Teacher Empathy and Implementation of Multicultural Practices in the Classroom

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Abstract

Teaching a culturally diverse classroom can be challenging for educators. Understanding the needs of the students is essential in delivering effective educational practices. However, how can this be achieved when there is little knowledge about the cultural background of the students and their daily lives? Research has highlighted the positive impact of teacher empathy on students' academic, social and emotional development. At the same time, studies report that induced empathy can generate positive attitudes between culturally diverse individuals. Nevertheless, little research has focused on the connection between teacher empathy and multicultural practices in the classroom. The current study investigates the role of teacher empathy in the implementation of multicultural practices, for Greek primary teachers. The mechanism between empathy, multicultural beliefs and practices is explored controlling for various demographic variables. 62 Greek primary school, preschool and kindergarten teachers participated in this cross-sectional study using self-report questionnaires. Qualitative data from interviews with some of the teachers elaborated further on the relationship between these variables. Findings showed that empathy is positively associated with multicultural practices. Additionally, multicultural beliefs partially mediate the relation between empathy and the implementation of multicultural practices. The results suggest that teacher empathy could be beneficial for responding effectively to the needs of culturally diverse students.

Keywords: empathy, cultural diversity, teachers, multicultural practices

Teacher Empathy and Implementation of Multicultural Practices

Teaching a culturally diverse classroom can be challenging when there is limited knowledge about the cultural background of the students and their needs. It can be difficult to understand the perspective of the other when you are not familiar with the habits and practices of his/her culture (Brunel, Walker & Schleifer,1989). Nonetheless, teachers should be able to understand their students' needs and behaviour in order to support them academically, socially and emotionally. Sometimes, the cultural and social background of the student is completely unknown to the teacher and this gap of knowledge might render their communication ineffective. However, there could be a competence that teachers can develop in order to facilitate complex interactions like these. Research has shown that empathy positively influences the beliefs of educators about cultural diversity (Warren, 2013). However, beliefs and attitudes do not always lead to actions (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Fazio, 1990). Could empathy have the power to contribute to the culturally responsive practices that a teacher will employ in his/her classroom? To answer this question, we first have to define the key elements of this research: empathy, multicultural beliefs and culturally responsive practices.

Empathy

A definition given by Brown in 1993, perceives empathy simply as "the power of mentally identifying oneself with a person or object of contemplation" (p. 808). However, empathy is a highly complex and multidimensional phenomenon with various attributes (Davis, 1980). In addition, empathy develops over time and is dependent upon the frequency of interaction. (Cooper, 2002, pp. 148–157; Hoffman, 2000). In an effort to define empathy in earlier years, researchers have suggested that empathy is the ability to take another's perspective and to share an affect with that person (Davis, 1983; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). Similarly, Hoffman (2000) points out that empathy involves an affective response with a

focus on the other person more than one's self. Davis (1994) perceives empathy as having two parts, *perspective taking* (intellectual) and *empathic concern* (emotional) or sympathy. The former is concerned with the recognition of emotions of the other while the latter concerns the actual feelings of the individual towards the other, such as personal closeness, sorrow, compassion, and personal distress (Batson, 1991; Batson et al., 1997a; Davis, 1994; Hoffman, 2000). The intellectual aspect of empathy requires the individual to suppress his/her egocentric perspective and actively consider the perspective of the other (Davis, 1994, p.17). This is a fundamental step for teachers in understanding how a student is feeling in situations that the teacher is not involved in and possibly has never experienced. Furthermore, the emotional aspect of empathy goes further to facilitate human relationships and connect people on a personal level as it allows to sympathize with the feelings of an individual and relate them with ones experienced before.

DeTurk (2001) considers more realistic the idea that empathy is a process of building shared meaning rather than true knowledge of another person's existing thoughts and feelings. In this sense, true empathy is relational empathy, which is fostered through dialogue. Thus, how can empathy influence the decision of teachers to employ certain practices in the classroom? Zhou, Valiente and Eisenberg (2003) state that ''empathy motivates the desire to help others as well as facilitates people's social competence for interacting with others, and provides a sense of connection among people'' (p. 269). This could suggest that teachers who are more empathetic have an inclination to understand their students more closely and help the ones in need.

For the purpose of this study, a more general definition of empathy is going to be used. As Spreng, McKinnon, Mar & Levine (2009) described, empathy is the ability to perceive things from the perspective of another person, understand the feelings of another and thus comprehend their point of view.

Teacher Empathy

Research in educational psychology and related fields considers empathy as an important element for teaching, learning, and prosocial development (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Gage & Berliner, 1998; Hoffman, 2000; Ormond, 2000; Woolfolk, 1998). Teacher empathy is defined as "the ability to express concern and take the perspective of a student, and it involves cognitive and affective domains of empathy" (Tettegah & Anderson, 2007, p. 50). Studies have demonstrated that empathy is related to helping and care in teaching, moral modelling (Brown, 1997; Goleman, 1995) and effective teaching (Kyriacou, 1986; Bell & Harrison, 1988; Straughan, 1988).

