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TRAINING ACTIONS FOR SPECIALIST SUBJECT TEACHERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper, which makes use of Basil Bernstein's theoretical framework, is the investigation of training actions for specialist subject teachers in Primary education and their contribution to the teachers' professional development, as well as, the detection of the factors that influence it within the context of the school. The research was carried out using semi-structured interviews with a sample of 16 specialist subject teachers who were working in Primary education in Greece. The most significant findings of the research revealed that their main training actions focused on the initial in-service training, atypical forms of self-training, as well as informal forms of training which didn't appear to make a meaningful contribution to their professional development. In addition, the most significant factors that appeared to have a negative influence on the professional development of specialist subject teachers, within the context of the school, were the formation of vertical – hierarchical work – collaborative relationships, as well as the obvious absence of the school advisor.

Key words: Training, professional development, specialist subject teachers, code, recontextualisation

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Σκοπό της εργασίας αυτής, στην οποία αξιοποιήθηκε το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο του Basil Bernstein, αποτελεί η διερεύνηση των επιμορφωτικών δράσεων των εκπαιδευτικών ειδικότητας στην πρωτοβάθμια εκπαίδευση και η συμβολή τους στην επαγγελματική τους ανάπτυξη, καθώς και η ανίχνευση των παραγόντων που την επηρεάζουν εντός του σχολικού πλαισίου. Η έρευνα πραγματοποιήθηκε με ημιδομημένες συνεντεύξεις σε δείγμα 16 εκπαιδευτικών ειδικότητας που εργάζονταν στην πρωτοβάθμια εκπαίδευση

στην Ελλάδα. Τα σημαντικότερα ευρήματα της έρευνας κατέδειξαν ότι οι κύριες επιμορφωτικές τους δράσεις αφορούσαν στην αρχική ενδοϋπηρεσιακή επιμόρφωση, σε άτυπες μορφές αυτομόρφωσης, καθώς και σε μη τυπικές μορφές επιμόρφωσης οι οποίες δεν φάνηκε ότι συνέβαλαν ουσιαστικά στην επαγγελματική τους ανάπτυξη. Επιπλέον, οι σημαντικότεροι παράγοντες που φάνηκε ότι επηρεάζουν αρνητικά την επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη των εκπαιδευτικών ειδικότητας, εντός του σχολικού πλαισίου, ήταν η διαμόρφωση κάθετων – ιεραρχικών εργασιακών – συνεργατικών σχέσεων, καθώς και η εμφανής απουσία του σχολικού συμβούλου.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: επιμόρφωση, επαγγελματική ανάπτυξη, εκπαιδευτικοί ειδικότητας, κώδικας, αναπλαισίωση



INTRODUCTION

In recent decades teachers have experienced continual educational reforms that are linked to the need to adapt to the educational policy of the states according to the demands of the so-called 'society of knowledge' (Day, 2003; Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011). The implementation of the reforming procedures, as much within organisations as educational systems, is a complex task which is usually carried out from 'top to bottom' (Avidov-Ungar, 2016). On a Greek and international level, the changes in the educational field through educational reform are multiple and multi-dimensional as far as the content of knowledge and educational objectives are concerned (Herdeiro & e Silva, 2013; Papanaoum, 2005). Teachers are at the centre of this process, since it is believed that they play a key role in the success of educational work. In particular, through policies that are developed for the smooth running of educational systems, the teachers are confronted with a plethora of challenges. These stem from socio-economic, technological and cultural developments, as well as from the enforced and increasing updating of knowledge. Consequently, their training and professional development are deciding factors in upgrading education (Papanaoum, 2005).

