

**Transforming a school into a Professional Learning
Community: A comparative study between Finland and
Greece**

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ABSTRACT

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Professional Learning Communities (PLC) set in the core of the school students' learning by highlighting the vital role of the human resources of the school and their collaborative practices. Originally, the PLC model is rooted in business sector, within the model of Learning Organization. As applied in educational settings benefits student learning through mutual trust and substantial collaboration. The aim of this study was to explore and compare PLC practices in two primary schools, one in Finland and one in Greece. A qualitative ethnographical comparative approach has been followed. Data collection methods were field observations for 9 days, field notes and photographs from each school and interviews from school personnel. An interpretive thematic analysis was performed to reveal the main themes, inductively and deductively. Results indicated that the PLC model could be detected within the Finnish school, whereas within the Greek primary school the model could not be detected. Suggestions for the Finnish school related to the development of the existing leadership practices are discussed, while recommendations related to the need for a paradigm shift within the Greek school are suggested.

Keywords: *Collaboration, Professional Learning Communities, Human Resource Frame, Learning Organization, School reform, Comparative Study*

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1 Introduction

This research will present the theoretical model of the Professional Learning Communities (PLC), which set at the core of the school community the school stakeholders; and, on the same time, arise trust and collaborative practices as vital elements rewarding the functionality of the school and students' better results (Hord, 1997; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). PLC model is suggested as a tool for educators and school leaders who aim at reforming a school in terms of true collaboration (Bezzina, 2006; Bezzina, 2008; Southworth, 2000; Newman et al., 2000; DuFour, 2004).

Even if there is no single definition for the theoretical model, Professional Learning Communities can be defined as an “ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker & Many, 2010 p. 11). The roots for the development of the theoretical model of PLC can be found within the business sector at the theoretical model called Learning Organization, which highlights that organizations can learn (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990). Senge et al., (2000) underlined the importance of educators' continuous learning and the impact of this learning on students' outcomes. During the past decades, models from the business sector have inspired educational leaders and theorists to explore if those models could be applied in the field of education (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003). The model of the Professional Learning Communities is applied from educational leaders who want to develop and establish an environment of professional learners, within school context, who would try collectively to work towards student's better outcomes by collaborating and trusting each other (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003).

Little (2002), highlighted the difference between schools with different leadership styles. On the first category belongs the schools, which are characterized from their traditional culture, with central administration, where educators work under a specific framework, which is set by the leadership team. In the second category belongs the schools, where the model of “teachers learning community” is applied. Teachers, within a learning community, work together under a framework of collaboration, sharing, mutual trust and professional growth. Studies had shown that the most functional schools work under the model of the Professional Learning Communities (Newman & Wehlage, 1995).

This research is a comparative ethnographical study, which aims to explore if the, selected primary schools, one in Finland and one in Greece work under the PLC model and how they can be improved, if it is needed, following the literature and the practical example of the other school. In more details, the research especially emphasizes in the existing collaborative practices within the two school, rewarding the literature for the PLC. This study could be used from both schools as a guideline towards a paradigm shift, where a strong, sustainable leadership is a critical element in creating and establishing the required environment where the school stakeholders would collaborate in terms of mutual trust.

2 Background and Context: The Greek and the Finnish educational systems

2.1 The Greek Educational System

Education in Greece is compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 to 15 and is free of charges for all citizens across all grades. Greek educational system is consisted of three levels. On the first level belong both the pre-school (one year of attendance) and the primary school (6 to 11-year-old students). On the second level belongs the secondary education, which includes two cycles, one compulsory and one non-compulsory. Lower Secondary School (Gymnasio- in Greek Γυμνάσιο) of three- year attendance and the three years optional Upper Secondary school (Lykeio- general, Greek acronym GEL or Vocational, Greek acronym EPAL- Γενικό Λύκειο, Επαγγελματικό Λύκειο). (Eurydice Unit, 2016). Following the educational reform of 1997 (Bouzakis, 1995), students are not required to take a qualifying examination in order to continue their studies from primary to lower secondary school. The third level is the tertiary education, which includes both Universities (Universities, Technical Universities, School of Fine Arts) and Technological institutions (Technological Educational Institutions, Higher School of Pedagogical and Technological Education). (Nuffic, 2015; Stamelos, 2002). The books are provided for free to each student at the beginning of the academic year, in all the above mentioned educational levels, from the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (OECD, 2011).

2.1.1 Adult Education

During the last two decades, many efforts have been done to increase and promote education and learning in adulthood. According to the Law 3879/2010 (Eurydice, 2016), a foundation for planning and implementing a national strategy for lifelong learning was set. Evening General

Upper Secondary Schools and Evening Vocational Upper Secondary schools, as part of the Lifelong Learning project (Law 4186/2013), offer a second chance to those adults who want to continue with their studies.

2.1.2 Special Needs Education

Following the policies for the Special Needs Education (Law 3699/2008), established primary schools for students with special needs are established specially in urban areas. For students' support, integrated programs can also be found in schools (Law 2413/1996). In 2000, the Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis, and Special Educational Need Support Centers (in Greek-Κέντρα Διαφοροδιάγνωσης, Διάγνωσης και Υποστήριξης Ειδικών Εκπαιδευτικών Αναγκών-ΚΕΔΔΥ) were established (Law 2817/2000). These certified Centers provided supervision under the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, where pupils with special needs can be diagnosed for free. According to the Law 4115/2003, a new structure for supporting pupils with special needs was suggested. Firstly, support is provided to students at all the school levels, secondly, due to students' better support, a communication network has been created between the Special Education School and the local schools.

2.1.3 Purpose and Mission of Education

The purpose of education in Greece according to the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs is “the moral, spiritual, professional and physical education of Greek people, the developments” of a national consciousness and the development of free and responsible citizens (European Commission, 2016). More specific, according to the Law 1566/1985 (Greece: Legislation Eurydice, 2016), primary school education aims at the multifaceted intellectual and physical development of the children. In particular, primary school helps pupils,

- to be able to combine their creativity under the study of a phenomenon,
- to develop both their mental and physical health,
- to develop their critical thinking and their skills in oral and writing speech,
- to get gradually familiar with values such as religion, nation, friendship, humanity in order to be able to construct and develop their own holistic and moral thinking. (Greece: Primary Education Eurydice, 2016).

2.1.4 Administration and Funding

The administration of the Greek educational system can be divided into three levels, the central, the regional and the local. The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs belongs to the first level (central level) and it is responsible for all the decisions regarding the national

education in all the fields. Some of the Ministry's' responsibilities are the definition of the learning contents for all the levels, the division of teaching time, the distribution of students' textbooks, the distribution of the funding, teacher salaries etc. (OECD, 2011). For example, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, in cooperation with the Institute of Educational Policy (Law 3966/2011) are responsible for the national curriculum design and development, which is implemented to all the schools and at all the educational levels (Voutsinos, 2017).

Public schools

The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs is responsible for the supervision and the financing decisions which occur all the educational levels. Schools in Greece are not financial autonomous as they have to take permission from the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs or the authorized Regional Education Directorate to order new equipment or to make any financial transaction (Fanariotis, 1999). The Regional Directorates of Education, which belongs to the regional level, is responsible for controlling schools in each region and report directly to the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. The main aim of this authority is to supervise the implementation of the national curriculum from schools and to connect the regional education with the central authority. Lastly, at the local level, the school units (Chatzipanagiotou, 2003), which include both parents and teachers are formally organized bodies which are dealing with daily issues towards students well-being. (Saitis, 2005; Spanou, 1992).

Private schools

Except for public schools, in Greece, there are also private schools, which are under the competence of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs is also responsible for the supervision of the private schools, as they are following the national curriculum and they use the same textbooks and learning material. Following the Law 682/1977, private schools are structured like the public schools and the license for the establishment is given from the Greek Ministry of Education as well. Students after their graduation are receiving the same certifications and the teaching curriculum is the same with those on the public schools. Finally, the tuition fees are set for each private school independently (Article 11 of Law 3279/2004).

2.1.5 School Unit Description

According to Saitis, (2005) and Georgiadou & Kampouridis (2005), most of the administrative practices in a Greek primary school, are held from the principal, the vice principal, the teachers'

association and the school board. Parents and guardians association also have a key role in the proper functionality of the school, as they represent parents' voice. The principal is the head of the school community and he or she is responsible for the educational and the pedagogical procedures of the school community. The main principal's duties are the following,

- To design and develop school vision, as well as, to support teachers towards the shared goals.
- To be able to become a "mentor" for the teachers.
- To collaborate with his or her colleagues.
- To organize and to coordinate the school community.
- To support teaching and pedagogical procedures.
- To be able to establish collaborative practices among his or her colleagues by understanding their skills and ideas.
- To collaborate with the parents and the guardians.
- To arrange often meetings both with the school counselor and the authorized regional education director for better application of the educational policies.
- To manage the finance of the school community.

In Greek schools, the vice principal supports principals' work. Some of the principals' responsibilities and daily tasks are shared between him or her and the vice principal. Moreover, teachers' association plays a key role in the educational procedure. According to the law 1340/2002 teachers' main responsibilities are teaching, guiding and educating students. They have a high social responsibility, as they should guide students towards their development in three main areas,

- The psycho-pedagogical,
- The psychokinetic,
- Ethics

Teachers are also involved in the decision- making process in subjects such as,

- students' support and co-teaching practices,
- educational training programs or seminars which are offered for them,
- teaching methods and practices.

Lastly, the school board which is consisted from five to fifteen members (the principal, one member from parents and guardians association, a school consultant from the municipality

where the school belongs and some teachers), is responsible mostly for school financial issues, such as the purchase of new equipment, educational material, school renovation etc.

2.2 The Finnish Educational System

According to the Finnish National Agency of Education (Historical Overview- Oph.fi, 2017), education in Finland is compulsory for all children between the age of 6 to 16. The education in Finland is free of charges for all citizens across all grades. According to the National Core Curriculum (2016) Finnish educational system consisted of, the pre-primary, the basic, the upper secondary and the tertiary education. Since August 2015, one year of attendance is mandatory in pre-primary education (Early Childhood education and care- Oph.fi, 2017; Early Childhood Education and Care Eurydice, 2017). In basic education belongs the comprehensive school for pupils from 7 to 16-year-old. Non-compulsory Upper Secondary Education (16 to 18) is divided into two different educational systems. The general upper secondary schools (in Finnish: lukio) and the vocational institutions (in Finnish: ammattikoukutus) (OECD, 2015). Finally, tertiary education consists of the Universities and the Polytechnic institutions. The education in Finland is free of charges for all citizens across all grades. More specifically, in basic education municipalities and schools provide a free meal, books and educational materials, and free transportation. In addition, both health-care and other welfare services are provided free to the pupils. In upper secondary schools, students have to buy their books and manage their transportation (Education system- oph.fi, 2017).

2.2.1 Adult Education

Finland offers to adults who had not completed their studies, an opportunity to attend a formal general upper secondary schools or a non-formal liberal adult education. (Adult Education- oph.fi, 2017). The general upper secondary schools focus more on adults who want to complete the basic or the general upper secondary education. On the other hand, the liberal adult education offers educational programs that help adults to develop themselves without taking any qualification at the end of the courses. (Adult Education- Eurydice, 2017; Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2017).

2.2.2 Special Needs Education

Following the Special Needs Education policies, changes to the National Core Curricula in pre-primary and basic education in 2010, formed a new structure towards the provided support that combined with three levels. The General, the Intensified and the Special support, which are offered to pupils, according to their personal needs, aiming at the earlier, prevent and support.

(Educational Support and Guidance Eurydice, 2017; Support in basic education- oph.fi, 2017). In Finnish Educational System, the diagnosis can be done by the teacher or the parents. Both of the above mentioned observe the pupils and can determine if a child needs extra support. If the school community believes that a pupil needs extra help, then after a meeting with a special education teacher, the group of people who are responsible for the educational processes decide together with the parent, the teachers and the student for the required actions that are needed to be done, for pupils' better outcome. (Graham, Jahnukainen, 2011). All the students belong to the first support level, the General support. Each student has guidance and support from the classroom teacher. (Graham, Jahnukainen, 2011; Special Education Needs Provision within Mainstream Education- oph.fi). Intensified support offers to pupils support from three different perspectives, firstly by the class teacher, secondly by a special needs teacher who in collaboration with the classroom teacher develop a co-teaching process, which aims to pupils' support and thirdly, the students have the opportunity to work part-time into groups with other students under the supervision of a special needs teacher (Sahlberg, 2012). Finally, the special support includes a wide variety of special education services. On this level, the school in cooperation with the parents decide if the student will continue attending the mainstream school following a special needs program, in a different classroom or if is better for the pupil to attend a special school. (Takala, 2014).

2.2.3 Purpose and Mission of Education

The purpose of education in Finland according to the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, is "to provide general knowledge, information and skills that will help individuals act and impact society" (Opetus- ja kulttuurimisteriö, 2017). The National mission of education in Finland according to the Law 422/2012 is combined with three specific goals.

- The growth of pupil as human being with a strong sense of membership in the society. In more details, the educational practices are helping pupils to become ethical responsible with an understanding on the cultural heritage of the Western civilization.
- The preparation of pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills. In addition, the emphasis of teaching practices is given in pupils' development and acquisition of the required knowledge and abilities, in order to broaden their view of the world.
- The promotion of knowledge and ability, equality and lifelong learning (National Core Curriculum of Basic Education, 2016, p. 20). More specific, according to the National Core Curriculum of Basic Education (2016, p. 19), basic education aims to develop pupils'

both human and social capital by helping them identify their own strengths and by developing their future with the emphasis in learning.

In particular, basic education helps the pupil to develop themselves by focusing on three different oriented perspectives. The educational perspective, which emphasizes in knowledge and learning, as well as to the environmental sustainability. The social perspective, which emphasizes to concepts such as equity, equality, and justice. Finally both the cultural and the future-related perspective, which emphasizes in culture and aim the pupil to build and create his or her own cultural identity and capital.

2.2.4 Administration and structure of public schools

According to the Finnish National Board of Education (Historical Overview- Oph.fi, 2017) and the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission (2017), in 1990s effort for educational system's decentralization begun, prohibit the educational inspections and change the administrative structure of the Finnish educational system. Regarding the structure of the administration, the Finnish educational system can be divided into three levels, the central, the intermediate and the local. Both the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency of Education belong to the central administration. The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the educational legislation and for the promotion of education. On the other hand, the Finnish National Agency for Education which is in cooperation with the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, is also responsible both for the development and the reform of the National Core Curriculum. Under the central administration, belongs the Intermediate level administration. Agencies and centers belong to this level and one of their responsibilities is the education and culture. The educational agencies are in close collaboration with the local authorities of each municipality. Municipalities and local authorities belong to the last, local level. Local authorities are independent with strong self-government based on the local decision-making process. Following the 1990s reform, in 1994 the local educational authorities started designing and developing their own curriculum according to the needs of their municipality based on the National Core Curriculum (Historical Overview- oph.fi, 2017). Local education providers are also responsible for the division of the public funding and the teaching arrangement, as well as, for the educational effectiveness and quality. The Finnish educational system relies on the culture of trust and teachers and others people expertise. The education is evaluated locally, regionally and nationally. However, there is an emphasis on self and team evaluation in schools. (Basic education- oph.fi, 2017).

2.2.5 Funding

Regarding the funding, education in Finland is free of charges and is publicly funded. According to the Act on the Financing of the Provision of Education and Culture (1705/2009; laki opetus- ja kulttuuritoimen rahoituksesta) the division of the funding is managed by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. On the local level, responsible for the funding are the state and the local authorities (Funding in Education Eurydice, 2017). Except for the public schools, private educational institutions receive public funding and they follow the National Core Curriculum (OECD, 2013). However, most of the pupils attend public schools, especially in the basic education (Eurydice, 2017). According to the curriculum, private schools are following both the National Core Curriculum and the local curriculum (oph.fi, 2017).

2.2.6 School Unit Description

According to the National core curriculum for basic education (2016), a Finnish elementary school can be understood as a learning environment, which includes students- teachers relationships, teachers- principal relationships, an open learning atmosphere, as well as the involvement of the principal in everyday school life. In Finnish primary school, the administrative practices are held from the principal, the vice principal and the teachers. The principal can be considered as school's pedagogical leader who are trying to establish a culture of trust among school entities. The principal, with considerable autonomy, is responsible for a wide range of duties such as,

- administrative practices
- financial management
- pedagogical
- personnel administration
- teaching

In Finnish schools, the vice principal is supporting principals' work. In these terms, some of principals' responsibilities as well as daily tasks and projects, are shared between him or her and the vice principal.

The management team of the school, which includes all the school entities, is responsible for decisions such as,

- schools instructions,
- students' guidance,
- students' welfare,

- students' provision of support.

Teachers play a crucial role in Finnish primary schools as they have a high level of autonomy. They can choose the learning practices and methods, which will be followed during the school year, they can decide which educational material and book they will use, and they also participate actively in the decision-making process of the school. The teachers' primary aim is to support the students' learning and development. Other teachers' responsibilities and duties are the following:

- To monitor and promote learning.
- To work on students well-being by finding different approaches when it is necessary.
- To ensure the respectful and fair treatment of each student.
- To recognize early students' potential learning difficulties.
- To provide guidance and support to their students.

According to the National core curriculum (2016), the school entities are obligated to collaborate with each other in a weekly basis in order to promote education both for students and for teachers' professional identity. In these terms, the cooperation between school and home, the cooperation between school and other external parties of the society, the active students' participation and the collaboration among school entities are necessary factors to promote students development.

3 Theoretical Framework

Historically, many efforts for educational reforming have failed (Levin, 2008 as cited in Harris, 2010). As Harris (2010) underlined the first step towards change is to understand both the community of the school and the society where the school belongs. After realizing the big picture, there is a need to find the core of the problem by observing and analyzing both the school and the society. Only if there is an understanding of the nature of the problem, there are chances to analyze, and thus to change or reform it.

Main purpose of this chapter is to introduce the major concepts, frames and models used for this research and to review the literature. The chapter is divided into the explanation of the theoretical framework and the review of the literature. As the human being can be considered

as the most important element in understanding and analyzing a school climate and the human relationships, in the theoretical framework part, the Human Resource frame by Bolman & Deal (2013) will be analyzed. In the section of the literature review, concepts such as Organization Learning and Professional Learning Community (PLC) will be analyzed.

