
QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF GREEK KINDERGARTEN ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLE AS LEADERS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF TEACHER-PARENT CONFLICTS

► IOANNA AIVATZIDOU

Educator of the Primary Management of Eastern Thessaloniki, Greece
iaivatzidou@gmail.com

► DIMITRIS VROIKOS

Educator of the Secondary Management of Eastern Thessaloniki, Greece
dvroikos@gmail.com

Abstract

In any professional area, where many people work and do business on a daily basis, as in the field of education, conflicts often arise between dynamically involved entities. In fact, conflicts between nursery school staff and the parents of children attending them are a common phenomenon. An important role in the success or not of conflict management plays not only the characteristics of management executives but also the leadership techniques they use. In this research work, through the use of qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, we investigated the perceptions of the heads of Greek public kindergartens about their leadership role in managing conflicts between teachers and parents. The main goal of this research paper is to investigate the attitudes and beliefs of the heads of careers regarding the types of conflicts that develop in kindergarten between teachers and parents, the underlying causes involved, but also whether they ultimately affect the functioning of the educational organization and the effectiveness of the teaching work. In addition, we tried to understand in depth their perceptions of the concept and the forms of leadership as well as the way to link leadership theories with their personal attitudes towards the management of disagreements between educators and parents. The results showed that the issue of parental involvement in school and the conflicts which inevitably derived from it are very important since they concern all teachers holding a position of responsibility, while their proper management is directly related to the leadership style they adopt. Consequently, it has been highlighted that the term leadership is vague to the participants, and the implementation of two distinct forms of leadership, transformational and distributed has emerged. Thus, effective conflict management was positively correlated with the use of these forms of leadership and was found to contribute significantly to the smooth functioning of the school unit and ultimately to the fulfilment of its mission.

Keywords: Concepts, preschool supervisors, leadership styles, teacher-parent conflicts, conflict management, preschool age.

1. Introduction

The kindergarten area is a dynamic environment in which inconsist-

encies and incompatibilities of opinions, perceptions, values, feelings, needs and goals develop between the people who are directly or indirectly involved, leading to conflicts (Msilla, 2012). Conflicts indeed, when connected with parents, affect greatly the effectiveness of the educational work carried out within the school since they significantly affect the psychological state of teachers, ultimately shaping the climate that the school creates with its external environment. The ability of managers for early diagnosis and effective management of conflicts is one of the key elements of their success as leaders (Σαϊτης, 2008). The ways in which leadership is practiced and the management of conflicts are factors that may determine, either alone or in combination, the effectiveness of the leader (Zafar, 2011). According to the new developments in the organization and administration of education, the role of school administrators is not simply limited to carrying out administrative and bureaucratic tasks, but is expanded to new leadership roles that are related to the formation of a positive climate in the school area, through promoting cooperation and trust, innovation as well as the effective settlement of conflicts that may develop inside and outside the school unit.

In this research work, an attempt is made to investigate the perceptions of preschool school principals, regarding the leadership style and management techniques they adopt as leaders, in order to manage the conflicts that develop between the teachers and the preschool age children's parents.

In order to achieve the research objective, the issue is highlighted through three research questions. The first question refers as to how the principals perceive the causes and types of conflicts that arise between parents and teachers in kindergarten. The second question explores the principals' views on the leadership style they adopt in managing such conflicts, based on their personal attitudes. The third question investigates the link between the leadership style followed by the principals as well as the conflict management tactics, based on the effectiveness in providing educational services, according to their perception.

Regarding the subject of conflicts and leadership, there is a great number of researches yet most of them mainly concern the conflicts that develop within school units and especially between teachers. In addition, most of them are related to secondary education and, as far as primary education is concerned, they focus mainly on primary and not on pre-school education. Last but not least, the issue of leadership in preschool education has not been sufficiently developed in the literature. Therefore, this particular research work to a certain extent contributes to this gap regarding the conflicts that develop between parents and teachers in preschool education.

