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Contradictions around Inter-collegial Collaboration Regarding Differentiated Assessment for Pupils with Dyslexia in Greek State Secondary Schools

Maria Rontou

Abstract

This chapter discusses the issue of inter-collegial collaboration regarding differentiated assessment and marking for students with dyslexia in two Greek state secondary schools. Activity theory is used to analyse the contradictions that arise around the issue of differentiated assessment for pupils with dyslexia from data collected from interviews with headteachers, teachers, pupils and parents and field notes from observation across two schools. The analysis demonstrates that contradictions are created when participants try to achieve their goals for differentiation by the lack of staff meetings and collaboration between colleagues in the same school. The findings suggest the necessity of a staff meeting in the beginning of the school year regarding students with dyslexia requiring support and differentiation or the introduction of a list of pupils with dyslexia and their profiles.

Keywords: pupils with dyslexia, inter-collegial collaboration, differentiated assessment, contradictions, secondary schools

1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the issue of inter-collegial collaboration regarding differentiated assessment and marking for students with dyslexia in two Greek state secondary schools. Collaboration between colleagues is necessary for dyslexia provision. Mackay suggests that portraits on all pupils with specific learning difficulties including individual teaching and learning strategies should be available to all staff [1]. The introduction of student profiles was an example of a successful initiative taken by SENCOs in Hunter-Carsch study [2]. SEN directories and student profiles were introduced in one school in order to increase the effectiveness of communication between SEN staff and curriculum subject teachers. Pollock and Waller also mention the difficulty of special needs teachers to communicate with all subject teachers about individual students [3]. They suggest that a list of pupils requiring support circulates regularly emphasizing their particular needs. They also suggest that all teachers communicate regarding students with dyslexia.

As far as the Greek context is concerned, Arapogianni reported lack of contact and collaboration of teachers with other professionals [4]. Lappas also reported lack of communication and collaboration between learning support teachers and mainstream teachers in Greek primary schools because of the lack of responsibility of the headteachers for the provision for specific learning difficulties, which lay only with the learning support teachers [5]. In my study, I used similar methods (semi-structured interviews) to investigate if inter-collegial communication is effective from the perspective of parents, pupils and teachers and headteachers but not learning support teachers and policy agents as Lappas [5] did. Furthermore, my study was carried out in secondary schools as opposed to primary schools in Lappas [5].

1.1 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework was needed for this study that explores human learning within organizational systems in a collective way. Activity theory and the work of Engestrom provided one such framework [6]. Sociocultural activity theory was initiated by Vygotsky when he tried to explain the learning process by arguing that learning enables people to think or do something beyond their capability and this is done in a historical, cultural and social context, with one or more people [7, 8]. Vygotsky believed that human activity happens when the subjects, those whose actions are analysed, resolve a shared problem, an ‘object’, by using ‘tools’ to achieve a goal [9]. Engeström [6] describes how the current understanding of activity theory has evolved through three generations of research. The first generation contributed to activity theory the idea of ‘mediation’, which was represented in Vygotsky’s [8] triangular model (**Figure 1**) linking the subject and the object through mediating artefacts [6].

In the second generation, which was developed from Leont’ev’s writing [6, 10, 11], Engeström expanded the triangular representation of an activity system to enable the examination of activity systems at an organizational level as opposed to a focus on the individual actors operating with tools [12]. This expansion of the Vygotskian triangle represents the social or organizational elements in an activity system through the addition of the elements of community, rules and division of labour (see **Figure 2**).

Activity theory was selected as a theoretical framework for the data collection and analysis of this study because it allowed the inclusion of different groups of participants and the investigation of the relationship between them. The second principle of activity theory, multi-voicedness, was useful for this study as it allowed the investigation of multiple points of view on the same issue, that of the EFL teachers, the students, the parents and the Ministry of Education [6].

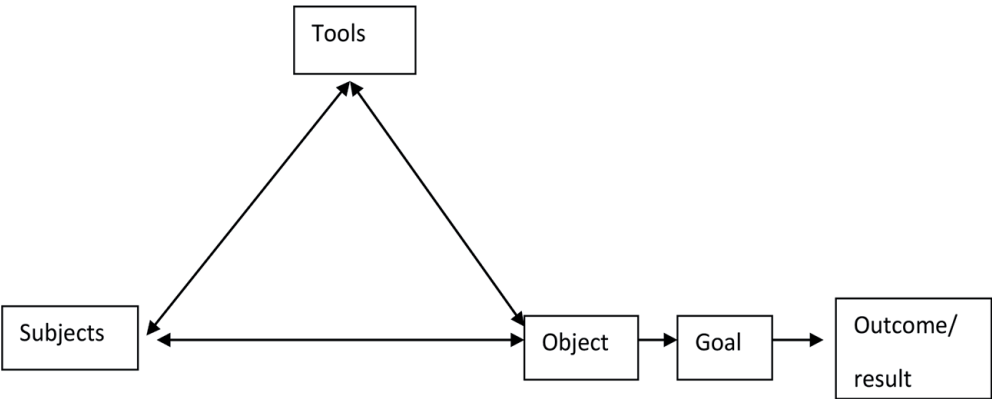


Figure 1.
The principal relationship in an activity system.