3.1 The Human Resource Frame

The work of Bolman & Deal, “Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice & Leadership” (2013), provides a useful tool to analyze a school. The authors of the book have developed a model, which helps educators, to understand and analyze educational systems and schools. Frames provides a guidance to investigate an issue holistically from four different perspectives. Bolman and Deals’ (2013) model is combined from four frames, the structural, the human resources, the political and the symbolic frame. Each frame provide a tool, a map or a perspective to understand both the big picture of a school as an organization, as well as the daily processes. Using this model, a researcher can suggest ways for improving, developing or reframing a school. More analytical, the use of these specific frames helps researchers to understand complicated environments and make them simpler. In more details,

- The structural frame focuses on the architecture of the organization, which includes the goals, the structure, the technology, the roles and relationships and the coordination of them. The challenge for the leaders of the organizations involves designing, maintaining, and aligning structural forms with current circumstances, tasks, technology, the environment, and goals. When structure does not line up, problems arise.
- The human resource frame emphasizes in understanding people and their relationships. According to this perspective, individuals have needs, feelings, fears, prejudices, skills, and development opportunities. The focus of this frame is on how the organization can meet individual needs and train the individual to meet organizational needs.
- The political frame sees organizations as jungles or arenas. This frame emphasizes to power, competition, and winning scarce resources. People set agenda, bargain, negotiate, build coalitions, compromise and coerce, and manage conflict. In these terms, effective management and leadership guide the proper disbursement of power, influence and determine organizational effectiveness.
- The symbolic frame captures organizational life as drama and treats organizations as theatre, or carnivals. This frame focuses on the meaning and on the faith. Events and

processes have importance more for expression than production. Culture, symbols, and spirit provide this frame's pathway to organizational effectiveness. The focus of this frame challenges leaders to create and maintain faith, beauty, and meaning.

Bolman and Deals' (2013) human resources frame focus on the people who work in an organization. Following this frame, the emphasis is given to peoples' needs, as well as their roles, skills, interests, values, and interactions. This emphasis is crucial for this research as the Learning Organization and the Professional Learning Community models, which will be analyzed below, set in the core of schools' functionality the human resources of the school.

The roots of this frame can be found at Hugo Munsterberg's (1913, 1921) theory of the industrial psychology. Munsterberg (1913, 1921) tried to find the hidden psychological aspects, which are behind workers' productivity. He tried to understand how workers would work productively by combining productivity with job satisfaction. Munsterberg (1913) was the first who referred to employees and to the meaning of having happy and thus effective employees in an organization. He "transformed" employees as the key element to organizations' effectiveness. Later, Mary Parker Follet (1918) and Elton Mayo (1933) set at the center of organizations policies, peoples' dynamic. They wanted to understand employees' rights beyond work. Bolman and Deals' human resource frame has been built on the three following questions,

- if an organization takes into consideration employee's needs
- if employees have opportunities to show their true skills and abilities in their work
- if the daily work reaches employees' needs both in financial and lifestyle aspects.

Human resources frame, puts at the heart of organizations the people, both as individuals and as members of a team and the emphasis is given to the human relationships. Organizations to survive need satisfied people; and people need organizations to work and to cover their needs, their motivations and their self-fulfillment. The first important value in this frame is the human capital and the biggest challenge which arise, is to keep the employees satisfied. If organizations want to target to long-term success, then owners or in our case principals, have to invest to their employees, to put right people to right positions, to understand their talents and to respond to their needs (Deal and Jenkins, 1994; Applebaum et al., 2000).

Following the main guidelines of the human resource frame, an organization has to provide specific steps to be successful.

- Clear philosophy towards employees is needed. Employees need to know the strategies were the managers and the leaders will follow (Becker and Huselid, 1998).
- Management and leadership team need to know the talents and the skills of their employees. This knowledge is a crucial requirement towards organizations' development.
- The leadership team has to find ways to keep the employees satisfied (Bolman & Deal, 2013). To keep the employees satisfied, managers and/or leaders have to reward them, to provide them job security and to give them opportunities to climb on the organizations' scale.
- Reward the employees after every success.

3.1.1 Leadership in Practice

The leadership model according to the human resource frame, suggest to managers and/or leaders,

- to keep the employees informed,
- to encourage their autonomy and participation,
- to create and recruit teams,
- to promote egalitarianism,
- to infuse their work with meaning (Bolman & Deal, p. 147, 2013).

Employees to be satisfied have to be empowered. However, for all the above mentioned to be done, organizations need managers and/ or leaders who know how to treat people. According to this frame, leaders can adopt different leadership styles; effective or ineffective. Ineffective leadership can be found in employees' isolation. In that case, leaders do not support their employees, and they want them to be productive without knowing and understanding their feelings and needs.

On the other hand, effective leadership supports employees; delegate power; and gives autonomy to each employee to act as he or she wants. Finally, empowerment is one of the most crucial aspects in keeping employees satisfied. By nurturing human capacity and by treating it as the most valued institutional asset, enrollment leaders invest in an enduring strategy.

3.2 Learning Organization

Traditional organizational theories, such as classical theory which one served industrial models of organizations that were static, predictable and controllable are now seen as outstanding. (Holbeche, 2011). In today's changing world, organizational flexibility and responsiveness are crucial for the organization to thrive and survive.

Argyris & Schön (1978) developed an organizational model called, Learning Organization model, which became popular, especially in the field of education, by Senge (1993). In his book, *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1993) introduces learning organizations as dynamic and highly adaptive structures, which interact with the environment, as well as a method to achieve and maintain the desired result (Grey et al., 2016, p. 877; Bezzina, 2008, p. 22; Coppieters, 2005).

3.2.1 Learning Organization VS Organizational Learning

Before the explanation of the different perspectives of the organizational learning and the characteristic of it, it is useful to differentiate two terminologies, which are often confused, the Learning Organization and the Organizational Learning. According to DiBella & Nevis (1998), Learning organization referred to organizations, while organizational learning is related to the process of learning or the process towards organizational change or transforming into a Learning Organization.

Learning Organization is an applicable model with particular characteristics. Companies, organizations and schools can be considered as Learning Organizations. The institutions mentioned above are composed of employees and individual departments, which are part of the general structure of each institution. The different departments of the organization interact and reflect with each other as a whole in a system which works towards a common outcome. Learning Organization can be seen as a systems-level concept where every organization or company is combined by three levels. The first level includes the employees and the second the different departments in where the employees are working. On the third level belongs both the employees as individuals and the various departments of the organization. The third level is the level which combines the previous two into one. (DiBella & Nevis, 1998)

3.2.2 Learning Organization: A matter of Perspective

The main aim of the Learning Organization model is to support the organization to overcome its' limits and thus to generate a new structure (DiBella & Nevis, 1998). However, there are two different perspectives according to which circumstances an organization is ready to start the process of change. The normative and the developmental perspective. According to DiBella (1995), normative perspective claims that change begins after specific strategies which are held by the managers or the leadership team of an organization. According to this perspective, managers and leaders develop and design the future strategies towards change. In this theoretical framework, external circumstances do not play a role in the process of change as the key elements are the management practices which create the essential conditions for learning in an organization (Goth & Richards, 1997). This approach assumes that change will bring success to the organization and sets people in the core of the process of change (DiBella & Nevis, 1998). Primary supporters of this perspective are Senge (1993) and Garvin (1993), who define Learning Organization as an organization's ability to adapt to change (DiBella & Nevis, 1998, p. 28). According to Garvin (1993, p. 80), a learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge. Following Senge's (1993, p. 339-340) perspective, in a learning organization, leaders are designers, teachers and mentors to employees. Building an organization, where people continually expand their capabilities to understand the complexity and to improve a shared mental model, is leaders' responsibility.

On the other hand, according to DiBella & Nevis (1998), the developmental perspective assumes that Learning Organizations represent one stage of organizations' development. Transformation can be seen as a result of organizations' age, size, experience, industry growth and life cycle (Greiner, 1972; Cameron & Whetten, 1983), and leadership strategies (DiBella & Nevis, 1998).

3.2.3 The Fifth Discipline

Senge (1993) defined Learning Organizations as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 1993, p.3).

Senge's (1993) approach emphasizes to people. According to his model, due to people's ability and willingness to become learners, Learning Organizations are possible to be created, as learning is a social activity and organizations are the places where learning takes place (Senge, 1993, p.4). As his model is based on his belief that all people are learners, he suggested five disciplines, which if are applied, can transform an organization into a Learning Organization. Those disciplines can be understood as useful tools or guiding ideas to commit employees towards a common goal and to teach them how to be a part of a larger group. (Senge, 1993.) The main characteristics of the Learning Organization according to Senge (1993) are the following,

- the vision is shared among the employees,
- the learning process is based on the experience,
- there is a willingness to change the existed mental models of the employees,
- there is motivation both in individuals and individuals as members of a group,
- teams are learning together,
- learning capacity is continuously increased to reach a state of continuous change.

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking recognizes organizations as a complex system. This discipline suggests a way to understand the organization as a whole by identify the individual parts. Systems thinking represents a powerful practice towards a holistic understanding. It claims that people's action creates their realities. Thus, it is essential to understand the individual parts in order to understand the whole. Following this discipline, there is a need to move from specific issues to the understanding of the big picture. It sets in the core the tool of feedback as a process to open people's horizons by understanding better the others, themselves and thus the organization. System thinking sees the organization as a whole. (Senge, 1993.)

Personal Mastery

People with high level of personal mastery want to learn new things, to expand themselves and to set new, more attractive personal goals all the time. Personal Mastery is a process of continuous clarification and continuous willingness to make yourself better. In this discipline, the focus is not on the organization or a group of people but on each individual; an individual who wants to develop him or herself by learning new things, by sharing his or her experiences with others. (Senge, 1993.)

Mental Models

Mental models refer to people's different views of the world. Different people have different points of view. This discipline is challenging as it assumes that in an organization people with different perspective need to respect and understand each other, in order for the whole organization to have a common understanding for the same issues. For the discipline of Mental Models to be applied, Senge (1993, p. 187) underlined the importance of organizational “commitment to the truth”. There is a need to listen and respect different opinion to recreate or transform an organization. When mental models exist, all the decision-making processes are based on a shared understanding and shared respect. (Senge, 1993.)

Team Learning

Team learning sets in the core of the organization people who work in teams and who learn together. This discipline describes the process of developing the capacity of a group to create results by listening all the different opinions and perspectives, by respecting the diversity and by combining different point of views into one. Team’s member by working together can develop both a shared vision and individuals’ personal mastery. Following this discipline, individuals can bring better results if they work in teams and if productive dialogue and discussion are seen as a reflective process. (Senge, 1993.)

Shared Vision

Shared Vision is the most collective discipline. Learning Organization cannot exist without a shared vision. Shared Vision is essential as it is constructed from all the individual members of the organization. Following this discipline, all the members feel commitment into the shared vision as they can reflect on their personal visions under a broader organizational vision. Building a shared vision can change the relationships among the employees and the way they feel for the organization where they are working. Building a shared vision is the first step to make all the employees work together, as they will know for what purpose they are working for. This discipline makes people connected under a specific goal, which can be either short or long term. (Senge, 1993.)

3.2.4 Schools as Learning Organizations

If the organization that wants to apply the Learning Organization model is a school, then the emphasis should be given to teachers, to the leadership team and under which circumstances

they work collaboratively (Southworth, 2000). According to Leithwood & Aitken, (1995, p.41), a school as a Learning Organization can be defined as, *a group of people pursuing common purposes with a collective commitment to regularly weighing the value of those purposes, modifying them when that makes sense and continuously developing more effective and efficient ways of accomplishing those purposes*. According to Senge et al., (2000) part of school's purpose must be the teacher's development, which includes their career safety and their professional development. They assume that a school learns by the continuous interaction of three different level,

- the classrooms, which include both students and teachers,
- the school, which include the leadership team and all the stakeholders of the school,
- the community, which includes the parents and other external sources of the society.

Leithwood et al. (1998, p.77), mentioned a list of the characteristics which make a school a Learning Organization

- School vision and mission

The school vision and mission has to be clear, accessible and shared by most of the staff. It has to be perceived as meaningful, and all the stakeholders have to be involved in the decision-making process.

- School culture

The school culture is built upon collaboration. Mutual support and respect, shared belief, provision of honest feedback, informal ideas and material sharing and encouragement for risk-taking are some key elements in building true collaboration on a daily basis.

- School strategies

A systematic strategy, where the school will take into consideration students, parents and staff opinion in the decision-making process is suggested. In addition, periodic review and revision of goals make teachers feel more commitment towards goals.

- Policy and resources

Resources to support teacher's professional development are suggested. Computer facilities, available professional library and access to technical assistance to implement new practices will make the stakeholders feel that the school supports them.

3.2.5 The power of school's human resource

Many researches (Senge et al., 2000; O' Sullivan, 1997; Holly, 1994; Smylie, 1995; Leithwood et al., 1998; Bezzina, 2008; DuFour, 2004; Newman et al., 2000, Fullan, 1993) agree that the

most important element in schools is the people and their relationship while others had found that teacher's change can define a successful school reform (Grossman et al., 2001; Richardson & Placien, 2001). In addition, research had shown that teachers succeed better in school's goals if the school offers them opportunities to collaborate (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000; Fogarty & Pete, 2001). According to Ainscow et al., (1994), the most important element for a school as a Learning is the enquiry and true reflection among teachers and the leadership team. Nias et al., (1989) mentioned that collaboration requires trust and safety. According to their research, when trust is present in schools then mutual support, encouragement, security and openness are also present. Fullan (1993), claimed that as people are one of the most crucial parts of the school community, change needs to start for and from them. People in an organization will change only if the future reform is meaningful for them and only if it applies to their work. Holly (1994, p. 132-136) mentioned teachers' dynamic when they work in teams. More specific, teams in a Learning Organization can,

- look the future by looking their present,
- institutionalize reflection in action,
- understand planning and evaluation as a learning process,
- combine learning with development,
- learn from themselves and others,

3.2.6 Leading a Learning Organization

Honey & Mumford (as cited to O' Sullivan, 1997) underlined that leaders by knowing individuals' learning styles can create and develop teams, which will interact with the best possible ways towards learning and organizations' development. Senge et al. (2000) claimed that leaders could create learning conditions in a school.

According to West Burnahn (1997, p.117), distributed leadership as leadership style needs to be adaptive from the leaders and the principal of the school. Following this leadership style, strong relationships will build among schools' stakeholders, as they will be involved in the decision- making process. Distributed leadership also will transform the school system into

people- center system, where collaboration will be the key element. Moreover, according to Nias et al. (1989, p. 72), a collaborative culture will create the conditions to develop mutual trust among the employees.

Another suggested leadership strategy comes from Smylie (1995). He suggested a leadership style, which will provide teachers' autonomy, everyday challenges, collaboration, often meeting, feedback sessions, shared power and authority. Also, access to external academic sources can be offered to teachers, which will promote their professional development.

Finally, Roberts (2000, p. 412- 418) suggests a leadership model, which aims at *leading without control*. According to this model, leaders should emphasize in the following four key elements,

Engagement,

As schools are complex systems, the existence of engagement is crucial. The school has to provide a safe working environment where all will be free to express themselves and share their experiences and ideas.

Systems thinking,

The ability of schools' employees to understand the school as a holistic system, which is combined with smaller departments. School stakeholders have to be able to recognize possible issues and how those effects the school.

Leading Learning,

Leading learning requires a learner- center system where all the entities share their knowledge and experience with others. Often meetings, empowerment, support and freedom will make teachers learners. Leading learning is an ongoing process, which puts in the center learning and professional development.

Self- awareness,

Leaders need to know what is happening daily in the school. They need to know the employees in person, to identify their strengths and weakness, their worries for the future and their innovative ideas. The above-described process requires interpersonal relationships with everyone who works in the school.

3.3 Professional Learning Community (PLC): Model, Myth or Mainstream Practice?

Numerous of researchers (Senge et al., 2000; Stoll et al., 2003;) claimed that a school could be transformed into a Professional Learning Community by becoming a Learning Organization. Learning Organization describes the process, which a school has to pass through, to become a Professional Learning Community. Learning Organization can be described as a phase of change, where school's stakeholders learn how to work together and how to feel commitment into a common goal and vision by sharing their knowledge and experiences (O' Sullivan, 1997.) Furthermore, educational research has emphasized to Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as one particular feature of the Organizational Learning and as a way to move education forward and upwards (Bezzina, 2008; Coppieters, 2005; Southworth, 2000). Hord (2003), claimed that PLCs' roots can be found in the work of organizational theorist such as Peter Senge (1990).

3.3.1 Defining the Professional Learning Community (PLC)

There are several different definitions for the Professional Learning Communities. PLCs' are communities where all the stakeholders, with emphasis on teachers and principals, collaborate for students better outcomes by sharing their experience and knowledge (Lomos et al., 2011; Stoll, 2007; Toole & Stoll, 2002).

According to Brown & Isaacs (1991), PLC refers to a school community where the future of the school is planned by all the entities by focusing on students' growth and schools' development. Stoll et al. (2006) assumed that PLCs, aiming to continuous improvement, the focus is the continuous development of their human resources. Hord (1997, p.4) defined PLCs as "*the professional staff studying and acting together to direct efforts towards improved student learning*". According to Geijsel & Meijers (2005), the main assumption of understanding schools as PLCs, is that teachers and other entities have great knowledge, which can be expanded only when the stakeholders will start to interact and to collaborate with each other. This approach understands learning as a dynamical and cyclical process.

3.3.2 Essential Characteristics of a Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

Professional Learning Communities seem to have five main characteristics, which are identified from many educational researchers (Hord, 2004; Louis et al., 1995; Andrew & Lewis, 2007; Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006; Southworth, 2000; Bezzina, 2006; Steward, 2004). According to Hord (2004) and Louis et al., (1995), the five key characteristics are:

Shared Values and Vision

The existence of shared vision and a sense of common purpose in a school are crucial (Andrews & Lewis, 2007). When all the stakeholders share the same vision, there is a collective effort towards common goals such as student's learning (Hord, 2004). In addition, Louis et al., (1995) claimed that when there is a sense of purpose and unity, the decision- making process usually becomes a collective, shared process.