2. Conflicts

Conflicts in all organizational environments as well as in that of the school arise from various sources-causes. Knowing the origin of conflicts is particularly important for the effective management of an organization (Παρασκευόπουλος, 2008). The most important factors in the school environment that can trigger conflicts and frictions derive from: a) communicational problems Ajai (2017), which are the most important or at least one of the most important causes of conflicts (Ιορδανίδης, 2014), b) limited resources (Montana & Charnov, 2002) and generally from the organizational structure of the school (Ιορδανίδης, 2014), c) different and opposite goals (Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα, 2008α), which can lead to the creation of informal groups

within the organization with the aim of achieving their own common goals (Πετρίδου, 2011) and cause conflicts of either shorter or longer duration (Σαΐτης, 2002), d) human factors, such as different personalities, perceptions, values, beliefs, desires and ambitions, the different educational, social and economic status, different age as well as interests, which contribute to individuals perceiving each subject in their own way (Παπασταμάτης, 2005; Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα, 2008α), e) introduction of innovations or changes, which might meet with teacher's resistance according to theorists reports (Everard & Morris, 1999), f) management style (Κουτούζης, 1999) and working status (Ghaffar, 2010).

Conflicts, as stated by Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα (2008β), are considered neutral regarding their value, being neither good nor bad. What is vital though is their impact on the organization and the behaviour of individuals, as well as on the organization's performance, but that depends on the way they are addressed. Larasati and Raharja (2020), claim that the management of conflicts in schools by principals is a process of planning strategies that they will apply in order to resolve and control them so as to bring positive results to the school area. The results that ultimately derive from a conflict reveal the place that conflict resolution has in the organizational behavior of an organization and the complexity associated with its management (Rahim, 2001). Educators should not only understand the context in which conflicts develop but also the techniques by which they can be managed (Rahim, 2001).

3. Conflicts and leadership

The concept of leadership is not identical with the concept of management. The concepts of leadership and management are related and complementary but they are not the same thing. The executive (manager) plans, organizes and coordinates daily tasks, while the leader inspires, motivates and directs an organization (Πασιαρδής, 2004). Μπουραντάς (2005), defines leadership as the process of influencing the emotions, thoughts, behaviours and attitudes of a group by the leader, ensuring their voluntary cooperation, in order to achieve the organization's goals and its well-being. Understanding leadership as a process of social influence, leadership theories differ in terms of who exerts influence, the nature of that influence, and its purpose.

The leadership literature reveals that leadership theories have evolved and modified over time, and none of them are completely wrong. Situations, context, culture, work environment, new laws and regulations, information overload, organizational complexity, and psychosocial developments can influence the form and style of leadership, making it similar to the changing organizational dynamics (Amabile et al., 2004). Despite the fact that there are several studies that examine the different forms of leadership and how they affect a wide range of variables, such as satisfaction, performance, etc. (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Rafferty & Griffin, 2004), there is a gap regarding leadership styles and conflicts.

Bass and Riggio (2006), emphasize the fact that transformational leaders can play a key role in conflict management by motivating employees involved in conflict situations to find collaborative solutions and turn the conflict into a mutually solvable problem. In addition, they can reduce conflicts by being sensitive to the needs of subordinates. This personalized reflection can encourage employees to respect and understand the position and needs of others and at times overcome adamant attitudes. On the other hand, Xin and

Pelled (2003), identified a negative relationship between emotional conflicts and emotional support and encouragement from the leader and found that employees who experienced this type of conflict, consider that in this way the leaders inspire less confidence in achieving their goals and encourage their creativity to a smaller extent.

Kotlyar and Karakowski (2006), consider that, compared to transformational leaders, the behaviours of transactional leaders are associated with lower levels of emotional conflict. By clarifying certain goals and rewarding good performance, the transactional leader can create and maintain positive interactions among subordinates and thereby help reduce emotional conflicts. In addition, Bass and Riggio (2006), consider that transactional leaders can reduce conflict because they seek and reward easy compromises. This search for neutral solutions is more satisfactory for both parties and therefore reduces potential conflicts. On the other hand, Parent and Gallupe (2001), consider that a leader who adopts a transactional management, ultimately tends to increase conflicts between subordinates.