Kyriacou (1986) and McManus (1989) also argued that it is important for teachers to perceive the classroom through the eyes of their students in order to teach them effectively. Similarly, in his research about signs of empathy in the classroom, Barr (2011) found that teachers with better perspective-taking, understood their students' relationships much better and reacted more appropriately to student behaviour as they were able to take a third-person perspective and interpret the situation with a more holistic viewpoint. This demonstrates that the ability to understand a situation from the perspective of the student can aid the successful teacher-student communication and can help the teacher respond more effectively to the needs of his/her students.

In her article about searching for profound empathy, Cooper (2010) recognizes three different types of empathy that can be found in school classrooms. The findings from the in-depth interviews and classroom observations of 16 experienced and student teachers are the following. Firstly, fundamental empathy involves the characteristics that are crucial for initiating relationships. Some of the initial elements are: adopting an open and non-judgmental approach, being attentive, listening carefully, paying attention to the feelings of others and showing verbal and non-verbal signs of interest. Teachers report than when

attention is focused, the communication and engagement between student and teacher are maximized as students also imitate the behaviour observed from their teachers. Secondly, profound empathy, which is developed with frequency of interaction and over time, involves deeper understanding and higher quality relationships between teachers and students. In this case, teachers model morality to students and have the ability to demonstrate personal levels of care and concern. Profound empathy is fostered with the frequency of one-to-one interactions and over a period of time where the teacher has the opportunity to get to know the student as an individual. Lastly, functional empathy is usually observed in large classrooms during a lesson where the teacher is unable to develop personal connections with each student. The teacher uses a "mental representation of the whole group" in order to support the sense of belonging and create group cohesion. This is achieved by using examples that are considered somewhat "universal" and can interest multiple students, such as football, fashion, music. Nevertheless, this type of empathy promotes stereotyping, and the more diverse a group is the more problematic this phenomenon seems to become. Moreover, empathy becomes relative depending on the constraints of the context.

With profound empathy, teachers treat students as unique individuals, valuing their existing knowledge and extending it. In this way, they respect and appreciate the differences of their students and foster an environment where learners develop confidence, engagement and skills (Cooper, 2010). However, displaying empathy in the classroom is not always an easy and natural task for the educator. Developing trust and positive emotions with students sometimes requires the teachers to cover negative emotions. Cooper (2010) mentions that finding sympathy with less likeable children was central to profound empathy. This notion is critical in situations where teachers do not have a strong bond with the student because they cannot relate to their cultural or religious norms and habits.

In addition, Teich (1992) highlighted that empathy was crucial for establishing teacher-student relationships. Empathy can aid the communication and interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds as it allows for an increased sensitivity for different cultures. Additionally, it has been shown to be an effective capacity for teachers working in urban diverse schools, helping teachers to connect with the life of the students outside of the school and their home/neighbourhood culture (McAllister & Irvine, 2002).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Gay (2002) describes culturally responsive teaching as the use of cultural characteristics and perspectives of culturally diverse students to facilitate effective teaching. This notion is based on the idea that students are more interested and engaged in knowledge when it is related to their lived experiences and in this way, students learn more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). Although culture includes various elements, some of them are crucial for teachers as they influence their daily interactions with students. For example, communication styles, learning styles, traditions, cultural values, and relationship norms are critical to the way that students behave and perform in certain tasks. Gay (2002) mentions that teachers need to know if certain ethnic groups value communal living and cooperative problem solving, codes of behaviour of how children should interact with adults, gender roles and family socialization etc. Although a multicultural curriculum is a great way of acknowledging and appreciating diversity in classrooms, pedagogical practices are equally important (Gay, 2002). Teachers can use the lived experiences and knowledge of students to help them thrive socially, emotionally and academically and expand their horizons without introducing new curriculum. Researchers suggest that the first step for effective cultural teaching "demonstrating culturally sensitive caring and building culturally responsive learning communities". Teachers have to support and encourage ethnically diverse students

to succeed and thrive as much as every other student in the classroom (Foster, 1997). In this way, caring is a social responsibility and a pedagogical necessity.

Association between Empathy and Multicultural Practices

Lindquist (2004) introduces the term strategic empathy, meaning the use of empathetic emotions in both critical and strategic ways. This refers to "the willingness of the teacher to be strategically sceptic (thinking sometimes against his/her own emotions) in order to empathize with the troubled knowledge students carry with them". This is crucial to culturally responsive teaching, as sometimes a reaction or practice that is normal and usual to a student might seem odd or out-of-place for a teacher of a different cultural/ethnic/religious background.