The professional development of teachers also constitutes a matter of great significance in the upgrading of education and is a long-term process that includes experiences, knowledge and skills for the development of their profession (European Commission, 2010; Huang, 2016). This professional development is a dynamic process of continuous education, self-training and in-school activities that the teachers take on so as to improve their personal and professional abilities and consequently their work environment (Bagakis, 2005; Day, 2003). The teachers' professional development appears in the scientific literature as a multi-dimension-

al concept (Avalos, 2011; Gemeda, Fiorucci, & Catarci, 2014; Ifanti & Voziatis, 2009; Sakkoulis, Asimaki, & Vergidis, 2017; Zein, 2016). It is based on formal and institutionally determined learning practices, such as basic training, in-service training and participation in scientific conferences and seminars of a professional nature. In addition, it is based on informal learning activities as well, which are mainly fed by informal 'collaborative' networks in order for the teachers to enrich their pre-acquired knowledge (Avalos, 2011; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

In Greece, the educational authorities and the educational-scientific community have turned their attention to the training and professional development of teachers hoping in this way to achieve the qualitative advancement of education system (Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Ifanti & Vozaitis, 2009; Papanaoum, 2005). However data on training and professional development of teachers in Greece and most European countries reveal that the implementation of mass training programmes hasn't proved effective enough. In addition, the in-service training programmes are of short duration, are not linked to each other and do not satisfy the goal of the improvement and development of teachers' teaching knowledge (Borko, 2004; Karagiorgi & Symeou, 2008; Sakkoulis & Vergidis, 2017; Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Vougioukas, 2011; Zein, 2016).

The training of specialist subject teachers in Greek Primary Education is an important issue since this particular group has followed different educational trajectories that shape different training needs, directly linked to their professional development (Sakkoulis & Vergidis, 2017).

The aim of this paper is to investigate training actions for specialist subject teachers in Greek Primary Education and their contribution to their professional development, as well as to search for the factors that seem to influence it.

The paper begins with the section on the theoretical framework and this is followed by the research questions, the methodological approach and the presentation and analysis of the research findings. The paper is completed with the discussion and conclusions.

^{1.} The Ministerial Decree FEK 1324/11-5-2016, issue B shaped the 'Unified All Day Primary School' in which specialist subject teachers had the chance to teach in all primary schools that had for or more year groups (Sakkoulis & Vergidis, 2017).



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Bernstein (1989), pedagogical discourse reflects, in the educational field, the regulative discourse and is a principle that incorporates power and social control. The chief mission of pedagogical discourse is the operation of recontextualisation, which refers to the process of the selection and transfer of knowledge from its primary spaces of production (primary context - intellectual field) to the space of its transmission (secondary context – field of reproduction). The recontextualisation of the specialised scientific discourses (training discourse here) is implemented by the Official Recontextualising Field - ORF and the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field – PRF. The PRF is made up of actors (intellectuals, university professors) who have the potential to intervene in the planning of educational policy and the educational field it is implemented in. The ORF is made up of state sectors that are responsible for the shaping and implementation of educational policy, as well as control mechanisms (actors and positions) that concern the control of its application and which Bernstein named 'guards' (in this case headmasters and school advisors) (Bernstein, 2000).

Training is characterised as a process for the 'integration' and recontextualisation of knowledge from the primary framework of production of pedagogic discourse to the secondary framework of its reproduction (Bernstein, 1989). So in the secondary framework of the reproduction of educational discourse (training field), recontextualised 'texts' are moved from the primary framework of their production to the educational field of the teachers (specialist subject teachers here), offering them the opportunity to acquire recognition rules and realisation rules which are linked to the acquisition of the rules of the pedagogic device (Bernstein, 1989, 2000).

The recognition rules offer teachers the opportunity to distinguish those essential elements that characterise a school framework and are those that determine which 'meanings' can be put together (Bernstein, 1989, 2000). The realisation rules determine the appropriate and acceptable processes for each specialised pedagogical framework. Their acquisition offers the teachers the chance to select suitable elements so as to incorporate them into their own pedagogical practices (Bernstein, 1989; Sakkoulis, Asimakis, & Vergidis, 2018). The question that

^{2.} The concept of 'text' in Bernstein's theoretical framework can be anything that can undergo evaluative judgment. In addition the 'texts' potentially constitute a means of reproduction or other change in the placing of the subject within a framework (Bernstein, 1989; Solomon, 1994).

arises is whether the specialist subject teachers drew from the training field those elements that contribute to the enrichment of the recognition and realisation rules that were acquired in their initial training, in order to be able to adapt their educational work to the needs of their students and be flexible in the shaping of their 'texts' as they practice their educational work.