Last but not least, in the context of distributed leadership, which develops as a group phenomenon of strong shared leadership practice, the negative effects of conflict on team relationships and creativity are mitigated (Pearce & Conger, 2003), ultimately contributing to the development of a climate of social support and mutual vision (Hoch, 2013). When the level distributed leadership increases, the negative impact of conflict on relationships is reduced because participation and collaborative decision-making is encouraged (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). Group members who have interpersonal conflicts, despite their differences, may behave in a common way and coordinate effectively (Klein et al., 2011).

4. Research methodology

Based on the bibliographic approaches to leadership and conflicts, there is a subjectivity but also a biased approach in the way of perception of the individual regarding these two concepts and for this reason the qualitative method was dictated as the most suitable for the present research. The research lasted about three and a half months and involved a group of people who worked in public Greek kindergartens and were involved or had been involved in the past, in an administrative way, in the operation of a preschool education unit. The participants were selected based on the convenience sampling technique. A total of twelve teachers of both sexes who worked in insular and mainland Greece, in small and large urban centres as well as in villages, participated in the research. They had administrative experience in single, double and triple kindergartens. Almost all participating teachers had many years of service and practiced administrative work as principals from 3.5 to 24 years, but without particularly high formal qualifications, as well as expertise in administration matters.

Semi-structured interview was chosen as the data collection method, which holds a prominent position among the research techniques used in the social sciences, due to the advantages it offers, mainly because it is flexible (Ισαρη & Πουρκός, 2015). Thus, based on the three research questions posed and their thematic axes, the interview protocol was created. The interviews which were conducted lasted approximately twenty-seven (27) minutes. The transcription of the interviews was carried out by the verbatim transfer of what the interviewees said in approximately one hundred pages of written language. For the analysis of the research data, thematic

analysis was used, which is widely used in qualitative research and focuses on identifying, describing and integrating the data into thematic axes of meanings that are observed to appear and/or repeat (Ισαρη & Πουρκός, 2015).

In order to strengthen the research and limit the threats to the validity of the research design, we followed some specific strategies, such as engaging the researchers with the field, which helped to develop a relationship of trust and maintain a neutral relationship between the researchers and the participants, while the strategy of controlling the material by those willing participants, was also followed (Padgett, 1998, as ref. in Robson, 2010). In addition, in order to achieve the maximum possible reliability of the interviews, a pilot interview was conducted, while great attention was paid to the wording of the questions. There was no notable differentiation of the questions after the pilot interview and the final interview protocol so the following questions were included: 1) What the types of conflicts are. 2) What the main causes are. 3) How intense the conflict incidents they have faced are and whether they affect the functioning of the educational organization. 4) What the meaning of the term leadership is. 5) What types of modern leadership theories are applied in kindergarten. 6) How personal attitudes in managing conflict situations with parents are related to leadership theories. 7) What leadership styles and theories they adopt. 8) What conflict management tactics they adopt. 9) How these conflicts affect the effectiveness of educational work.

5. Interpretation of findings

5.1 Basic types, causes and consequences of conflicts

The main types of conflicts are distinguished into interpersonal, intergroup, intrapersonal or intra-individual and conflicts between individuals and groups (Rahim, 2001; Αθανασούλα-Ρέππα, 2008α, 2008β). From our research we found that in the context of preschool age, the conflicts are mainly interpersonal and concern individual parents with individual teachers, while sometimes conflicts are also found between parents of children attending kindergarten, which were deliberately transferred by the parents to the school premises. Intergroup conflicts are rare, such as between the parents' association and the teachers' association, while even more rare but existing are conflicts between individuals and groups, such as the parents' association with the principal or groups of parents with the principal (Table 1).