For many years, empathy has been considered an important aspect of teachers' professional preparation to teach in diverse school settings (Aspy 1972, 1975a, b; Black and Phillips 1982). Gordon (1999) concludes that the application of empathy in urban settings improves teacher effectiveness with students of colour. Pajak (2001) argues that empathy is a necessary element for teachers working in diverse classrooms and should be taught in teacher training programs, since it is a competence that can be taught (Lam, Kolomitro, & Alamparambil, 2011). Milner (2005, 2008a, 2010a) suggests that pre-service teachers need to be prepared with the appropriate skills and knowledge to meet the shifting cultural, social and intellectual needs of a diverse classroom. More research has shown that empathy can be used as a tool for teachers to close perception gaps and minimize negative results that are associated with the misinterpretation of students' behaviours, engagement, and motivation (O'Brien, 2003). In addition, empathy can potentially promote openness and positive relationships between teachers and students. As Pedersen and Pope (2010), state in their research inclusive cultural empathy encourages professionals to accurately understand and respond appropriately to the individual's comprehensive cultural relationships with their

environment. At the same time, being able to take on the perspective of another individual, helps understand their needs better. In this way, empathy seems like a necessary capacity for educators in multicultural classrooms, as it allows them to understand the classroom from the students 'perspectives (Rychly & Graves, 2012).

However, it is clear that simply paying attention to and understanding the student is only the first step towards empathy. Aspy (1972) made a distinction between cognitive understanding of empathy and the capacity to demonstrate it. He argues that knowledge alone is insufficient and teachers have to model it as well in order for it to have an effect on students. Similarly, Ormell (1993) points out the difference between 'soft' (stated values) and 'hard' (practiced values). Lastly, McAllister and Irvine (2002) perceive empathy as refined element of caring and not as a separate teacher characteristic. In this way, we can conclude that being able to recognize, understand and sympathize with the thoughts and feelings of a student towards a certain matter is not enough for achieving positive results in a diverse classroom. Empathy has to be demonstrated and modelled daily in order to have an influence on the lives of the individuals involved. At the same time, research reveals that school personnel fail to provide empathic responses toward students who are victimized in schools (Craig, Henderson, & Murphy, 2000). Maybe this is a further sign to suggesting the importance of cultivating empathy in educators that work with minorities and socially/culturally disadvantaged groups.

Current Study

Although there is a large body of research confirming the positive role of empathy on multicultural openness and separately the beneficial role of teacher empathy in teacher-student interactions and student well-being, there is little research actually connecting those two. Could increased empathy, in fact, be translated into actual behaviour? The empathy-attitude-action model proposed by Batson et. al (2002), suggests that induced empathy

towards a stigmatized individual does not only increase positive attitudes towards the individual, but also increases the readiness to help. To investigate whether increased empathy can go as far as to influence actual behaviour of individuals, Batson et. Al (2002) conducted an experiment, where they experimentally induced empathy in a group of individuals and measured whether it influenced their behaviour towards helping a stigmatized group. Findings showed that the individuals who had induced empathy, were more willing to take action towards helping the stigmatized group. The study found that empathy affected attitudes which in turn influenced the readiness for change and thus, attitudes mediated the effect of empathy on taking action to help. Of course, we cannot assume that the children from different cultural/ethnic backgrounds are being stigmatized or victimized. However, as they are considered a minority immigrant group, we can hypothesize that their cultural or ethnic needs and customs are not as widely represented in the mainstream education as the ones of the ethnic-majority students.

Consequently, this study explores the role of teacher empathy in the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. The hypothesis of this study is that higher teacher empathy will lead to more implementation of multicultural practices in the classroom. This hypothesis supposes a mediation effect of multicultural beliefs. Based on the mediation model, the hypothesis is that increased empathy relates positively to multicultural beliefs, which then influence the implementation of multicultural practices of teachers.

Method

Research Design

The current study investigated the relation between teacher empathy and the implementation of multicultural practices, in Greek primary school, preschool and kindergarten teachers. To examine this relation and its underlying mechanisms, a cross-sectional study was implemented. The reason for examining multicultural practices instead of

culturally responsive pedagogy is, as Rychly & Graves (2012) state, the content in multicultural practices represents various cultural perspectives regardless of the classroom composition, while culturally responsive pedagogy responds to the cultures that are present in the classroom. Multicultural education could be the overarching concept and can be measured more accurately measured through a questionnaire.

Participants

Participants were selected on the basis of their profession (primary school, kindergarten and preschool teachers) and their previous or current experience working with students from diverse cultural/ethnic backgrounds. The reason for not including secondary school teachers was the small frequency of their interaction with the students on a daily basis and thus, the limited interpersonal relation. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Due to bureaucracy and time-management issues, approaching schools systematically was not an option. Greek teachers from different networks and various regions of Greece were contacted and informed about the purpose and process of the study, who in turn, informed their network of educators who were suited to participate. Finally, 62 teachers participated in the study (M_{age}=40.2 years, *SD*= 8.6, 84% female) of which most were primary school teachers.

Measures

The questionnaire included three main measures: teacher empathy, multicultural beliefs and multicultural practices, along with certain demographics (age, gender, years of working in education, level of education, classroom cultural/ethnic composition, self-efficacy).