According to Bernstein (1989) code is a regulative principle which selects and unifies appropriate concepts as well as the frameworks that they emerge from. The codes are acquired tacitly by the subjects and determine their behaviour and consciousness. They are culturally defined, class placement mechanisms that determine the subjects' position concerning the forms of communication and the relationships between them (Bernstein, 1989, 2000). Bernstein (1989) shapes a typology of pedagogical codes founded on the fluctuations of the concepts of classification and framing. It is the collection code that emerges from strong classification and framing (C++/F++) and the integrated code that emerges from weak classification and framing (C--/F--). Classification refers to the actualisation of power and the imposition of boundaries and segregation between categories such as the cognitive subjects. Framing refers to the internal logic of the pedagogical practices and the nature of the pedagogical relationship (teacher - taught) during the transmission of knowledge in the communicative framework of the school classroom (Bernstein, 1989).

In the Greek education system the approach to school knowledge is regulated and its implementation is based on the principles of a collection code with strong classifications and framings (Koustourakis, 2007). From this perspective, the pedagogical collection code that holds in the Greek education system constitutes a regulative principle that places the subjects unequally (in this case the specialist subject teachers) in the school field. So, a strong classification of the separate contents of school knowledge and the segregation of the roles of this particular group of teachers determines the communicative framework of their action, hindering the growth of professional collaborative relationships with primary school teachers who teach a different specialist subject to them.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS – METHODOLOGY

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

What are the training actions for the specialist subject teachers in Greek Primary Education and how do these contribute to the teachers' professional development?

• What are the factors that influence the professional development of specialist subject teachers in Primary Education?

To select the sample, we used deliberate sampling on specialist subject teachers who could give complete and in-depth answers to the research issue (Creswell, 2011; Patton, 2002). We carried out interviews with 16 specialist subject teachers (2 English Literature, 2 French Literature, 2 German Literature, 2 Arts teachers, 2 Music teachers, 2 Theatre Studies teachers, and 2 Information and Computer Technologies teachers). There were 4 men and 12 women and their ages ranged from 40 to 50 years old and they all worked in Primary Schools in the wider Patras area. With the exception of the 2 Music teachers who had a degree in vocal studies and Harmony, the remaining 14 were University Graduates and of those, 5 had an M.A. and 2 a Ph.D.

We used the research 'tool' of the semi-structured interview to conduct the research. The interviews took place in the teachers' workplace following a prearranged appointment over a four-month period (January-April 2017). The teachers participated voluntarily in the research and before they had been informed of its purpose prior to the research taking place. A questionnaire concerning their demographic details was filled prior to the interviews. Each interview was recorded with the consent of the interviewees and the average duration of each was roughly forty minutes. We then proceeded to the transcription and qualitative analysis of the content of the interviews (Cresswell, 2011; Mason, 2003).

The research data were categorized with the theme as unit of recording, while as far as the degree of reduction, during the categorization of the recording unit is concerned, we remained with the manifest content of the text (Kyriazi, 2011). Two main analysis categories and two sub-categories, were formed, based on the research objective, the research findings and the theoretical framework.

A. The dominant and ineffective training actions for specialist subject teachers.

- A1. The contribution of the recontextualised 'texts' for the training of specialist subject teachers to their professional development.
- B. The vertical hierarchical relationships within the school as the organisational consequence of a collection code.
 - B1. The absence of the school advisor: A negative factor in the professional development of specialist subject teachers.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

A. The dominant and ineffective training actions for specialist subject teachers

According to Bernstein (2000), on the 'inside' of the official pedagogical discourse, the recontextualisation of training knowledge is a process through which knowledge is selected and transferred from the spaces where it is created to the spaces where it is transmitted. From this perspective, the training of specialist subject teachers takes place through the action of ORF, which includes all the official state institutions and factors that create and implement educational policy (Bernstein, 1989). These factors are responsible for the choice and formation of training programmes that are offered to the specialist subject teachers. From the discourse of the teachers in the sample it emerges that the ORF initially supported them with the compulsory formal – in-service training:

'When I was appointed, I attended the compulsory training programme of the Regional Training Centre. That is compulsory' (Teacher No. 7 -T7).

