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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2013.825638>.

**The 'Good Practice' School Advisors in Greek Education: The Difficulty in
Linking Collaborative Networks, Communities of Practice and Quality Culture**

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Abstract

Quality in education is considered to be a central aim as far as the formation and the implementation of educational policy worldwide is concerned. The basic prerequisite for it, though, is quality culture. Collaborative networks between school advisors and primary school teachers are examined to reveal how they can affect the formation of communities of practice and then a quality culture. The technical tools of grounded theory and basically semi-structured interviews are used for the investigation of collaborative networks and their connection to communities of practice. School advisors and primary school teachers who worked together in forming collaborative networks displayed common characteristics, such as a belief in the value of constant effort for improvement, the importance of introspection, common reading material, and a sense of trust. Individuals with shared goals and visions can form communities of practice which will then work as fashioners and multipliers of a quality culture.

Keywords: collaborative networks, communities of practice, quality culture, quality in education, primary education.

Introduction

The present work is concerned with the far-reaching, not to mention central question of Quality in Education (QiE), which has constituted, for the past fifteen years, the axis for the formation of national, international and transnational policy (Newton, 2010; Sahney et al, 2010; Cheng, 2003; Sauders, 2002; Reezigt, 2001; Yin & Wai 1997; Lee & Fitz, 1995). In fact, QiE is considered one of the main aims of

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education and for that reason all those involved are called on to contribute to achieving it (Newton, 2010; Poole, 2010; Sahney et al, 2010).

Nevertheless, it is also widely accepted that the meaning of QiE is not easy to pinpoint, especially as far as its relationship with its social context, and its particular objectives, are concerned (Van Graan et al, 2006, p. 7; Damme, 2002; Freeston, 1993). In the specialist literature, there is a plethora of definitions and approaches (Poole, 2010, p.6; Snyder, 2007, p.425). Therefore, QiE is encountered as a dynamic concept (Vettori, 2006, p.3; Harvey, 1995), which is determined by two structural features, its assurance (Poole, 2010; Saarinen, 2010; Harvey & Williams, 2010) and professional development (of the teacher) (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2008, p. 11; Phillips, 2008, p. 1; Yeigh, 2008, p. 2)

A basic prerequisite for QiE is considered to be a Quality Culture (QC). In reality, a Quality Culture seems to be an umbrella term which characterizes procedures and actions which are aimed at the achievement of QiE. Difficulties however arise from the fact that it is not easy to create a Quality Culture. It is influenced as much by the pre-existing institutional culture, as by the culture of its members (Brunetto & Wharton, 2005, p. 177; Newton, 2000, p. 162). For the creation of a QC it is important for communities of practice to exist, or to be set up, for they can create or strengthen a sense of commitment among members to common goals. The particular goal of the present work is the presentation of the importance of the setting up of communities of practice for the creation of a Quality Culture which, as has already been noted, is a prerequisite for QiE. As an example, the School

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Advisor in Primary Education (in Greece) will be used, who, through his actions, and within the framework of his duties, can play a significant role.

The research and Research Methodology

This section describes the method and data we use in order to draw attention to the importance of setting up communities of practice if a Quality Culture, which, as has been noted, is a prerequisite for QiE, is to be created. The research, which is integrated into the framework of an interpretive approach, uses the technical tools of grounded theory (Kiriazi, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Houser, 1996). Its basic tool was the semi-structured interview, based on which the material collected formed, over time, our research approach, through a parallel discussion between the material and the existent specialist literature. It is clear that we are in agreement with Strauss and Corbin, according to whom the interpretation that arises in this way provides more scope for a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12).

More specifically, the evidence presented here comes from qualitative research, within the framework of which the following took place: a. 28 semi-structured interviews with School Advisors in Primary Education in the region of western Greece, b. 7 semi-structured interviews with teachers and c. content analysis of the relevant legislation, which concerns the work of the School Advisors, and the quality of education.