Collective responsibility

Working in a Professional Learning Community means that all the stakeholders have a collective responsibility towards students' learning (King & Newman, 2001; Leithwood & Louis, 1998). Collective responsibility, not only for educational issues but also for issues such as schools' policies and professional development, leads the teachers and the other entities to feel commitment to the school community (Newman & Wehlage, 1995).

Reflective professional inquiry

Reflective professional inquiry includes reflective dialogue (Louis et al., 1995); capacity building (Stewart, 2014; Southworth, 2000; Gleddie & Robinson, 2017); planning the educational material, such as curriculum and common activities, as a team (Newman & Wehlage, 1995) and application of new ideas (Hord, 1997). Here, learning is viewed as a social activity and thus teachers need to work together in teams and not isolated to promote their professional identity and students' outcomes (Southworth, 2000, p. 276; Gleddie & Robinson, 2017, p. 23).

Collaboration

Collaboration requires the involvement of the staff in designing the activities and in the decision-making process (Louis et al., 1995). Collaboration may be connected to a specific aspect of education like improving curriculum or more broadly to overall school development (Southworth, 2000). Building relationships through collaboration is seen as an important way to motivate teachers who share a common goal (Bezzina, 2006).

Promotion of group and individual learning

As it is mentioned above, learning is a cyclical process (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005). All teachers are learners and they learn daily when they interact with each other, by sharing their experiences and knowledge through reflective dialogue (Louis et al., 1995). PLC philosophy recognizes a strong link between teacher professional development and the quality of teaching, for this reason the focus is also on teachers learning (Steward, 2014; Joyce, 2004).

Furthermore, Bolam et al., (2005) and Stoll et al., (2006), even if they confirm the characteristics mentioned, they suggested three more, fundamental features.

Mutual trust

Trust and respect are necessary elements for PLC, as they help individuals to receive constructive feedback and respect diversity (Bezzina, 2006; Stewart, 2014). In addition, only through trust and mutual respect among the stakeholders, they can work collaboratively with a commitment towards a common goal (Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006).

Inclusive membership

Bolam et al., (2005) and Stoll et al., (2006) emphasize the importance of the school community to work as one. School community should include all the staff in the decision-making process, in designing the educational material and goals. In contrast, if the leaders collaborate only with small groups of people, the rest of the employees will feel isolated.

Openness, networks and partnerships

For a school to work as a PLC needs external support as well. The society where the school belongs and other local schools have to become school's partners to develop educational programs together and to share their experience to learn from each other (Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006).

Hord (2004), underlined as main features of a PLC,

- the supportive and shared leadership;
- the shared values and vision;
- the collective learning and both the shared practices and the supportive conditions towards educators.

Finally, DuFour (2004) and Newman et al., (2000) claimed that a school as a PLC emphasize in three essential elements:

- collaborative work among school's stakeholders;
- focus on teaching and learning regarding collaboration;
- Collection and use of data (students' results, observation of daily life) as a basis for shared inquiry and school evaluation.

3.3.3 Leading a Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Learning and teachers are at the center of PLCs. Educational theory on PLC agrees that leaders equally play a crucial role. Leaders support PLCs by creating the necessary structural, financial and cultural conditions for a PLC to flourish (Bezzina, 2006; Bezzina, 2008; Joyce, 2004; Stewart, 2014; Southworth, 2000; Gleddie & Robinson, 2017.)

A culture of learning

According to Fullan (1992), the provided leadership will influence the culture of the school. Following Scheins' (1985, p.2) strategies for developing a culture which will promote learning, leaders should,

- take into consideration employees' interests;
- focus on people and not on the existing system;
- make people believe that the change can be real;
- find time for meetings to promote the learning;
- encourage an open climate for discussions;
- support and believe in teamwork;
- have a holistic, collective approach to problems solving strategies.

Multilevel learning

Leaders in PLCs do not have to focus only on pedagogical issues (Southworth, 1999). If leaders want to transform their school into a PLC, then their focus has to be in the holistically in the school; in group dynamics, in students and teachers learning, on building authentic relationships among the stakeholders (Leithwood et al., 1999).

Distributed leadership

According to many researchers, (Gibb, 1958; Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2006) leaders have to involve the teachers and the other entities on their daily task by delegating power to them. Following this strategy, teachers become leaders as they can to decide without taking permissions from the official leaders of the school. In addition, delegating power is a leadership strategy to make the stakeholders feel a commitment to school's goals (Growther, 2001).

Management & Coordination

According to Ainscow & West, (1994) the management and coordination practices have to give teachers the needed autonomy to make their own decisions for the educational issues, to

let them decide alone the educational material which they believe it will bring better results and outcomes to their classrooms.

Empower the Human Resource

As it is mentioned before, collaboration, positive relationships, support and distributed leadership are some of the strategies to transform a school into a Professional Learning Community. However, leaders have to create a supportive environment; where the employees will work in collaboration in terms of personal autonomy. Some more leadership strategies are suggested below.

Trust and positive climate

Group work increases teachers' productivity and enhances the healthy collaborative climate in a school (Nias et al., 1989). If a leader wants to establish often meetings and group work, then trust is crucial (Louis et al., 1995). As Bryk (1999, p. 767) stated, *"By far the strongest facilitator of professional community is social trust among faculty members. When teachers trust and respect each other, a powerful social resource is available for supporting collaboration, reflective dialogue, and de-privatization, characteristics of professional community"*. In these terms, principals and leaders have a key role in forming the required conditions for the people to trust and respect each other (Schneider, 2002).

Time

Researchers have found that time is crucial in building and developing Professional Learning Communities (Stoll et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2003; Senge et al., 2000). Reflective dialogue and free time to share ideas and knowledge in both official and unofficial meetings are key elements in building trust and developing collaboration among the stakeholders (Bezzina, 2006; Senge et al., 2000; Stoll et al., 2005).

Space and School Structure

If building and developing PLCs require collaboration, respect and trust among the entities, then the schools building has to have rooms and areas where the teachers can interact and work with each other freely (Senge et al., 2000; McGregor, 2003; Dimmock, 2000). Coffee rooms, where teachers and other staff members can meet altogether during the breaks; workrooms, where teachers, while they are working, can share their experiences and exchange opinions for educational or non- educational issues and free spaces with tables in school where teachers can

discuss unofficial during the day (Senge et al., 2000; Dimmock, 2000; Stoll et al., 2006.) Following these strategies, leaders support the educators to work together by providing the required conditions for collaboration. Rewarding the common rooms, educators do not work in isolation. (Hargreaves, 1994).

Support

According to Saunders (1999), leaders have to empower staff members to do self-evaluation by using the daily data they have from their experience. Except for the support that is provided to the human resource of the school, leaders create the necessary financial and cultural conditions. Bezzina (2006) and Joyce (2004), underlined the importance of leadership to support and fund activities for employees' professional development, as well as, to improve school facilities and resources. Southworth (2000), Gleddie & Robinson (2017) and Bezzina (2006) emphasize on the importance for leaders to create the necessary cultural conditions, by sharing leadership and by fostering democratic learning environment, where teachers can collaborate as trusted educational practitioners. Finally, the use of technology changes the way the stakeholders can communicate with each other (Lieberman 2000). For example, communication through emails (MacIsaac, 2000) or an establishment of an online platform for self-evaluation and open feedback (Colgan, 2007) shown that technology can be viewed as a tool for better communication and collaboration in a school environment.

3.3.4 Challenges in building a Professional Learning Community (PLC)

PLCs can differ from place to place as schools have different people, resources, structures and are subject to various circumstances often influenced by the local or national politics and the society (Gleddie & Robinson, 2017; Bezzina, 2006). According to Bolam et al., (2005), building a PLCs, is not an easy task; it needs time, patience, hard work and commitment from each who is working in a school. In this section, possible challenges in building a PLC in schools will be discussed.

School Size

Stoll et al., (2006) underlined the importance of school size, as in bigger school with more than one buildings on campus and with a lot of staff members, usually it is more challenging to develop a sense of belonging, with a shared vision and collaborative practices in a daily basis to be developed.

External Influences

Stoll et al., (2006) emphasize the importance of the external support. The community where the school belongs, the educational policies and the availability of educational seminars or training courses from the Ministry of Education or the Educational Institutions would be beneficial for the schools.

Teachers' resistance

Joyce (2004) underlined that teachers resist anything when they are not truly involved in the process. However according to Joyce (2004) & Bezzina (2006) the more significant challenge is when teachers do not want to be involved. In that case, leaders have to give teachers the opportunity to experience PLCs before they actually commit to them (Joyce, 2004). As research has shown that resistance from teachers is generally overcome with time and patience (Bezzina, 2006 & Joyce, 2004).

4 Methodology

Silverman (2001 p. 4) underlined that a methodology refers to the researcher's choices in regards to the methods of information acquisition. In this section, the purpose, methodological approach, ways for data collection, criteria for data selection, method for data analysis, ethical perspectives and the limitation of the study will be examined.

4.1 Purpose of Study and Research Questions

During the past few years in Greece, many conversations have been held about the Finnish educational system among the political parties, within Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and the Institute of Educational Policy. In the core of those conversations is admiration for high Finnish PISA results, teachers' autonomy and education, and the structure of the Finnish educational system. In addition, the Finnish educational system has been prominent in the Greek Press.

My undergraduate degree is in social sciences and when I first came to Finland to study "Education Leadership", I was interested in gaining a holistic understanding of the Finnish educational system. Because I want to work in Greece as an educational counsellor, my main aim was to find what Greek educators could learn from the Finnish education system. Reflecting on my studies and my experience in Finland, I am trying to identify the differences between the two countries. I realized that the main difference between the two educational

systems is in the disciplines, which are guiding the people in the educational work field. In Finland, the educators work under collaboration (Tryggvason, 2009; Malinen, Väisänen & Savolainen, 2012). After realizing the importance of the human resources in education, I was intrigued to find ways to implement aspects and strategies that can be applied into the Greek system.

The purpose of the comparative ethnographic study between a Finnish and Greek primary schools is for the researcher to identify the collaborative practices within the community of the schools. As discussed in Section 3, PLC model is based on trust and collaboration among the school stakeholders. This study in particular, focuses on the existing collaborating practices within the communities and the relationships among the Human Resources of both schools.

The study aims to examine if the Greek and the Finnish schools work under the PLC model and if not how can both be improved by following the theory of the PLC model and the functional aspects of the other school. In this research, the focus is specifically on people and the leadership practices that promote collaboration.

The research questions of this study are as follows;

- Can the characteristics of the PLC model be found within the Finnish and the Greek school? If yes, how are they applied rewarding collaboration in both cases? If not, how can the schools be improved?
- Does the leadership team supports the human resources in the Finnish and the Greek schools rewarding PLC?
- Does the physical layout of the schools promotes the existence of official and/or unofficial collaboration among the school stakeholder?

4.2 Research Methodology

As the researcher intends to understand peoples' relationships within a school community and the leadership practices towards collaboration, qualitative research has been selected for the methodological mode of inquiry of this study. Usually, qualitative research approaches are used when a researcher aims to understand a group of people, their culture and the meaning that they are giving to their actions (Gray, 2014). Along with these aspects, they allow the researcher to

gain an overall view of the context, by listening, observing and interacting with the participants of the study (Gray, 2014).

One of the basic elements in a qualitative research approach is the interaction between the researcher and the participants of the study. By interacting with the participants, the researcher can gain an in-depth understanding of peoples' lives (Creswell, 2007 p. 43) and a holistic view of the environment where the participants live (Miles et al., 2014). In addition, according to Gray (2014), qualitative research is flexible and contextual as it firstly, allows the researcher to conduct both inductive and deductive analysis of the data. Secondly, the researcher can create and design more abstract themes for analysis.

As the researcher aimed to gain a holistic understanding towards school entities daily habits and the practices that they use towards collaboration, for the collection of the data, ethnography was selected. The roots of ethnography can be found in anthropology and thus provides the researcher a way to study people within a real-life setting, including their culture, habits, and the interactions among them. In ethnography the researcher plays a crucial role as he or she tries to understand the subject of the study and to translate the hidden meaning behind their actions by observing them in their natural environment. (Patton, 2002) The aim of this observation is for the ethnographer to understand subjects' realities by participating in their lives or by living among them for a long-time period (Gray, 2014).

Ethnography requires the researcher to have a deep understanding for the subject of research and a holistic understanding towards their habits, culture and relationships. Ethnographers, by observing and interviewing the subjects of the study, as well as, by collecting visual data, such as photographs, aim to gain a deep understanding towards peoples' lives. (Gray, 2014; Creswell, 1994.)

In this study, ethnography was selected by the researcher because she wants to have a holistic understanding towards the collaborative practices, the leadership and the support which is provided from the leadership in each school. Besides the strategies that she wants to identify, she is also interested in listening to the voices of the people and to observe school stakeholders in their working environment.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

Observation

As mentioned above, conducting an ethnographical study means that observation is held in the field. For this study, the researcher conducted a nonparticipant observation. In nonparticipant observation, the researcher observes and takes field notes while he or she conducts the research. In nonparticipant observation, there is a distance between the researcher and the subject of study (Gray, 2014.)

In this study, non-participant, structured observation was held. In structured observation, the researcher observes and takes field notes following an observation guide or specific topics that he or she wants to investigate further. In congruence with this research format, the researcher observed the relationships among people and the ways they collaborate (Gray, 2014).

Visual Data

According to Flick (2009), photographs are a way to collect data in ethnographical studies. Visual data and photographs can be used by the researcher in order to present how the subject of the study lives and works (Gray, 2014). As taking photographs is the researchers choice, they will show the pictures that the researcher considers important and is thus considered highly subjective data. For the study, photographs act as visual data and were captured to present the areas of the schools where the teachers and the other stakeholders of the school community can collaborate in both official and unofficial ways.

Interviews

As in ethnography, the researchers need to gain a holistic understanding for subjects' realities makes interviews a useful tool for the researcher. Interviews are a way to collect data that allows the participants of the study to reflect on their own experiences (Seidman, 2013). The researcher decided to conduct semi-structured interviews. According to Gray (2014), semi-structured interviews provide the researcher a flexible way to discuss with the participants of the study, in general contexts. The researcher has a list of contexts and topics that he or she wants to discuss with the interviewees. Thus, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ask more or less questions towards the research topic during the interview, while new issues or topics arise from the discussion. Due to the nature of this method of communication, usually, the questions are not answered briefly and thus the interviewee has the opportunity to answer freely and to develop his or her thoughts towards the questions. (Gray, 2014)

For this study, the researcher developed her own interviews questions based on the characteristics of the theoretical model of Learning Organization and Professional Learning

Community. As discussed in section 2, the roots of Professional Learning Communities can be found from the Learning Organization model. Through these terms, the researcher combined the characteristics of LO and PLC to create five general themes for the interviews. Each theme had around six questions in order for the researcher to gain a holistic understanding towards the topic of study.

4.4 Procedure

The process of data collection in ethnography according to Creswell and Poth (2018) has specific phases. The first step was for the researcher to gain access in the field of the study; and then, during the phase of data collection, the researcher had to observe, to conduct interviews and at the same time to take field notes.

For the first stage of the research process, the researcher reflected on the literature and the theoretical model and then she developed the questionnaires and the broader themes of observation. In the research design phase, the researcher decided on the sample that she wanted to take. After that, the researcher contacted with the school administration, in order to gain permission for the study conduction.

During the data collection phase, the researcher was in each school daily for nine days. The data from the Finnish school was collected in October of 2017 and the data from the Greek school was collected in January of 2018.

For the first two days of the observation, the researcher was introducing herself to the school stakeholders while she was informing the participants of her research. She informed the subjects of the study that she did not want them to change their behavior during her observation. During the nine days of observation, the researcher was at each school from around 9 o' clock in the morning till around 12.30 in the afternoon. During this time, the researcher was involved with the teachers and the schools' stakeholders during the breaks. The rest of the time, in the Greek school she did not have permission to go into the classrooms or to walk freely in the school, so, she was at the secretary's office. While in the Finnish school, she was attending the courses and she was free to go wherever she wanted in the school. The researcher stayed longer one day in both schools as she attended the weekly staff meeting.

According to the visual data, the researcher was not sure if she would observe something worth capturing. However, in the Finnish school she found a very interesting to take photos from the

common areas of the school, after asking permission. In Greece, she informed the owners and the principal of the visual data and she took photographs after asking permission.

Regarding the interviews in the Finnish school, the researcher asked the teachers and the other entities if they have time to book an appointment. While in the Greek school most of the appointment with the teachers and the other participants of the study were booked by the school secretary after the principals' permission was granted. Each interview was recorded after interviewees permission and after signing the information sheet for the study. All the interviews were transcribed by the researcher within one week of the interview. Most of the interviews lasted from 10 to 15 minutes. Two interviews in both schools lasted 5 minutes, while four other interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes.

4.5 Rationale for comparing a public and a private school

As mentioned above, this is a comparative study between two primary schools, one in Finland and one in Greece. The researcher decided from the beginning of the study that the data will be collected from a Greek private school. However, in Finland there are few private schools. Because of this, the researcher had to find a way to make this comparison between a Greek private and a Finnish public school feasible. After conversations with the researchers' supervisor, professors and local people, the researcher realized that in Finland there are some schools which are parent's first choice for their children due to the high quality of education offered. One of those schools belongs to the university, the teachers' training schools.

To be able to conduct this research and this comparison between a Finnish public and a Greek private school, the researcher followed Bourdieu's (1997) theory for the cultural capital. The cultural capital refers to people's academic achievement and educational qualifications, which can help the person to change his or her social status in a higher social-status within the society. Bourdieu (1977) connects the cultural reproduction with the social reproduction in his book where both are reproduced within the school content. Cultural capital is developed from peoples' early years of life, as it is influenced both from the school environment and parental social position.

In Greece, parents from high social classes prefer their children to attend a private school. The reason for this choice is that in private schools the teachers are selected very carefully, there is no bureaucracy, there are no strikes and usually the quality of the offered education is higher than in public school. Also, the private schools offer more educational projects and activities in and out of the campus.

On the other hand, in Finland, parents prefer to send their children to the University school as all the stakeholders of the school are considered experts in their field and they are very carefully selected. Also, all the educational innovations in Finnish educational system start from those schools. In these terms, parents send their children to those schools as they want the best for their children education.