Empathy was measured with the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) (Spreng et al., 2009) that was translated in Greek by professor Ntina Kourmousi and her colleagues. The questionnaire included 16 items (half of which were negatively worded) and participants

were asked to rate how frequently they behaved or felt according to the statements, ranging from 0 to 4 (*never* to *always*). The statements consisted of sentences such as, *"When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too"*. There are a number of instruments available for measuring empathy, but the TEQ measures a more general construct of empathy, has been officially translated in Greek and has been tested for reliability and validity in Greek educators (α=.72) (Kourmousi et al., 2017). The TEQ was simple to deliver and allowed for a straightforward comparison with the other variables.

The multicultural beliefs and practices were assessed by a self-report questionnaire designed by the ISOTIS WP5 team for the purposes of similar research and translated by the Greek team of ISOTIS. Multicultural beliefs were measured in a 7-statement questionnaire. Participants were asked to respond using a 5-point Likert scale about how strongly they agreed with the statements presented (ranging from *disagree* to *agree*). The questionnaire included statements such as "It is important for children to learn to respect other cultures as early as possible."

Multicultural practices were examined using both a 12-item measure and a short vignette. The set of questions included statements such as "I plan activities to celebrate diverse cultural holidays and practices". Using a 5-point Likert scale, participants were asked to indicate how frequently they implemented the practices described, ranging from *never* to *always*. The vignette referred to an imaginary scenario that occurred in the classroom during a lesson, involving a culturally sensitive incident:

In the beginning of the school year two Albanian children, Elsa and Dimitris, have just started (pre)school. During free play these four-year old children use toy animals to engage in pretend play. The children use their home language (Albanian) and the Greek language interchangeably while playing together.

The participants were asked to indicate to what extent they would act according to each of the 9 statements presented to them by answering on a 4-point Likert scale ranging

from *I would definitely not do this* to *I would definitely do this.* An example of a statement is, *"I would encourage a child with another language background to join in their play and observe what happens."*

The study also collected qualitative data in order to gain insights into the opinions of teachers on empathy and practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four female teachers individually (M_{age}=38.5). The participant was given a scenario, similar to the one presented in the questionnaire (Appendix A), was asked to respond on the 4-point Likert scale and afterwards was asked to elaborate on her answer. This approach was chosen because it allowed for open-ended answers that elaborated on the quantitative data and could also be compared to the empathy scores of the same participants.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, the participants were informed about the aim and process of the study and once they agreed to participate they were asked to sign an informed consent. Participants had the opportunity to complete the questionnaire either online or on a hard-copy. The participants' personal data were safely stored and their anonymity was guaranteed. Participation was voluntary and the participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point. The participants were also informed about the interview, and given the opportunity to participate. The four that offered to take part were interviewed by the author. First, they listened to the scenario and then each statement was read to them one at a time. They were asked to respond to what extent they would employ each practice and then provide the motives behind their decision. Participants were thanked for their time and effort.

Data Analysis

All analyses were carried out using SPSS, version 25 (2017). The scales that were used for the final analysis were the following three: multicultural beliefs, multicultural practices and empathy, the vignette and the demographics.

For the empathy scale, a final score was computed by summing the scores of all the answers of the participant (reversing the score for negative items) according to the process by Spreng et al. (2009). For the scale of multilingual beliefs two encompassing scales were derived, a multicultural scale with three final items and an assimilationist scale with two final items. The final scale included only the three items that measured multicultural beliefs by computing the mean scores for each participant. The reason for this selection was to strengthen the reliability of the final scale and measure more specifically the construct of multicultural beliefs. For multicultural practices, one scale was generated including all the items, with one item reverse-scored (as it was negatively worded) and one item removed as the reliability of this item was very low. The final scale was constructed by computing the mean scores for each participant. For the vignette, similar to the Multicultural beliefs scale, a scale with three items was formed that represented multicultural practices. The final score was computed by deriving the mean of the three items for each participant. To facilitate the analysis of these variables, the scores of all three scales were then standardized.

Apart from the three main variables, the following variables were included as control variables in the statistical analyses. Classroom composition (percentage of cultural/ethnic diversity) with three groups, 32,3% of participants reported almost no children from a diverse background, 54,8% of participants reported around 25% of children from diverse backgrounds and 12,9% participants reported 50% or higher diversity in their classroom. Self-efficacy, namely the extent to which participants felt they were capable of working effectively with children from different cultural/ethnic backgrounds. Years of working in education and lastly, to investigate differences based on educational level of participants, two dummy variables were constructed for the different levels of education of the participants In the Vocational category Bachelor took the value of 0 and Technical the value of 1 while in the Master category, Bachelor again received the value of 0 and Master the value of 1. In this

way, the Bachelor remained constant. (61.3% Bachelor, 32.2% Master, 6.5% Technical degree).

Then, a correlation analysis between empathy and multicultural practices was conducted. Next, a multiple regression analysis was carried out to examine the independent relations of empathy and beliefs on practices, including certain items as control variables. In order to explore the underlying mechanism by which empathy influences practices, an analysis based on the mediation model proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) was performed, in which a third variable (in this case, beliefs) serves as the mediator in the relation between empathy and practices. Figure 1 shows the mechanism of mediation between the three variables.