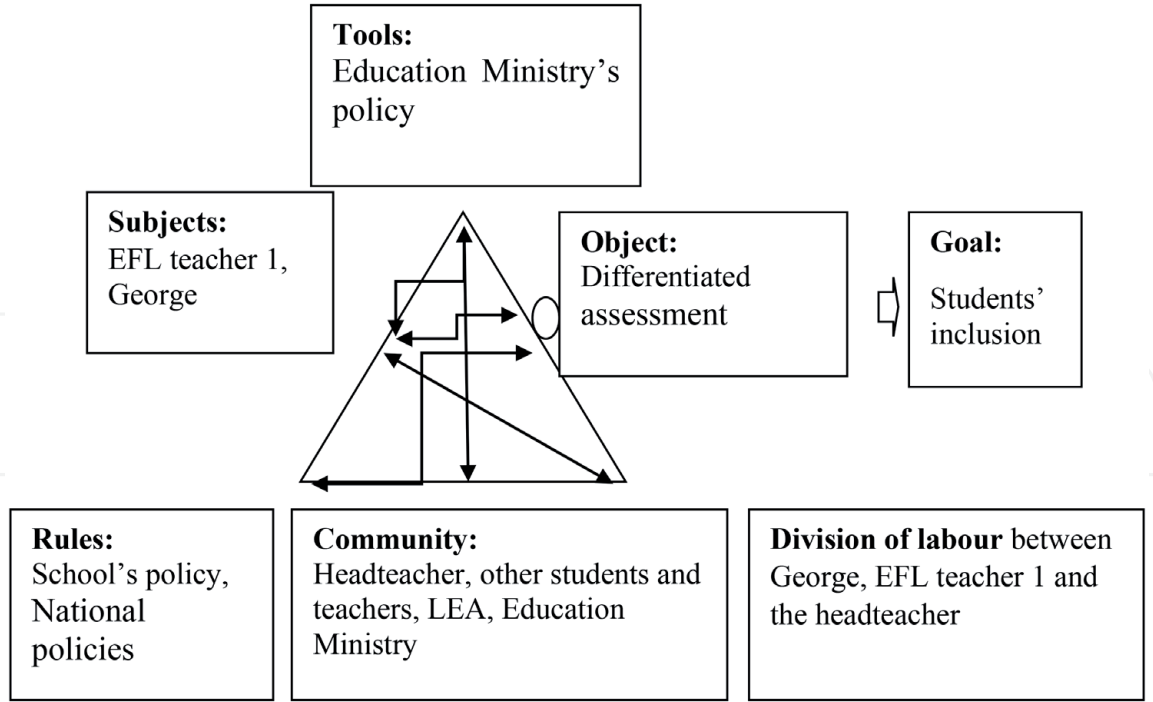


Figure 2.
Second generation of activity theory.

Therefore, the subjects of learning of the activity system in School 1, the school where the study took place, are English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher 1 and one student with dyslexia, George (see **Figure 2**). A possible object of learning, that is, what the subjects are working on, is differentiated assessment [12]. The goal in an activity system is the result of the ‘creative effort’ that can be met when the problems are resolved [13]. A possible goal in this study is the inclusion of students with dyslexia.

The community representing the wider sociocultural influences includes the context of the activity, that is, the people who are concerned with the same object: the headteacher of the school, the other students and teachers, the Local Education Authority (LEA) and the Ministry of Education [12, 14]. Therefore, the activity is a collective one and not an individual action of the teacher only or the students only [6].

The division of labour in this study refers to the division of tasks between the EFL teacher, the headteacher and student. The rules are the principles regulating the actions of the participants and they can be both written and unwritten, for example, the national policies on dyslexia and their interpretations by the headteacher of the school as well as the routines and professional practices of the teachers [12].

Since activity theory is deeply contextual and studies specific local practices, it is often linked with the use of case study (e.g. [6, 15, 16]) that takes context and its details into account [17]. An appropriate design for this study using activity theory as a theoretical framework was a case study. A case study was suitable for this study as it aimed to go into sufficient detail and explore the complexities of dyslexia provision and multiple sources were necessary for the collection of data [17].

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Methods

The study included multiple methods for triangulation purposes, which is a characteristic of case studies [18]: semi-structured and unstructured ethnographic

interviews with two EFL teachers, one teacher of Greek, two headteachers, one student with dyslexia and his parents and lesson observation with field notes and digital audio recording of EFL lessons.

The interviews with participants were carried out in the Greek language and they were transcribed and were translated into English. This process involved construction of meaning and interpretations by the transcriber and translator [19]. One problem was that the interviews were in spoken form transcribed in the Greek language, which had to be translated in written form in the English language. This created a problem of equivalence.

The case studies in this paper are ethnographic because this study had a longitudinal element as it included the researcher's contact with the participants in schools and their houses over a long period of time [20]. The researcher spent 13 weeks collecting data with School 1 participants and 16 weeks collecting data with School 2 participants. The researcher also kept contact with EFL teacher 2 and attended seminars with her the year after the study.

The data were analysed using activity theory in order to investigate the perspective of the different groups of participants and the relationship between them as well as the relationship between the participants and the tools, the rules, the community and the division of labour and how these influence the achievement of participants' goals. The analysis focused on patterns in teachers', students' and parents' needs as well as on the contradictions in the achievement of the participants' goals. Contradictions are tensions or dilemmas that arise from the processes within and between the elements of the activity system and become the object of collaborative learning [9]. Therefore, the aim of the analysis is to identify the contradictions that appear when the teachers, students and parents try to work on their objects as well as the factors that created these contradictions. Contradictions between elements of the activity system are indicated in the figures by lightning-shaped arrows [16].

1.2.2 Context and participants

The data for this study come from two state secondary schools in Athens, School 1 and School 2. School 1 was an upper secondary school while School 2 was a lower secondary school. The data used in this paper from School 1 involved an EFL teacher, a headteacher, a student with dyslexia, George and his parents. George was 17 years old and attended the second year of senior high school. He was diagnosed with dyslexia at the age of 14. He attended EFL lessons up to B class at a language school. EFL teacher 1 had 19 years of teaching experience, 6 out of which were at the state sector. The data used in this chapter from School 2 involved an EFL teacher and a headteacher. EFL teacher 2 had 19 years of teaching experience, 8 of which were at the state sector.