4.6 Participants

4.6.1 Structure of the Human Resource of the schools

The Greek school has 694 students and the staff members of the primary school are around 102 people. However, as the building of the school (excluding the primary school) hosts the lower and upper secondary schools, a lot of subject teachers work for the whole school. As the staff of the school is organized in different departments, only the classroom teachers and the people in the central administration office of the primary school are working for the primary school. The staff that belongs to other departments of the school work for the primary school as well as for the lower and upper secondary schools. Every department works individually and the secretaries of each department inform and are informed by the secretaries of the central administration office of the primary school. The different departments of the school are:

- The physical education department
- The English language Department
- The psychologist Department
- The German language department
- The French language department
- Accounting office (6 people)
- Office responsible for students transfer from and for the school (2 people)

Greek School	
Staff	Number
Classroom teachers	30
Speech- therapist	1
Principal	1
Educational Coordinators	2
Vice principal	1
Educational Counsellors	3
Physical education teachers	16
Psychologist	8
Music teachers	1
Theater teachers	1
Environmental studies teacher	1
English Language Teachers	9
Foreign language teachers	14
Science teacher	1
Librarian	1
Arts & craft teachers	4
Janitors	2
Laboratory teachers	2
Doctor	1
Nurse	1
Secretaries	2

The Finnish school has around 410 students and 58 staff members and nonprofessionals who take care of the students after the school day. The school building hosts only the primary school and the teachers are working together because there are not different departments for different educational subjects.

Finnish School	
Staff	Number
Classroom Teachers	18
Special Needs Teachers	3
Principal	1
Vice principal	1
Counsellor	1
Physical Education Teachers	3
Social Worker	1
Psychologist	1
Music Teachers	2
Wood Lab Teachers	1
English Language Teachers	4
Foreign Language Teachers	4
Textile Teachers	1
Science Teachers	1
Religious/Ethics Teachers	2
Nurse	1
Secreatry	1
Librarian	1
Janitor	1
Cleaning & Cooking	5

4.6.2 Participants of the Interviews

In the research design phase, the researcher decided to interview from both schools the classroom teachers, principals, and if possible, one teacher from each of the secondary courses,

such as music and arts & craft. In order for the researcher to understand the school community holistically, she decided to interview people in all different positions in the school.

In the Finnish school, the researcher conducted 13 interviews while in the Greek school she conducted 17 interviews. The criteria for the interviewees included the desire of the researcher to gather around six interviews from classroom teachers and at least one interview from someone in non-teaching position. The researcher knew from the beginning who to interview according to school's stakeholders position within the school, thus the sample was purposive. In more details,

Greek School		
Interviewer- Teaching Subject	Code name	Gender
Classroom teacher- 1 st grade	GR-Teacher1	Female
Classroom teacher- 6 th grade	GR-Teacher2	Male
Classroom teacher- 2 nd grade	GR-Teacher3	Female
Classroom teacher- 6 th grade	GR-Teacher4	Male
Classroom teacher- 5 th grade	GR-Teacher5	Female
Classroom teacher- 3 rd grade	GR-Teacher6	Female
Principal	GR-Principal	Female
Speech-therapist	GR-Speech-therapist	Female
Secretary- department of psychology	GR-SecretaryPS	Female
Educational coordinator- psychologist	GR- Coordinator1	Female
Educational Coordinator-vice principal	GR-Coordinator2	Male
School doctor	GR-Doctor	Female
Music teacher	GR-Musician	Male
Arts & Craft teacher	GR-Arts & Craft teacher	Male
German Language Teacher	GR-German Language Teacher	Female
Joint interviews:		
1. Secretaries		
1 st secretary	GR-Secretary1	Female
2 nd secretary	GR-Secretary2	Female
2. Owners		
1 st Owner	GR-Owner1	Female
2 nd Owner	GR-Owner2	Male

Finnish School		
Interviewer- Teaching Subject	Code name	Gender
Classroom teacher- 4 th grade	FI-Teacher1	Male
Classroom teacher- 6 th grade	FI-Teacher2	Male
Classroom teacher- 6 th grade	FI-Teacher3	Female
Classroom teacher- 6 th grade	FI-Teacher4	Female
Classroom teacher- 1 st grade	FI-Teacher6	Female
Classroom teacher- 3 rd grade	FI-Teacher7	Male
Classroom teacher- 4 th grade	FI-Teacher8	Male
Principal	FI-Principal	Male
Special Needs teacher	FI-SEN teacher	Female
English/ Spanish language teacher	FI-Foreign language teacher	Female
Nurse	FI-Nurse	Female
Music teacher	FI-Musician	Female
Secretary	FI-Secretary	Female

4.7 Interpretive Thematic Analysis

According to Gay et al. (2006), qualitative data analysis can be described as the researcher's process to divide the data into smaller parts with a common topic or content.

Regarding the analysis of the data, the researcher chose to conduct a qualitative interpretive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis according to Braun & Clarke (2006), is a method which allows the researcher to identify, analyze, organize, describe and report themes. The researcher choose qualitative thematic analysis because, as a process, it is very flexible (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke 2006). According to Braun & Clarke (2006), themes can arise from the data of the study and refer to issues or topics which can answer the research questions of the study. Themes describe the crucial issues related to the research questions of the study. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to analyze his or her data by creating and developing themes both from the data and the literature (Boyatzis, 1998). In more detail, themes can be developed in two ways; inductively and deductively. In the inductive analysis, themes develop from the data, and it is not necessary for these themes to fit with the chosen literature. However, in deductive analysis, themes arise from the theory.

In terms of ethnography, this flexibility allows the researcher to reflect on his or her observation and field notes by combining it with the information that they get from the interviews. Secondly, thematic analysis applied in ethnographical data is more effective. Gathering data with multiple methods (interviews, visual data, observation), allows the researcher to combine different sources on their analysis and thus the presentation of data will be more effective and valid. (Creswell, 2009.)

According to Smith (2004), in interpretive thematic analysis, the researcher, during the period of the data collection, reflect on people's stories according to his or her experiences. The researcher, while he or she collect the data, has the opportunity to reflect on them and to become more critical towards the research as he or she filters and interact with participants experiences. Moreover, by this interpretation, the researcher especially, in ethnography, were the interviews usually are semi-structured or unofficial, can add questions and observation topics in order to gain a holistic understanding from the research field.

For data analysis, the researcher used the guidelines as provided by Braun & Clarke (2006).

1st phase: Familiarizing yourself with your data

The researcher, after conducting the interviews and the observation, transcribed the data within one week. Every day after her visit to both schools, she read her field notes and she thought of new issues or topics that arose after the observation. The researcher, in the transcription phase, read the data many times and made her own notes, as a means of preliminary analysis.

2nd phase: Generating initial code

While the researcher was reading the data, she found the disciplines, behaviors, leadership strategies, and individual definitions of these elements to be repetitive. The theoretical model that she chose helped the researcher to focus on specific topics and disciplines within the data, but during the revising phase she identified new codes.

3rd phase: Searching for themes

The themes arose both inductively and deductively. The researcher knew from the beginning that the themes from the theoretical models would be regarding the characteristics of PLC and the leadership practices. However, especially on the leadership practices, new themes arose from the data which were not anticipated from theory.

4th phase Reviewing themes

After categorizing the themes, the researcher read the theory, purpose, research questions and themes that she decided to analyze in order to see if the themes apply to the study.

5th phase Defining and naming themes

In this phase, the researcher defined the themes which emerged from the literature using the model as guideline. She defined the themes by identifying them from the research as to clarify them for the reader. The names of the themes came from the theoretical model and the choice of the researcher.

6th producing the report

The last phase involved the researcher deciding which part of the interviews and the observation she will in the report. She related the themes and the analysis within the theoretical model that she used in the previous section and also combined the theoretical perspectives with the emergent themes from the inductive analysis. She decided the ways that she will report the data and how those will be applied on the final part of her thesis.

4.8 Ethics

Following Gray's (2014) guidelines towards the ethical perspective of the study, the researcher firstly conferred with the school that she was willing to conduct her research. As the researcher was living in Finland, during the summer of 2017 she visited the Greek private school and she agreed for the conduction of the research. Because the owners of the school accepted her proposal from the first meeting, she did not give to them the thesis proposal at first. However, she send the thesis proposal via email within two days. The contact with the Finnish school was held during the October of 2017. The researcher visited the school and she had a meeting with the principal in order to inform him of the research and to ask for permission.

In both cases, the researcher contacted the responsible parties from each school to informed them of the purpose of study, the sample she is willing to collect, the length of the observation, the research methods, and she asked for permission from both of the owners of the Greek school and the principal of the Finnish school.

During the period of the observation, the researcher was introducing herself to the participants in order for the subjects of the study to learn who she is and what kind of research she is conducting. To begin the interview, the researcher asked the interviewee if she can record the interview and then she gave each participant an information sheet (see Appendix) to sign. The information sheet had the details for the researcher, the purpose of study and the methodology.

The interviews were anonymous and both the recorded and the hand written data will be kept for two years after the conduction of the study. Finally, the researcher was very careful while she was capturing photographs from the school areas, as she did not want people to be included in those photographs.

5 Data Analysis

In this section, the results of the research will be presented. At the beginning of the chapter, a description of the settings and the structure of the schools, based on the interviews and the field notes will be described. On the second part of the chapter, the themes which arise both from the theoretical model of the Professional Learning Community and inductive analysis will be presented. The characteristics of PLC, the crucial role of the leadership and the leadership practices towards schools' stakeholders support rewarding collaboration will be described. The results are presented in line with the research questions.

5.1 Settings and Contextual Description

In this section, the structure of the school, and the leader and secretary role would be presented. The above-mentioned themes arise inductively from the data analysis process. The aim of this description is for the reader to gain a holistic understanding of the structure of the schools, as well as, the main differences and the similarities.

To begin with, the physical layout of the school, the building of the Finnish school hosts only a primary school, while the Greek school hosts a primary, a lower and an upper secondary schools on the same building. In these terms, the Finnish educators work only for the primary school, while in the Greek school, except the primary school teachers, educators from different departments work with students from different educational levels.

5.1.1 School Administration

5.1.1.1 The role of the secretary

One of the main differences between the schools were the role of the secretary. In the Finnish school, the secretary has a supportive role while in the Greek school the secretary can be seen as the cornerstone towards primary schools functionality.

5.1.1.1.1 The Finnish Case

The administration of the Finnish school is shared and divided among the school stakeholders. Rewarding the leadership style, the Finnish secretary has a supportive position. Secretary helps

the principal with the workload and especially with the paperwork, and she is not involved with the educational issues. Moreover, the secretary is not involved with the teachers and parents, as they, communicate directly with each other. Every beginning of the year, parents meet with the secretary, to fill their children's application form for enrolment.

I have a supportive position. I am helping the principal. I have more administrative tasks. I am principals' helper and I am helping him with the paperwork and the paper- load. I am not involved with teacher's work, not at all. The parents for example contact directly with the teachers and the opposite. Parents come to me only when they want something related to administration, for example at the beginning of the year they come to fill the application for the enrolment (FI-Secretary).

5.1.1.1.2 The Greek Case

As the administration of the Greek school is central, the role of the secretary is vital towards school's functionality. The school is divided into different departments, the department of physical education, psychology, English language, German language, French language. All the departments have a secretary who is responsible for informing both the educators of their departments and the secretary of the central office of the primary school for every issue, which has been arising during the day. The secretaries of the central office inform the principal, and then the principal, during the official weekly meetings, informs the classroom teachers and her colleagues. Therefore, the secretaries complete most of the communication processes in the school. In general, secretaries are responsible for schools' proper functioning. In more details, they book all the appointments between the parents and the principal, and between the parents and the teachers; they inform the teachers and the leadership team of the primary school for every issue which emerges, and they are in contact with the secretaries of the different departments. In addition, the secretaries are in charge for all the administrative tasks, but they are not involved in the educational designing and planning.

The appointments between the teacher and the parents, administrations meetings, if a student is late, why, how, students transportation, everything starts here. We know everything and we inform the teacher, the principal etc. There is no direct communication between the teacher and the parent, even if a parent wants to have a meeting with a teacher we will book the appointment. We organize everything, everything. We organize the phone meeting between parents and teachers as well (GR-Secretary 1).

5.1.2 The Role of the Principal

As school's administration style is different, the role of the principal is also different in both schools.

5.1.2.1 The Finnish Case

In the Finnish school, the principal is responsible for the whole school. Timetables planning, teaching schedules, are some of the principals' tasks. He is also in charge of planning to which classrooms teachers will teach. However, even if the principal plans everything, the final decisions comes collectively from the educators and the school stakeholders. The principal sets the guidelines. Moreover, the principal is responsible for the financial management of the school. Furthermore, as the school is part of the university, the principal is also responsible for any communication between the school and the university.

I organize everything. For example, schedules for the teachers, I am making a plan and then I mark with an X the place where the name of a teacher has to be, and then I give it to the teachers and they decide alone what they want to do, when and how. During the summer, I am making the annual schedule and I discuss it with the staff during the first meetings in August. I am responsible for the financial of the school. Now for example I am planning the next years' teaching hours, we want to make the lesson last from 45 minutes 75 and we want the breaks to be longer. This is because we want to make students use the schedule of the high school, before they go (FI-Principal).

5.1.2.2 The Greek Case

The principal of the Greek school is responsible for everything, and the tasks that she is responsible for are more than those, which the Finnish principal has. The principal of the Greek school is responsible for everything in the school, except the financial issues. Meetings with both the educators and the parents in order to inform them for an issue or to introduce them the school and its' culture; the supervision of teachers' weekly curriculum; the supervision of the tests and the exercises which will be given to students, are some of principal's daily tasks. The principal is also responsible for informing the owners of any activity, idea and decision, which occurs the primary school.

The owners, on the other hand, are responsible for the whole school, and they are responsible for the final decisions. They arrange the financial issues, such as the heat of the school and students' transportation with the school buses. They are also responsible for giving the final permission for every event or project where the teachers want to begin. The owners are getting informed from the principals, they advise them, and then the principal of each educational level, discusses with the teachers and the educational coordinators.

We talk with parents, sometimes with the students, we talk with the teachers and with the principals, we are having meetings and we set school goals, what we want to do. We are solving issues in general but also more practical issues, daily things. For example, we are having meeting once a week and we discuss about performances, events, we are doing new things all the time (GR-Owner 1).

We coordinate the people. We set the guidelines. Usually the principals will come to us and we discuss with them, the new ideas and projects, after that each principal is discussing those things with the responsible department and the teachers. Of course, this does not make prohibited for a teacher to come to us if he/ she wants to suggest something directly to us. And the same is happening with the students. Our work is on a lot of different levels but usually we talk with the principals (GR-Owner 2).

5.2 Shared Vision & Mission

A sense of common purpose towards the education, which is shared among the school stakeholders, characterize the first generated theme, shared vision and mission. In a school content, students are at the core of the shared vision (Hord, 2004). In addition, for the school staff to be committed to the vision and the mission of the school, usually, it's development has to be a collective process (Louis et al.,1995).

5.2.1 The Finnish Case

The vision of the Finnish school is clear and shared among all the staff. The answers of the interviewers were the same; the mission of the school is to raise human beings. The educational goal is for the children to socialize, and to develop their critical thinking based on their ethics and values. The school vision is not set only from the school though; in addition, it is set in three level. Firstly, the National Curriculum sets the main guidelines. After, each municipality underline the main elements that are needed to be taught. Finally, the school sets its vision by combining the guidelines from the National Curriculum and the municipality where the school belongs. However, as the teacher's training schools belong to the university, the vision of the school is also set after discussions between the university and the leadership team of the school. Even if the principal of the school sets the main guidelines, the final vision of the school would be formed after a staff meeting at the beginning of the year, where they discuss and agree altogether. In addition, the interviewers answered to researchers' question,

School vision is clear; we want to raise human beings (FI-Teacher 4).

Every year we have meetings with the university we discuss our purpose etc. We want to raise human beings (FI-Principal).

Our principal gives us the main guidelines but we discuss everything, we have this freedom. If we (the teachers) do not agree, we discuss it and we decide all together (FI-Teacher 5).

5.2.2 The Greek case

The vision of the Greek school is also clear to the staff. However, the researcher did not understand it holistically, as the answers from the interviewers were not clear. In addition, the researcher realized that the school tries to be a pioneer, as during every school year, the teachers of primary school emphasize their teaching towards a specific educational topic. For example,

teachers try to establish a school year of history or Greek literature, and they combine the chosen topic with different courses. The aim of this educational decision is for the children to gain a holistic knowledge, by combining different courses following one theme as a guideline. The vision of the Greek school is set in multiple levels as well. The main directions come from the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. After, the owners of the school set the school goals and vision; they discuss them with the principals; and then, at the beginning of the year, there are some established meetings, where all the staff of the school discuss the goals and the vision for the upcoming year. In addition, the interviewees answered to researchers' question,

Of course, there is a vision, and it is set every September. Usually there is a general guideline from the owners and the administration of the school but then we (the teachers) discuss all together and decide the details. It is a common process (GR-Teacher 2).

We are trying every year to have a specific topic, the year of the history. And the teachers are trying to focus on that field specifically by combining the courses together. (GR-Teacher 1).

We set school goals, and the vision of the school. Where are we heading, how, why. We set the guidelines (GR-Owner 1).

5.2.3 Comparison

As it seen from the interviews and the analysis, in both schools the guidelines towards the vision and the mission of the school are provided from the National Curriculum. In both schools, the leadership team builds the vision and the mission of the school rewarding the National Curriculums and then, at the beginning of the year, after meetings with all the staff, the vision of the school is set under collective and shared processes. The researcher realized that in both schools, educators are working together to build the vision of the school. This collective process shows that the first characteristic of the Professional Learning Communities is applied in both schools, under collective responsibility (Newman & Wehlage, 1995) and reflective professional inquiry (Southworth, 2000; Louis et al., 1995).

5.3 Trust and Respect

The existence of trust in a school context is a fundamental characteristic of the PLC model, and it can also be found within every individual characteristic of the PLC model. In these terms, the second theme was labelled after the literature of the PLCs' as "Trust & Respect". Trust can be considered as the cornerstone in developing and/or transforming a school into a PLC. As the characteristics of the Professional Learning Communities are focused on common

activities, collaboration and holistic educational approaches, trust is a required element for the existence of PLC.

