

Primary School Teachers' Collaborative Relationships within the Framework of the School Unit

Dimitris Sakkoulis¹, Anna Asimaki² & Gerasimos Koustourakis³

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the type of collaborative relationships that take shape between the teachers in Greek primary schools, as well as the factors that influence the shaping of these particular relationships. This study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with a chosen sample of 20 teachers. The main findings of the research revealed the existence of powerful classifications among teachers working in the school units that the research focused on. More specifically, the development of collaborative relationships was limited since it appeared that a traditional culture of parallel and partly isolated work was dominant. In addition, when there were collaborative relationships between teachers, these were of a restricted, occasional and fragmentary nature. Finally, there were collaborations of technical nature between the teachers working in the same school, for the organization of wide ranging school events, like school celebrations and innovative actions, such as the implementation of a project.

Keywords: Primary education, teachers, teamwork, code, boundary, classification, framing.

1. Introduction

The development of collaborative relationships for the design, implementation and final evaluation of the educational act, as is clear from a review of the relevant literature, was never dominant in the shaping of the means of organising a school. This is because these particular collaborative relationships between teachers do not comprise a form of in-school work, nor are they taught or adequately supported. That's why they appear only occasionally, taking various forms (Dobber, Akkerman, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2014; Draper, 2008; Goddard, Goddard, & Tscannen – Moran, 2007). Indeed, in schools, vertical, hierarchical relationships between the agents, which are linked to specific forms of centralised organization and reflect the implementation of provisions of an institutionalised nature relating to their means of operation, dominate (Bernstein, 1989; Dee, Henkin, & Singleton, 2006; Kougioumtzis & Patriksson, 2009).

As Basil Bernstein claims (1989), the development of collaborative relationships within school units upsets the traditional distribution of power, shaping conditions for the modification of the pedagogical identity of the teachers. It is to be noted that the educational collaborative forms are to be found outside the traditional frameworks of school organization, and provide (more or less) powerful links, as much between the staff in the school as between the school unit and the surrounding social structures or organizations. Finally, these forms provide an opportunity to work on issues that the traditional school structures do not permit (Dee et al., 2006). Besides, teaching, traditionally, is seen as a lonely process of planning, implementing and evaluating educational acts. Teachers who adopt traditional means to approach teaching, demand distinct and exclusive management of “their class” (Kougioumtzis & Patriksson, 2009). The schools, under these terms of operation, are, simultaneously, spaces for parallel work and spaces for the lonely endeavour of teaching (Shah, 2012).

¹ Ph.D Candidate, University of Patras, Department of Primary Education, Rio Patras, 265.04, Greece.

² Assistance Professor, University of Patras, Department of Primary Education, Rio Patras, 265.04, Greece.

³ Associate Professor, University of Patras, Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education, University Campus, Rio Patras, 265.04, Greece. E-mail: koustourakis@upatras.gr (Corresponding Author).

The concepts of collegiality and collaborative teaching, while used widely in the relevant literature, remain unclear from a theoretical point of view even though they create a sense of optimism (Little, 1990). The relationship between collegiality and collaboration is multifaceted and is expressed in the use of concepts such as *team teaching* (Al-Saaideh, 2010; Dilaveri, 2010; Polemi-Todoulou, 2011), *co-teaching* (Gallo – Fox & Scantlebury, 2016; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016; Strogilos, Stefanidis, & Tragoulia, 2016; Theodorou & Palikarou, 1999), *collaborative teaching* (Dakopoulou, Kauka, & Maniati, 2013; Meirink, Meijer, & Verloop, 2007), *teamwork* (Allen & Hecht, 2004) and *pair teaching* (Andersson & Bendix, 2006). The common element among all these concepts, which comprises a prerequisite for a teaching process to be considered collaborative, is the continual, systematic and voluntary collaboration between two or more teachers, of the same or differing specialities. The aim of such collaboration is the design, implementation and final evaluation of pedagogical practices that are expressed within the context of the various school classes, which aim at the improvement of learning outcomes.