The selection of schools was guided by convenience, that is, the accessibility of schools and the availability of individuals in them due to professional contacts [21, 22]. The researcher was also informed by the headteacher that there were students with dyslexia in the school. The EFL teachers that participated in the study were teachers who had pupils with dyslexia in their classes and who agreed to participate in the study after being informed about its aims and procedure.

The criterion for choosing students was a dyslexia diagnosis and their parents' informed consent to participate in the study. In order not to identify the school and the participants, pseudonyms were used for the students and the teachers' names were replaced with codes like EFL teacher 2, headteacher 2, mother 1 and father 1 [23].

The researcher was not a teacher at the schools in which the research was conducted but was a teacher permanently employed by the Greek Ministry of Education working in another LEA. Although she was not an employee in the two schools, the researcher was part of the same culture, had gone through the same educational system, had grown up and went to school in the same area as the first school and had lived in the area of the second school.

2. Findings

2.1 The parents' perspective in School 1

I next investigate whether teachers in School 1 collaborate with each other for dyslexia issues. I explore the issue from the perspective of the parents, the student, the headteacher, the EFL teacher and the teacher of Greek of School 1.

George's parents were especially unhappy with the lack of information to teachers about the students with dyslexia in their classes. George's father complained that when he went to the school the year before the research was carried out to talk to the teachers, he was told that George had not informed teachers about his 'diagnosis' (Extract 1):

Extract 1. Interview with George's parents.

F1 ... last year was his worst year at school

M it was the worst yes

F1 he felt ... something with the teachers, I had gone two or three times. When I tell [teachers] 'he has [dyslexia]', 'he hasn't told me' eh how hasn't he told you?

If George is expelled for five days don't teachers tell each other? That is don't you notice this problem?

M teachers don't collaborate with each other

F1 yes this is my problem, that is, I went nuts last year.

Furthermore, George's father felt disappointed the year before the study took place when he saw that George's diagnosis was the first on the pile when the teacher of Greek opened the folder in front of him:

Extract 2. Interview with George's parents.

F1 ... and last year when the teacher of Greek opened the folder the paper [diagnosis] that we had taken that he has a problem was on top so how come they not know?

As a result of not being informed, some teachers refused to differentiate testing for George, for example, they refused to examine him orally:

Extract 3. Interview with George's parents.

Mo1 not only did they not know that there was a problem that is, ... when we went George was finishing the first four months and they hadn't even gone to the trouble of telling him 'come to tell us [the answers] orally'

Last year, the history teacher refused to examine George orally and the same happened this year also with the theoretical subjects of Principle of Economic Theory and Principles of Management and Administration of Business and Services:

Extract 4. Interview with George's parents.

F1 Last year while he was writing history and he says 'can I say it orally?' because George will make a mistake, 'it doesn't matter George', she says, why doesn't it matter?

Mo1 It doesn't matt- George she says, 'instead of 18 you get 15', 'why did I get 15?' 'Because there is no clear meaning'... 'I can tell you orally', 'eh now [how can we do it]

M When did this happen?

Mo1 Now now, this has happened now as well

M With teachers of Greek?

Mo1 I can't remember if it happened with a teacher of Greek, it has happened with a theoretical subject that you could say it orally that is. In economics and in business management it has happened sometime.

George's and his parents' object in the activity system in **Figure 3** during the year before the research was carried out was to inform George's teachers about his diagnosis. Their goal was to make sure teachers differentiated their teaching and assessment for George. The teachers are not in the subject position as I cannot know if they wanted to be informed or not considering at least two of them were not willing to examine George orally. There was a contradiction in the teachers' not being informed about and not using the tool of George's diagnostic report, which made the object and the goal difficult to meet. This contradiction could have been resolved by either the parents going to the school at the end of the first 4-month period or the student telling the teachers about his diagnosis after getting his exam result. The goal of differentiated assessment and marking was not achieved with the history teacher last year even after she was informed about his diagnosis by George (Extract 4).

2.2 George's perspective for the current year

Because of his past year's experiences, George decided to inform the teachers of the subjects for which he would have to take exams for entering university about his dyslexia from the beginning of this school year as he wanted to be given good grades in these subjects (Extract 5, lines 340–341). It is interesting though that George informed only the specialization subject teachers about his dyslexia and not the general education subject teachers such as the EFL teacher and a teacher of Greek whom I interviewed because he did not care about these subjects. His parents also mentioned this (Extract 5, lines 336–337).

However, it seems that last year's situation is being repeated this year as two teachers, the teachers of Development of Applications in Programming and Principles of Management and Administration of Business and Services, have refused to examine George orally or at least to differentiate their marking in exams although they were told that he had difficulty expressing his thoughts in written form and he wanted to be examined orally (Extract 5).

Extract 5. Interview with George's parents.

332 M But he went and told them himself in specialization subjects

333 Mo1 In specialization

334 M Teachers of the rest of the subjects didn't know

335 Mo1 Yes yes yes

336 F1 But he doesn't care

337 Mo1 We said this that he doesn't care at all for the general education subjects

338 but where he cared ... he went alone

339 M Ah he went
340 Mo1 And he said from the start 'I have dysgrafia, I want you to pay attention
341 to it'

The activity system of School 1 in terms of George's object for the current year (informed specialization teachers) is presented in **Figure 4**. Second generation of activity theory [6] is applied to analyse this theme as both George and his current teachers belong to the same institution and the same community with the same rules. George's object was to be taught by specialization teachers who were informed about his dyslexia and differentiate his assessment and marking of his paper. He knew from previous experience that his specialization subjects' teachers would not be informed about his dyslexia in the beginning of the year. For this reason, he informed them about it although it was not his responsibility to do so. George's behaviour was innovative; he tried to solve the problem in the activity system on his own, subverting the rules of the activity system of School 1, the usual practices that require the headteacher to inform teachers about students' diagnoses rather than the students themselves. George's innovative behaviour led to the partial achievement of his goal, which was differentiation in assessment and marking, as two teachers still refused to differentiate their marking. I showed that George's parents and George would have liked to have informed teachers on students' diagnoses in order to have the provision he deserves but this was not always the case.