5.3.1 The Finnish Case

Reflecting on the interviews and the observation, the researcher realized that trust and respect could be found in both leadership and collaborative practices in the Finnish school. Even if the questions of the researcher were not clear towards trust and respect, all the interviewers underlined trust, which exists among the school stakeholders. In addition, educators even if they know what kind of educational activities their colleagues practice, they trust each other. Some teachers explained that even if sometimes they do not agree with other educators' approaches or ideas, due to the trust, which exists among them, instead of judging them, or trying to convince them for their own opinion, they admitted that they would may learn something new. Trust is at the core of the school entities' relationships. Following the same beliefs, the principal explained that trust is the key element for the development of the school. All the interviewers described trust as a process, where all the entities trust each other and have as a result school's functionality. To conclude, all the interviewers highlighted the existence of the culture of trust, which promotes them as professionals. Towards respect, the researcher realized from both the field notes, and the interviews that respect could be found in every practice of collaboration among educators, as well as, within the decision- making processes.

Is part of our culture, we respect each other, we trust each other and we have the freedom to do what we have to do in our way, using our strengths (FI-Teacher 1).

Well, is all about the culture of trust. We trust each other a lot, I do not know why this is happening but we trust each other (FI-Teacher 7).

Trust is a big thing here in Finland, we trust each other and we do not need to supervise each other work (FI-Foreign Language Teacher).

Well, I trust them, my boss trusts me and is going like this. Trust is the keyword in this school and in Finland in general (FI-Principal).

5.3.2 The Greek Case

Interviewing teachers and school stakeholders in the Greek school, the researcher realized that the Greek stakeholders did not mention trust on their answers. Due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher did not ask if there is trust among the school entities. Even if the interviewers mentioned respect, they mostly emphasized on their interpersonal relationships. When friendship arose on interviewer's answers, then respect and trust were easier to be identified.

The researcher realized both from the interviews, and the field notes that even if the owners and the principal trust the teachers as professionals, control from the leadership can easily identify as the educators have to take permission to apply something new or different from the planned weekly curriculum. Both the owners and the principal want the educators to feel free to suggest new things, however, due to the control that exists, teachers do not suggest a lot of new ideas that could may have, as they know that the process to move from the theory to practice is long.

Even if the researcher, during the breaks, observed a lot of collaboration practices and people who wanted to share their ideas, the researcher also observed many interpersonal relationships, which are based in trust and respect. Following the field notes, the researcher also realized a challenging situation for the leadership team. During the meeting, the researcher observed and listened to some teachers to set limits to the principal. The principal of the school was not a classroom teacher; her studies was on a different field, and for many years she was teaching arts and history in lower and upper secondary school. Due to the previous work and educational background, many teachers did not take into consideration her opinions towards the educational curriculum and the teaching material. The principal admitted that there is a trust issue between her and the teachers, as many times, teachers believe that she cannot advise or guide them towards educational issues, as she does not have the required experience. The owners are also informed about this situation, and they admitted that there is a trust issue. However, as there were many complaints about the previous principal, who was a classroom teacher, the owners decided that the position of the principal would not be assigned to classroom teachers ever again.

To conclude all the entities mentioned the support and the respect which exist in the school culture. However, the researcher understood that true respect and trust exist among friends.

The core on our relationships is the respect. However, I am not friend with everyone here; it is impossible (GR-Teacher 1).

They have their culture, I trust them, I want them to come to me and tell my: I did something new” If this happens, I will be very happy (GR-Principal).

They respect and support each other (GR-Owner 1).

5.3.3 Comparison

There is a big difference towards trust between the Finnish and the Greek school. In the Finnish school, the entities of the school mentioned trust as fundamental element of the school culture. On the other hand, in the Greek school, trust was not clearly mentioned by the school

stakeholders. In the Greek school, the researcher identified respect among the school stakeholder rewarding professionalism. When trust comes in collaboration and project design, a good collaboration would depend on the interpersonal relationships among the educators. In these terms, trust as a characteristic of a PLC can be identified in the Finnish school, while in the Greek school there are many trust issues among the teachers and the principal. Trust, as a key element in building a Professional Learning Community, is a characteristic that can be identified within all the other characteristics, which will be analyzed below.

5.4 Collaboration

The third theme that emerged from the theoretical model of the Professional Learning Community is collaboration. The main theme, collaboration, emerged from deductive analysis, while the subthemes were formed from inductive analysis. The theme was generally characterized when the educators work together in teams, by reflecting, advising and sharing their ideas and experiences (Southworth, 2000; Bezzina, 2006). Collaboration in PLCs' can be flourish in an open atmosphere and not under control. In both schools, the leadership team promotes collaboration in official and unofficial ways. School educators underlined the importance of collaboration in their working environment even if, in both schools, the lack of time was mentioned as an obstacle.

5.4.1 Official collaborative practices

The interviewers in both school mentioned the official strategies, which are set from the leadership team to promote collaboration among the school stakeholders.

5.4.1.1 The Finnish Case

In the Finnish school, the principal had established, once a week, an official meeting, where all the stakeholders of the school, except of the secretary, participate. According to the interviewers, during the weekly meeting, the school stakeholders discuss new practices towards educational issues; they explain educational practices that they have used; they reflect on their own and on others experiences; they share their ideas freely, and they plan the future. Usually, during the meetings an educational seminar or a training program is offered after principals' or other educator's initiator. All the interviewers underlined the open atmosphere that exists among them during the meetings.

We have a meeting once a week but we also have unofficial meetings all the time, the teachers of each grade interact with each other a lot (FI-Teacher 7).

I am attending all the meetings and I am expressing my point of view freely (FI-Nurse).

The researcher after taking permission from the principal attended the weekly meeting. Following the field notes, the atmosphere among the school staff was very friendly. Even if there was the language barrier, and the researcher could not understand exactly the discussion topics, the researcher tried to translate their expression by observing their facial expression and the body language. Also, the researcher noticed that before the beginning of the meeting, some educators were making coffee and they were talking in a friendly way, while others were sitting on the couch and they were talking and laughing. When the principal came into the room, he informed the teachers for the research, which was taking place in the school, and he explained why the researcher was attending the meeting. The educators welcomed the researcher, and they continued talking with each other. While the school staff were discussing, the principal started the preparation of the meeting, as he prepared the projector and the upcoming presentation. Five minutes after all the school staff arrival in the meeting room, the principal started talking by welcoming them and by informing them about the agenda of the meeting. When the principal started the meeting, all the stakeholders stopped talking. This made the researcher realize that all the school entities respect both the principal and the meeting process. When the principal explained the topics of the meeting, an educator from the ICT team of the school presented the meetings' training topic, which was aiming for the educators to learn how to use two Google applications, the Google Drive and the Google Classroom, by the guidance of the ICT team of the school. After a short presentation, the responsible teacher asked from the school entities to form groups of around five people and then each group with one person from the ICT team. Each group went into one classroom to learn how to use the applications mentioned above. After the meeting, the researcher realized that trust and respect could be found in the core of the relationship among the educators. The idea for the training course came from the ICT team of the school, they discuss it with the principal and they designed it, as the use of the applications in a daily basis can be seen as a very useful tool, which will support the collaborative practices among the educators.

5.4.1.2 The Greek case

The Greek school has also established official meetings. Weekly, there are two meetings, on two different levels. The first is the leadership meeting, where once a week the principals from all the educational levels meet with the owners, and the second is the primary schools' classroom teachers meeting, where the principal, the educational coordinators and the classroom teachers of each grade meet once a week. In these terms, there are six meetings during the week, one for each grade. The educators, the coordinators and the principal follow a specific agenda in every meeting. Before the meeting, the responsible teachers for each

subject have a meeting with the educational coordinators, to supervise and discuss with the teachers the weekly curriculum that they have planned. Later, during the official weekly meeting, the responsible for the course teacher, present what he or she had planned to the rest classroom teachers. If the rest of the classroom teachers do not agree with the curriculum, they discuss it, and they decide together. According to teachers, usually, the decision follows the majority as rarely they all agree on a topic. Teachers found this practice very helpful as they plan and organize everything together and the whole cohort follows the same guidelines. In addition, all the classroom teachers of each grade teach the same educational material and the homework, which is given to students, is common for the whole grade. As it is mentioned above, there is one responsible teacher for each subject, for example, mathematics, Greek language etc., who designs the weekly curriculum. The interviewers mentioned that this practice is not pressing them as they feel safe and they know that they are working under a specific frame altogether. However, a lot of the interviewers stated that there are a lot of times where they do not express their objections as they believe that the rest of the team will oppose them as they do not want to add extra work to their daily schedule. Other teachers mentioned that good collaboration depends on the people who they have to collaborate each time, sometimes it is easy to collaborate, while other times they have to collaborate. Subject teachers, such as the foreign language teachers, the arts & craft teachers and the physical educators have an individual meeting once a week as well with their colleagues.

Usually yes, but in sometimes you feel that if you say your opinion, your suggestion or your disagreement, you will may feel that they will try to cut you out from the team (GR-Teacher 3).

yes of course, but it is always relevant with the team that you will work with. We are working on teams of 5 people, I had an experience where the other 4 people were divided into groups of 2. They had a fight and when I was supporting one's' position, for an educational issue, the other 2 people were upset with me (GR-Teacher 4).

During the observation period, the researcher had a chance to attend an official meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, teachers came into the principals' office, which is also the meeting room for the classroom teachers of the primary school and they were talking about random topics and issues. The researcher explained who she is and that she had taken permission from the principal. Around five minutes later, a teacher started talking for an educational activity that he has done, it was very effective, and the rest of the teachers found the idea very good. Around seven minutes later, the principal came into the room, and she joined the conversation. In the middle of the meeting, the educational coordinator came, as well and they discussed all together for a student who had behavioral issues. The agenda, which was followed during the

meeting, included specific topics such as the weekly curriculum, students' behavioral issues, the timetable for the grades submission and they planned, all together, an activity for the next year.

5.4.1.3 Comparison

As there is an established meeting once a week, both schools follow the same strategies and practices towards the official meetings and the official promotion of collaboration among the school stakeholders. However, there are some differences.

Firstly, in the Finnish school, all the school staff attends the meeting, while in Greece, only the classroom teachers of each grade, the principal and the educational coordinators participate in the meeting. During the meetings, the Finnish leadership team provides training courses to the educators, while the Greek school has no practices for further education to the educators during the weekly meetings. Also, in the Greek school, there is a practice where one classroom teacher organize the weekly plan for one course, while in Finnish school each teacher organize and design the teaching material individually, by taking advises from his or her colleagues. Reflecting on the interviews and the field notes, the researcher realized that in the Finnish school, the stakeholders truly collaborate while in the Greek school even if official meetings are established, true collaboration can be found when there is an interpersonal relationship among the teachers. Finally, in the Finish school, all the entities feel free to express themselves; while in the Greek school a lot of teachers do not suggest new things as they afraid their colleagues' reactions.

5.4.2 What if there was no principal?

The researcher, after two days in the research field, started thinking what would happen during the meetings if someone takes out the principal or some people from the leadership team. The purpose behind this question was for the researcher to understand if collaboration among the educators was true, or was guided due to the respect to the principal and if the educators would be capable of collaborating with their colleagues if the principal would not be present during the meetings.

5.4.2.1 The Finnish case

Finnish educators explained that there would be no difference in their collaboration practices even if the principal would be absent from the meetings, as trust and collaboration is part of their culture, and they have many common projects without principals' supervision. Similarly, the principal explained that everyone is equal and his role is not to control and supervise the school stakeholders, but to guide them. In addition,

Usually I discuss with my colleagues, with the principal not that much, this is because of the culture of trust (FI-Teacher 7)

We have a lot of projects and teachers are working into teams, there is not need for me to supervise them, I trust them and they inform me during the weekly meetings (FI-Principal).

5.4.2.2 The Greek case

On the other hand, in the Greek school, the interviewers mentioned that they do not believe that they would be able to collaborate without the principal into the meetings. Some teachers believed that true collaboration exists among people who like each other, or they are friends while classroom teachers with many years of teaching experience highlighted that they do not want to listen to younger teachers who they do not have much experience. Other teachers explained that the way that they talk to each other change during the meetings due to the respect that teacher shows to the principal. The principal, who attends all the meeting, explained that without this control the teachers would feel vulnerable and she highlighted that without supervision classroom teachers would not be able to collaborate. Similarly, the owners of the school explained that they have never think about it and that they believe that effective collaboration depends on the people and the combinations of people who they had to collaborate each time. However, the researcher realized that teachers believe that true collaboration would exist very difficult and both the owners and the principal were very skeptical towards this question as they have never tried a similar practice in the past.

I do not know. If someone does not control our conversation ...mm, this will not be good. (GR-Teacher 4).

Mm, let me think about it. This could be possible only if our training was also based in collaboration. We need more training, not only as professionals but also as humans. Too simple, too real, too difficult (GR-Teacher 5).

MM, I do not know, they will may kill each other, I do not know. Look,.. I do not know (skeptical). We can try it, but I do not know. Now a lot of people complain but they also have their safety net. If we take off this, I do not know what will happen. I do not know, all these practices are interesting for someone to try them. What I am interested in is change. I do not keep a specific agenda to have the power, I am totally open to expose myself and to try new things (GR-Principal).

It depends on the people in each cohort. Some of them will collaborate, some others no. Maybe they will be divided into groups with 2 or 3 people. I don't know we have never tried something like that. It depends from the people. But I don't know, I really don't know (GR-Owner 2).

5.4.2.3 Comparison

Comparing the collaborative practices of the schools, it is easy to identify that in the Finnish school, the school stakeholders can collaborate even if the principal is not present. Finnish educators explained that collaboration is part of their daily routines and an integral part of their working culture. Teachers work together and decide on the educational issues both individually and in teams. On the other hand, in the Greek school, as the interviewers were not sure about the existence of collaboration without principal's supervision, the collaborative practices seems to be weak. Combining the previous theme, *trust*, with the collaborative practices, the researcher identified the existence of trust issues among the educators.

5.4.3 Unofficial collaborative practices

The second sub-theme which emerged from the inductive analysis was labeled *unofficial collaborative practices* as during the interviews teachers from both schools mentioned that they collaborate with their colleagues in a daily basis at the corridors and during the breaks.

5.4.3.1 The Finnish Case

Most of the teachers in the Finnish school highlighted that they do not really understand a difference between the official and the unofficial meetings. Teachers explained to the researcher that during the day they meet with their colleagues at the corridors or at their offices. The atmosphere of the school is very open, and school entities feel free to discuss, advise and share their ideas or considerations with their colleagues daily. In addition, some classroom teachers mentioned that some days during the month, they open the doors of the classroom and they teach together with the teachers of the same grade.

We are planning everything together and we try to find ways to collaborate in a daily basis and to combine different ages of students (FI-Teacher 2)

Very often, we open the doors of our classrooms and we teach all together the same subject. Three classes into one, students really enjoy it" "If you want to find someone you will, you can find the teachers on their offices, at the corridors or during the lunch break (FI-Teacher 4).

The researcher observed the educators often collaborate during a school day. Especially during the lunch break school stakeholders were having lunch together, and they were discussing new educational practices and activities want to apply. However, the researcher after the third day of the observation realized that due to the physical layout of the classrooms, educators were spending most of their free time in their offices, which were located into the classrooms. Reflecting on the observation realized that teachers do not really have time to collaborate. However, the educators during the interviews, even if they mentioned the lack of time, they

highlighted the strong unofficial collaborative practices which exist in the school. With the end of the observation period, the researcher has understood that even if teachers' time is limited, teachers find time to collaborate and to interact with their colleagues during the day, by designing common projects, by combining the courses and by sharing their experiences with each other.

5.4.3.2 The Greek Case

In the Greek school, teachers and school entities admitted that true collaboration takes place unofficially, at the corridors and during the breaks. As it is mentioned above, classroom teachers follow the same guidelines, practice which provides them safety. In addition, true collaboration among the classroom teachers starts when the weekly curriculum is set. As there is no supervision and control from the leadership towards the teaching practices which teachers use, teachers discuss at the corridors outside of their classrooms educational activities, new educational approaches and they advise each other. In these terms, teachers often discuss what kind of activities have tried and how the students reacted to new teaching approaches. However, effective official and unofficial collaboration among the educators, it always depends on the people who collaborate each time. In addition, teachers explained that they could not be friend with all the school entities and they highlighted that they try to collaborate with those people who know that they can communicate.

We collaborate always and for everything. For example, we discuss what are we going to do in order to share our opinions and experiences, if someone wants to suggest something. We are collaborating always, during the weekly meeting but also during our breaks (GR-Teacher 1).

we usually meet each other outside the classrooms. In the halls. We discuss everything daily, especially when there is an issue. We support and respect each other a lot (GR-Teacher 2).

Following the field notes, the researcher realized that classroom teachers, unofficially, inform each other for their educational processes, they share their ideas and some educational material. They met outside the classrooms, during the breaks when they supervise the students or during the breaks that they have into the day. The atmosphere among the educators was open, but and the researcher identified that most of the educators interacted mostly with the teachers who had a more interpersonal relationship.

5.4.3.3 Comparison

In both cases, the school stakeholders use similar practices towards the unofficial collaborative practices. The main difference towards the unofficial collaborative practices can be found in

the leadership practices and the educators' freedom. In the Finnish school, the principal allows the educators to decide individually or in teams for the begging of a new project or for the application of a new idea both in an official and unofficial way. In the Greek school, on the other hand, even if educators are free to collaborate unofficially, they need to take permission from the principal to apply a new idea or project. In addition, due to the strict curriculum which is needed to be followed by the classroom teachers, it is difficult the classroom teachers to collaborate with the subject teachers. However, classroom teachers and subject teachers find ways to collaborate, unofficially, and get informed for students' progress.

5.4.4 Collaboration among educators from different departments

The third sub-theme which emerged from the data was characterized by the collaborative practices which exist among educators who teach different courses, such as foreign language teachers, physical educators, etc. Subject teachers, in both schools, mentioned that they would like to collaborate more with the classroom teachers.