"The most common thing for me, from personal experience, is that conflicts mainly develop between teachers and parents, that is individually" (7th).

"The conflicts mostly involve a teacher while very seldom the teachers' union" (10th).

The causes that can trigger conflicts and frictions in the kindergarten area, concern (Table 2):

a) Differences and oppositions of objectives. They come from the way issues related to learning disabilities, behaviour and aggression problems are approached, or they begin from issues that arise between students and teachers within the school space, which according to parents are not approached or handled properly.

"they are not receptive to discuss nor to easily accept things, when we talk about a child who has some particularity, when you approach them and try to inform them about it, to say what you have observed, since they do not easily accept what you mention to them as an observation" (10th).

Table 1

TYPES OF CONFLICTS	
Interpersonal	Parents with Educators (mostly)
	Parents to each other (sometimes)
Intergroup	Parent Teacher Association (rare)
Between individuals and groups	Parents Association with Administration (rare)
	Parent Groups with Administration (rare)

Table 2

CAUSES OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND PARENTS
1. The disagreement in the approach to learning difficulties and «problematic» behavior of children
2. Issues arising from relationships between students and teachers
3. Failure to abide by and respect school hours and rules
4. The discredit of the school and the teachers by the parents
5. The lack of trust and communication between parents and teachers
6. The excessive involvement of the parents' association, but also of individual parents in the school operation
7. The changes promoted in the school by the teachers and the management

b) Communication problems. These conflicts are mainly related to the compliance with the timetable and the implementation of the school's rules, which seem not to be perceived by the parents. These problems may arise not only from poor communication between teachers and parents but also from the constant changes and reforms promoted and applied by the central administration. In addition, communication problems are also related to the lack of trust between parents and teachers, often leading to misunderstandings and miscommunication.

“...whatever conflict I had...had to do mainly with the schedule, that is, with the rules of the kindergarten in general, timetable, food, things like that” (7th).

“... the parents ... think that ... they know ... they will not accept some suggestions that the teachers will make to the parents ... when the teacher says something to a parent, he does not realize that it is for the child's sake and for the effective operation of the school unit there is no personal gain or personal feud, because most parents take it that way and conflicts arise immediately” (12th).

c) Human factors. The differences that exist in the social, economic, political, cultural context in which individuals act and evolve and also in their culture, differentiate the way they approach a subject (Ιορδανίδης, 2014). This fact can be a main cause of discrediting the role of teachers and the kindergarten by parents, resulting in conflicts and frictions, which are difficult to settle because it is usually impossible to change people (Ιορδανίδης, 2005).

“The change of times, the lack of respect that now exists towards teachers, the economic crisis has infuriated and dramatically intensified the confrontation. Teachers as a social group have become a target... they

CONSEQUENCES OF COLLISIONS	
Positive	Negative
Mutual understanding between parents and teachers and possible improvement of all, because a conflict can provide a stimulus for reflection, redefinition and a different look at approaching issues.	To the teachers • They cause mental fatigue, anxiety and constant anxiety, restlessness, irritability, wariness, alienation, decrease in appetite for work. • They focus on the relationship with their parents and not on their work. • They are biased towards the child. • They stop cooperating with parents.
	To the children They make them not feel good at school, they create anxiety and a feeling of insecurity as well as a skeptical look towards the teacher.
	To the parents They are not informed and do not participate in school activities, since the school closes its doors and reduces activities, excursions, etc.
	In the unit in general There is a negative climate, lack of respect and cooperation, time wasted on»meaningless matters», lack of contribution from parents to things that might help improve the school.

Table 3

have targeted the face of the teacher, who is generally discredited by the state... morals have changed... there is no respect for the teacher...” (11th).

d) Limited resources and organizational structure. The building infrastructure and the lack of logistical infrastructure cause many of the problems of the schools (Σαϊτης, 2002), which often lead to the excessive involvement of the parents’ association or individual parents in the running of the school. This involvement can become a cause of conflict, especially when its boundaries are not clearly defined.