2.3 Professionals' perspectives in School 1

I next explore whether headteacher 1 informed teachers about the students with dyslexia in School 1 and how a teacher from the lower secondary school informed EFL teacher 2 from the upper secondary school (School 1).

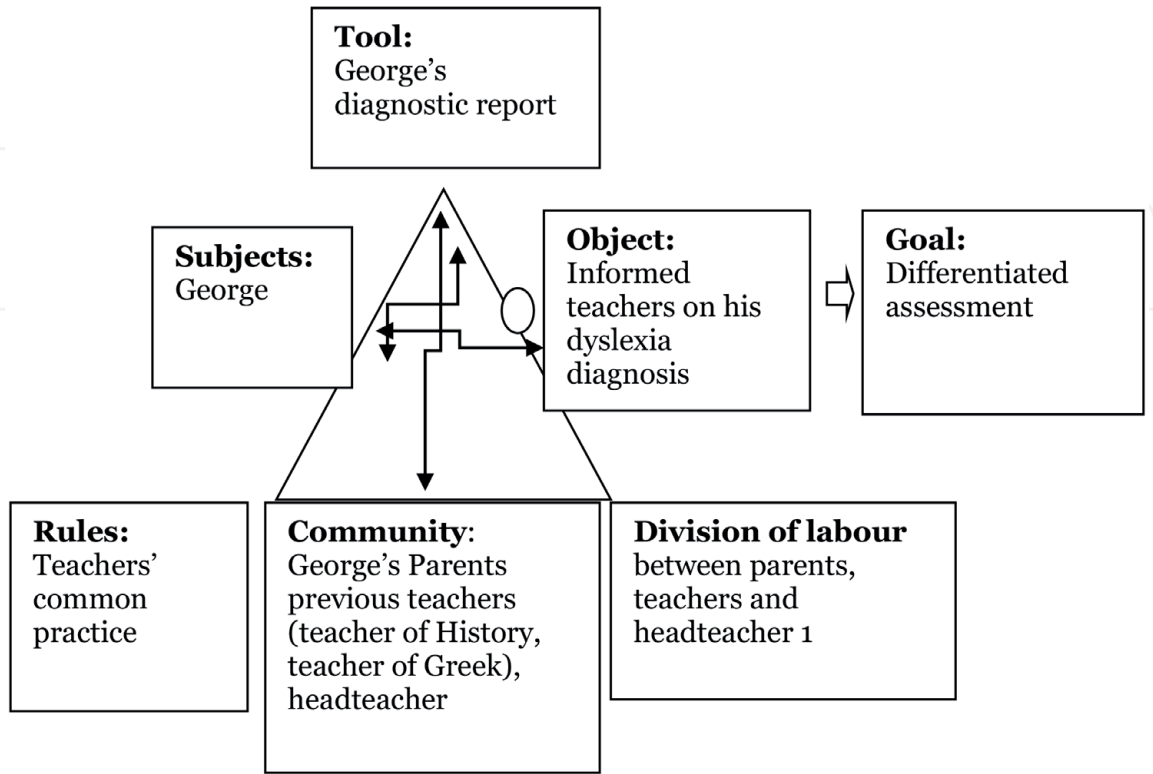


Figure 3.
George's object and goal for previous year.