The form that the collaboration of a team of teachers takes each time varies depending on the form the team takes and the views of its members, their goals, the implementation framework of a project and the existence of collaborative culture in the school (Hargreaves, 1994; Kougioumtzis & Patriksson, 2009; Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016; Sawyer & Rimm - Kaufman, 2007). The common element shared by all collaborative relationships, which could be characterised as “authentic” in contrast with “artificial” collaborative relationships, is the need for the teachers to work together as members of a team that focuses on reflection, collaboration and research, aimed at the transformation of pedagogical practices (Chan & Fai Pang, 2006). This prerequisite calls “artificial” those collaborative relationships that emerge from administrative type initiatives and are the result of pressures that are external to the team. From this point of view, the “contrived collegialities” do not always have the previously assured positive will of the participants. In addition, they undermine the development of long term collaborative relationships and are of an occasional nature (Giannakopoulou & Papageorgiou, 2014; Johnson, 2003; Kougioumtzis & Patriksson, 2009).

Frequently, in the literature we come across references to “unofficial” collaborative relationships, of an occasional nature and limited reach. “Unofficial” collaboration is linked to communicative behaviours and takes the form of atypical interaction between teachers. This is expressed in unofficial frameworks and after individual initiatives (Sawyer & Rimm – Kaufman, 2007). “Official” collaboration is less frequent and when it appears it has a particular organizational character (Sawyer & Rimm – Kaufman, 2007). The collaborative networks develop chiefly between teachers of the same grade-level (Sawyer & Rimm-Kauffman, 2007) in cases where the vertical bonds between the staff members give way and the powerful horizontal bonds are strengthened (Bernstein, 1989). What’s more, the development and maintenance of “authentic” collaborative relationships requires the existence of a relevant culture in the school, which may facilitate and support collaboration between teachers (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994; Jang, 2006; Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). Important parameters for the content and quality of the collaboration that develops each time, are the views of the teachers and their work environment, the existence of previous experience in collaborative networks, as well as social processes that are realised as much within the school as outside of it (Brown, Howerter, & Morgan, 2013; Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Dee et al, 2006; Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). In addition, it seems that the teachers’ particular working conditions play out an important role (Forte & Flores, 2014; Giakoumi & Theofilidis, 2012), as well as the existence of common goals and values amongst them. In other words, the existence and acceptance of a “correlative idea” by the members of the team of teachers, pervades and defines the collaborative relationship (Bernstein, 1989). The formation of collaborative relationships contributes to the upgrading of the school unit, to the personal and professional development of the teachers and to the improvement of learning outcomes (Goddard et al, 2007; Jao & McDougall, 2016; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Moreover, the development of a collaborative culture in a school contributes as much to its upgrading (Dee et al, 2006; Dilaveri, 2010), as to the professional development of the teachers and the renewal of the means and methods of teaching they choose and apply (Jao & MsDougall, 2016). Despite this, reservations are often noted in terms of the effectiveness of collaboration between teachers and the worry is often expressed that manipulative, centrally controlled and regulated collaboration may be turned into a tool of administrative control. In this case it brings about the orchestrated control of the teachers, a loss of their autonomy and is linked to accountability and efficiency leading to the intensification of the school workload (Johnson, 2003). In particular, some researchers mention the “romance of team work” claiming that there is not enough empirical evidence of its effectiveness and the improvement of learning outcomes (Allen & Hecht, 2004).

From a review of the international literature it is noted that scientific dialogue, concerning teacher collaboration is especially rich and is continually growing, “shedding light” on new aspects. However, focussing on the Greek space, the relevant bibliography is limited and is to be found in approaches of a descriptive nature (Dilaveri, 2010; Polemi-Todoulou, 2011). Papanastasiou & Lazaridou (2016) investigating classroom management techniques, used by Greek teachers, note that they often desire collaboration with their colleagues for teaching purposes and that this desire is on a number of occasions, fulfilled to a certain extent. Other studies focus their interest on the use of collaborative teaching in particular activities, such as teacher training and adult education (Giannakopoulou & Hasapis, 2012; Giannakopoulou & Papageoriou, 2014), as well as the implementation of educational projects (Dakopoulou et al, 2013; Papavassiliou – Alexiou & Zourna, 2016). The recent adoption in Greece of parallel support for children with learning difficulties and co-teaching in the classes that host them has become a field of investigation in recent years (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016; Strogilos et al, 2016). This is a specific and demanding form of “artificial” teamwork, in an educational system that traditionally displays a low culture of collaboration between teachers (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016). Finally, research by Kougioumtzis & Patriksson (2009), which focuses on secondary education and is a comparative study of collaborative practices being developed in Greece and Sweden is especially interesting. From the findings of this research, it follows that the Greek educational system is structured hierarchically with high levels of framing between teachers, creating fragmented collaborative cultures.