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The teachers were chosen for two reasons. Firstly to distinguish 'good practices' as these emerged from continuous categorization as the research progressed, and for reasons of triangulation or multiple operationalism, as Denzin mentions (in Keenes, 1988, p. 511). Multiple operationalism according to Denzin (as cited in Keeves 1988) provides an opportunity "to overcome the weaknesses or biases of a single method taken by itself" (p. 511).

Participants

The research was carried out during the school year 2008-2009 in the region of western Greece and concerned all the school advisors in primary education. From the total of 33 school advisors invited to take part in the research, 28 responded positively and thus participated. Of those, 27 were regional school advisors and 1 a former school advisor and member of the government of the time, in a position which had direct involvement with school advisors. Then, for purposes of methodological triangulation, 7 interviews were held with teachers regarding the prominence of good practice on the part of school advisors. For ethical reasons, the identity of the participants is not revealed. To ensure anonymity the responses presented in the data analysis section are encoded as Interviewee 1,2, 3 for the school advisors and Interviewee 101, 102, 103 etc, for the teachers.

Data Analysis Procedure

Semi-structured Interviews

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Within the framework of the present study and in accordance with the demands of grounded theory, data analysis was carried out in the following way: each interview was transcribed immediately upon completion. The immediate transcription of the recorded material allowed for comments concerning non-verbal signs, changes in the manner of speaking, pauses and so on, which had occurred and been noted during the interview, to be added in brackets. Notes were also kept on the non-verbal behavior of the interviewee immediately after the interview. In this way, as accurate as possible a transcription of the interviews was attempted. The continuous categorization of concepts led to the description and analysis that follow. In order to account for the findings, we used Wenger's (1988) interpretive tool, to the extent where in 'communities of practice' we found references in accordance with, as well as similarities to, our findings.

School Advisors: Legislative Provision

The institution of the School Advisor (SA) was established with Law 1304/1982. He is responsible for the scientific-pedagogical guidance of teachers, and participates in their evaluation and in-service training. He also encourages every effort in scientific research in the field of education.

The most recent law 2986/2002 and the Ministerial Decree (F.353.1./324/105657/D1, 2002) which followed do not result in any changes to the School Advisor's duties. In brief, the legislative framework assigns the SA five areas of activity: as in-service trainer, co-coordinator, programmer, evaluator and colleague of Administration (Pamouktsoglou, 2003; Karageorgos, 1994):

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- In-service trainer, because he takes part in the in-service training of teachers, organizes seminars, updates teachers on the latest scientific, pedagogical and teaching issues, and so on.
- Coordinator, because he works with the parents' and guardians' associations, with members of local government, with the trade unions and supports every effort to develop productive relationships between school life and the social environment.
- Programmer, because he controls the putting into practice of the educational programme and the feedback from the state on its effectiveness, indicating and submitting to the Ministry of Education and National Religions, and to the Pedagogical Institute, his observations and recommendations concerning the books, teaching methods and so on.
- Evaluator, because, as is explicitly referred to in Law 1304/1982, article 2, and in Presidential Decree 214/1984: "In collaboration with the teachers, he evaluates the results of whatever had been planned...", "he prepares a brief report, which he submits to the Ministry of Education in which he evaluates the work that has been carried out...", "he examines the experience..."
- Colleague, because he works together with the Heads of the school units and the teaching staff, as well as with the Director and members of the Local Education Authority, on every issue related to the improvement of education, in order that there is pedagogical, scientific as well as administrative support for the operation of the school.

School Advisors: Reality in the Field

The Greek education system appears, at first sight, impressively multi-dimensional, with its varied fields of activity. However, this positive first impression is tempered by the extent to which it is uncertain whether its quantitative aspect is matched by a corresponding qualitative one (Stamelos, 2002, p. 17).