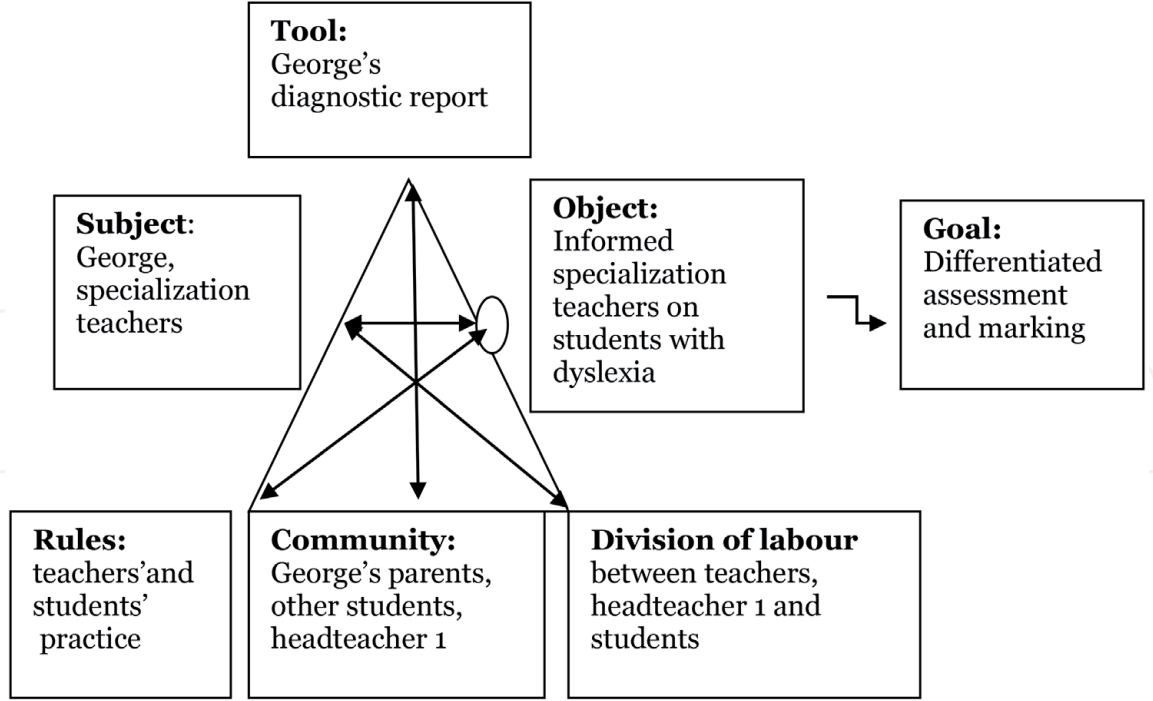


Figure 4.
Informed specialization teachers.

When I started the study in School 1, the headteacher told me that the teachers who have students with dyslexia in their classes are always informed about the students with dyslexia and the children are supported:

Extract 6. Interview with HT1.

M Have all the teachers been informed?
HT1 Yes, always when a student comes, when such a student exists the teachers who teach the specific class are informed and this child is helped because of this problem

This interview gave me the impression that the headteacher talked generally about what is done in schools regarding dyslexia, not what happened in his school. I came to this conclusion because when I met the EFL teacher a month earlier she was not informed by the headteacher about this issue but by a teacher of Greek from the lower secondary school in the same building. This is what I wrote in my field notes about this:

Extract 7. Field notes.

She [the EFL teacher] wasn't informed by the headteacher about the fact that these students have dyslexia because both she and the headteacher came to the school this year. A teacher of Greek from the lower secondary school told her about these students because she had taught them at lower secondary school.

At an organizational level, there is no collaborative mechanism between the lower secondary and upper secondary school to exchange information on students with dyslexia. At an individual level, the teacher of Greek from the lower secondary school (subjects, **Figure 5**) gave information on the student with dyslexia (George) to the EFL teacher in the upper secondary school in order to facilitate my study. She gave the information that the EFL teacher (subject) needed to receive in order to differentiate her teaching. In this way, she subverted the rules of professional practice, which require that the headteacher informs teachers about students with dyslexia (contradiction). The teacher of Greek offered the EFL teacher a 'what artifact' that she could use to achieve the goal of differentiated teaching.

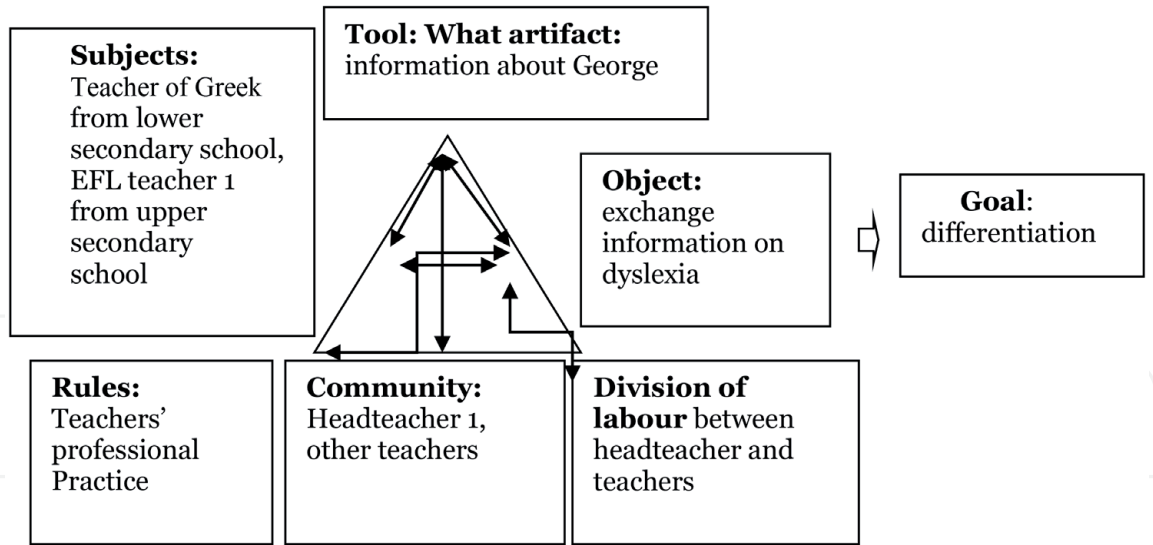


Figure 5.
Teacher of Greek and EFL teacher 1 exchanging information.

This artefact influenced the community in School 1, that is, the headteacher and possibly other teachers in School 1. When my research started, the teacher of Greek from the lower secondary school informed EFL teacher 1. EFL teacher 1 probably searched for students' diagnostic reports. She must have asked the headteacher to give her the reports or tell her who the students with dyslexia were since she mentioned to me the other two students with a diagnosis of dyslexia during the study. She mentioned a boy in January (*there is another boy who is supposed to have [dyslexia]...* Interview with T1) and a girl in February:

Extract 8. Interview with T1.

T1 ... there are students like I said, a female student there is in the other class, who, while she has a paper [diagnosis], I don't see her facing this problem.

When I talked to the teacher of Greek of George's class in December she was not aware of George's diagnosis of dyslexia either:

Extract 9. Field notes.

She [the teacher of Greek] didn't know that George had a diagnosis, she hasn't seen his writing yet as they haven't written an exam yet and it is the first year that she teaches his class. She didn't happen to see his file with his report either.

This suggests that in the beginning of the year there was no appropriate staff meeting or no other effective way of informing teachers on students with dyslexia.