'Initially I attended the Regional Training Centre, which was the initial training for my appointment' (T13).

However, through the accounts of the teachers in the sample, it becomes apparent that the initial formal – in-service training that the ORF offers them does not meet their needs. This led to them resorting to unofficial forms of training and self-education, with the most predominant 'source' being the internet:

'I use the internet a lot to find something of interest for my specialist subject' (T10).

'Luckily the internet exists and we can get information about developments in our specialist subject' (T6).

In addition, a large number of teachers in the sample (11/16) chose specialist scientific books for their self-education:

'I buy books because I want to find things out for myself. Every time I find something new it is like a flash of light...' (T5).

'It is from books that I draw elements for my personal training and development' (T14).

The position of a number of teachers (9/16) regarding the non official forms of training that they have engaged in, is of interest. They are referring to organised forms of training actions that take place beyond the institutionalised educational framework and mainly to 'collaborative' networks:

'I prefer to go in an out of school network and to talk to people who have the same attitude and educational gaps as me...' (T8).

'Contact and meeting up with other colleagues are very important for our specialist subject and contribute decisively to our training' (T3).

Overall, the attitudes of teachers in the sample reveal their continuing desire for further training and professional development due to the scanty in-service training provided by the ORF (Bernstein, 1989). Consequently, it emerged that the official training actions did not provide the specialist subject teachers with the necessary recognition and realisation rules that would contribute to the formation of targeted realisations in the field of the school classroom (Bernstein, 2000; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

A1. The contribution of the recontextualised 'texts' for the training of specialist subject teachers to their professional development

Bernstein (2000) claims that knowledge that is produced in the primary framework (scientific laboratories - research centres) is not transferred to the field of educational action (here the training) unaltered, but recontextualised. Recontextualisation doesn't constitute a simplification of scientific knowledge, but a substantial reshaping of it and involves various processes. Focusing on the contribution of the recontextualized contents of the training programmes in the official initial - in-service training, that the teachers in the sample attended, for the shaping of their pedagogical practices, we discovered that they did not contribute to their professional development (Bernstein, 1989).

'The training seminars haven't given me very much' (T11).

'A lot of training could have taken place. However the training seminars haven't offered me anything as far as my specialist subject is concerned' (T1).

In addition, focusing on the statements of a number of teachers (10/16), it appeared that the ORF offered them in-service training on programmes that were irrelevant to their specialist subject and scientific interests, which is negative for their professional development:

'I was the only P.E. teacher in the room who was learning what phonological awareness is...' (T7).

'It is not easy to be trained in foreign languages when you teach Music' (T13).

However, although the recontextualised 'texts' that teachers in the sample followed didn't succeed in contributing to the strengthening of the rules of recognition and realisation, in the specialised content of their school knowledge (Bernstein, 1989), a number of teachers (10/16) claimed that they somehow enriched their teaching practice with new elements:

'I have enriched the lesson with new knowledge and tools from ICT, that's the only thing the training have helped me with' (T2).

'The seminars have given us a lot of resources for ICT and I discovered new tools to use in the classroom' (T15).

In addition, seminars that focused on classroom management had a positive impact on the teachers in the sample, as is evident in the following representative excerpts:

'The seminars helped me quite a lot with classroom management. How to understand and utilise the team dynamic in the classroom' (T8).

'In particular, pupil management was a thematic from the seminar that I got things from' (T10).

Through the discourse of the teachers in the sample, it emerges that the recontextualised 'texts' in the training field do not contribute satisfactorily to their professional development since they couldn't provide them with the necessary cognitive elements for the enrichment of their pedagogical practices (Bernstein, 1989; Sakkoulis, Asimaki, & Vergidis, 2018).