5.4.4.1 The Finnish Case

In the Finnish school, even if collaboration is part of teachers and school stakeholders culture, due to teachers' autonomy and freedom, some groups of educators work mostly individual than collaboratively with classroom teachers. In more details, Special Needs teachers plan and design their courses together, as a team, and they collaborate closely with the classroom teachers who teach on the grades where they are responsible for. Also, foreign language teachers besides the fact that they collaborate a lot among them; with the classroom teachers, even if they have a lot of common projects, mentioned that they would like to have more time to design more activities together. However, they all stated that the lack of time in the school is a huge issue and they try to find ways to surpass it. The researcher realized that there are not different departments within the school but teachers from different subjects would like to have collaborated more with the classroom teachers, to design and develop together common projects. However, an excuse for this situation can be the lack of time, due to the university students who are in the school all the time. However, both the educators and the principal are aware of this issue, and they try to find more time for the educators to interact with each other.

I do not collaborate that much with classroom teachers, I collaborate mostly with the English teachers. However, a lot of times we have common projects with the classroom teachers (FI-Foreign Language Teacher).

But as a SEN teacher I collaborate mostly with the other two SEN teachers, and I can say that we have a great team, we plan everything together. We also collaborate a lot

with the classroom teachers, each of us is in charge for some grades and we are in a close collaboration with those teachers (FI-SEN Teacher).

5.4.4.2 The Greek Case

In the Greek school, due to the structure and the strict curriculum, where the classroom teachers have to follow, there is no official collaboration among the classroom teachers and the subject teachers. There are two obstacles towards the collaboration among classroom and subject teachers. Firstly, classroom teachers do not have enough time to work with the subject teachers, and secondly, due to the strict curriculum, which the classroom teachers have to follow, subject teachers, have to design their courses following the classroom teachers' weekly plan. The most difficult is the classroom teachers to collaborate with the foreign language teachers, as students on those courses are divided according to their level, and each class follows a different curriculum. Furthermore, as there is a common guideline from the school for all the classroom teachers of each cohort, classroom teachers can not arrange and develop individually a project with a subject teacher. However, when students change classroom, the responsible for the subject course teacher meet with the classroom teacher and they discuss unofficially for students' progress or issues. Moreover, there are times where classroom teachers combine their courses with the course of music or the arts & craft course in order for the students to gain a holistic knowledge on a topic. However, it is easier for other subject teachers such as the musician to collaborate and to organize a project with the other subject teachers, such as the English language teacher.

We know our students' progresses and we discuss if there is any issue. As I am the classroom teacher, the other teachers, music, English language they will come to me and they will inform me and we will discuss, individually. But we cannot plan together, we the classroom teachers have a very strict schedule (GR-Teacher 5).

It would be very helpful if we could have the opportunity to combine and plan together, however daily we discuss when the children are changing classroom for example. It would be nice if we have more meetings all together. It would be very helpful (GR-Arts & Craft Teacher)

I really feel that the teachers (English, German, physical education) and the class-teachers have to meet more often. Officially, we do not have meetings, unofficially we are trying it but still, I think that this is needed. Is happening but not organized, there is willingness for that, we have discussed millions of times, maybe the structure of the school does not let us. We do not have time (GR-German Language Teacher).

5.4.4.3 Comparison

In both schools, the practices towards the collaboration among educators from different departments could be improved. Due to the lack of time in both schools, the educators do not collaborate as much as they would like to. However, there is a difference between the two

schools. In the Finnish school, as teachers can plan and design individually what they will teach and when the only obstacle is the time. Classroom teachers collaborate with subject teachers during the official and the unofficial meetings but they would like to have more time to design and plan together common projects. On the other hand, in the Greek school, except of the unofficial meetings, the classroom teachers do not meet with the subject teachers and the common course development seems very difficult to be achieved as the classroom teachers cannot change their weekly plan due to the structure of the school. The researcher realized that in the Finnish school, the educators collaborate and they try to find ways to collaborate more, while in the Greek school there is no official collaboration among teachers from different departments.

5.4.5 Collaboration among classroom teachers who teach in different grades

The last sub-theme, which emerged from inductive analysis, was characterized by the existing collaborative practices among classroom teachers who teach in different grades.

5.4.5.1 The Finnish Case

In Finland, classroom teachers during the official and unofficial meetings design and plan together activities, which aim in combining students from different grades in the educational activities. Teachers explained that when they plan common courses with teachers from different grades the students really enjoy it. The purpose of this practice is for the students to develop their social skills. The older students teach and guide the younger students and the younger students feel more confident for themselves by presenting their work to the older students. Teachers, on the other hand, find very interesting to work with a teacher who teaches in different grades and who follow a different curriculum, as they can share their experiences, they can learn from each other and they can develop their teaching practices by reflecting on each other work.

There is an agreement for the 6th graders. Once every 2 weeks we have a common course, we read together and the children present what they have done during this period of time. Alternatively, we have a common course with the 2nd grade. 6graders and 2nd graders are working together. The older help the younger children (FI-Teacher 3).

I am not collaborating only with the 6th grade teachers, I collaborate a lot with the 5th grade teachers, as well as with the 2nd grade teachers, and the 4th grade teachers. Ha-ha-ha. We work all together (FI-Teacher 4).

5.4.5.2 The Greek Case

In Greek school classroom teachers who teach in different grades do not collaborate with each other. Classroom teachers mentioned that the weekly curriculum, which is needed to be taught, is so strict that they do not have time to collaborate with classroom teachers of different grades.

Other teachers mentioned that due to the different educational material there is no need to work together or to have common meetings during the year. Finally, some teachers found very interesting the possibility of having common meeting often as they believe that there would be an opportunity to share their ideas and learn from each other.

Every class has specific educational material for the year, so I cannot ask a teacher who is teaching on the 5th grade for example, we are doing totally different things (GR-Teacher 1).

mm. No. We do not discuss all together, only if we have an issue. However, if we had meetings all together it could be good, very good to hear other opinions as well (GR-Teacher 4).

5.4.5.3 Comparison

Following the collaborative practices among classroom teachers who teach in different grades, it is easy to be identified that the two schools have different practices. In Finland, collaboration in all the levels it is easier to be achieved as the teachers have power and no one supervise their work. On the other hand, in Greece, collaboration among classroom teachers who teach in different grades does not exist. However, teachers' interaction generates new ideas and motivate the educators.

5.5 Leadership support

The theme generated from the literature of the theoretical model of PLC. As leaders in PLCs' have to set the guidelines, and to support and empower the members' of the school community, they play a crucial role. Leaders are responsible for creating the required conditions for the model of PLC to flourish (Saunders, 1999). Except for the administrative tasks, leaders have to support the educators by being around them all the time, for them to understand the support from the leadership team. By encouraging and empower the educators, leaders can create a learning environment for the school stakeholders and educators would feel free to suggest new things (Joyce, 2004).

5.5.1 The Finnish Case

In Finland, all the interviewers emphasized to the freedom that is given to them by the principal towards the suggestion and the application of new ideas. There is a culture among the stakeholders of the school where all encourage and support each other. For the establishment of this culture, the principal has a key role. He trusts his colleagues and the entities of the school trust him. Moreover, even if the principal is busy during the day, he always finds time to interact with the educators. Finally, shared leadership, where all the school stakeholders have power

and they are responsible for specific tasks, create a supportive environment where all the educators feel unique.

The principal is very supportive and I feel that we are equal (FI-Teacher 3).

Principal encourages us, my colleagues encourage me and I encourage my colleagues. This is what we are doing (FI-SEN Teacher).

5.5.2 The Greek Case

In the Greek school, the leadership team supports the Human Resource of the school in a different way. Teachers admit that the principal is always available for them to discuss any issue, unless if she has a meeting or an appointment with parents. Even if they mentioned that the principal is supportive, they highlighted that the decision-making process, usually, is time-consuming. This delay has as consequence teachers' productivity decrease. Teachers mentioned as obstacles in suggesting and applying new ideas, firstly, bureaucracy and secondly, their colleague's reactions, as some of them do not want to increase the daily workload. The researcher realized that educators do not often suggest new ideas due the extra workload and due to the leadership control and the permission practices of the school.

However, the principal appreciates new suggestions and tries to empower the educators. Similarly, the owners, promote the suggestion of new, innovative ideas and they try to be close to the teachers for them to feel supported and empowered. Owners mentioned that even if they want the teachers to talk to them directly, they have the impression that educators do not talk to them due to the hierarchy that exists in the school. Usually, educators will talk to the principal, and then the principal will discuss with the owners. Furthermore, they mentioned that they feel that classroom teachers are competitive with each other and that when someone has an idea, the rest teachers would feel that he or she suggesting something in order to take the credits from someone. This situation sometimes brings teachers isolation from the team. They also explained that even if they want to apply innovative ideas, this competition among the teachers is an obstacle and this is the reason behind the fact that all the classroom teachers have to follow the same guidelines. This strategy aims to the establishment of friendly working environments and to the avoider of some educator's isolation.

Following the field notes, the researcher observed that both the principal and the educational coordinators were outside with the teachers and the students during at least one out of two breaks. They were talking and interacting both with the teachers and the students and they were trying to establish a friendly climate among the school stakeholders. This physical contact, instead of them being in their offices, promotes support and creates a caring environment.

But at the end of the day, after some time some of our ideas will be applied. Because "why are you doing this, why this new approach?". In order for something new to begin, they need to understand that this idea will help the school and it will have some benefits (GR-Teacher 4).

Usually I will take the permission. But a lot of times I have a last minute idea, and I am not even trying to take permission because I know this long process. Or some other times because I had a last minute idea and I apply it, and I will listen afterwards, "why you did it? (GR-Teacher 5).

mm, no I am trying to be around, I am always outside during the breaks, it is more unofficial. I talk with them and I am listening, their anxiety, their fears, and I am trying to solve their problems. (GR-Coordinator 2).

For example, maybe someone will have an idea to do something new and he/she will not be able to apply it. This is something that I am trying to change it. Sometimes administration do not let a single class to do something if the rest of the cohort will not do it. There is a culture among them, I cannot understand it, where they have to do something altogether. There is no freedom for one teacher to do something differently, is because the others do not want other teacher to take the credits? I do not know. Usually new ideas are not applied if they are not all agreed (GR-Owner 2).

5.5.3 Comparison

Leadership practices towards school entities support can be found in both schools. In the Finnish school, teachers are free to decide and to act individually, a practice which increase their productivity. Also, the principal is always available for the teachers usually unofficially, as he always has lunch with the educators and the other school stakeholders. Furthermore, except the principal, the educators support and respect each other. In the Greek school, on the other hand, the leadership support the educators by controlling them. The principal and the owners have identified that there are some issues on the educators' relationships and they have decided to keep them all on the same level, in order to avoid possible conflicts. The teachers, on the other hand, would like more support from the leadership but they appreciate that the principal is always available for them.

Following the PLC model, the Finnish school meets the requirements as the leadership is shared and all the school entities feel equal and free. The Greek school even if the leadership team has a lot of practices (mostly unofficial) towards educators support, the control and the fact that all the educators have to follow the same guidelines, from the one hand make the teachers feel safe, on the other hand, reduce teachers productivity and creativity.

5.6 Teacher's autonomy

The theme "teacher's autonomy" generated from the theoretical model of the Professional Learning Communities. The theme was characterized by the leadership practices, which can

be found in the schools and by those practices, which support teacher's autonomy by giving them the freedom to decide individually for their students, the teaching material and the educational activities that they desire to design, without taking permission from the leadership team of the school. Teaching is a creating process, and by giving freedom to teachers, their imagination and productivity are not reduced (Nias et al., 1989). However, this practice requires trust (Ainscow & West, 1994). The researcher, through interviewing and observing the school stakeholder in their working environment identified the levels of teacher's autonomy in both schools.

5.6.1 The Finnish case

Following the leadership practices towards the autonomy of teachers in the Finnish school, the researcher realized that all the interviewees highlighted that they feel extremely free to decide what they will teach and in which order; which books they will use, and what kind of activities they will do with their students. The curriculum that is needed to be taught during a school year is set from the national curriculum. However, teachers have the freedom to decide in which order they will teach each subject. All the teachers, both the classroom and the subject teachers are informed by their colleagues for their work. They discuss and reflect to each other experience but, at the same time, they are free to decide individually for their students. The principal, during the interview, explained that he trusts all the school stakeholders and he mentioned that there is no need for them to inform him towards their decisions. Even if the principal is informed about every issue or new idea, which is applied in the school, educators do not inform him in order to ask for permission. They have the freedom to decide on educational issues without principal's supervision. Teachers have to take principal's permission only when their decisions include a financial cost. In those cases, teachers have to inform and ask the principal before they will order extra educational material. However, according to teachers, the principal had never denied something to the teachers.

Following the field notes, the researcher during the observation period understood what the teachers were explaining by saying that they have the ultimate freedom. Firstly, since the observation took place a week before the Halloween holiday, the researcher realized that schools' classroom teachers decide to start a competition on the school. All the students had to decorate their classrooms, and at the end of the week, the elected critical student committee would vote for the best-decorated classroom. The students decided this activity and the teachers, without taking permission from the principal, helped the students to apply their idea, by providing them with enough amount of time for the preparations.

Furthermore, during the observation period, the researcher was booking the appointments with the interviews individually. Educators were checking their schedule and they book an appointment with the researcher without asking her if she had taken permission from the principal. Both examples underline teacher's autonomy in the school as in both cases educators they were free to decide on the first example to run a weekly project for the whole school and to organize their schedule alone without administrative support. In addition, the teachers and the principal said,

I am leader in my classroom. I am deciding when, what, how and why, me and my students (FI-Teacher 3).

I can be the teacher that I want to be, I do not need permission. I do not have to take permission or to ask the principal (FI-Teacher 4).

I have the freedom to decide what I want to do, when and how. Of course we have the national curriculum and I am following it but the teaching methods, the educational practices, the activities, the books and the activities are all my responsibility (FI-Foreign Language Teacher)

In Finland every teacher is fully responsible for all the students in his/her class and for the educational material that they want to use. I am not going to their classroom to observe what they are doing or how. I am not here to tell them how you will do this or that. Is all about pedagogical freedom (FI-Principal)

5.6.2 The Greek case

On the other hand, the leadership practices on the Greek school are central. Teachers are free to decide on their own the teaching methods that they will use, but they are not free to decide individually towards the educational material. What is taught to students is the same for the whole cohort. Teachers need to take permissions almost for everything. For example, if they want to teach within the campus but outside their classroom, teachers have to inform the administration office of the primary school and to take permission from the principal. This leadership practice aims to school's functionality. Some teachers explained to the researcher that those practices, usually, do not reduce their productivity and that they understand why those practices exist to the school. The main goal of the control that exists is for the school to work as a whole and to be more functional. Following the interviews, teachers do not have the freedom to do something which is not planned both from all the classroom teachers of each cohort and the principal. Even though educators have the freedom to ask and suggest new things, many teachers mentioned that if they have a last minute idea, they would not ask the principal or the educational coordinators for permission, as they know that the process of taking permissions is time-consuming.

On the other hand, the principal explained to the researcher that she is very interested in new ideas, and suggestions. Furthermore, the principal underlined the importance of control, as a way to protect teachers from taking the wrong decision by choosing to do something that is for example against on the culture of the school. The principal during the interview was not judgmental, as she understands that teaching is not a simple process, but she underlined the possibility of teachers making mistakes. Interesting for the researcher was the owners' perspective, who claimed that they want the teachers to feel free. However, they believe that teachers feel safe under this control. Both the owners and the principal underlined that there is a competition among the teachers and they do not want someone to do different things to avoid possible conflicts with their colleagues. They explained that some classroom teachers believe that if someone suggests something new or do something innovative, he or she did it to differentiate from the others to take the credits for someone. Both the owners and the principal described this situation, but no one could understand why this is happening. Moreover, the owners want the teachers to have more autonomy, but through the conversation with the researcher, they admitted that something is not communicated well. Furthermore, this control exists for all the different departments of the school and it aims to the better coordination among the departments.

Following the field notes, the researcher realized the authorization, which exists in the school and the central administrative system from the first day of the observation period. During the first day, the principal asked the researcher how many interviews want to conduct with classroom teachers to give the order to the secretaries to book an appointment with teachers whom the principal will choose. At this point, the researcher was not able to book the appointments with the teachers individually. The next days, the researcher asked the secretary to book an appointment with a teacher, the secretary firstly took permission from the principal, and then she booked the appointment. In addition, for the researcher to talk with people from other departments, the principal had to inform them about the researcher and then the researcher was able to book an appointment and discuss with educators from different departments. Finally, from the third day, the researcher was with the teachers and the other stakeholders during the breaks. When the researcher was asking a school entity to conduct an interview, educators first was asking the researcher if she had taken permission and then they were answering positively. After the unofficial agreement with the educators, the researcher was booking an appointment with them through the secretary. In more details,

Usually I will take permission. But a lot of times I have a last minute idea, and I am not ever trying to take permission because I know this long process. Or some other times I had a last minute idea, I apply it and then I listen, "why you did it?" (GR-Teacher 4).

I would never dare to take children without taking permission and go outside. But I am working so many years under that system and I am used to it. Maybe sometimes it stress me, but I have used to this practice (GR-Musician).

Yes, many times there are complaints from the majority, that we (administration office) reduce their creativity, their imagination. I will not reduce my creativity because I have to take permission. In addition, many times there are teachers who had told me, "you know I wanted to do this and this and I did it." And I am very happy when this is happening. However, they do not need permission for their teaching practices. They need permission for example, when they want to show a video to the classroom. There are situations where permission is for their safety. We are all human beings, sometimes, we cannot understand the whole picture. That is why we are checking. When I say no, it is not because I want enemies here, or because I want to reduce their creativity. It is because by having the whole picture on my mind I can understand that you will may not have the time, it is not relevant to the educational goals etc. (GR-Principal).

For example, maybe someone will have an idea to do something new and he/she will not be able to apply it. This is something that I am trying to change it. Sometimes administration do not let a class to do something if the rest of the cohort will not do it. There is a culture among them, I cannot understand it, where they have to do something altogether. There is no freedom for one teacher to do something differently, is because the others do not want for other teacher to take the credits? I do not know. Usually new ideas are not applied if they are not all agreed (GR-Owner 2).

Because the administration is central. There is no way for something to happen without permission. Teacher have to take a permission from the administration office for everything that they want to do (GR-Secretary 1).

