teaching which they considered their primary and ultimate task. Consequently, the dissatisfaction expressed in this research stems mainly from the managing/leading role. The subjects see the headship roles as an extra “burden”, while teaching young children offers them safety and security and releases them from stress and dependence on others. This result has been repeated in the previous research (Argyropoulou & Hatira, to be published in 2014).

#### **Emerging Leading Skills: Building and Sustaining Meaningful Teams**

Although several Heads stated that they do not see themselves as leaders, obviously, misinterpreting the notion of leadership, they commented on various aspects of leadership by talking about leading roles and qualities (collaboration with colleagues; working harmonically with others, children, colleagues, and parents; and meaningful team building). They pointed out that a Head should have communication skills, the ability to listen to others and then make decisions, to be a model, and to guide others. Nupponen (2005) had also noted the importance of communicative skills which she calls “intrapersonal and interpersonal” qualities to deal with colleagues, parents, and social partners. Working with parents and sustaining a sincere relation with them are of great importance for ECE institutions (Ebbeck, Zaccardo, Hill, & Hughes, 2003; Nupponen, 2005; Rodd, 2006). Parents constitute a strong group; working with them, although desirable, may be difficult and demanding. Heads have to face diverted family needs that may lead to various parental attitudes towards the kindergarten

staff.

Colleagues as a group often cause worries. The repeated emphasis on “solidarity”, “working well and/or collaborating with colleagues”, or “not seeing themselves as leaders” indicates another constraint of the internal environment. Subjects often note that conflicts tend to affect the centre function and require extra time to work towards a solution.

A considerable number of Heads expressed their strong feelings about the development and the well-being of the young children. Although they have “a diverse range of administrative responsibilities... they remain focused that the core of their work is providing quality care for children”. This stance indicates both strong pedagogical focus on the primary task and professionalism.

Although the model of leadership used by the Greek state kindergarten Heads has not been a specific objective in this study, it is likely that the combination of the two elements—working harmonically with others (parents, teachers, and the community) and providing a meaningful learning and developing environment for young children—implies a type of leadership, often residing in ECE environments, which is called “pedagogical leadership”<sup>5</sup>.

### **Perception of Contextual Constraints**

Knowledge and intention are not the sole factors contributing to harmony and job satisfaction in modern schools. The school context constitutes another crucial parameter. Results regarding macro-environmental constraints are also common in Nupponen (2005), who emphasized on the increased regulatory requirements and a number of considerable external environment pressures (parents, community, and business competitiveness, in case of privately-owned centers) that EC leaders face.

In the case of Greek state kindergarten Heads, the major constraint seems to be the duality between the teaching and the headship roles. This duality causes negative feelings. Can they teach a class and lead the EC school at the same time? Their answers are negative, but both roles are imposed by the strict statutory framework. The duality of EC head’s teaching and managing/leading roles has also been noted by Boardman (2003). Karila (2002) had also indicated regulations as the constraining factor in EC environments.

Moreover, the Greek law about children’s safety is strict: Legal consequences for accidents involving young children may include EC teachers’ dismiss from their job plus the loss of all job benefits (Argyropoulou, 2007). This explains why they would like training on educational law. Lack of relevant training is another cause of stress.

The stress factor has been mentioned repeatedly in a variety of expressions. Some subjects attribute stress to lack of knowledge, resulting from lack of training, some others to lack of adequate headship time; all identify job dissatisfaction due to stress. The stress caused by the duality of roles (headship and teaching) has also been one of the main results in previous research (Argyropoulou & Hatira, to be published in 2014).

This finding seems to align with Cheuk, Wong, and Rosen (2000) who argued that “More experienced principals experience less job-related stress... as they probably have developed an understanding of the work in leading their school...”. This is because they can make proper preparations and planning to prevent

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<sup>5</sup> Heikka and Waniganayake (2011) stated that there is a confusion in the use of the term in early childhood settings, which is rooted in the way the notion of pedagogy is conceived, applied, and researched in contemporary work in various national contexts. However, in the relevant literature about pedagogical leadership (Sergiovanni, 1998; Andrews, 2009; Katz, 1997; Waniganayake, 2010; Hujala & Heikka, 2007), the latter, as they are referred in Heikka and Waniganayake (2011), has two major themes around which the epistemological discussion is involved: (1) the way/method and the content of teaching to young children; and (2) the dynamics of creating an “environment” of good relations among all those involved in the teaching and learning of young children.

task-related difficulties and they have developed skills and confidence to work out effective solutions to arising problems. However, age-related, negative feelings, fatigue (possibly from life and job), and (occasionally) resignation cannot be generalized characteristics, as they reflect individual personality traits.