B. The vertical hierarchical relationships within the school field as organisational consequences of a collection code

In the Greek education system the dominant pedagogical code in Primary Education is organised and regulated by the strong classifications and framings of a collection code (Bernstein, 1989; Koustourakis, 2007). Bernstein (1989) claims that, wherever educational knowledge is regulated according to the principles of a collection code, on one hand it is selected and parcelled through a hierarchical classification of cognitive subjects and on the other it creates vertical collaborative relationships between the headmaster and teaching staff. Through the discourse of most of the teachers in the sample (11/16) it became clear that the head teachers, as representatives of power and 'border guards', treat the specialist subject teachers unequally in the field of their action, in order to strengthen and maintain strong vertical work relationships (Bernstein, 1989). As a result, the specialist subject

teachers describe the implementation of forms of their segregation and exclusion from the unified school framework in a number of the schools they work in:

'In staff meetings the headteacher has said: All the teachers are to stay, the specialist subject teachers are to go out. Also, when I went for the cutting of the new year cake he said: This is for the class teachers, this is for the specialist subject teachers' (T5).

'The headteachers don't particularly respect the specialist subject teachers because we are not bestowed with the gravity of the class teacher. They often don't know our names' (T12).

In addition, according to Karagiorgi & Symeou (2008) the headteacher acting as 'guide' ought to strengthen the role of teacher in the sectors of acquisition of new knowledge and skills, as well as in changing their negative attitudes towards issues that concern their teaching work. From the discourse of a large part of the teachers in the sample (10/16) it became clear that the headteachers in their schools didn't contribute to this objective, as emerged from the following indicative excerpts:

'In practice, they have taken away our right to training and that comes from the top, with the headteachers. It starts with how the specialist subject teacher is regarded within Primary Education' (T3).

'A headteacher can help with my development, but usually doesn't do so and I have quite a number of years of experience and career progress to be able to state that' (T9).

In order to have a turning in the closeness of the collection code that dominates the Greek education system, it is imperative that teaching staff (class teachers and specialist subject teachers together) develop collaborative relationships that will stem from an openness as much of the cognitive subjects that they teach as of the relationships that they will form (Bernstein, 1989). The teachers in our research mentioned that they weren't able to develop strong collaborative relationships with non-specialist subject teachers. This results in their reduced participation in the implementation of common practices and actions with the other teachers, in the school unit where they work:

'We haven't learnt to work together in the schools in Greece and the teachers are not interested in doing a little more' (T2).

'I can't say that there was any willingness from colleagues to work together with the specialist subject teachers' (T14).

However, a number of teachers (12/16) claimed that they often worked together with other specialist subject teachers in the school thus shaping particular identities based on their socialisation into their cognitive subjects. These are 'horizontal relationships' which are not characterised by a workplace formality and a tick-box mentality (Bernstein, 1989):

'I work together with colleagues of the same specialist subject more because there is an exchange of opinions, material and good will' (T10).

'I work together with other teachers of my specialist subject a lot. We share material, exchange opinions and ideas...' (T7).

Consequently, the implementation of strong borders within the school field of work of the teachers in the sample can be discerned as they work together almost exclusively with the same kind of teacher as far as the exchange of ideas, solving teaching dilemmas and enriching their knowledge and skills is concerned (Goddard et al, 2010).

B1. The absence of the school advisor: A negative factor in the professional development of specialist subject teachers

In the Greek education system, it is the duty of school advisors to organise training seminars. These actions mainly take the form of one or two day workshops or seminars and meetings that are formal or informal, with the teachers in their region, constituting forms of in-service and ongoing training (Vougioukas, 2011). As part of the 'control mechanism', as well as a kind of 'guard' of the dominant pedagogical code, the school advisors are called on to monitor the safeguarding and maintenance of the rules of the transmitted knowledge (Solomon, 1994). Most of the teachers in the sample (11/16), state the absence of school advisors in their field of action:

'You don't see him very often [the advisor]. I see the class teachers' advisor more frequently' (T9).

'We have not seen the advisor, not even once in our lives [laughter]. I saw him one time, about ten years ago and that was probably by accident' (T16).

In addition, a large part of the teachers in the sample (12/16) stated that the school advisor for their specialist subject hadn't contributed at all on a training or guidance level:

'The advisor's contribution is non-existent, because he isn't in the schools, generally they are nowhere to be seen' (T1).

'In practice there is no contact or collaboration, at least on the level of training. What he [the school advisor] gives us is minimal' (T4).