As an example of the distance between official prerequisites and reality in the field, mention could be made of the non-implementation of the role of the SA as "evaluator", due to the vehement reaction of teachers, and despite the insistence of the legislators¹. In reality, the SAs appear to be trapped in an unproductive confrontation between the education hierarchy and trade union reaction. The result of this is, on the one hand, that the SA is seen as an institution without authority or duties, and on the other, that the SAs themselves consider their role to be more decorative than substantial and without the necessary governmental support.

Given this, the majority of SAs are resigned to the situation and carry out their duties in a purely formal way, which is not encouraging for the provision of quality education. The findings of this research can satisfactorily sketch the current situation in the field, with its shortfalls.

¹ In fact, in Law 2986/2002 Article 5 paragraph 6, the following reference is made: "the purpose of teacher evaluation is to ascertain the need for in-service training and determine the content of that training". In addition, in article 5, paragraph 2 this reference is made: "the teacher is evaluated by the head of the school unit (the headmaster) and by the appropriate School Advisor".

A. Statutory-organizational problems

One of the first points our interviewees referred to was the unstable and ineffective statutory and organizational environment, and also the lack of communication, if not actually rivalry, between the different components of the education system. As indication of this:

A1. Instability:

Int24: "One government comes along and brings in its own law, the next comes and the same thing happens, they change everything, and by the time they start over from *the beginning, years go by and the same thing happens again*".

Int23: "ee qualitative upgrading is a sweet the political system uses to cover its *shortcomings. It considers that within the context of its future it will ...in other words, the familiar political battle cry*".

Int20: "but which will have continuity in order for it to bear fruit, because when something is continually changing *there's never time for us to taste the fruit*".

A2. Ineffectiveness

Int26: "*I believe that a lot of what is sent out in government circulars is ...rhetorical phrases, [...] I don't know how much real meaning they have ...I mean to say*

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qualitative upgrading ...*there's no point bandying concepts about, what's important is to give concepts which are measurable, but to also provide the tools*".

Int23. "qualitative upgrading is never achieved with wishful thinking, it comes about through struggle, with actions, with *programming, with a schedule, with a plan*".

Int102: "*first of all I don't think that the administration could care less, excuse the phrase, about whether you are involved in programmes or not ...and if that happens, at the end of the day, it's down to the conscientiousness of a few*".

Int20: "the legislative framework makes provision for a lot of things that never happen".

Int27: "*eee to a large extent we see that despite the effort we make they're not implemented*".

A3. Lack of communication

Int26: "*I don't think that communication with the base exists....after the reports I would expect us to extract some central points and have a meeting*".

Int21: "Our working relationship with the P. I. is one-sided, [...] *then they take our report, and they supposedly read it. What can I say...*".

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Int15: "*I consider that we're not doing too well there, of course above us they believe that all the schools work in teams, all the schools make work schedules, all are high quality, all ...all...*".

A4. Rivalry

Int15: "*there is a... there is a distance [...] the administration heads look on the SAs from a particular angle perhaps because inwardly they believe that the SS have something more than they do*".

Int14: "*Non-existent, non-existent is the relationship (with administration) [...] often the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing*".

B. Inadequate scientific dialogue and problems of professionalism

Our interviewees then focused on another dimension of the problems in the field: the lack of scientific dialogue and the problem of professionalism. These two issues are linked, in their opinion.

Indicatively:

Int28: "*they're not correctly informed eee they have their objections or rather their resistance*".

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Int21: *"there's no pervading pedagogy, in other words things aren't discussed, there are no pedagogical movements"*.

Int19: *"eee they haven't fully understood, they weren't helped by those who should have helped them to understand"*.

Int104: *"I think that the most basic reason they want the SA is that, like they phone the doctor in the middle of the night"*.

Int106: *"but the other thing too, to open a book or to search on the internet or to search in encyclopedias, for them not to do that, to not want to do that"*.