“When the parent comes to school they want the best for their child... then the interventions begin...they express complaints, anger, blame the teachers and conflicts are created...” (4th).

e) Introduction of innovations or changes, which concern alterations promoted in the school by the teachers and the management, affecting the harmony of the organization since they require the change of expectations and roles, resulting in reactions and conflicts on the part of the parents, who find it difficult to accept and struggle against them.

The consequences of the conflict situations concerned teachers, children and parents (Table 3).

Due to the conflicts, the teachers stop cooperating with the parents and the parents are not informed and do not participate in the school’s actions, since the school closes its doors and reduces its actions, such as holidays, excursions, etc. At the same time, parents also stop offering things to the school that might help improve it. In addition, the relationships between the teachers and the children

are disturbed, as the children do not feel well at school, they develop anxiety and a feeling of insecurity as well as a skeptical look towards the teacher, while the teachers subconsciously and to a certain extent, become biased towards the child.

"... it basically affects the psychology of both the parent and the teacher and the worst thing is that it has a direct impact on the child, in each child... when you talk to a child in front of his teacher with offensive words then how will the child be able to respect his teacher and vice versa" (12th).

"... it also has an impact on the school unit because many times, the parents offer too many things, but when the cooperation stops, their offer also stops..." (4th).

"...the teacher begins to see the child negatively... it sounds bad, but it's the truth... it brings out negativity on behalf of the teachers..." (8th).

Another negative effect of conflicts is the drop in teacher morale in combination with the increase in work stress. Conflicts affect the psychology of teachers causing them mental fatigue, stress and constant anxiety, agitation, irritation, wariness and alienation. Teachers manifest negative emotions such as sadness, frustration, worry and tension when conflicts are not managed properly (Göksoy & Argon, 2016). The result of all this is the creation of an increased level of work stress, which affects the creativity and performance of employees (Παππά, 2006). As Ιορδανίδης (2014), mentions, conflict in a team can limit the strengths of the involved members, reducing their satisfaction and coherence and diverting their attention and interest from their primary work.

"... after a conflict, when there is already a disagreement and I have realized something is not right, I have already thought about it, I get sad, maybe I can't sleep at night, I think about how I will tell the parent the next day, how I will approach it, so that it doesn't become something more than the situation is, that is, there is a mental fatigue..." (1st).

Of course, there are cases where moderate level conflicts can have a positive effect on the functioning of the educational organization. A conflict can provide a stimulus for reflection, redefinition and a different look at approaching issues within a reflective process. It can bring mutual understanding between teachers and parents and improve everyone's relationship. Controversies between groups bring to the surface more proposed solutions, a fact that works to the benefit of the organization (Σαϊτης, 2002).

"...perhaps sometimes these conflicts provide the stimulus for a redefinition, or for a reflection on how we cooperate and operate because mistakes are always made from our side too, we are not Gods" (9th).

It was also mentioned by the participants that in recent years the conflicts have become very intense and that the degree of their intensity depends on the personality mainly of the teachers, but also of the parents and in general on the way in which the teachers deal with the parents and manage the conflicts.

"... the parents are quite intrusive, but I think this is exacerbated more depending on the personality of the kindergarten teacher ... how each one will manage it ... the parents ... are generally more irritable than in previous years" (10th).

"if there is no diplomacy they can develop into intense conflicts and then the situation is uncontrollable" (12th).