However, 4 of the 16 teachers in the sample stated that they are satisfied with the positive reinforcement and feedback on the part of the school advisors for their specialist subject:

'We have an excellent relationship with the advisor and do a lot of seminars together on a regular basis and on various topics' (T3).

'She is the kind of person who hugs her colleague [the school advisor]. She is very active and when a colleague needs anything at all she will be there for her' (T11).

DISCUSSION – CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to investigate the training actions that are directed at specialist subject teachers in Greek Primary Education and their contribution to those teachers' professional development. In addition, we investigated those factors that appear to influence the teachers' professional development within the school field.

From the research data it emerged that teachers in the sample have a clear and established opinion on the official in-service training that was offered by the ORF. It was ascertained that the initial in-service training, as an element of recontextualised discourse, of ORF, did not provide them with the essential recognition and realisation rules (Bernstein, 1989; Sakkoulis, Asimaki, & Vergidis, 2018).

The teachers in the sample pointed out that in order to cover the 'gaps' in their training and the 'failures' of the recontextualised training discourse, they resorted to unofficial forms of training, dominant amongst them being the use of the internet followed by utilisation, on their own initiative, to research appropriate scientific books. Furthermore, the unofficial training actions, such as the collaborative 'networks' amongst teachers of the same specialist subject, seem to contribute in part to the 'scanty' training and their professional development. The above findings are in agreement with research by Gemeda, Fiorucci, & Catarci (2014), which showed that the teachers' professional development includes formal and informal activities that are taken on either as individuals or as a group, so as to reinforce their educational skills.

As far as the contribution of training to the professional development of the teachers in our sample is concerned, the majority believe that the 'effect' of the official – in-service training, had virtually no contribution to their development within the school. This means that the recontextualised 'texts' in the training field, didn't contribute to their professional development. However some teachers

stated that they acquired some supplementary elements of the recognition rules from the training seminars and enriched their pedagogical practices with new tools and knowledge, such as classroom management and incorporation of ICTs. Finally, an important negative element concerning the simultaneous co-existence of teachers of different cognitive subjects on the same training programme emerged from the discourse of the teachers. Similar positions were expressed in research by Ifanti & Vozaiti (2009) where it was discovered that the Greek education system hasn't formed a stable and consistent training policy, adapted to the needs of all teachers.

Referring to our second research question, which investigates the factors that influence the professional development of specialist subject teachers within the school framework, two chief negative factors emerged: Firstly the participating teachers claim that the headteacher, acting in the context of the 'oligarch' controlling a collection code, shapes vertical collaborative relationships within the school unit. Hence he classifies and places the specialist subject teachers unequally within the framework of their action, without operating supportively in terms of their development in the work environment (Bernstein, 1989). Secondly, from the research data, zero collaborative relationships between specialist subject teachers and classroom teachers in the school unit emerged. The opinions of the majority of the teachers in our sample on the development of collaborative relationships within the school unit reveal their isolation and the lack of development of collaborative relationships and collective actions within it (Borko, 2004). However, a significant role in the strengthening of the professional development of specialist subject teachers and their training appears to be played by the positive collaboration with colleagues of their specialist subject, improving, at least partially, their professional development. In any case the results of a number of pieces of research confirm the strength of the relationship between collaboration and professional development within the school field (Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Guskey, 2002).

The second negative factor that seems to influence the professional development of the teachers in our sample is the total absence of the school advisor, as much within as outside of the educational framework. However, some teachers expressed their fundamental need of the existence of a school advisor who is not distanced from the educational process and who with his strong presence would target the provision of help and support (Ifanti & Vozaiti, 2009).

The issue of training of specialist subject teachers emerges as an interesting issue for sociological analysis. The investigation of the specialised educational needs of specialist subject teachers that work in Greek Primary Education schools

needs further deepening and study, so that the training field, as a framework for recontextualisation and relocation of discourse, operates effectively for the shaping of specialised training content founded as much on the demands of the specialist subject teachers' daily working life in school, as on their different educational trajectories (Bernstein, 1989; Sakkoulis & Vergidis, 2017).

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