The aim of this research is to highlight the dominant collaborative relationships that develop within primary school units in Greece, and to set out the framework that contributes to the shaping of these particular relationships. In this study, after a brief review of the literature on the question of teachers’ collaborative relationships, which was attempted in this introductory section, the unit containing the theoretical framework follows. In this, Basil Bernstein’s theoretical tools, which were made use of in this research, are highlighted. There then follows the research findings and methodology, as well as the presentation and analysis of the research findings. This paper comes to an end with the section containing the Discussion and Conclusions.

2. Theoretical framework

In order to advance to the sociological approach to and analysis of our data, we relied on Bernstein’s theory which offers us “*an internal descriptive language*” of our research object (Tsatsaroni & Koulaidis, 2010, pp. 18-19). More specifically, for the approach to and analysis of our data, we made use of the concepts of code, boundary, classification and framing.

The concept of *code*, as an abstract structural principle, constitutes the ‘connecting thread’ that runs through and gives meaning to the whole of Bernstein’s theoretical model and condenses the central problematic of the theory (Solomon, 1989). The code constitutes a silently received regulative principle, which selects and unifies the appropriate meanings, the forms of their realization and the contexts that they are highlighted in (Bernstein, 1989). In other words, the codes are culturally determined and class regulated placement mechanisms (Bernstein, 2005b). In this sense, the dominant pedagogical code is a regulative principle that places the subjects (in this case, the teachers) within particular relationships with the other subjects who work within the same school unit, shaping their communicative framework. Closely linked to the concept of code in Bernstein’s theoretical schema are the concepts of *boundary*, *classification* and *framing*. Boundaries are explicit or implicit prohibitions, since as social contracts and practices they separate social groups, cognitive fields and process stages in time and space (Bernstein, 1989, 1999, 2000). The materiality of the boundary is of no great significance since boundaries are mainly symbolic (Solomon, 1989). This means that boundaries could potentially constitute forms of isolation that categorize and separate the teachers who work in a school (Bernstein, 1989). From this perspective, the collaborative relationships that develop among the teaching staff are linked to the isolations between cognitive objects and the power of the vertical and horizontal relationships that develop amongst them.

Classification refers to the extent to which boundaries between the categories are preserved. It is linked to the concept of power and determines how distinct one category is from another (Bernstein, 1989). The content of the categories can be made up of actions of subjects, actors, discourses, practices or transmission frameworks. The categorizations are determined by particular forms of power distribution. The question of power within the educational establishment is linked to the formation and maintenance of boundaries between distinct categories (Koulaidis & Dimopoulos, 2010). The power of the boundaries between the categories determines the strength of the classification.

A weakening of the boundaries means a weakening of the classification, that is categories less differentiated and vice versa (Bernstein, 1989). The form of collaboration that develops within a school unit seems to be determined by the strength of the classification of the acting subjects within the educational framework too.

Framing refers to the relationships that develop within a particular communicative framework. In other words it refers to what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, appropriate or inappropriate for the content of a communication. The appropriateness or inappropriateness of communicative content is based on the power of the boundaries in relation to the structure of a process, such as for example the educational process. In addition it is based on the relationship of the power of the boundaries between various levels in a particular professional category, such as the professional category of teachers in the case of our research (Bernstein, 1989). Consequently, the concept of framing “sheds light” on the whole of the attitudes and the boundaries between teachers.

Bernstein (1989), based on the strength of the classification and the framing, has formulated a typography of pedagogical codes, the elaborated code and the restricted code. The elaborated code is formed within every organization of transmitted educational knowledge where strong classification and framing is observed. In contrast, weak framing and weak classification in terms of the formation and organization of the transmitted knowledge form the restricted code. So, the existence and strength of the relationships as well as the form of the bonds that develop between the staff in a school constitute an organizational consequence of the elaborated codes or the restricted codes. Where elaborated codes dominate, the lesser numbers of staff members are vertical, and horizontal relationships are restricted to contact that has to do with work. In contrast, restricted codes oblige the teachers to enter into powerful collaborative relationships (Bernstein, 1990).

3. Research Questions - Methodology

In this paper we attempt to answer the following research questions:

- a) Do collaborative relationships exist in the primary schools, and what forms do such relationships take?
- b) What factors influence the development of collaborative relationships in school?