5.2. Leadership and leadership theories

Through the teachers' responses, it was found that the participants, regarding the definition of the term leadership, expressed a vari-

ety of opinions, which was also identified in the literature due to the difficulty of conceptually defining the term. Most participants perceive the leader as a manager whose role is primarily limited to enforcing rules, planning, organizing, and coordinating day-to-day operational issues. They perceive their own role mainly as managerial and administrative and not so much as leadership. We believe that this point of view is mainly due to the structure of the kindergartens, which are mainly small in size with few teachers (single or few-seater and rarely multi-seater), but also due to the limited time that the administrators have at their disposal beyond their teaching duties, for administrative work. The day-to-day operational and administrative obligations of kindergarten administrators are many, which they must manage simultaneously and during their teaching hours. As mentioned by Θεοφιλίδης (2012), the principals of primary education have two main priorities, on the one hand to ensure the efficient and smooth operation of the school and on the other hand to promote its educational work, utilizing the potential of the teachers and the leadership role they have in the school unit. For this reason, the participants also expressed the opinion that the management of an educational unit requires you to exercise a role not only administrative but also managerial and leading as well as teaching and managing relationships, conflicts, interaction of ideas, opinions, attitudes, etc.

"I control the whole situation of the school unit, I use personal power, I am alone and everything depends on me, I use my instinct, what I need to do for the school unit to function properly, I make changes, I make innovations and I am interested not in how something will be done, but about why something will be done, what it will offer to the children and what innovative things I will do for the school unit..." (4th)

"...the headmistress is the driving force to take initiatives to do things at the school that concern the educational work but also cooperation with other agencies" (7th).

Regarding the forms of leadership that appear in the kindergarten, as shown by the responses of the participants based on the necessity of their mediation as administrators in resolving conflicts in relation to existing teachers, the following were mentioned (Table 4):

a) Some consider dealing with conflicts as a form of coordinated action and a product of cooperative service, without judging that their participation is necessary, thus displaying a form of horizontal (distributed) leadership, where the practice of leadership is shared among the members of the educational organization.

"... I believe very much in the teachers' association, there everyone needs to handle the situation together and not just the headmistress..." (7th).

b) At the same time, some other teachers have identified that they consider the participation of the director necessary in the process of conflict management, thus expressing their intention to adopt a model of a transformational form of leadership, where the leader as the first person of the school unit guides and motivates also during the decision-making process.

"... every time during a conflict... the other person in order to seek justice he will look for the manager, there is this culture, so it is necessary to have a calmer approach to situations from the supervisor's side, to deal with problems calmly, to have discussion with dialogue" (8th).

5.3. Conflict management tactics and leadership theories

Regarding the conflict management tactics adopted by the participants as administrators, the most important element that emerged

FORMS OF LEADERSHIP AND ATTITUDE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT SITUATIONS	
FORMS OF LEADERSHIP	ATTITUDE IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
Horizontal (Distributed) Leadership	Coordinated action and collaborative product, through the Teachers' Association.
Transformational Leadership	The administrative executive guides and motivates, his participation is essential.

Table 4

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TACTICS
• Correct and valid information. • Direct communication between parents and school • Participation and involvement of parents in school life. • Attempt to normalize and calm the situation. • Training of teachers, but also of parents in matters of school and relationships.

Table 5

LEADERSHIP FORMS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TACTICS	
FORMS OF LEADERSHIP	CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TACTICS
Horizontal (Distributed) Leadership	• Resolution by all members of the organization, through the Teachers' Association. • It is the administrator's responsibility to establish trusting relationships with parents and set boundaries.
Transformational Leadership	• Solved by individual teachers with encouragement from management. • The intervention of the administrative staff is necessary. • It is the administrator's responsibility to establish trusting relationships with parents and set boundaries.

Table 6

concerns the direct communication between parents and the school and the correct and valid information of parents on operational issues, procedures which significantly contribute to the creation of good relations between teachers and parents (Table 5 & 6) .

“I think that when the parent is properly informed from the beginning of the school year and at regular intervals throughout the school year, things go very well and there are no conflicts or heated arguments...” (1st).

“... I make the general assemblies, I have time for parent cooperation for anything that arises ... so when we have conflicts they can't blame me that I wasn't there to prevent it or we didn't talk or something wasn't done earlier” (3rd).