C. The problem of non-evaluation

Inadequate scientific dialogue, in direct connection as much with the problems of professionalism, as with the lack of evaluation, leads the teachers on the one hand into a rut and the SSs on the other into feeling the impossibility of intervention and the realization of their initiatives.

Some examples:

Int26: *"since he has no scope for action (the SA)..in other words ...you can't force the other ...I don't know if he can, I don't know the legislative framework...but I think you can't force someone else to do something"*.

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Int24: *"eee and then there's the ways we ask ...we leave it to the mercy of the Lord*

eee why should he do it? And why should he be anxious, since that suits him better and since he's not going to suffer any consequences?".

Int22: *"if he's asked to he can intervene in some matters, but he doesn't check, he doesn't slap any wrists as they say, you can't even issue a mild rebuke"*.

Int19: *"and no one dares say anything to them"*.

Int16: *we would advise him that things are done like this [...] we say that but nothing happens, the same again"*.

Int14: *"there the SA should intervene decisively. Not with wishful thinking. You're not going. End of story"*.

Int10: *"there was nothing I could do, nothing, I just watched them, I made a note of them if you like"*.

Good Practice School Advisors: From Inertia to the Creation of Collaborative Networks.

From the analysis of the findings of the research it emerged that a minority of SAs are not content to carry out their work on an official, bureaucratic level, but they appeared to be especially active. To distinguish them from the others, we named them 'good practice SAs', agreeing with the following definition of the term 'good

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practices' they cover "the methods and approaches which lead to better results which can be passed on" (CEDEFOP, 2011).

What emerged is that the SAs, as much the teachers who worked with them, displayed common characteristics, such as: Belief in the value of constant effort for improvement, the importance of introspection, common reading material, a sense of trust. Some extracts from the interviews are characteristic:

Int102: *"more reading...the bad thing is that we keep asking the SA 'help me, give me a formula' ...I think that we teachers should constantly be on an internal quest and ...improving ourselves"*.

Int101: *"he [the SA] gave me some books too ...we discussed some things that we could put into practice"*

Int103: *"(evaluation) will help us become better...to see ourselves...to see our shortcomings...our attitudes, and to move forward"*.

The importance of interaction, communication and cooperation also emerged.

Int5: *"and the in-service training we do, its mixed, so that we can show them (the teachers) that they're not alone in the schools, and then of course through working together we will go ...further"*.

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Int6: *"There is full cooperation, whatever we do (...) and the in-service training is planned and carried out jointly, combining our opinions we can achieve better results (...) our effort in this direction is for them [teachers] to be able to open the door eee...so another colleague can come in ...to talk together afterwards ...to...eee...for there to be some collaboration between them, for opportunities to be provided in order that they are able to talk (...) we have tried and we have created some teachers' networks (...) there are some teachers that we are old friends with [...] and we call on their help so as to influence a more general situation"*.

Int103: *"...I believe that we are the school and not the class and we are all together and we should all act together and to help one another"*

Int101: *"he (the SA) has been to the school quite a few times...he has shown an interest in the children..."*

Int102: *"the fact however that we found in our SA, ...the desire to promote an educational programme was very encouraging"*.

Int104: *"[he is] my assistant [the SA], he advises me, we exchange opinions, I mention matters that have come up, we examine strategies...we correct"*.

Finally, it was clear that a sense of responsibility was developing, as well as coordination, for the attainment of common goals. For instance:

Int103: *"I always try to check where we are, what we've done and where we are"*

Int103: "to put in place a programme of action for the school, in collaboration with *the SA, had been suggested by both (SAs) in June*"

Int101: "he had guided me as regards the curriculum for the primary school, because *our objective is ...that these children...learn basic...basic things*"

Int105: "at the end of the year the SA gave us the framework within which we can *move, that's where the role of the in-service trainer* came in, both external and within *the school*"

Int105: "the SA provided the opening, I update her whenever she comes to the school, *what we've done, how we did it, why we did it*"

Interest lies in the fact that the previous features create the preconditions as much for innovative actions as for many-sided psychological support, to the extent that it does not just concern the relationship between the SA and the teacher, but the relationship among the teachers too.