When I asked the EFL teacher later during the study, in January, if she collaborates with the headteacher about dyslexia issues, she said that she does in order for the headteacher to inform her about students with dyslexia. However, he does not tell her how to examine them because he probably does not know either:

Extract 10. Interview with teacher 1.

M Do you collaborate with the headteacher?
T1 Look... I collaborate so that they tell me first of all who they are ...
M Has he told you what to do in exams?
T1 No there isn't such a thing, because who knows? Who knows?

In **Figure 6**, the activity system of School 1 is presented. The learning object for EFL teacher 1 and the teacher of Greek is to receive information on students with

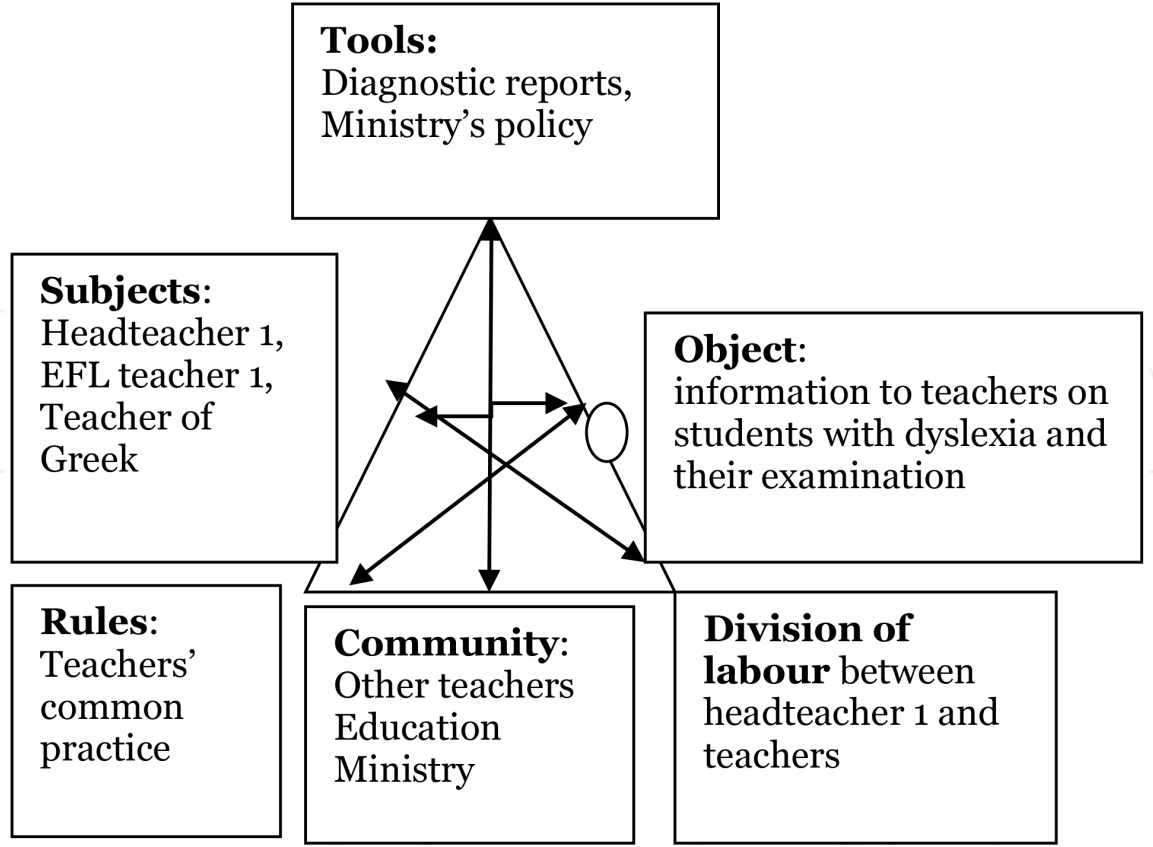


Figure 6.
Headteacher 1-EFL teacher 1 collaboration.

dyslexia and on how she can examine them. The headteacher's object is to inform teachers in his school about the students with dyslexia. However, it seems that the he did not inform teachers at the beginning of the year (September–October). Therefore, his object was not met by him but by the junior high school teacher who informed the EFL teacher about George's diagnosis. It is possible that headteacher 1 and EFL teacher 1 collaborated in the middle of the school year regarding the diagnostic reports since EFL teacher 1 seemed to know about them as I mentioned before.

In this section, I showed that in School 1 EFL teacher 1 and a teacher of Greek would have liked to be informed by the headteacher on the students with dyslexia but this did not happen in the beginning of the school year. EFL teacher 1 was informed by a teacher of Greek from the lower secondary school instead.

2.4 Collaboration between EFL teacher and teachers of Greek in School 1

Next, I discuss the collaboration between EFL teacher 1 and the teachers of Greek in School 1 around the examination of students with dyslexia.

EFL teacher 1 admitted that she does not collaborate with teachers of Greek of the same school as she believes that in Greek subjects the oral examination is much easier than in EFL even if the student with dyslexia is weak in the subject in which s/he is examined:

Extract 11. Interview with T1.

M And with the teachers of Greek? You said you haven't talked to them.
T1 I haven't talked to them because, look, they deal with Greek. The oral examination is much easier. How can I examine him orally in a foreign language? That is, it is as if I am asking someone who doesn't speak Greek to be examined orally in

Greek. In what can I examine him exactly? I talk to him let's say and he doesn't [talk back].

The second generation of activity system is used for this theme as both EFL teacher 1 and the teacher of Greek belong to the same institution (School 1) and therefore the same community. The EFL teacher's object (object in **Figure 7**) was to have information on how they learn better and what difficulties they face and her goal was to examine the students with dyslexia like George orally (goal).