Cheuk, Wong, and Rosen (2000) and Wong and Cheuk (2005) emphasized the close association of stress with negative emotions and less job satisfaction. The situation is likely to worsen when any type of support is absent.

Stress has always been identified as affecting the quality of subjects' personal lives. Lack of time is interpreted as the insufficient time to complete the range of responsibilities in both roles. Rodd (2006) noted that it is due to the staff-to-child ratio defined by the government regulations and that time management has to do with each individual's ability to deal with it. "For many practitioners, the job takes as long as it does to get done regardless of statutory working hours", a fact is often pointed out by one of our research subjects: "I usually take work home. I do it either in the afternoon or during the weekend". In such cases, pressure is placed on "the work-life balance". Boardman (2003) identified time as an organizational aspect of the EC environment; she supported the idea that the lack-of-time issue represents the "conflict associated with the time for teaching and (the time for) leadership responsibilities". She also highlighted "the dilemma associated with dual teaching and leading roles", which is also true for the Greek case.

Views on training for headship are likely to build on the difficulties the subjects face in praxis; they are closely interwoven with statutory and management aspects of the organization and, to a lesser degree, with pure leadership issues. The type and content of training program at each level of competence (Jorde-Bloom, 1998) and in each national case is differentiated according to local job descriptions and needs; however, research has repeatedly shown that the importance of training as a shaping empowerment and self-developing strategy is common to all contexts; training as a notion and a necessity are associated with all parameters in this study. Lack of relevant training is likely to be blamed for all the inconsistencies put forward by this research. The majority of the subjects have attributed almost all their problems to this lack; consequently, their reluctance to undertake managing and leading roles is seldom based on lack of intention to get involved, but on lack of the required skills to be successful in these roles and on the negative feelings arising from this lack.

## Conclusions

Data from material provided by the open-ended questions led to the following conclusions:

(1) The fact that ECE Heads perform their teaching tasks at the same working hours with the performance of managing and leading tasks is the main cause of post-related stress and dissatisfaction and the one that averts them from aspiring for a headship post at their own will;

(2) The environmental constraints of the ECE head role are so powerful that they form specific attitudes towards the headship post. The macro-level environmental constraints, especially the ones imposed by the legal framework (organizational and operational), are also important factors for their not aspiring for headship posts. As the main criterion for ECE headship is still "the seniority", Heads are obliged to undertake the centralized tasks (continuous reporting to LEA, lack of individual decision-making within school) of the post without their own will. Their perception of headship is that "they have to implement the authority that comes with the post, to execute prescribed tasks; they are not entitled to the autonomy to take decisions for the benefit of the school as an organization". This explains why the majority of the samples claim the absence of leading role;

(3) Lack of relevant training before or during headship makes the post responsibilities onerous and undesirable. Moreover, it makes difficult for them to distinguish between management and leadership and accept the importance of leadership;

(4) ECE practitioners prefer to remain focusing on teaching young children instead of aspiring for headship posts. The seniority criterion will eventually lead them to the post; this is, actually, a vicious circle, as they are neither opt for any post-related preparation on their own nor will they receive any training on the behalf of the LEA or the Ministry.

A number of key themes emerged from this research:

(1) In most cases, there is confusion between the managing and the leading roles and responsibilities. Even in cases that leading roles are present, the subjects believe that “they are not leaders”;

(2) The status of the Greek ECE Heads is confusing “per se”. They are obliged (by the statutory framework) to perform two distinct roles (teacher-school leader) in one without previous understanding of the demands of each role. This implies a potential inadequacy in both. The one role closer to the training they have received is that of the teacher. As for the second, there is a lack of cognition which, combined with time shortage because of teaching, results in stress and dissatisfaction. Consequently, the role of school leader is not included in their career aspirations;

(3) The small size of ECE schools, with only one (Head) teacher, known in Greece as “one-position schools”, also contributes to the forming of specific attitudes. The one teacher-Head is difficult to realize the notion of leadership in a school without other teaching staff;

(4) The ECE Heads learn the ropes of their role either by apprenticing (in case of larger schools) or by living experience, a fact that questions the quality of the services they offer and the effectiveness of their performance;

(5) ECE Heads realize that the difficulties of the job are more than they had initially expected and they often get discouraged. Interim training and/or support from critical friends and colleagues would reduce negative feelings, especially at the beginning of their headship career.

### **Implications**

The leadership challenge within the Greek school environment lies in two major points: understanding the importance of leadership and implementing/realizing it in a less “bureaucratic” and more “re-schooling” system scenario.

For the first point, it is important for all involved parts in the educational system to move from a rather managerial, “industrial-like”, attitude towards headship to a broader concept of the authority to lead, probably, shared among several people. To achieve this transition, it is necessary to distinguish between the two notions-poles, management, and leadership, where to start from, where to go to, and where to do both. Sound and systematic relevant training before assuming the post and during the early steps in the post would be the best remedy to all discrepancies mentioned above.