For our choice of sample, we applied the available sample method (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008; Kyriazi, 2011; Robson, 2010). More precisely, we interviewed 20 teachers (8 men and 12 women) who were working in 10 Primary Schools in the area of Patras (an urban area with a differentiated social composition). The average number of years of service of the research subjects was 16.7 years (the smallest number being 8 years and the greatest 32 years of teaching). The majority of the sample worked in schools more than 6 teachers. We used the semi-structured interview as our research tool for conducting the research. The interviews took place in the teachers' workplace, following a pre-arranged meeting and since they had earlier been informed of the purpose of the research. The interviews were conducted over a five-month period (January – May 2014). Each interview was recorded and lasted approximately one hour. Before the start of the interview, the interviewees filled in a questionnaire which concerned their relevant demographic details. When the interviews were completed we proceeded with their transcription as well as the qualitative analysis of their content (Creswell, 2011; Mason, 2003; Robson, 2010). In addition, based on our research objective as well as its theoretical background we moved on to the categorization of the data using the theme as the recording unit (Kyriazi, 2011; Vamvoukas, 2000).

In terms of the degree of reduction, during the categorization of the unit of recording, we chose to remain with the manifest content of the transcribed texts of the interviews (Kyriazi, 2011; Robson, 2010). The conceptual categories that we formed are articulated as follows:

- A. The collaborative relationships and the horizontal bonds between teachers.
 - A.1. The distinct appearances of the collaborative relationships between the teachers in the educational field.
 - A.2. The forms of the manifest collaboration between teachers.
- B. The collaboration of teachers as an organizational consequence of the implementation of dominant codes.

4. Presentation and analysis of the research findings

4.1 *The collaborative relationships and the teachers' horizontal bonds*

The Greek educational system, at the level of primary and secondary education, is traditionally distinguished by strong classification in the organisation of educational knowledge (Varnava – Skoura & Vergidis, 2011; Koustourakis, 2007).

As Bernstein (1989) claims, in educational organizations, where educational knowledge is organised according to the logic of strong classification, elaborated codes dominate. In this case knowledge is settled in well isolated and hierarchical cognitive objects and the lower educational staff tend to have vertical bonds and work relationships. This is because the teacher has been socialised based on the subject of his studies in a distinct and strongly isolated scientific identity, which contributes to the reproduction of the elaborated codes (Bernstein, 1989, 2000).

Studying the research findings we noted that the majority of the references that were recorded verify the aforementioned. A number of teachers clearly state that they don't have any experience of strong collaborative relationships in their working life, as emerges from the following representative excerpts:

"I have never done some common activity with colleagues during a particular programme. I have seen others doing it, but I have never done it" (Interview 2 – I.2.) *"Common work, long term? ...No! No!...These cases are few and far between, where particular individuals take on such actions"* (I.3.). *"Co-teaching or to apply common things with another teacher? No!"* (I.9).

The traditional culture of parallel isolated employment and the "invisible teaching acts", without systematic collaboration, are strong in the greek educational system. We noticed that, while in recent years changes have taken place that potentially support the restricted codes, such as the adoption of the interdisciplinary approach to cognitive objects and the large influx of speciality teachers, chiefly for foreign languages, Physical Education and Music¹, the elaborated codes do not appear to be giving way (Sakkoulis & Vergidis, 2017; Spiropoulou et al, 2008). Indeed, one teacher mentioned characteristically:

"In the past it was one teacher per class and the class could function like a box. Today there are so many speciality teachers, even on a technical level, that there is no dialogue between the individuals who enter the classroom. Why do they work in this way? How do they organise their teaching? How do they evaluate? Nobody talks about it!" (I. 13).

From the above excerpt it would seem that the influx of speciality teachers into the greek primary school, while it modified the composition of the teaching personnel, didn't change the internal processes. That is why the strong classification of the cognitive objects and their hierarchical relationship is reflected in the collaboration between teachers. Collaboration has the form of satellite support of the dominant cognitive objects (Language, Maths), as well as of the teacher who has the responsibility for a particular class and teaches all the main primary and secondary lessons. The following excerpts are representative:

"We will work together for example with the music teacher. If she knows an alphabet song, which is what we are doing at the moment, it will help the children learn it better" (I. 17). *"If I ask the children to find some information, I'll tell the Information Technology teacher, when he comes, to do that. Show them! With the Theatre Studies teacher too, I'll tell her to help the children understand something that I have taught them, with a theatre game"* (I. 8).