Some examples:

Int101: "*for example, the other day...[...] I had brought a newspaper and we read some articles or children's comics ...[...] or I take in bills for them, the phone bill, the electricity bill...*"

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Int102: 'I was very involved in health education programmes, with personal relationships, self-esteem, anxiety''

Int102: "*environmental...and I did a cultural one...*'

Int103: "*some steps have been made, let's say with the flexible zone, we've already set up a topic that we will work on together, they've made a schedule which is small or big...*"

Int103: "*[I organized a] reading programme*"

Int103: "he [the SA] brought a package from the CDAS² on how to manage anxiety...[...]"

Int106: "we implemented an in-school training programme..[.]"

Int102: "We worked together, we organized a seminar for the teachers who were taking on programmes for the first time, which was also an initiative of the SAs, I'd like to believe that we are a good team'

Int103: "*the issue of support, to get together and to discuss something which...we hadn't done it in the past*"

² The CDAS is the Centre for Diagnosis, Assessment and Support. It is a department of the Ministry of Education and it makes provision for the diagnosis, assessment and support of pupils and in particular those with special educational needs.

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Int104: "generally we talk about everything, matters that have to do with the children, with their behavior, *with the lesson*"

Int105: "a climate of *cooperation, trust, [...] put simply, each of us makes a contribution wherever he is able to*".

To sum up, the factors that appear to distinguish the 'good practice' SAs (but also the 'good practice' teachers) are: belief in the value of a constant effort towards improvement; the importance of introspection; common reading matter; the importance of interaction, communication and working together; and also a sense of responsibility and coordination, for the attainment of common objectives.

These factors led us to Wenger's remarks on the community of practice. According to him, factors which point to the existence of a community of practice are the interaction among members, common references and the choice of practices, ideas in common, willingness to assess the effectiveness of their actions, responsibility, communication, feedback, coordination, negotiation, the willingness to take on elements from other communities, joint meetings, shared practice. Wenger (1998) similarly notes that "components which articulate community of practice are: members interactions, mutuality through shared action and situated negotiation, situated improvisation with in a regime of accountability, brokering and conversations" (p. 240).

It is clear that the findings from the field are in accordance with the characteristics Wenger describes. However, how is a community of practice defined?

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Wenger (2006) claims that communities of practice "are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they *interact regularly*" (p. 1). Indeed, the features of the community of practice are evident when practice is an element which unites the members of the community and the relationships between the subjects which are aimed as much at the diffusion of the provision of information, as at the creation of knowledge (Wenger, 1998). Put briefly, Hara mentions (2000) that "the community of practice forms an informal network that supports professional practitioners to develop a shared meaning and engage in knowledge building among members" (p. 11). According to another definition (Barab & Duffy, 2000), a community of practice has three main characteristics: 1. A common culture and historical heritage. Communities of practice have a significant history and members share a common historical heritage, with shared practices, goals and meanings. 2. An interdependent system. Members of a community of practice work and interconnect to the community, sharing purpose and identity. 3. A reproduction cycle. Communities of practice take in new members who then become practitioners and guide the community into the future.

The dilemma we encounter in the case of Greece is that the characteristics that have been identified are not common to the system, but only to a group of SAs and teachers, which we characterize as 'good practice'. Consequently the question not only of its effectiveness, but also of its duration, arises. Indeed, one of the features of the informal networks, such as those of 'good practice' SAs and teachers, is their instability, but also their temporariness. Finally, an issue arises concerning the qualitative relationship between 'informal network' and 'community', to the extent to which a 'community' is characterized by its stability and permanence. Indeed, if we

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refer again to the specialist literature, this appears to be an unstated prerequisite.