5.6.3 Comparison

Following this theme, there are clear differences between the two schools. While in Finland the teachers have their absolute autonomy, in Greece the system is central. The leadership practices towards teachers' autonomy in Finnish school meet the characteristic of the Professional Learning Community, while the practices of the Greek school do not meet the PLC characteristic. The leadership practices in the Greek school are strict, but the above-mentioned supervision is not applied rewarding control; it aims at schools' better productivity. The researcher realized that there is a trust issue in the Greek school as from the one hand, the principal and the owners want the teachers to be more autonomous and to feel free to take their own decisions; but from the other hand, they do not want to change the leadership practices towards teachers' autonomy and control. They also understand that educators are afraid to take the responsibilities of their actions. Furthermore, teachers complain on the owners that their creativity is sometimes reduced, but on the same time, the owners are also aware that educators

feel safe by following the same guidelines. The researcher realized that there is a trust issue among the school teachers and the leadership team. Another issue is that even if the owners know the whole picture of the school they cannot find a way to communicate their will towards teachers' autonomy, both with the principal and the teachers.

5.7 Distributed Leadership

The theme emerged by the characteristics of the Professional Learning Community and it is characterized by the practices which are used from leaders, firstly, to involve school entities in the decision-making process and secondly, to delegate power to the staff and to divide the workload (Gibb, 1958; Spillane, 2006).

5.7.1 The Finnish Case

In the Finnish school, the workload is divided among the established teams of educators. Additionally, every teacher belongs to one or two teams who are responsible for specific projects or tasks. Teachers mentioned that there are teams who are responsible for the Information and Communication Technology of the school, for some educational projects, which involve students from all the grades and a group of educators who is responsible for the National Curriculum development and application on the school. The individual teams inform the school stakeholders of their progresses and actions. Educators can advise the teams and share their ideas towards teams' projects. Staff members who do not teach are also participating in teams and they are involved in the decision-making process and in the school leadership. Towards the decision-making process, the school stakeholders have to agree with the teams' suggestions and there is no need for the teams to take permission from the principal in order to apply the collective decisions. Following the educators' interviews, the principal highlighted that school entities do not have to ask for his advice or his permission to decide something. He is informed of the activities that take place in the school and he supports all the school stakeholders by providing them freedom and autonomy, by aiming to school's functionality. In addition, following the field notes, during the meeting, the Information and Communication Technology team presented a training course that was provided to educators by them. After the presentation, the staff of the school and the principal formed teams of four or five people and they went to the classrooms to apply what they have learned from the presentation. Furthermore, during the meeting the responsible team for the curriculum design and development, informed the educators for their progress and asked for feedback and new ideas.

In this school, we are working into groups. There is one group responsible for the new curriculum development; I am part of a team who is running an environmental project.

We are discussing our progress all the time, during the meetings, during the day. We are asking the others, the other teams ask us and is going like that. The principal is informed but he is not telling us what to do (FI-Teacher 4).

I am part of a smaller group, which take care of the computers and the technology in general. If there is a problem with classroom computers teachers will call me (FI-Teacher 6).

We have a lot of team in our school, and everyone is part of 1 to 3 teams. We can delegate the responsibilities and everyone is involved in decision-making process. Sometimes they ask me, some others not. Usually they are asking me when they want to buy something (FI-Principal).

5.7.2 The Greek Case

In the Greek school, the process for the decision-making process is central. The owners, the principal and the leadership team are responsible for everything that occurs in the school. The responsible teacher of each course designs the weekly curriculum and then he or she discusses it with the educational coordinator of the primary school. The principal will give the final approval. The approved weekly curriculum will be shared and discussed with the classroom teachers during the weekly meeting. Following the interviews, during the meeting, the teachers review the weekly curriculum and if it is needed, they would change together with the principal some topics. However, the interviewers mentioned that rarely they change something. Furthermore, educators emphasized to the processes for a project design and development. Usually, when a teacher has an idea for a new project, he or she discuss it with the principal, and if the principal agrees then the teacher with a person from the primary school leadership team try to find other educators who are interested in the project design. If they do not find, then the leadership team try to combine a team. In these teams, a person from a leadership team has to be included and the principal has to supervise often the teams' process. Teachers are not responsible for specific tasks; the educational coordinators supervise the educational projects and the weekly planning for the teaching curriculum, but the final permission and approval will come from the principal. Moreover, schools' entities who are not teaching, such as the doctor and the secretaries, are not responsible for any project or specific educational task. In addition, secretaries have administrative tasks. The rest of the educators are not involved in the curriculum design and development processes, and they participate in educational projects only if the projects are in their field of expertise. Usually, the school offers extra education to educators by inviting guest lecturers. School entities cannot design a seminar or an educational project individually or in teams if there is no supervision from the leadership team and the principal.

First the teacher is taking permission in order to run the project. After that he/she asks the other teachers if they are interested and if someone is then we start combining the team. Otherwise, the administration office will suggest someone who can have more education on the topic of the project etc. (GR-Teacher 2).

For example I am the responsible for the coordination for the whole cohort. So, what I am doing is to plan a week and then I discuss it with primary's school educational coordinator, who is discussing it with the principal and the educational coordinator for the Greek language. So when we are having our meeting .. actually no one never told me to change something (GR-Teacher 5).

Because the administration is central. There is no way for something to happen without permission. Teacher have to take a permission from the administration office for everything that they want to do (GR-Secretary 1).

5.7.3 Comparison

As the school stakeholders work in teams and they can make decisions without advising the principal, distributed leadership can be found in the Finnish school. On the other hand, in the Greek school, the leadership is central. However, in the Greek school, some elements can be used as a foundation towards the development of the leadership practices to reach distributed leadership. The decision- making process in the Finnish school is a collective process, where all the peoples' voices can be heard and all the school entities are responsible for specific tasks and practices, which aim to schools' functionality. On the other hand, in the Greek school even if the classroom teachers have some responsibilities, they cannot decide without taking permission from the principal. Furthermore, in the Greek school except for the classroom teachers and the educational coordinators, educators from different educational subjects are not responsible for designing and developing educational projects and programs.

5.8 Existence of an open and supportive climate

For this theme, "trust and open positive climate", the leadership strategies towards the establishment of an open, friendly and positive climate among the school stakeholders will be discussed. The leadership team plays a crucial role in building the right conditions, firstly by empowering the school educators by their physical presence in the school areas; and by supporting the school entities to suggest new ideas, and to ask for advises, both from the leadership team and from other educators (Schneider, 2002).

5.8.1 The Finnish case

In the Finnish school, the staff members explained that they are free to express themselves. They have the freedom to talk both with their colleagues and the principal whenever they want to if the others are available. There is a culture in the school, where the teachers could move freely in the school, the doors were open during the breaks, as well as during the lessons.

Teachers explained that when they want to discuss an issue with their colleagues if they are not available, they book an unofficial appointment following their schedule. Usually, teachers are informed about their colleagues' daily schedule, and thus they can arrange their meetings by following both their own and others schedule. Following the field notes, the researcher observed that principals' office door was always closed but due to the fact that walls had been replaced by windows, teachers could easily understand if he is available when they want to meet him. When the principal was alone in his office, the teachers were feeling free to ask, advice or talk to him about any issue that they could have. Teachers were free to visit their colleague's classrooms and offices, as well. The principal had created an open culture among the school entities, where everyone was responsible for each own classroom and they were feeling supported both from the principal and their colleagues.

Here in our school everything is easy, we can talk to each other, we can share opinions, and we do that a lot (FI-Teacher 3).

I feel that in our school everything works very nice. We are working together, the atmosphere is open and we share our thoughts (FI-Teacher 4).

5.8.2 The Greek case

In the Greek school, even if the leadership is central and the teachers need to take permission to do something, which is not arranged, the teachers mentioned that the principal is supportive and accessible. Teachers cannot talk directly with the principal only when she is in a meeting with parents. Some teachers mentioned that the principal really tries to keep the balances as she has so many task and responsibilities during the day. Teachers described a positive climate where they feel free to discuss with the leadership team for every issue that can be emerged. Furthermore, the owners support and empower the principal and the leadership team to create the necessary conditions for the teacher to feel free to express their ideas, their suggestions and their complaints, as well. However, even if they are satisfied with this climate among the school stakeholders and the leadership team, they mentioned that teachers do not talk directly to them and they highlighted that they feel that teachers do not talk directly to them as they feel that they do not want to go against the school hierarchy.

No, no the doors are always open. Only if she has an appointment with parents she cannot be around. So when I am looking for her but she has a meeting, is not always possible to reach her (GR-Teacher 5).

Yes, they are supporting me, both the school and my colleagues. The school wants, fantasy, creativity, productivity, new ideas, new suggestions (GR-Arts & Craft Teacher).

In addition, during the observation period, the principal explained to the researcher from the beginning, that if she wants to understand what is happening in the school then she had to stay in the central office of the primary school. Due to the fact that the system was central, and the teachers need to inform and take permission from the principal for any new educational application, the researcher gained a holistic understanding by being at the central office of the primary school. The principal was always available for the educators unless she had an appointment. Also, both the principal and the educational coordinator were outside during at least at one out of two breaks to communicate with students and teachers in an unofficial way.

5.8.3 Comparison

In both schools, the school stakeholders feel free to talk with both the principal and their colleagues. Principals from both schools are busy during a school day, but they find time to interact with their colleagues and to show them that they support them towards any emerged issue or consideration. Both the Finnish and the Greek principal have their offices open for the educators, and it is easy for them to reach them.

5.9 Support towards educators professional development

This theme emerged from the characteristics of the theoretical model of PLC. One more leadership practice for supporting the school staff is the leaders of the school to provide training courses and educational seminars to the school stakeholders (Joyce, 2004; Bezzina, 2006). To empower the teachers, the leadership team of the school can offer to teachers' opportunities for professional development.

5.9.1 The Finnish case

Reflecting on the interviews and the field notes, the researcher understood that the leadership team of the school supports the educators as it offers training courses and seminars, which aim to teachers' professional development. Both the teachers and the principal explained the strategies that they follow for their extra education. The principal is regularly informed, especially from the university for the offered seminars. During the meetings, or through individual conversations with the teachers, the principal informs the teachers for the offered training courses and seminars. Furthermore, if a teacher finds individually an interesting course, he or she can also suggest it to the principal. Tuition fees are covered by the school, as well as the expenses for educator's transportation when it is needed. In addition, during the observation period, two teachers had two days leave to attend a seminar in another city. Also, as the school is teachers' training school and belongs to the university, it organizes seminars which are offered to other schools.

The principal organizes everything, he knows what kind of seminar are offered from the university, from the municipality and he asks us and if we are interested we participating (FI-Teacher 3).

We do not force them to attend educational seminars, I know their interests, if I believe that something will suit to someone I am suggesting it in person, otherwise I inform them during our meeting (FI-Principal)

5.9.2 The Greek case

The Greek school follows the same strategies towards the offered further education to the school stakeholders. When the owners are informed for a seminar, they inform the secretaries, and the principal and those inform the teachers. Sometimes, teachers suggest training programs, which are interested in attending. Furthermore, the owners invite guest lectures to present educational training programs or to inform teachers for new innovative ideas in education. When there are tuition fees, usually, the school cover the half and the other half is paid by the interested educators, while some other times, the school covers the whole amount of money. During the observation period, the researcher realized that the leadership team support the extra education as one of the educators was in leave as she was attending a course at the university.

If I want to develop myself with extra seminars, training or educational courses I am totally free to suggest it. For example, some Fridays I am not here as I am attending a course at the university. I suggested it and they accepted it (GR-Speech therapist).

Also, we are trying to organize some seminar, we invite people to talk, for example, for the learning difficulties. Also, if there are tuition fee the school pays half of it (GR-Owner 1).

5.9.3 Comparison

Both schools meet the requirement for a school to be a Professional Learning Community as they both offer extra education to the school staff during the school year. The main difference between the two school is that the Finnish school pays the tuition fees in every case, while the Greek school, usually share the expenses with the educators. The most critical aspect though, rewarding PLC is that school entities have the opportunity to suggest to the leadership team a seminar, or a course that they want to attend and the leadership team takes into consideration their will.

5.10 Schools physical layout and collaborative practices

The theme, *schools physical layout and collaborative practices* emerged from the theoretical model of the Professional Learning Community, was labelled and represent the ways where the physical layout of the school promotes the unofficial collaboration among the school entities. Common areas, and coffee rooms in the school for the educators to collaborate freely

formed this theme. For the analysis of the theme, the researcher used her field notes, the interviews and the visual data.

5.10.1 The Finnish case

During the interviews, Finnish educators mentioned the physical layout of the school and how it promotes the unofficial collaboration and the teamwork among the teachers, even if they were not asked from the researcher. Interviewers underlined the common areas, and the physical layout of the school, especially, outside the classrooms promotes collaboration among the educators. Teachers from the Finnish school said,

Is the school building, here we are all on the same floor. It is very good for us to have those tables outside, it really helps. It is very easy for us to go to each other classroom and ask or say something (FI-Teacher 6).

What helps us very much are those tables outside our classrooms. The classrooms of the entire cohort are around those tables and we (the teachers) are close to each other. (FI-Teacher 7)

Following the field notes, the researcher observed that all the classrooms of each cohort are located together on the same floor. Each cohort is composed of three classes, which are together, side by side on each floor. Outside the classrooms, there are desks, tables and chairs for the students and the teachers to collaborate. In addition, almost in every corner of the school, there are tables, poofs or couches for the teachers and the students to work together. The science and the wood laboratories are located on the first floor, while the computer laboratory is located on the third floor.

Finally, the coffee room that is also the meeting room is consisted of couches, meeting tables, and chairs. In addition, the school provides coffee to the staff, and the purpose of the meeting room is for the school stakeholders to have a place where they can work in a friendly atmosphere while they discuss for educational or not issues officially or unofficially. The school staff can spend their free time and socialize on a daily basis. However, even if the existence of the coffee/meeting room aims in the promotion of collaboration, during the observation period, the researcher realized that educators were not visited the coffee room during the day. Moreover, occasionally they were two or three people talking and having their coffee, but usually, it was empty due to teachers' lack of time. However, during the weekly meeting, the coffee room was crowded. Before the meeting, some teachers were making coffee, while others were sitting on the couches and discussing in a very friendly atmosphere.

5.10.1.1 Visual data

- Classrooms' corridors



- Areas from the school for students and staff collaboration





- Meeting room- Coffee room





5.10.2 The Greek case

Teachers from the Greek school also mentioned that the schools' architecture promotes collaboration. In addition, the desks and the chairs outside the classrooms at the corridors support the unofficial collaborative practices among teachers. In more details, the Greek teachers mentioned,

We usually meet each other outside the classrooms. In the halls. We discuss everything daily, especially when there is an issue. We support and respect each other a lot (GR-Teacher 2).

Collaboration outside our classes, is much more functional and productive we have those desks on the corridors. We can talk, change something planned etc. (GR-Teacher 3).

Following the field notes, the researcher observed that all the classrooms from each grade were located on the same floor. Also, tables and chairs were located outside the classrooms at the corridors. However, reflecting on the field notes, the researcher realized that even if each grade was located on the same floor, one class from the third, fourth and fifth grade were located on different floors. For example, on the second floor was located the second grade and one class from the fourth grade, while the rest classrooms of the fourth grade were located on the second floor. Even if most of the teachers mentioned how much the physical layout of the school promotes the unofficial collaboration practices, the researcher was more than interesting to understand how isolated the teachers of the classes, which are on different floors are. Following

the interviews, teachers did not feel isolated. Instead, they feel that the existence of the desks outside the classrooms promote collaboration and support unofficially, their work. Except for the common areas outside the classrooms, in the school, there is a coffee room for the teachers from all the educational level, a room for the teachers to correct tests and exercises during their breaks and a central office for the primary school. The central office of the primary school consisted of three rooms. On the first room are located the desks of the secretaries, on the left, there are two offices; one for each educational coordinator and on the right of the secretary's office is located the office of the principal, which is also the meeting room. The principal's office/ meeting room consisted of the principal's desk, a couch, a meeting table and chairs.

During the meeting, the leadership team offers water to the teachers. Before the meeting, the teachers sat on the table and started talking in a very friendly way. They were laughing, and they were talking about some educational practices that they have tried during the week.

5.10.2.1 Visual data

- Classrooms' corridors



- Office for teachers to correct exercises and tests



- The central office of the primary school- Secretary's office



- The meeting room- Principals' office



5.10.3 Comparison

The schools seem to have almost the same physical layout, as tables and chairs can be found in both schools outside the classrooms. The difference is that the Finnish school provides more special configured areas to promote teachers and students' collaboration. However, the Finnish school consisted only of a primary school. On the other hand, the Greek school also hosts the lower and upper secondary school on the same building. In these terms, it is easier for the common areas of the Finish school to be designed towards the promotion of collaboration, in comparing with the Greek where the leadership team has to find a balance among the school stakeholders of all the educational levels.

6 Discussion of the Results

The purpose of the qualitative study was to identify if the selected for the study schools, were working under the theoretical model of PLC. A model, which set at the core of the school the stakeholders of the school and the collaboration practices among them to support students learning and development (Stoll et al., 2006). Also, this study aimed to detect the leadership practices which are applied in both schools rewarding the PLC model and how those promote collaboration. Finally, the comparative study sought to examine which aspects from the one school can be implemented to the other. In this chapter, the answers to the research questions, recommendations following the data analysis for both schools, and the leadership practices that can be learned from the one school to the other will be discussed.

6.1 Can the characteristics of the PLC model be found within the Finnish and the Greek school?

The first research question investigates if the schools work under the PLC model and if the characteristics of this model can be found in the schools. The researcher decided to analyze fewer characteristics than the existence, as a lot of features overlap with each other.

6.1.1 Shared Mission & Collective Responsibility

Shared vision and mission can be found in both schools. The annual plan and mission in both schools are set at the beginning of the year after some meeting with all the stakeholders of the school and after reflecting on the National Curriculum. However, developing a shared vision within a school content is an ongoing process (Louis et al., 1995).

In the Finnish school, during the academic year, all the school stakeholders participate in the weekly meetings to share their ideas and to reflect on their educational progresses. As the process of developing a shared vision and mission regarding of PLC has to be a collective responsibility, Finnish educators, officially or unofficially, are involved in developing the mission and the vision of the school weekly, by expressing their opinion not only towards educational issues but also towards the school policies and practices decision (Newman & Wehlage, 1995). Following those practices, Finnish educators are active members of the school community.