The teachers additionally reported that when there is an intention of parental involvement in school life then this improves their behaviour and thus incidents of conflict are reduced or overcome more easily. However, some of the participants consider that it is a matter of character and personality whether the parent will be involved in the educational process and whether this will positively or negatively

affect his relationship with the teachers. The conflict between them should be considered harmful and undesirable and efforts should be strengthened for the conscious coupling of the two sides (Συμέου, 2003).

The participants also expressed the opinion that the conflicts that arise with parents can be overcome by trying to normalize and calm the situation using diplomacy and soft tones.

“In essence, the supervisor in these cases acts as a fireman ... I think he should have a lower tone of voice ... calm the spirits with the parents, be the fireman...” (6th).

Finally, it was mentioned that the training of both parents and teachers in school and relationship matters can significantly help not only in the proper management of conflicts but also in their avoidance.

“I think that trainings are important, when a scientist comes at regular intervals, such as a school psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist. He could give more information to parents as well as to us, because we also need training to be better towards parents The knowledge of an expert can unblock you in seconds» (9th).

Through the attitudes followed by the participants, during the process of conflict management, it was found that conflict management is mainly the responsibility of teachers, through a form of distributed leadership where the practice of leadership is shared among all members of the organization. A similar picture emerged in a survey by Boucher (2013), where 91% of principals adopt a collaborative profile of conflict management with parents.

“... I believe very much in the teachers’ association, there everyone needs to handle the situation together and not just the headmistress, this helps more” (7th).

At the same time, the intention of most of the participants to implement transformational leadership practices by supporting, encouraging, urging teachers to manage conflict situations themselves, being a source of inspiration through their dedication to them, was evident.

“... there would be an intervention from me only if I saw that I was dealing with a colleague who was advocating something that she could not substantiate ... if there was an incident where she could not control her behavior at some point and explained to parent, but the parent didn’t understand, then I would intervene and take the colleague’s side” (10th).

It was also mentioned that it is very important for the proper handling of conflict situations with parents, for the school management to create a relationship of trust with the parents. It was pointed out that this relationship of trust should be structured in a context where the management will define and make the boundaries clear to the parents.

“...above all I must have a good relationship with all the parents and they must have the courage if something happens to them to come and tell me, to express it” (5th).

“There must be a relationship of trust and both of them can cultivate this, that is, the director must cultivate this, but also the teachers...” (8th).

“This is what I call boundaries, in all areas, and when I say diplomacy I mean that everything I say, I say in such a way that it will not be considered that I am entering foreign fields, but I will not allow ... I will limit the movement of the parent to enter in foreign fields” (12th).

We did not distinguish in any of the answers the emergence of transactional leadership practices, as most of the respondents indicated that in their opinion, they reward teachers either verbally or

non-verbally for managing conflicts correctly, but without providing reciprocating incentives.

Regarding the positive or negative effect of conflicts, the participants reported that conflicts have both negative and positive effects on the effectiveness of the educational project. They consider that conflicts do not contribute to the effectiveness of the educational work since they mostly negatively affect all the sides (parents, teachers, children). At the same time, of course, the opinion was expressed that through conflicts issues can be highlighted and the communication of those involved can be improved and ultimately the effectiveness of the educational project. With the appearance of a conflict, the weakness that caused it can also be identified and thus simultaneously the stimulus is given to deal with it permanently (Ιορδανίδης, 2014).

"... it can be a well-intentioned remark from a parent if they have detected something ... but there is also the other side of parents, who scan everything, they don't understand anything, they insult you, they are absolute" (10th).

We should mention that all the participants, without any doubt, believe that despite the existence of conflicting situations, the involvement of parents in school life is important for the children and the orderly functioning of the school. As mentioned by theorists (Πασιαρδής & Πασιαρδή, 2000; Συμέου, 2003; Θεοφιλίδης, 2012), an indicator of the quality and effectiveness of the education provided by a school unit is the guarantee of effective communication with parents, applying "free entry" policies in schools.