Once again, Wenger's work claims that the Community of Practice has three characteristics:

Commitment, the first feature, is considered essential, because practice cannot take place in a vacuum. Wenger (1988) mentions that "Membership in a community of practice is therefore a matter of mutual engagement" (p. 73). That one can belong to a social group and have purely formal relationships with others does not imply that he is a member of a community of practice. Mutual relations of homogenization are as likely to give rise to differentiation as to homogenization. Crucially, therefore, homogeneity is neither a requirement for, nor the result of, the development of a community of practice. Often it is differentiation that provides the spark for the development of a community of practice, through the exchange of knowledge and different practices (Wenger, 1998, pp. 75-76).

Joint enterprise, the second characteristic, keeps a community of practice together: it is the result of a collective process of negotiation that reflects the full complexity of mutual engagement. It is defined by the participants in the very process of pursuing it. It is their negotiated response to the situation and thus belongs to them in a profound sense, in spite of all the forces and influences that are beyond their control. It is not a stated goal, but creates among participants relations of mutual accountability that become an integral part of practice (Ardichvili, Page & Wentling, 2003; Wenger, 1998, pp. 77-78).

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The third characteristic of practice as a source of community coherence is the development of a shared repertoire. The repertoire of a community of practice according to Wenger (1988) includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, actions that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence and which have become part of its practice (p. 83).

We realize then that while communities of practice as much as the informal 'good practice' networks have common characteristics, there is an indiscernible limit which is as much to do with the duration of their existence, and its significance, as with their relationship with official institution and its legislative choices. Essentially this question can be transformed as follows: how likely is it, and under what conditions, for an unofficial 'good practice' network to become fully identified with a community of practice? To go a step further, how will this identification work positively within a system with very specific statutory commitments and entrenched unofficial workings and conduct? Or, to put it differently, how can an informal 'good practice' network spread and react decisively as much in the field as in legislative choices? The specialist literature informs us that research in organizations has shown how a community of practice influences the transmission of knowledge, the efficacy and the quick solution of problems (Coburn & Russell, 2008, p. 206) and by extension, change and improvement (Hildreth & Kimble, 2004).

In fact, assuming that the community of practice is accompanied by knowledge and willingness for change (as emerged from our research into the promotion of innovative actions) it seems that it can contribute to the professional development of its members. One of the first who tried to link the creation of the community to

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professional development was Goode (1957). While it is not the objective of this paper to present and study professional development, it is interesting to note how Servage (2008) believes that it is easier to achieve professional development through the community of practice, "because professional development is more effective when it is collaborative and collegial and because it (professional development) is accomplished in real everyday educational situations" (p. 63). Lai, Pratt, Anderson and Stigter (2006, pp. 24-26) refer specifically to the areas of professional development that the community of practice can influence. These are learning, which has a direct relationship with real life situations and contributes to the improvement of educational practices, to the change of educational practice and the corresponding strategies, to the change in attitudes and conduct through collaboration and interaction, to the creation of knowledge and the exchange of good practices, to the change in the role of the teacher to co-learner, to the building of an educational identity, to the reduction of the isolation teachers feel and to the fact that it appears teachers are satisfied with the shape their professional development may take. These elements exist in the extracts we quoted without their being explicitly linked to professional development.

The Connection between Communities of Practice and Quality Culture:

Theoretical Dimensions

From the above findings it emerges that the issue is, firstly, the stabilization and spread of 'good practice' networks and, secondly, changes to the entrenched culture. Indeed, the absence of a quality culture is a negative factor for the improvement of educational provision. Robbins (2001) characteristically comments that "the quality

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culture is a social adhesive" which binds all the various features, processes and animate and inanimate material of an organization.