In any case, the absence of collaborative relationships is highlighted in cases where we ascertained the positive desire of some teachers to develop them too. So, the isolations remain strong and the "painfully lonely parallel" work is maintained, as emerges from the following teachers' comments:

"One year I had a lot of problems and I really wanted collaboration and support. However this didn't happen! That got me down a lot, it was my worst year in school" (I. 4). *"Collaborative teaching? I doubt that happens anywhere ...[silence]...not in any primary school. I want it! I desire it! But... [silence]... I feel very alone!"* (I. 5).

Our research data reveal that a portion of teachers refer to past experiences of collaborative "schemata". In particular, the first case of collaborative teaching, which constitutes a case of exogenous imposition and not an "authentic" collaborative endeavour, concerned the enforced collaboration of a teacher with the headmaster of the school. This collaboration included the common preparation of a cognitive object and its implementation: *"First of all we shared our ideas, how we would do the lesson. Then, since there were a lot of children in the class and we were both needed, one of us taught the lesson while the other kept an eye on the children. One would explain an exercise and the other was with the children that needed help"* (I. 1).

This particular collaboration came about due to the objective conditions that were shaped as a result of the large number of children in the particular class and the difficulty the teacher faced in handling her class. The result was the forced involvement of the school headmaster in her teaching work. The second case of collaborative teaching concerned the common preparation and planning of teaching material and is attributed by teachers in our sample to random factors: *It happened that I collaborated with a teacher when we had another class of the same grade.*

We planned the lesson together. Each worked alone in class on the plan we had prepared” (I. 12). 4.2 The distinct appearances of collaborative relationships between teachers in the educational field

As was mentioned in the literature review, the greek educational system introduced the idea of parallel teaching support for students with learning difficulties fairly recently (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016; Stogilos et al, 2016). From the data we collected we ascertained that through collaboration of the special needs teacher with the class teacher, the pedagogical climate and the means of providing the teaching work for all the children in the class was influenced positively: “...another teacher came [into the class] for parallel support...at the end of the hour he advised me: ‘you know it would be really nice if you did this or that’. I was very responsive to his advice, as a newly appointed teacher and I think he helped me. I was very anxious and I was helped to teach the children in my class how to read and how to write” (I. 14).

Related to the presentation of distinct appearances of collaborative relationships, we believe that the reference to in-school and inter-school teacher networks is interesting. In this case the particular collaborative relationships are promoted by teachers that support the restricted codes and take on relevant pedagogical actions. Teacher networks constitute a particular form of collaborative relationship and the study of them is of interest (Bernstein, 1989). One teacher stated in reference to this: “I have good experiences of collaboration. But I had to fight for it in my school and with the networks we did with other schools. I meet up with my colleagues on a regular basis, we discuss, do things in common, exchange our experiences” (I. 11).

The last case, while it does not constitute a complete form of collaborative organization of the teaching act, is differentiated from the others since it is the result of the initiative taken on by the teachers themselves. It includes extended thought and reflection of the subjects for the content of their work and may, under certain conditions, constitute the starting point for wider processes for the development of collaborative relationships amongst them. It is worth noting that the majority of teachers who mentioned collaboration with their colleagues, were positive about this experience, considering that it contributed to their professional improvement and development: “I collaborated with a colleague and it was a very pleasant experience. We exchanged ideas. It gave me a feeling of assurance. I thought to myself, ok, I’m doing fine. Two heads work better than one” (I. 16). “When you collaborate, you see how someone else deals with things that you have difficulty with, you hear ideas, you talk about them, and that is really good. Talking about common problems, doesn’t offer you a solution, but, exchanging views and seeing the way others work, you improve” (I. 8).

However, despite the positive attitude all the teachers had towards collaboration with their colleagues, they don’t desire its continuation or deepening. So, collaborative situations that were mentioned by the teachers in our sample were one-off and didn’t continue: “It was a very pleasant experience, the collaboration I had with a colleague. I didn’t do it again though. It didn’t come about again” (I. 16).

4.3 The forms of manifest collaboration between teachers

The horizontal relationships of the lower teaching staff in educational organizations where elaborated codes dominate, as happens in primary schools in Greece, are mainly contacts that don’t go deeper into the content of school work (Bernstein, 1989). They are limited to discussions about management, issues that concern pupils, or secondary matters. The administrative and teaching practices remain invisible and the organizational structure maintains and strengthens the “gossip” and the scheming (Bernstein, 1989, 2005a). From the research data it emerges that the forms that the collaborative relationships of the teachers in the sample take are: a) *occasional – informal discussions* of an operational nature on school matters or discussions on various issues that do not have anything to do with the content of their work; b) *collaborative organization of school events* (eg. School celebrations) and educational visits; And c) *collaboration for the implementation of educational projects* within the framework of educational actions in areas such as Health Education or Environmental Studies². In particular, the occasional – informal discussions concern the following cases: organization of school work and management of the school classroom, approach to issues that concern learning difficulties, matters of delinquent behaviour and how to deal with it. The following excerpts are representative: “We discuss whether there are learning difficulties and how they can be dealt with” (I. 10).