Figure 1. Mediation Model (Beliefs mediating for Empathy on Practices)
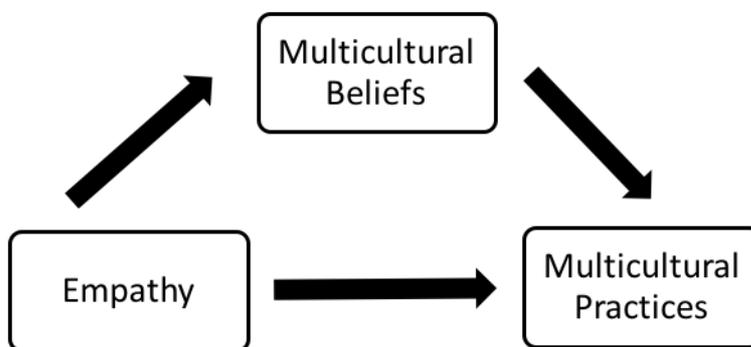
To investigate the mediation effect of beliefs Preacher and Hayes' (2004) bootstrap approach was performed using PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) with a 5000 sample size and a 95% confidence interval. Bootstrap was used as the results were not normally distributed and there was a small sample size (*n*=62).

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the scales that were used in the statistical analyses.

Table 1

Descriptives of Scales

	M	SD	Range	α
Empathy	50.32	4.93	41.00 - 62.00	.54
Beliefs	4.87	.28	3.67 - 5.00	.68
Practices	3.89	.82	2.40 - 5.00	.89
Vignette	2.68	.83	1.00 - 4.00	.72
Self-efficacy	3.87	.97	1.00 - 5.00	
Years working	15.58	7.47		

The correlation analysis, performed to investigate the relation between empathy and beliefs with practices, showed that teacher empathy correlated significantly with the implementation of multicultural practices (Table 2).

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations

		Empathy	Beliefs	Practices
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	1	.13	.36[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.34	.004
Beliefs	Pearson Correlation	.13	1	.42[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.34		.001

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To account for potential teacher characteristics that might play a role in the implementation of multicultural practices, a series of correlational tests were run to investigate their association. The results showed that four variables played a significant role in predicting part of the variation in the relation between empathy and multicultural practices. Therefore, the following constructs were included as control variables in the regression analysis: years of working experience, educational level (technical, bachelor, master), level of diversity in the classroom (almost none, around 25%, around 50% and above), and self-reported ability to work with children from diverse backgrounds. Table 3 shows the results of two models for the relation between empathy and practices, including or excluding beliefs as a predictor.

Empathy is a significant predictor of the implementation of multicultural practices (b=.32, p<.05), but its significance decreases when controlling for multicultural beliefs (p=.03).

Table 3

Regression Analysis of Multicultural Practices with Empathy (+ Beliefs)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	beta	Sig.	beta	Sig.
(Constant)		.03		.05
Years of working experience	-.03	.79	-.03	.83
Vocational	-.01	.96	.02	.85
Master	.10	.41	.17	.13
Level of diversity in classroom	-.13	.31	-.15	.19
Ability to work with diverse children	.42	.00	.36	.00
Empathy	.32	.02	.26	.03
Multicultural Beliefs			.36	.00

The fourth table indicates that the relation between empathy and the vignette has a lower significance (b=.25, p=.04) especially when controlling for beliefs where the association is not significant anymore.

Table 4

Regression Analysis of Vignette with Empathy (+ Multi. Beliefs)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	beta	Sig.	beta	Sig.
(Constant)		.09		.15
Years of working experience	.05	.66	.06	.62
Vocational	-.44	.00	-.41	.00
Master	-.00	.98	.05	.67
Level of diversity in classroom	-.02	.86	-.04	.74
Ability to work with diverse children	.25	.04	.21	.08
Empathy	.25	.04	.21	.07
Multicultural Beliefs			.25	.03

The association between empathy and multicultural practices decreased after including the beliefs as a predictor of practices (but remained significant $p=.03$). Afterwards, a bootstrapping approach was used to examine whether beliefs function as a partial mediator between empathy and practices. Results showed that empathy was not a significant predictor of beliefs (Table 5), but both beliefs and empathy were significant predictors of multicultural practices (Table 6).

Table 5
Empathy on Beliefs Model

	b	se	t	p	R^2	MSE	F	df1	df2
Empathy	.15	.14	1.10	.28	.02	1.05	1.21	1.00	56.00

Table 6
Beliefs as a Mediator

	b	se	t	p	R^2	MSE	F	df1	df2
Beliefs	.37	.12	3.19	.00	.41	.71	4.93	7.00	50.00
Empathy	.25	.12	2.08	.04					