In brief, the quality culture concerns (Ehlers, 2009; Harvey & Stensaker, 2008: 434)

1. the **structure** of an organization, in other words the administrative system, the programming, the design, the collaboration, the leadership, the tools and the mechanisms for assuring and upgrading quality. Creemers and Kyriakides (2008, p. 45) claim that for the aforementioned to be achieved, stability, consistency and cohesion are required, elements which in turn contribute to the quality culture.

2. the **shaping factors**, such as commitment, negotiation, communication, trust, participation and desire for change. These factors are vital if the new rules, new mechanisms and recommended courses of action are to be acceptable. If good communication exists, networks which permit on-going evaluation, innovation and improvement, can develop. (Penuel, Sussex, Korbak & Hoadley, 2006, p. 438). Communication also has to do with effective leadership and the extent to which the leadership is capable not only of administrating, but also of allowing good communication with the base, and the participation of all, so as to create a climate of trust and consensus (EUA, 2006, p. 20).

3. the **practice** which concerns everyday action, that is, the habits, common objectives, common values and the practice of the members which has a specific character, which differentiates it from the practice of other members of other

Stamelos G., Bartzakli M. (2013), "Good practice" school advisors in Greek education: the difficulty in linking collaborative networks, communities of practice and quality culture. *Teacher Development*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2013.825638>. organizations. More specifically, Ehlers (2009) as much as Sursock (2006) and Fischer-Bluhm (2006) emphasize the desire for and positive attitude towards change which lead to improvement. This desire for change, wherever it is judged to be necessary, comes as a result of good communication, trust, the participation of the members of an organization and the spreading of good practice (Newton, 2006).

Finally, we could define quality culture in the following way:

Quality Culture

[Figure 1 near here]

One realizes then that communities of practice and quality culture are interrelated concepts. But how? Where quality culture is an established feature of a system its relationships with the communities of practice are reciprocal, and the one influences the other. In the cases however where quality culture is more of a request, and less the reality, more evidence of a desire for change of attitude, then the community of practice appears to be a condition for the creation of a quality culture. In fact, in this case, the communities of practice seem to be a hotbed for the production of the conditions necessary to change the prevailing attitudes.

Closing Remarks

This paper deals with the wider discussion concerning QiE. It deals mainly with the binary quality culture and communities of practice, the existence of which is a prerequisite for QiE. Whether the quality culture comes first, converses and interacts with the communities of practice is a wider issue. As far as we are concerned, we

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believe that initially individuals with shared goals and visions can form communities of practice which will then work as fashioners and multipliers of a quality culture. Then, the quality culture and the communities of practice will interact and converse with each other, as they evolve.

In the case of Greece it is clear that we are referring to the need to create communities of practice with the aim of developing a quality culture. Our findings bear witness to the existence and action of informal networks which bear all the characteristics of communities of practice. The only difference lies in the fact the informal networks are by nature unstable and vulnerable over time. On the other hand, the characteristics of communities of practice require stability and permanence. Consequently, the fundamental question is, how will the 'good practices' which were identified in the field, in the shape of informal networks, be strengthened so that they can be transformed into more permanent entities.

In addition, a further question is that of the transformation of the informal 'good practice' networks into a means of influencing the overall operation of the system. In other words, the issue would be the maximizing of multiplicative benefits for the system of the existence of the networks in question. Characteristically, we refer to the belief in the value of a constant striving for improvement, the importance of introspection, the importance of interaction, communication and collaboration, but also a sense of responsibility and coordination, for the achievement of shared goals.

Of course here it is judged to be expedient to allude to the limits of the particular networks to the extent to which their existence requires the coming together of SAs

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ready for innovative action (good practice) as well as teachers ready for corresponding innovative actions (good practice). Consequently, this particular restriction makes their spread a lot less likely, although this should not detract from the effort to maximize the benefits of the existence of such networks.

On the other hand, the acceptance of the limits of the significance of the existing networks raises again the question of the assurance of the quality of education which, as was noted in the introduction to this work, involves all of us involved in the field of education. However, this issue goes beyond the scope of the present text.

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