"... it helps a lot to keep going of the educational work at home, when the parent enters the school and realizes what is going on, he gets ideas and can continue it at home if he is in the mood of course and in general parents and teachers come together and this climate is perceived by the children, which also helps in the educational process too much" (7th).

6. Conclusions – Discussion

From our research we found that in the context of preschool age conflicts are mainly interpersonal (between parents and teachers) and rarely involve groups (between the parent association or groups of parents and the teacher association or the principal). The causes that trigger the conflicts concern issues related to learning peculiarities and problems of behaviour and aggression of the students, with the observance of the timetable and the application of the school's rules (due to the successive changes and reforms promoted and implemented by the central administration), with the building infrastructure and the lack of logistical infrastructure and with the discrediting of the role of teachers and the kindergarten by the parents.

Recognizing the type of conflicts and knowing their origin is particularly important for the effective management of an organization because it indicates not only whether there is a need for intervention, but also the type of intervention required. It is important for both the teachers and the school management to understand the causes that create conflicts in the school environment because in this way they will be able to find ways to prevent and properly deal with them, so that they do not negatively affect the operation of the school unit. With the appearance of a conflict, the weakness that caused it can be identified, giving at the same time the stimulus for dealing with it definitively.

One of the most important factors that contributes to the pre-

vention of such conflict situations is the creation of a climate of trust between parents and teachers, as well as the development of communication channels with school outreach practices, such as daily information, parent schools, participation in programs, etc. In addition, conflicts can be overcome by trying to normalize and calm the situation, using diplomacy and soft tones, as well as by training both parents and teachers on school and relationship issues. The role of the kindergarten director is very important, where through the application of mainly horizontal (distributed) leadership practices, he/she can support and direct the teachers in such a way as to create a climate of fruitful cooperation not only with the parents, but also with the whole school community.

We believe that the present research could serve as a pilot study for a more extensive investigation that would encompass the perspectives of both teachers and parents, as well as quantitative data on a larger scale. Any weaknesses that such a study might reveal in the way leaders manage conflicts between teachers and parents could form the basis for targeted training initiatives. Although undergraduate programs in preschool education departments provide adequate knowledge for pedagogical practice, we believe they fall short in delivering insights into both the administration and leadership of educational units, as well as the conflict management with members of the school's external environment, including parents.

7. Final remarks

Our expectations from the research were to highlight the views of preschool teachers with experience in administrative duties, on the relationship between the management of conflicts that develop between teachers and parents, and the forms of leadership they have developed or implemented. Kindergarten is the first mandatory learning environment that children and parents encounter after the closed protective family context in which they used to operate. The existence of conflicts between parents and teachers significantly affects the psychology of both children and their parents, who due to their first contact with the school environment do not fully know how they can cooperate and/or work with the school or at school. The result is that this contact with the new environment creates conditions that cause friction and conflicts to a greater extent than in the following stages of schooling, where parents gradually reduce the time and the way they are involved. The issue of school leadership is an important issue that has concerned the educational world in recent years. Due to the constant changes as well as the changes in the society, it was considered imperative to treat the education executives not only as administrative and management bodies but also as leaders.

The research was carried out without particular problems and the willingness of all those who participated in it was remarkably great. All of them felt that the issue concerns them and that it occupies a significant part of their time during their daily life both within their working hours and outside of it and that the investigation of the causes as well as their proper management contributes significantly in improving the efficiency and quality of the educational work provided in the area of preschool education. The sample size was considered satisfactory because the information we obtained covered a wide range on the topic of conflict and leadership. The results met our expectations as they covered most of the subject matter. From their study we found a positive relationship between the implementation of leadership practices and the correct handling of conflict

situations. The improvement of communication, the creation of a climate of trust, the encouragement and reinforcement of teachers by the management, were found to be positive factors in the settlement of conflicts between teachers and parents.

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