Similarly, in the Greek school even if developing the annual mission of the school is a collective responsibility, during the academic year, there are no established meetings where all the school entities are involved; situation, which isolates the educators who belong in different

departments. Even if the vision and the mission of the school are set by all the educators, the lack of regular meetings can be seen as an obstacle towards the development of the sense of the collective responsibility.

6.1.2 Collaboration, Cooperation & Reflective Professional Inquiry

The second characteristic of the PLCs', *collaboration*, can be identified in both schools but it is applied in different ways. Collaborative practices include the existence of reflective professional inquiry (Louis et al., 1995), as well. Reflective professional inquiry requires reflective dialogue, collective planning and development of the educational material and application of new ideas (Stewart, 2014; Southworth, 2000; Gleddie & Robinson, 2017; Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Hord, 1997).

Established collaborative practices can be found in both schools. However, in the Finnish school, collaborative practices include all the staff, while in the Greek school, collaborative practices can be found in groups. The educators of each department collaborate with each other, but educators from different departments do not often meet all together. In addition, the non-teaching staff is not participating in the meetings. Moreover, the educational material that is used by the teachers is not developed through collective activities but from one classroom teacher at the time. Following the results of the study and the interviewers' voices, the researcher realized that true collaboration could be found among people who have interpersonal relationships. In these terms, the researcher realized that the practices that were described by the school entities are applied in terms of cooperation and not of collaboration.

Even if established collaborative practices can be found in both schools, only in the Finnish school are applied rewarding the PLC model. In the Greek school, official collaborative practices seem to exist mostly, for the teachers to feel safe and for the school to follow the same directions. However, unofficial collaborative practices that exist among the educators of the school seems to follow the guidelines of the PLC model.

6.1.3 Mutual Trust

Trust, as the cornerstone of the PLC model, has to be found in every practice and activity among the school entities in schools as PLC. Trust can be considered as a vital requirement for the existence of true collaboration, of teachers' autonomy and the development of good and friendly relationships among the school stakeholders (Bolam et al., 2005; Stroll et al., 2006). In the Finnish school, due to the existence of the "culture of trust" among the school stakeholders, the characteristic is applied. On the other hand, the Greek school does not meet

the feature of the PLC model. The leadership style in the Greek school seems to be centralized, as all the decisions come from the owners and the principal (Avdela, 2000; Zambeta, 2000). Finally, a trust issue was identified, firstly, among the educators and secondly among the classroom teachers and the principal.

6.2 Does the leadership team supports the human resources in the Finnish and the Greek schools rewarding PLC?

Leadership, leadership support and the role of the principal in developing or transforming a school into a Professional Learning Community play a crucial role (Bezzina, 2006; Joyce, 2004; Stewart, 2014; Gleddie & Robison, 2017). The second research question examines the leadership team of both schools and the support, which is offered to the Human Resource of the schools rewarding PLC. Following the literature, leaders and principals have to establish specific strategies and to apply specific leadership styles, for a school to work as a Professional Learning Community (Saunders, 1999).

6.2.1 Distributed Leadership & Supportive Climate

The principal of the Finnish school had established a *supportive climate and distributed leadership*. The principal had given power to the established small team of educators who are responsible for specific tasks in the school, in these terms; the leadership model of distributed leadership is truly applied. Moreover, the principal by establishing weekly meetings, where all the school entities are free to suggest new ideas and activities both towards the educational and the non-educational issues, had created a supportive climate where all the entities can express themselves freely, in both official and unofficial ways.

On the other hand, the leadership team of the Greek school follows different leadership strategies. As the principal and the owners are responsible for every decision-making process, and the teachers are not responsible for other tasks, except the teaching processes; the leadership style of the school is centralized (Avdela, 2000; Zambeta, 2000). The weekly meetings and the easy access that the educators have to the principal can be considered as elements for developing a supportive climate, which exist in the school. However, there is a contradictory situation, as from the one hand the leadership team wants the educators to suggest new ideas but on the other hand the educators by knowing the long process from the suggestion till the application of the idea, they avoid to suggest new ideas.

6.2.2 Educators' autonomy or Educators' authorization

Following the literature of the PLC theoretical model, autonomy has to be provided to educators (Ainscow & West, 1994). By giving autonomy and freedom to educators, they would be more productive and creative, and they would feel respected (Louis et al., 1995).

In the Finnish school, the school stakeholders have the ultimate freedom to decide individually towards their courses and students, without any supervision from the principal. Mutual trust can be found at the core of this established practice. Without showing and having trust to the school staff, leaders and principal cannot give the ultimate freedom to the school stakeholders.

On the other hand, in the Greek school, instead of autonomy, authorization prevails. As educators cannot decide on their own for their students without taking permission from the principal; and as all the classroom teachers of each cohort have to follow the same curriculum, which is supervised by the principal, educators do not have any freedom. Having the choice to suggest new ideas, without having the freedom to apply those ideas without taking permission from the principal, does not give to educators the autonomy, which is required for the school to be considered as a Professional Learning Community.

6.2.3 Professional Development

According to the literature, the last leadership practice, which is needed for a school to be considered as a PLC, is the leadership team to support the school stakeholders by offering educational training courses or seminars. This practice aims to educators' professional identity development (Bezzina, 2006; Joyce, 2004; Southworth, 2000). Both schools offer training courses and educational seminars to the educators. However, in the Finnish school, further education is offered more regular than in the Greek school. Moreover, rewarding PLC, seminars have to be funded by the school (Bezzina, 2006; Joyce, 2004). In the Finish school, all the seminar and training courses are financed through from the school, while in the Greek school, usually, the tuition fees are divided between the school and the educator who wants to participate in each course.

6.3 Does the physical layout of the schools promotes the existence of official and/ or unofficial collaboration among the school stakeholders?

Following the literature from the PLC model, a lot of emphasis is given to the physical layout of the school as it can promote and support the official and unofficial collaboration practices among the school stakeholders (Senge et al., 2000; Dimmock, 2000; Stoll et al., 2006; Hargreaver, 1994; McGregor, 2003). With the last research question, this study aims at

investigating if the physical layout of the schools promotes officially and unofficially the collaborative practices among the school stakeholders. From the data results, the theme *the physical layout of the schools* showed how the physical layout of the school and the specially designed areas of the school promotes collaboration.

Concerning PLC, both schools promote the unofficial collaborative practices; as outside the classrooms, there are tables and chairs for the teachers. In the Finnish school, there are couches and tables for the educators to work together. To conclude, the physical layout of the Finnish school promotes collaboration, and the educators take advantage of this, as they work together daily. Moreover, the meeting room is also the coffee room, and the educators were free to discuss, and it was easier for the principal to establish an open atmosphere among the educators during the meeting.

On the other hand, in the Greek school, except the office where the teachers can correct students' homework and test, and a coffee room which is provided to educators from all the educational levels, they do not have another office or room to collaborate. Moreover, the meeting room is located within the office of the principal. Teachers could express themselves more freely if the meeting room was designed as a room where the educators could collaborate and act in a more friendly way.

Trying to investigate what the Greek school can learn from the Finnish, and the opposite, the leaders of the Greek school could form special rooms, following the Finnish example, for the educators to spend more time together during the day. This practice would support them, as a school by having special designed areas and rooms creates and develops a school culture, which promotes an open climate, and supports the educators. On the other hand, the Finnish school could adopt from the Greek school the existence of a shared office where the educators can correct the homework or additional tasks. The existence of offices in each classroom isolates the teachers. If those offices got replaced by one office, then the educators would work together and would interact with each other more.

To conclude, the study showed that the Finnish school could be considered as a Professional Learning Community as all the characteristics of the PLC model are applied. All the leadership practices and the activities, which are held by the school stakeholders, set in the core of the school community the mutual trust. On the other hand, in the Greek school, the only characteristic that is applied concerning the PLC model, is the shared mission and vision. In these terms, the study showed that the Greek school does not work under the PLC model.

However, even if the administration is central and the leadership is top-down, there are some practices in the school, which underline the schools' potentials to transform into a PLC. There are a lot of collaborative practices, but they are not developed rewarding the PLC model.

7 Recommendations, limitations & Future Studies

In this section, the suggestion for developing and transforming the schools into a Professional Learning Communities, based on the evidence of the study and the literature, will be suggested for both schools.

7.1 Recommendations for the Finnish School

Following the literature and the practical example of the Greek school, the Finnish school could be improved in one aspect. As lack of time mentioned as an obstacle towards collaboration, the existence of individual offices reduces the interaction among the school stakeholders. The leadership team of the Finnish school could be inspired both from the Greek school and the literature, and it can create a common area for the educators to collaborate (McGregor, 2003; Dimmock, 2000). Even if there is a meeting/ coffee room where all the stakeholders can work, due to the teachers' offices in their classrooms they do not visit it a dot during the day. Concerning PLC, the study suggests, the individual offices to transform into, for example, a storage room for the educators to work mostly in the coffee room together with their colleagues.

7.2 Recommendations for the Greek school

As the theoretical model that is investigated in this study is not applied within the Greek content, the recommendations for the Greek school would be more. Inspired both from the literature and the practical example of the Finnish school, practices for development would be suggested.

7.2.1 Shared Mission & Vision

The leadership team of the Greek school could establish more meetings, to develop the *shared mission and vision* of the school, where all the school stakeholders would participate in order to reflect on their progresses, to discuss and to renew the mission of the school (Andrews & Lewis, 2007). Following this practice, the principal would not be the only who would communicate any new idea from the teachers to the owners, and the opposite. By establishing more meetings during the school years, the school entities would feel involved in the decision-making process; practice, which would make them feel a sense of belonging within the school

community as active members and their feelings towards collective responsibility, would be increased (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Louis et al., 1995).

7.2.2 Collaborative practices

Following the practices towards the promotion of collaboration, the first recommendation would be the establishment of meetings with all the school entities more often (Leithwood & Louis, 1998). Following the Finnish example, where the meetings are established once a week, the Greek school could begin by establishing once a month regular meetings including all the school stakeholder. According to the literature, established meetings could be an opportunity for the educators to conduct reflective dialogue (Louis et al., 1995) and to share their ideas by focusing on students' learning (Joyce, 2004; Steward, 2014). As unofficial practices exist in the school, the only recommendation, which could be done for further support is the leadership team to design an office for the teachers to collaborate and work together during their breaks (Senge et al., 2000; McGregor, 2003).

7.2.3 Trust as the key Component in transforming a school into a PLC

Trust can be considered as the cornerstone in developing and transforming a school into a PLC (Stewart, 2014; Bezzina, 2006). Trust is involved in all the characteristics and leadership practices in a school as a PLC. Trust can be found in collaborative practices and in teachers' autonomy (Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006). As the existence of trust seems to be an issue within the Greek school, recommendations for strengthen it, would be suggested.

Even if the owners and the principal trust the school stakeholders in terms of professionalism, educators do not have autonomy. Inspired both from the literature and the practical example of the Finnish school, the owners and the principal could support the educators towards the application of new ideas (Stoll et al., 2006). The leadership team only, by showing to the educators and the non-teaching staff, in a practical way that they trust them; the school stakeholders would feel respected. In addition, by delegating the daily administrative task among the educators, they would feel responsible and involved in the decision-making process (King & Newman, 2001; Hord, 2004). Following the Finnish example, the creation of small groups of educators who would be responsible for a specific task would change the leadership style and from authorization into shared. Those teams would be responsible for informing the leadership team and their colleagues for their progress and decisions. This practice would renew the climate among the school stakeholders of the school (Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al.,

2006), where the school stakeholders would work collaborative towards a common goal, by being involved in decision-making process.

Furthermore, by establishing distributed leadership, the school entities would be informed of all the new projects, leadership practices and new educational policies, which are held in the school, in short period. Practice, which would lead the school to work as one and not in different departments (Bolam et al., 2005; Louis et al., 1995). Moreover, as there is a trust issue among the educators, leaders could create the required conditions for the educators to learn how to work within a climate of true collaboration, where mutual trust is set at the core of every practice. According to the literature, educators, instead of working individually, could develop the weekly educational material and curriculum in teams (Newman & Wehlage, 1995). Similarly, in the Finnish school, educators have the freedom to design together many projects by combining different subject courses. Additionally, the leadership team of the Greek school has to find time for the school stakeholders to work together (Stoll et al., 2003; Senge et al., 2000). To conclude, following both the literature and the Finish example, autonomy has to be given to the educators by the leadership team. By giving autonomy, educators would become more productive and creative (Southworth, 2000; Bezzina, 2006).

7.2.4 Towards a PLC- The Case of Greece

Professional Learning Communities set in the core of the school development the human resources of the school (Fullan, 1993), the trust and the collaborative practices (Nias et al., 1989; Ainscow et al., 1994). However, taking the example of the Greek school, the process of transformation would not be either fast or straightforward (Fullan, 2016). Historically, all the educational transformations are time-consuming (Harris, 2010). The leadership style in the Greek school is central and top-down, and it is established for many years. A change in a leadership style has to be gradually (DiBella, Nevis & Gould 1996). As the application of the theoretical model requires the school to be first a Learning Organization, the first action that is needed to be done, is the leadership team to start transforming the school into a Learning organization in order to create the required environment for the PLC to flourish in the future.

The school as an organization needs to learn how to learn (Fullan, 1993), and change has to begin with the school stakeholders (Ainscow et al., 1994; Senge, 1990). The leadership team has to establish more meetings and to create and design joint activities among the educators of different departments. A practice which aims at developing the collaborative practices among the school stakeholders for the educators to start learning how to learn from each other and

how to trust each other (Senge, 1993). Learning organization model, sets in the core of change the team learning (Senge, 1993), the development of the shared vision (Senge, 1993) and the existence of respect towards different opinions (Senge, 1993). Following the results of the study; for the Greek school it is suggested, the leadership team to develop activities inside and outside the campus, were the school stakeholders would start to interact with each other; and they would also develop more interpersonal relationships. Practice, which aims at developing the necessary conditions for the school stakeholders to trust and appreciate each other.

7.3 Limitations of the study

This specific ethnographical comparative study has few limitations. Firstly, due to the language barrier, in the Finnish school the researcher based her observation mostly visually by trying to understand what the school entities were saying by translating the body language and the facial expressions. Secondly, as one of the characteristics of the ethnography is the long observation period. As the researcher was studying and working in Finland, she could not spend a lot of time observing the Greek school. Thus, the researcher decided to be in the study field for nine days in both schools that may limit the observational quality due to time constraints. Finally, in the Greek school, the principal had not informed the teachers and the other stakeholders for the conduction of the study, the subjects of the study were suspicious at the beginning towards the researcher. This issue inhibited some progress as the researcher spent two days introducing herself in order to gain peoples' trust and respect.

Following the chosen theoretical models, some limitations could be pointed as well. Due to the contents of the chosen for the research theoretical models, the analysis is one dimensional, as the emphasis is given in the human resources of the schools and not in other factors that could be taking into consideration in the process of reforming a school into a Professional Learning Community. Even if the literature of the PLC model emphasizes on the power of the human resources of a school, the four frames model of Bolman & Deal (2013) suggests the use of more than one frame for the holistic understanding of a school. To conclude, this research is highly prescriptively as the models and their characteristics guided the researcher during the data gathering and analysis process.

7.4 Future Research

This study suggests the need for additional research in different areas and levels. Many studies have been conducted within the Finnish educational system, with a given emphasis on the application of the theoretical model of PLC, both in national and local level (Sahlberg, 2014;

Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, Hämäläinen & Poikonen, 2009; Jäppinen, Leclerc & Tubin, 2015). On the other hand, within the Greek literature, most of the researches that have been held in the field of educational leadership emphasize on the role of the principal within a school (Saitis & Saiti, 2017a; 2017b) and the importance of the instructional leadership (Kaparou & Bush, 2016). As in the existing literature, there is no information towards Professional Learning Communities; this research can be used as the starting point for future researches within the Greek contexts.

Future studies are suggested to be conducted with more extensive sampling, both in the private and the public sector, as different administrative practices are followed in the public and the private sector. Furthermore, as this study found that the lack of trust is an issue in the Greek school, future studies can focus on the reasons behind the lack of trust. Moreover, as many Greek educators underlined the lack of their collaborative centered education, the revision of the curriculum that is followed from the universities within the faculties of Education in Greece is suggested for research. Furthermore, future studies with a focus both on local and national level could aim at a holistic understanding of the leadership practices, which are used within the Greek Educational system in multiple levels. Finally, this study suggests changes within a specific model, the Professional Learning Community model and specific frame, the Human Resource frame. Following the model of Bolman & Deal (2013), a holistic transformation has to be done in multiple levels. This study focused on the power of the Human Resource; however, future studies could explore educational transformation within different frames, such as the political, the cultural and the symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Overall, a future study for the Greek schools to go beyond the limitations of the present study needs to, a. use a larger sample both from the private and public sectors in order to explore their differences more extensive; b. to explore the reasons behind the lack of trust detected and link with the overall lack of trust within the Greek economic and political situations as a result of the crisis during the last decade; c. extend the focus to all levels of the model (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

7.5 Conclusion

In this study, the researcher, by conducting ethnographical qualitative research, tried to investigate if the selected for the study Finnish and a Greek primary schools work under the theoretical model of the Professional Learning Community. The main aim of the researcher after answering the research questions was to identify how the schools can be improved

following the literature and the practical example of the other school. The main finding of the study was that the PLC model is applied in the Finnish school, while in the Greek school, different leadership practices and strategies are followed by the leadership team. Moreover, following the findings and the literature, the theoretical model of PLC is applicable, and it can be developed even if there are many difficulties in the process of transformation. Furthermore, the findings underlined the importance of trust in developing or transforming a school into a PLC. In more details, the study highlighted how the “culture of trust” in the Finnish school allows collaboration and collective responsibility to flourish, while in the Greek school the lack of trust can be understood as the main reason of the existence of control and authorization from the leadership team.

The literature illustrates the first steps that need to be taken from the leadership team for the school to be transformed into a PLC. As there is no single way to transform a school into a PLC, the process of transforming depends from the leaders and the needs of each school (Lomos et al., 2011; Stoll, 2007; Toole & Stoll, 2002). However, this study can be used from both schools as guidance. The Finnish school could follow the recommendations and get improved, while the Greek school can also develop the suggestions and transform the school into a Learning Organization and later into a Professional Learning Community.

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