The teacher of Greek who taught George's class wanted to be informed on the students with dyslexia in her class (object) but this did not happen in the beginning of the school year (Extract 9). She was also interested in examining students orally (goal) when I told her that George wanted to be examined orally:

Extract 12. Field notes.

Therefore, there is a systemic contradiction in the activity system of School 1 (Figure 7) in the lack of an appropriate tool (how artifact) for the information of teachers on dyslexia issues and the establishment of collaboration among them.

Therefore, there is a systemic contradiction in the activity system of School 1 (**Figure 7**) in the lack of an appropriate tool (how artifact) for the information of teachers on dyslexia issues and the establishment of collaboration among them.

2.5 Inter-collegial collaboration in School 2

Headteacher 2 told me that she informs teachers about dyslexia issues, on dyslexia diagnoses in the school and on the relevant guidelines:

Extract 13. Interview with HT2.

HT2 we give ... information to teachers around the problem and the dyslexia certificate as well as the relevant guidelines.

It seems that headteacher 2 did inform the staff in her school about the above issues as EFL teacher 2 was fully informed about the students with dyslexia when

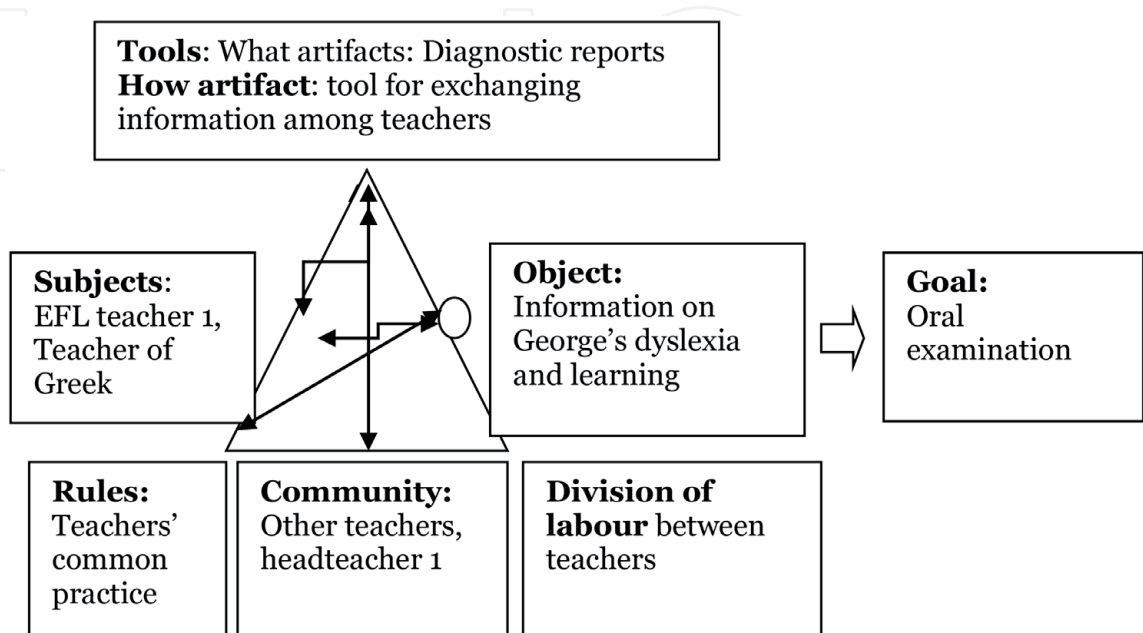


Figure 7.
Information on George's learning.

I first discussed the issue with her. EFL teacher 2 was also informed about the Education Ministry’s guidelines regarding students with dyslexia. Therefore, headteacher 2’s object of informing the teachers about students with dyslexia diagnoses and about the guidelines was achieved (**Figure 8**).

However, EFL teacher 2 was not aware of School 2’s collaboration with the diagnostic centres that headteacher 2 told me about. This suggests that headteacher 2 has not informed EFL teacher 2 on the issue, which means that her object of informing teachers was partially met.

I also asked EFL teacher 2 if she collaborates with teachers of Greek in her school and she replied that when a teacher in the school suspects that a student has dyslexia s/he discusses it with the other teachers (Extract 14, lines 384–385). She asks what