Understanding the importance of school leadership is not enough unless it is made a policy priority. At the macro-level, this means redesigning the organizational structure of the educational system on a more decentralized basis, allowing more freedom to the “periphery” than to the “centre”. At the micro-level, we support that the redesigning of the organization and the operation of Greek ECE institutions, would facilitate to change ECE Heads’ perceptions and attitudes towards their roles and responsibilities. The small number of

children and the small number of teachers in ECE institutions do not allow the creation of a more concrete organizational mind. In the past, this had been put forward as an asset, as kindergartens were supposed to replace the family environment. Nowadays, as the demand for effectiveness in the provision of ECE augments, the family/cozy environment can be maintained only for the children. The ECE institution should be a more organized setting where strategic planning, quick and appropriate decision-making, and collaboration among an increasing number of professionals need to take place. Reorganizing the structure of ECE institutions will facilitate professionals to understand the importance of being active members of a flourishing organization and think and act accordingly. In such a case, ECE effective Headteachers cannot perform dual duties, teach and lead, at the same time.

Concluding, the commonality of the findings of this research with those from previous research shows that the lack of training is a dominant problem in almost all national contexts. However, the origins of the problem are not identical. The interpretation of findings in each national case needs to be approached cautiously through the understanding of the contextual factors and their impact on perceptions and attitudes.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A: The Questionnaire

- (1) Role perception;
  - (a) What is your perception of your managerial role?
  - (b) What is your perception of your leading role?
- (2) Describe a typical day at work;
- (3) Reflect on your first day as head: What do you remember of that day and why?
- (4) Have you received any training for headship? Do you think that if kindergarten teachers received proper training for headship, they would be more willing to assume headship positions? Please justify your answer. If yes, what training course content would you suggest?



**Appendix B****Table B1: Subjects' Age, Years in Service, Years in Headship**

| Age   | <i>N</i> | F%    | Years in service | Average | Years in headship | Average |
|-------|----------|-------|------------------|---------|-------------------|---------|
| 30-35 | 10       | 15.15 | 5-10             | 5.8     | 3-6               | 3.9     |
| 36-40 | 11       | 16.67 | 9-15             | 11.9    | 5-8               | 6.62    |
| 41-45 | 14       | 21.21 | 10-22            | 17.07   | 6-12              | 8.78    |
| 46-50 | 21       | 31.82 | 17-32            | 21      | 5-31              | 13.66   |
| 51-55 | 10       | 15.15 | 25-33            | 27.9    | 10-33             | 19.15   |

**Appendix C: Indicative Answers for In-text Table Data Analysis****Indicative Answers of Table 3**

"I have to carry out all the bureaucratic work myself (book keeping, issuing documents, school statistics, and children's absences and correspondence). Financial issues also worry me very much. I want to buy the latest material for children, but I have to economize because our school budget is minimal".

"The managerial role includes a variety of responsibilities: school maintenance, colleagues, timetables, control, parents, observing curricula, etc."

"I wish to perform well and responsibly. I do what I can to maintain an effective class and an effective school. I am trying to fulfill every obligation and not to leave things undone".

"A tiring and boring task; I am the first to go and the last to leave school".

"I feel lonely on top".

"I am always in a continuous alertness; I am trying hard to perform as well as possible, though I have a lot of responsibilities".

"I am the bad guy".

**Indicative Answers of Table 4**

"Without ignoring or underestimating the leading role, I am trying to behave not as a leader, but as a colleague; any decisions must be taken together with my colleagues. Generally speaking, I am trying to keep a balance in our relationship".

"I do not feel like being a leader, controlling and evaluating; I am trying to build a good relationship based on collegiality/solidarity with the teachers" .

"I am the animator, the one who inspires, the conductor of the orchestra".

"We work together, as a team, and we decide together".

"My role is equal to the roles of my colleagues, but, I have more responsibilities than they do. Moreover, decisions for all school matters are taken with the participation of all".

**Indicative Answers of Table 5**

"I cannot recall any particular or intense feeling, as I was positioned in a small rural school with very few children and fewer responsibilities... I was the only teacher and the Headteacher (of myself) at the same time".

"I was totally unaware of the daily administrative tasks and the managing strategies and/or techniques to handle them".

"I did not know how to work together with children's parents".

"I did not know how to cooperate effectively with my fellow teachers".

"Training during the induction phase was very short; I tried to approach colleagues and the nearest primary school head for help".

"I found my way by self-studying school management and regulatory framework books".

**Indicative answers of Table 6**

"My time is divided between the class and the office".

"I try to deal with the headship duties either before or after my class (i.e., before 8:00 a.m. or after 12:00 at noon).