The findings revealed that the indirect coefficient was significant, as seen on Table 6. Figure 2 shows that the indirect effect (c' path) is smaller than the total effect (c path) but the total effect of empathy on practices remains significant (Table 7). This suggest that beliefs partially mediate the effect of empathy on practices, in other words, multicultural beliefs explain some, but not all, of the effect of empathy on multicultural practices.
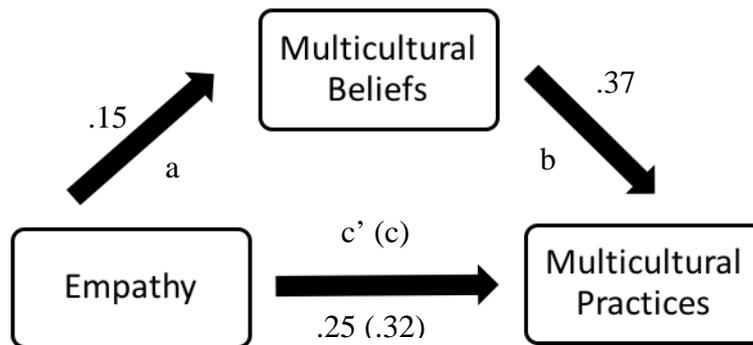
Figure 2. Mediation Model with Path Coefficients

Table 7

Bootstrap results

	Effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Total effect of Empathy on Practices	.32	.13	2.40	.02		
Direct effect of Empathy on Practices	.25	.12	2.08	.04		
Indirect effect of Empathy on Practices	.06	.03			.0038	.1285

Qualitative Results

To further elaborate on the practices of the teachers and their relation to empathy levels, interviews with four teachers (who also completed the questionnaire) were conducted. The interviews that were conducted using a Vignette as a reference point (Appendix A) revealed that teachers preferred talking about cultural identity with the whole class and bringing it as a matter of discussion with all of the students instead of correcting the child that had said to the other "You are Roma, you're not one of us". These teachers also scored high on the empathy scale. The teachers mentioned that they would talk to the child with Roma background to help the child feel better but they wouldn't justify the incident with his/her cultural background, as was suggested in one of the statements. They thought that at this age, cultural and ethnic identity is not something very structured and comprehended in the

children's minds, therefore talking explicitly about why the comment was wrong could produce negative results and even opposite to the ones intended. Similarly, disciplining the other child in front of everyone would not achieve anything as teachers argued, because it would "stigmatize the child as having done something inherently bad and would take away the attention from what is really important by forcing the child to behave in certain way without necessarily knowing why", as one of the teachers suggested. In addition, one teacher said, "in primary school, children do not fully understand what cultural stereotyping is. They hear something from a parent, a neighbour a person on TV and they adopt the same phrasing or way of expressing their dislike; they are not essentially discriminating against the other". Another important mention was that this was a frequent incident, but each situation originated differently. As a teacher of the classroom "you have to know the dynamic behind children's relationships and interactions" one teacher said. More specifically, "you don't know if this argument occurred for the first time, if it has been occurring for a period of time, or if they were friends that were fighting and this was a way of annoying the other". Depending on the situation and the circumstances surrounding it, teachers chose to deal with the incident somewhat differently, based on its importance and its effect on the children. This shows that teachers believe that knowing the children personally and understanding the perspective of each one in every situation is more important than making categorical statements about what is considered right and wrong.

Discussion

This study investigated the relation between teacher empathy and the implementation of multicultural practices in the classroom, controlling for several variables (years of working experience, percentage of diversity in the classroom, level of education and sense of self-efficacy while working with children from diverse backgrounds). The findings revealed that teacher empathy was a significant predictor of the implementation of multicultural practices

controlling for the variables mentioned above. The significance of empathy decreased when controlling for participant's multicultural beliefs and therefore, beliefs partially mediated the relationship between empathy and implementation of practices.

The classroom composition played a significant role in the relation between empathy and practices. In fact, participants reporting that there were almost no students from a different cultural/ethnic background in their classroom did not show a significant relation between empathy and practices. On the other hand, participants reporting approximately 25% of cultural/ethnic diversity in their classroom showed the highest association. It can thus be suggested that existing cultural diversity in the daily environment of the educator, encourages him/her to implement multicultural practices more regularly. A possible explanation for that is that it might be easier for the teacher to understand the curriculum from their students' perspective and adapt it to the needs of the classroom. This explanation is consistent with previous research, which suggests that empathy develops over time and with frequency of interaction (Cooper, 2002, pp. 148–157; Hoffman, 2000).

The implementation of multicultural practices was measured in two different ways that produced slightly different results. The association between empathy and the vignette was less strong than the one between empathy and practices. Firstly, the practices questionnaire asked for a more general attitude towards practices that the teacher would implement in the classroom. On the other hand, the vignette presented participants with a specific incident and asked them how they would react in this situation. Therefore, we can assume two different explanations for the slight difference in the findings. Although the vignette also focused on practices, it consisted of a hypothetical scenario and the possible actions that the participant would apply. The vignette targeted more strongly the participants' actual behaviour in a given situation rather than draw from their beliefs or attitudes. Therefore, it might reflect more closely their behaviour rather than what would be expected

of them based on school policies or school mentality. It focuses on the individual participant and his/her reactions to a certain event. A possible explanation for the lower significance could be that the social desirability effect on the vignette is lower as the participants are not completely aware of what each statement represents and thus are more honest in their reactions.