“We talk about everyday problems. A colleague says: I am facing this problem, e.g. the children are very lively or some child behaves in such and such a way. We say what we think and try to help” (I. 20).

Moreover, it appeared that the teachers in the sample, in their discussions within the field of the school, refer to the evaluation of their pupils, the material to be taught and issues related to communication with their pupils’ parents:

"We discuss how our pupils are doing and their term evaluation" (I.2). "If we have some questions about the syllabus, we discuss it in the office" (I.11). "There are informal discussions so we can avoid trouble with parents. For example, I'll ask: "There's this mum and she's driving me crazy. What shall I do?" (I.7).

We should mention that our research findings revealed the existence of "informal collaborative pairings", usually between an experienced and an inexperienced teacher. This particular type of collaboration includes the provision of support to new teachers (in the form of advice and practical guidance) from someone older: *"In my first year I had 5th Grade, and to help me understand what was going on with the syllabus and the pupils, an older colleague helped me. He showed me the steps so that I could move on too" (I. 10).*

Although through this particular teacher's discourse a primary collaborative – support schema is presented, we believe that this particular collaboration constitutes a mistaken socialization process of a newly appointed teacher in the field of the school into the dominant pedagogical code and a process of conformation to it. The majority of informal instances of discussions between teachers refer to issues that are not related to the content of the school work but focus on issues that concern things that come up, or their daily lives: *"We exchange opinions in friendly groups inside and outside of the school. We talk about current affairs, government measures... [laughter]... the weather... [laughter]... about our children. About our finances" (I. 6). "We talk about matters of burning interest to teachers, such as evaluation, as well as various personal matters" (I. 11).*

Collaborative relationships that could function as a process of socialization into the dominant pedagogical code, as Johnson (2003) observes, are the "artificial" collaborative schemata that emerge out of the attempt to implement a project, like various collaborations that were created as a result of external initiatives of an administrative nature. The following excerpts are characteristic: *"Within the teachers' board meetings, we discuss matters that concern Environmental Studies and Health Education projects, which, according to the orders (government directives), should be discussed and approved by the teachers in each school" (I. 9). "I see collaboration only when we make individual collaboration groups in order to implement various projects, such as healthy eating which some colleagues do as part of a Health Education project" (I. 5).*

The implementation of projects in the greek primary school constitutes established forms of collaboration between teachers who work in the same school unit. These collaborations could under some conditions constitute a weakening of the strong classification of cognitive objects and the teachers who are involved. Indeed, repeated participation of a significant number of teachers in projects of a restricted code has the potential to shape "interesting" ruptures in the dominant pedagogical elaborated code that is implemented in greek primary education (Bernstein, 1989). In any case, the occasional collaborations between the teachers in a school that are developed for the organization of a visit or school event constitute "artificial" collaborative processes, that are imposed by the established operational framework of the school unit (Bernstein, 1989): *"I collaborate with the 3th Grade teacher on some visits, for example to a museum..." (I. 5). "Usually [we collaborate] for a trip, for the organization of a celebration. We have to collaborate for those" (I. 9).*

From the above excerpts it emerges that the collaboration of these particular teachers remains within a distributive framework for the design and implementation of school actions of a collective nature, since almost all the pupils in a school participate in them.

4.4 Teacher collaboration as an organizational consequence of dominant codes

The forms that the official pedagogical discourse takes are determined, according to Bernstein (2005a, 2005b), by the respective values of classification and framing. The shaping of open collaborative relationships between the teaching staff of a school unit presupposes restricted codes (weak classification and framing). In educational systems, such as the greek where elaborated codes dominate, the margins for the growth of collaborative processes are restricted (Asimaki, Sakkoulis, & Vergidis, 2016; Varnava – Skoura & Vergidis, 2002). The views of the teachers in the sample point to the factors that undermine (or contribute to) the growth of collaborative relationships. In fact, based on the findings from this research, it appears that the teachers are socialized into particular traditional pedagogical identities with distinct features (Bernstein, 2000). An especial feature of the traditional identity of the teachers is their isolation during the exercise of their work. One teacher characteristically mentioned: *"We are professionals and I don't think we need to collaborate!" (I. 2).*

Loyalty to the dominant, traditional model of isolated parallel work is manifest in the views of a number of teachers in the sample: *"Teacher collaboration is at a very low level. Not that there is no interest in it. Perhaps there is just no need for it" (I. 6).*

The practice of the teacher's profession, from this point of view, is transformed into a mechanical process, with strong elements of circularity and routine, as emerges in the following excerpt: *"I have the feeling that the school operates like a council office. Each does his job and leaves"* (I.3).