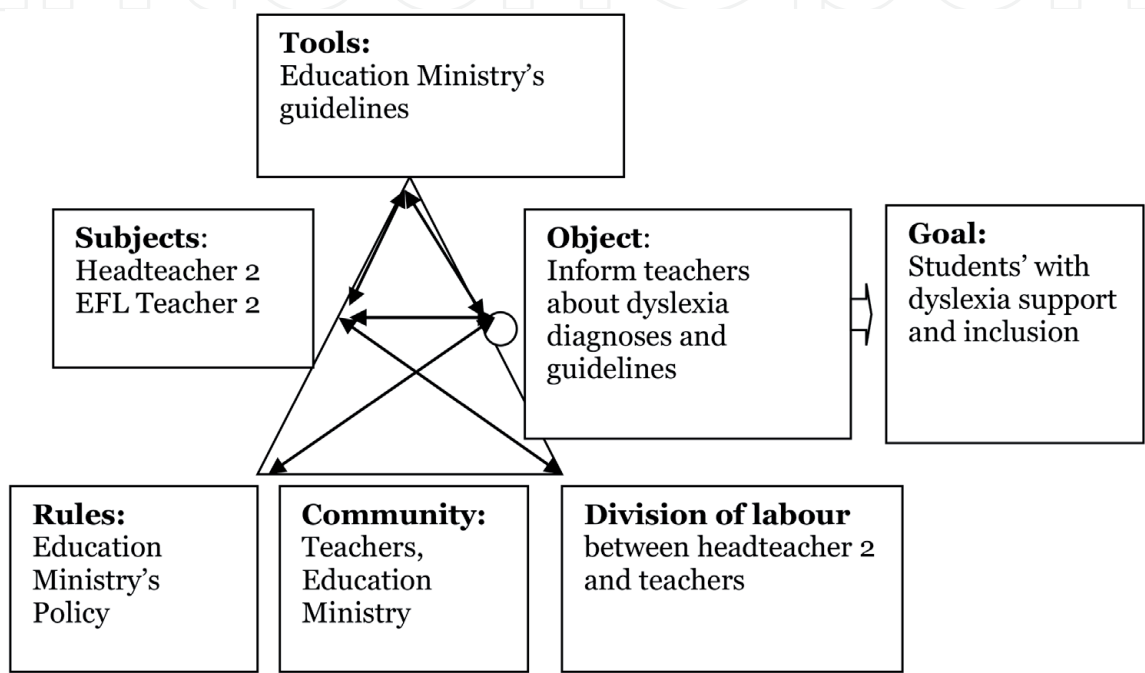


Figure 8.
Information from headteacher 2 to teachers.

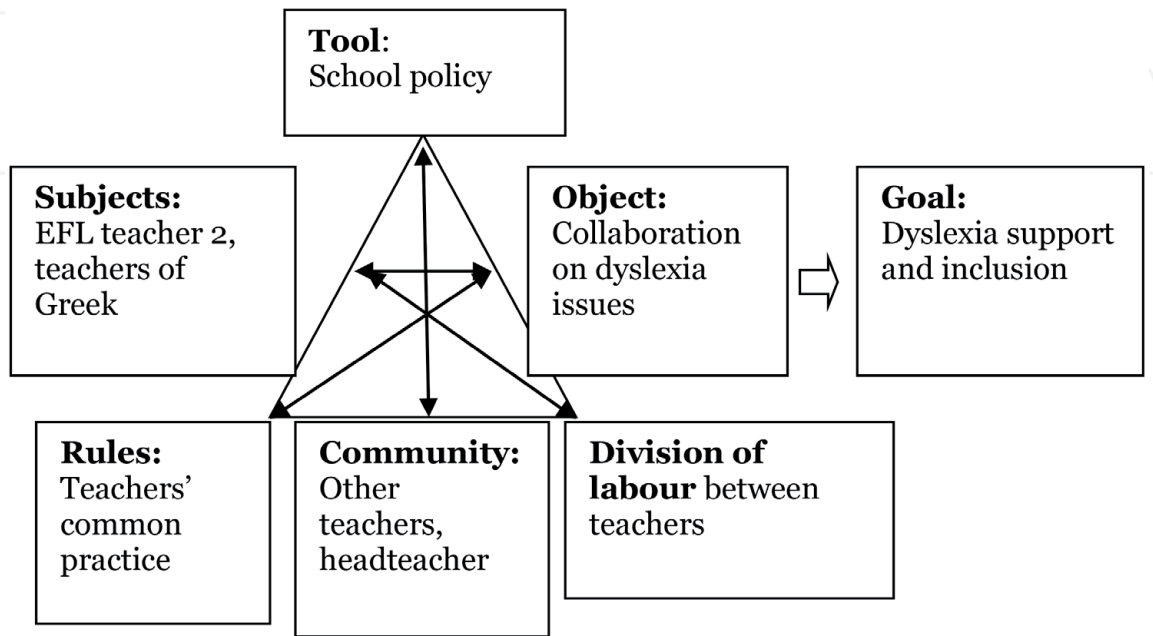


Figure 9.
Collaboration of EFL teacher 2 with teachers of Greek.

other teachers do in their classes only if she has a serious problem and if the student cannot follow the lesson at all (lines 389–391).

Extract 14. Interview with T2.

383 M *Is there collaboration with teachers of Greek ... ?*
384 T2 *When someone suspects there is an issue s/he discusses it with the*
385 *other colleagues to see if something is going on. If an issue arises, of*
386 *course we discuss it*
387 M *To see what the others do, how the student behaves in their lesson and*
388 *such.*
389 T2 *Only if I have a serious problem.*
390 M *Mmm.*
391 T2 *And I see that a child can't follow the lesson at all ...*

In **Figure 9**, EFL teacher 2's and teachers' of Greek object of collaboration on dyslexia issues is met. Furthermore, in School 2, headteacher 2 effectively informs teachers about students' diagnoses and the guidelines from the Ministry of Education.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter, data related to the themes of collaboration across schools and inter-collegial collaboration were analysed. The analysis showed that the collaboration of colleagues in the same school was not effective in School 1, which influenced dyslexia provision offered by the EFL teachers and other teachers. On the other hand, collaboration of colleagues in the same school was more effective in School 2. Therefore, second generation of activity theory was used to the extent that the data allowed its use and it was demonstrated by the analysis that inter-organizational learning and boundary crossing did not take place in my study. This happened because my study is not an intervention study that aims to bring professionals from different backgrounds together to work on a common object.

This study demonstrated that a 'how artifact' is needed in order for the contradiction of the lack of communication between colleagues to be resolved. A staff meeting is necessary in secondary schools in the beginning of the school year in which headteachers inform teachers on the students' with dyslexia diagnoses. Regular staff meetings need to be organized during the school year in order for teachers of the same school to exchange information on students' with dyslexia difficulties, behavioural problems and progress and the teaching techniques they use. According to Mackay and Hunter-Carsch and Pollock and Waller, portraits or profiles on all pupils with specific learning difficulties need to be available to all staff in schools [1–3].

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