The interviews, although a few, offered an interesting insight into teachers' answers. The teachers reported that although they understood the perspective of the child that was being victimized they thought that punishing the other child at that moment would neither be appropriate nor effective for the long term. They preferred to talk to both children individually, while calm, and have a broader discussion about the matter of cultural identity with the whole classroom. These reports align with the concept of functional and profound empathy, mentioned in the introduction Cooper (2010). Teachers thought that it was important to understand each child individually and develop a bond with it, before being able to correct his/her behaviour. Simultaneously, they understood that this incident could be one of many occurring in the classroom, going unnoticed, and most times these incidents are caused by confusion and frustration. In this way, acknowledging an issue that could affect the whole classroom and discussing their thoughts and opinions could be a good start to clear some of this confusion. The educators demonstrated signs of teacher empathy as described by Tettegah & Anderson (2007, p. 50) as they tried to think about the perspective of the student who said the "bad" thing and imagined that the child would not understand fully his/her mistake and needed a more thorough and meaningful conversation to comprehend the implications of this interaction.

An interesting finding was that empathy was not significantly related to multicultural beliefs, although it was significantly associated with multicultural practices. A possible explanation for this is that the set of questions evaluating multicultural beliefs focused more

on general opinions about multiculturalism and not specifically on their thoughts and values towards multicultural education or cultural sensitivity. For example, one of the statements included in the multicultural beliefs scale was, "It is important for children to learn to respect other cultures as early as possible". Therefore, it did not reflect directly their beliefs about how they should personally behave, but it rather suggested a more general standpoint towards multicultural school environments. Another explanation could be the variability in introspection of participants. The level of introspection of each participant and their self-awareness could not be measured, in other words, the ability to think about and accurately assess their own behaviours and feelings. This conceals the danger of untrue answers, not because of dishonesty of the participant but because of lack of self-awareness or introspection. Therefore, it is not possible to know which answers were completely honest and accurate regarding their beliefs. However, for the practices it was easier for the participants to respond accurately on whether or not they implement them in the classroom as the statements were clear and practical. An example of a practice described is "I plan activities to celebrate diverse cultural holidays and practices."

Limitations

There are several limitations to mention for this study. Firstly, the main method of recruiting participants was snowball sampling. The participants were required to be educators who had previous experience working with students from culturally diverse backgrounds and due to practical matters, schools could not be approached systematically. This method does not guarantee that the results are representative of the population as it is not possible to determine the pattern of distribution of the population. In addition, as the sampling error could not be determined, due to the fact that it is a non-random sampling method, we cannot make statistical inferences from the sample to the population. Fortunately, it was not a chaining snowball method, which means that the initial participants were from different

networks and therefore, there was some variance in the participants that finally took part in the study. The sample of educators that participated in the study was diverse in age, years of working, worked in various regions of Greece, at different institutions and was gathered from various networks. This suggests that the results are not systematically biased in terms of the network or work space they came from.

Secondly, the empathy scale had a lower internal consistency (α=.54), which could be due to the fact that there are multiple items measuring slightly different aspects of empathy. The scale consisted of both positive and reverse items (negatively worded). The positive items were adequately reliable (α=.76) while the negative ones were not consistent at all (α=.07). The statistical tests revealed that there was not a specific item responsible for the overall inconsistency. The reason for this inconsistency could be the variability among the items. The researchers that constructed the TEQ included six different categories of items (emotion comprehension in others, appropriate sensitivity, emotional contagion, sympathetic physiological arousal, con-specific altruism, higher order empathic responding /pro-social helping behaviours), including at least two items for each category. Therefore, the inconsistency of the overall scale could be due to the presence of multiple categories. However, the decision to keep the scale as a whole was in order to avoid the social desirability effect that could be related to the use of only positively worded items. As the respondents were aware of the subject that the questionnaire was measuring, and empathy is considered a desirable capacity, we can assume that there could be over-reporting of behaviour that would render them as empathetic especially if the items were very clearly stated such as "It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully" which had a very low variability (SD=.36), as most participants reported high results on this statement. Therefore, the negatively worded items were used to measure the same constructs but in a

way that participants would have to think more carefully of the statement and thus their response to it.

Another limitation of the empathy scale was that it was based on a self-report questionnaire. This can produce several constraints. For example, the social desirability effect is evident when the questions are clear about what they are measuring and thus the participants know what the "desirable" answer is. In addition, as the empathy questionnaire involved questions regarding personal matters about reactions or relationships, the variable of the introspective ability of the individual was not controllable or measurable beforehand. This conceals the danger of untrue answers, not because of dishonesty of the participant but because of lack of self-awareness or introspection.

Although the study took into account multiple control variables, we cannot rule out the effect of other variables that might play a role in the implementation of multicultural practices in the classroom. For example, previous knowledge of multicultural education, personal interest in multiculturalism and school's policy or mentality about diverse practices that are not part of the typical curriculum. Further research should include these variables as part of the association between empathy and multicultural practices.