It appears then that the established strong traditional structures support strong framing of subjects and that the weakening of boundaries is seen as a "threat" and an attempt at "homogenization": *"The teacher wants to stick to his job, his class. He doesn't want to interfere in his colleague's work, if he isn't asked to. He doesn't intervene because he doesn't know what might happen. He wants to avoid traps"* (I. 9). *"There are individuals that don't want to touch on such talk [discussions on collaboration]! They are negative!"* (I. 11).

What's more, an underlying element of this particular attitude is the tacit competitive relationship between teachers, which is 'revealed' clearly in the discourse of the teachers in the sample: *"There is a climate of suspicion between us. A mean spirited competitiveness. In other words, who is the best..."* (I. 8). *"My colleague who has the other class in the year group told me that she doesn't want collaborations with other teachers but wants to have her class exclusively"* (I. 10).

Consequently, in the communicative framework of the primary school, the implementation of strong horizontal isolations between teachers, as well as the difficulty in breaking the boundaries that support them, appear: *"Us teachers are very buttoned up. We don't want to go into each other's classes"* (I.1). *"I had suggested that once a month we have a meeting, to exchange views on the children, the class, our work. They said it was a very good idea...But it never happened!"* (I.5).

The discourse of the teachers in the sample reveals that apart from the strong horizontal isolations there are also vertical hierarchical relationships within the framework of the school units. The hierarchy may be institutionalized (e.g. headmaster – teachers) or emerge from the ranking of the cognitive objects of the teachers in a school (e.g. class teacher, English teacher, music teacher) or be the result of accumulated professional experience ('old' – 'new'). The statement of a teacher with many years of service is characteristic: *"I don't know why I should have to collaborate or in what direction. Perhaps it is egotistical, but I am willing to give them advice. But to be given to me advice? No!"* (I. 6).

Moreover, the strong isolations that characterize the relationships of the teachers of the cognitive objects that are taught can be found in the distribution of space and time in the field of the school. The teaching spaces are clearly delimited and distinct. Indeed, the lexical illustrations of the classrooms are interesting, which are understood by the teachers in the sample as spaces that are strongly isolated and "invisible": *"The classrooms are a bedroom!"* (I.6). In addition, time is clearly delimited, as emerges from the words of a teacher: *"The working hours are killing me! We mustn't lose an hour, not even a minute from the provisions of the curriculum or the school timetable!"* (I.4).

It is evident from the previous excerpt that the maintenance of strong boundaries between the categories is a reminder of prisons (Bernstein, 1989; Koulaidis & Dimopoulos, 2010). In this case, the role of the guards has been assumed, as the teachers mention, by education officials (the School Advisor or the headmaster), the pupils' parents or some more experienced colleague: *"...it is very easy for the School Advisor or a parent to come and ask you why you're not following the curriculum in terms of time"* (I. 5).

In addition: *"Today I went voluntarily to another class to make carnival hats and when they saw me [the other teachers] they said to me: Why are you doing that? Are they going to say well done?"* (I. 10).

Drawing to a close, we should point out that despite the unfavourable conditions, some teachers in the sample do clearly describe the conditions required for collaborative schemata to function effectively. Initially, they mention that a coherent (merging) idea is required and then the existence of positive interpersonal relationships, as well as the cultivation of a collaborative culture: *"To collaborate there must be a common framework. But it is difficult to find. People have different ideas, different opinions. It is hard for them to try out new ones"* (I. 6). *"The other teacher must trust you in order to open up and work with you. He has to want to do it and also be capable of doing it"* (I. 8).

5. Discussion – Conclusions

In this research we turned our interest to the collaborative relationships that are developed within a school unit, to their promotion and to setting out the framework that contributes to their shaping. In particular, we investigated if these particular relationships appear in the schools where the teachers in our sample teach, as well as the forms these relationships take. In addition we highlighted the factors that contribute to their growth or undermining. In the data collected we did not come across authentic collaborative relationships, as we defined them within the context of this paper. The traditional culture of parallel and partly isolated work dominates. This finding was to be expected and is supported by previous research (Kougioumtzis & Patriksson, 2009).

In a hierarchically structured educational system, like the greek, where strong framings of communicative relationships dominate in the school context, fragmented collaborative cultures are shaped. From the research findings it emerged that the teachers in the sample have limited experience of collaborative relationships. These experiences are referred to as isolated ruptures of the dominant code which, in some cases shape favourable conditions for the development of collaborative relationships which, however, are of a fragmented or occasional nature. These ruptures of the dominant code emerge either out of individual initiatives or out of special conditions required for the conduct of a lesson, or, finally, out of exogenous impositions. Under these conditions, we ascertained that the collaborative relationships we found are incomplete in terms of their organization. They focus on individual elements, like on common design or common implementation of certain educational actions and more rarely, the collective assessment of the teaching act. These relationships are occasional and are not repeated.

The in-school or inter-school teacher networks seem to constitute a particular form of collaborative relationships. Despite the fact that they do not constitute a complete form of collaborative relationships, they can, in certain cases, provide an opportunity for broader processes. These relationships which emerge as a result of teachers' initiatives, which support restricted codes and include thought and reflection on the content of school work may bring about ruptures in the dominant pedagogical code (Bernstein, 2005b). In addition, it seems that the artificial collaborations for the organization of events or the implementation of innovative actions, while they are usually occasional, may, under certain circumstances, strengthen the collaborative culture of a school unit. Our findings concur with the findings of other research (Kougioumtzis & Patriksson, 2009) which links the collaborative attitude of the teachers with the development of initiatives in the school. The fact that the teachers who support the collaborative culture of a school unit possess previous experience of involvement in innovative actions is characteristic.

Moreover, when the teachers in the sample mention collaborative relationships (Papanastasiou & Lazaridou, 2016), they usually describe downgraded communicative acts or informal forms of interaction in unofficial contexts, which do not go more deeply into the content of their work, as Bernstein claims (1989, 2005a). There are occasional discussions on matters of management, which concern every day school life, the pupils, current affairs or various matters of a personal nature. From this point of view, the particular communicative framework cannot transform the dominant tropes of the pedagogical code (Varnava – Skoura & Vergidis, 2002).

Then, as emerges from the data from this research, the dominant culture of strong framing, which is applied in the school framework, is the result of strong socialization of the teachers into belief in their cognitive object, as well as the traditional culture of strongly isolated work. Besides, the cognitive objects that are taught in the greek primary school are characterized by strong classification. In fact, their hierarchical relationship is linked to a strong classification as far as the way teachers work is concerned, a fact which shapes strong horizontal isolations. In addition, the vertical hierarchical relationships that take shape in the greek primary school are to some extent the result of the classification of the cognitive objects that are taught based on the official curriculum. Consequently the collective organization and implementation of the teaching act is undermined by the strongly structured identities of the subjects. Distinct elements of the particular identities, which function to inhibit the formation of collaborative relationships, are loyalty to the traditional model of teaching, the strong framing of the teachers during the practice of their profession, the secrecy over its content and, in part, its tacitly competitive nature. Indeed, a prerequisite for the development of authentic collaborative relationships is the existence of a merging – coherent idea that is accepted by all the teachers working in a school. Another prerequisite is high quality interpersonal relationships between the teachers, as well as a pre-existent or developing collaborative culture within the particular school unit (Bernstein, 1989, 2005a).

Bringing this study to a close, it would be interesting the conduct of research for the investigation of the development of collaborative relationships between teachers as much from a wider range of school regions in Greece, as comparatively with other countries that possess centralized educational systems, like the greek one. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate the contribution of collaborative relationships between teachers to the improvement of the learning outcomes of the pupils in particular cognitive subject areas.

Notes

1. The appointment of speciality teachers in Greek primary Schools began gradually from 1987. Initially it concerned teachers of Physical Education, English and Music. Later and since 2000 when the all-day schools began to operate, teachers of French, Theatre Studies, Information Technology and Art began to work on hourly wages.

Today, depending on the school year speciality teachers cover approximately 35-40% of the weekly teaching timetable (Sakkoulis & Vergidis, 2017).

- In the 1990s the creation of educational projects and actions in areas such as Environmental Education and Health Education was established in the greek education system.

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