Lastly, the sample was large enough to conduct the statistical analyses (n=62) it is small compared to the total population of Greek primary and preschool teachers, and thus we cannot generalize the results of this study to the total population of Greek teachers.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Further work is required to establish the variability of the construct of empathy and the implementation of multicultural practices. However, this study offers an encouraging view about the construct of empathy and the implementation of multicultural practices. Although there has not been previous research specifically focusing on the relation between these two constructs, the findings seem to be consistent with the theoretical framework that

connects empathy and multicultural education (Gage and Berliner, 1998; O'Brien, 2003; Stephan and Finlay, 1999).

Of course the results need to be replicated taking into account the variables and constraints mentioned above. Future studies on the current topic could focus on investigating specific aspects of empathy related to the implementation of multicultural education. As mentioned previously, the researchers that constructed the TEQ mentioned six different categories of statements. Separate correlational analyses for each category did not produce any significant results as the items for each individual scale were not enough to construct a reliable scale for an appropriate analysis. Only one item separately from the whole scale seemed to be significantly correlated with multicultural practices ($r=.37$, $p<.01$), the item "I like making other people feel better" although there was not a high variability of the answers ($SD=.56$)

Another interesting idea would be to try and construct a more reliable scale for empathy that minimizes the effect of social desirability on the answers of the participants. Perhaps a tool that includes more vignettes could increase the accuracy of the responses by decreasing the social desirability effect on the participants. Another suggestion would be to combine different types of questions to cross-test the reliability of certain categories of items. For example, measuring the different categories both from quantitative and qualitative data and including vignettes or other hypothetical scenarios.

Until now literature has focused on the importance of teacher empathy on academic achievement, emotional and social development and teacher-student relations. Similarly, the importance of culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education are essential elements in our ever-changing society. The findings of this study suggest that empathy plays an underlying role that perhaps is not completely conscious for the individual. Empathetic individuals are more prone to help someone in need, although they might not rationally agree

with their attitudes or actions. Beliefs are ideas or opinions that, to a certain extent, we choose to have. However, our reaction to a certain incident is not always logically justified. Empathy does not require one to agree with the other's decision or action but rather to perceive a situation through the other's perspective and thus comprehend their mentality (Davis, 1983); teachers are required to do this daily. They need to adopt the perspective of their students in order to understand their needs and choose the best pedagogical approach. Perhaps, empathy is a capacity that could be incorporated in teacher training or professional development as a competence that can aid the understanding of students from diverse backgrounds and facilitate the interactions of teachers with their students. Empathy allows teachers not only to comprehend the mental and emotional situation that a child is experiencing, but also understand the motives or thought process behind a certain reaction or behaviour, for example, the one described in the vignette. Of course, the first step to culturally responsive pedagogy is respect of and knowledge of the other and his/her background. Nonetheless, teachers know that it is impossible to learn the habits, customs and needs of every single child and his/her family, especially in large classrooms. Knowledge of the other is important, but perhaps, the motivation to understand the other and the ability to empathize with the other without having to translate it in your own terms, is the most fundamental step in bridging the gap between culturally and ethically diverse individuals. Lastly, if teachers can be taught to be empathetic towards students from backgrounds that are unfamiliar to them, and model a certain attitude, we could assume that students as well, can adopt this approach to diversity. As Batson et al. (2002) conclude "empathy felt for a member of a stigmatized group can change action as well as attitudes. Those induced to feel empathy appear willing to put their money where their mouth is."

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Appendix A

This is a hypothetical situation. Consider the following situation.

Two children, one of Roma background and one not Roma are fighting: the child with Roma background claims to be Greek but the other child argues that since his/her parents are Roma, he/she is Roma. The first child cries: "I'm Greek]!".

Think about this situation as if you were the teacher. How would you respond?

	1= I would **definitely not do** this 2= I would **probably not do** this 3= I would **probably do** this 4= I would **definitely do** this

Please check the box that reflects your *feelings* or *behaviour* best.	1	2	3	4
a. **I would accept the** child's right/claim to cons**ider him/herself "just Greek" since he/she now lives in Greece** and I would talk with the **Greek** child inviting him to respect it as well.	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. **I would talk with the** child **of Roma background**, trying to make him/her understand that, **his/her parents are Roma** he other child was right in saying he/she is **Roma.**	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. I would accept the child's right/claim to consider him/herself **Greek,** but, at the same time, I would develop activities to let **him accept and value also his Romani** roots.	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. I would bring up and discuss the issue with the whole classroom to explore what children think about cultural/ethnic identity.	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. I would encourage the whole class to reflect on the fact that our identity is multiple and complex, built on, but not solely confined to, our cultural roots.	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. I would encourage the two children to discuss together the commonalities [and differences] between the two of them	☐	☐	☐	☐
g. I would use this topic to discuss with the children what [cultural] identity is and exchange views on this topic	☐	☐	☐	☐
h. **How often does something like this happen to you as a professional/teacher**	☐	☐	☐	☐