

# Inclusion and Communities of Practice: the reification of the role(s)/identities of teachers and parents of students with learning disabilities

**Dimitra Eleftheriadou**

University of Thessaly  
Volos, Greece

**Anastasia Vlachou**

University of Thessaly  
Volos, Greece

This paper examines parent/teacher perception of their role-identities in the education of children with learning disabilities (LD) in Greek mainstream schools. The theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) is adopted as the most appropriate framework for the scope of the present study which aimed to explore four main issues: 1. parent/teacher perception of their role in student's with LD education, 2. parent/teacher goal setting for the education of the student with LD, 3. parent/teacher understanding and description of student's difficulties, and 4. parent/teacher engagement in shared practices. The above issues are examined and analyzed via semi-structured interviews of 40 parents' (20 mothers and 20 fathers) and 40 teachers' (20 regular and 20 special) perception of parent/teacher role-identity. The analyses revealed that the educational and affective support of the student with LD was the prevalent feature of parent/teacher identity. Additionally, most of the parents, as opposed to the teachers, distinguished between the regular/special education teacher roles. Parents/teachers set educational, personal or multiple goals for the child, while only teachers set social goals. Few parents/teachers perceived differently student's learning difficulties: the teachers considered parent expectations, beliefs or low educational level as the source of their difference in understanding, while the parents highlighted teachers' lack of special training. Finally, although both parents/teachers were engaged in in-school activities, there was no mutual engagement in other practices (i.e. IEP). The above findings are discussed in relation to their implications in promoting more inclusive and collaborative parent-teacher relations.

*Keywords:* Communities of Practice, learning disabilities, parent/teacher role-identities, inclusion.

## Introduction

There has been a long-lasting research interest investigating parent-teacher interrelations in order to better understand how they impact upon the education of students with or without LD (Eccles & Harrold, 1993). The literature indicates school and family as significant factors of student's academic achievement (Epstein et al, 2008). The majority of this research looks upon parent or teacher roles through socio-psychological lenses within mainstream or inclusive frameworks (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Vlachou, 2006). Only few empirical studies report on parent-teacher

interactions, when working together towards the education/inclusion of children with LD (Laluvein, 2010).

The current trend in education is to promote school-family partnerships. Nevertheless, the concept and content of parent-teacher collaboration, as well as their membership status in educational contexts has not always been harmonious. Sometimes, conflicts between parents/teachers occur, perhaps due to their divergent perception of their social identities and roles within the education system. Since a person's role(s) work as the base of his/her identities (Stets & Burke, 2014), we also supposed that parent/teacher roles will work as the base of their identities, when they interact towards the promotion of inclusion of students with LD.

Furthermore, we consider that the theory of CoP being a social theory of learning, is most

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dimitra Eleftheriadou, e-mail: dimiele4@gmail.com

appropriate to study and reveal parent/teacher role-identities in educational settings, since by definition CoPs are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting in an ongoing basis” (Wenger, Mc Dermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). All CoPs share a basic structure that contains three fundamental elements: a *domain of knowledge*, a *community of people* and the *shared practice* (ibid, p.27). According to Wenger et al (2002), the *Domain* creates common ground and a sense of common identity. “A well-defined domain legitimizes the community by affirming its purpose and value to members” “who decide which activities to pursue”. The domain creates a sense of accountability, and inspires members to contribute and participate in domain-related practices. It constitutes the *raison d’être* for members, and helps them to sort out what to share or disregard in their practices. The *Community* creates the social fabric of learning, so that CoP members build trustful relationships, interact continuously on issues important to their domain; in the process, they develop a sense of belonging and mutual engagement, without forfeiting the uniqueness of their individual identity in the community. Last, the *Practice*, the product of all joint community activities, represents the shared repertoire of tools, activities, documents, etc, that the community develops, shares, and maintains, creating the basis for action, communication, problem solving and accountability.

Wenger (1998) proclaims that identity acts as counterpart to the concept of the community, because the formation of a CoP is also the negotiation of identities. In CoP theory, identity is interrelated with membership, negotiation, and reification of new/old experiences of the community into shared artefacts available to all CoP members in perpetuum (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Exploring the identities of parents/teachers of children with LD in school context is challenging, and, simultaneously, complicated, because, as Wenger (1998) underlines, the analysis of “identity” is not about the person or the community; it’s about negotiating the experience of our membership in the CoP, defining ourselves and others through participation in the community (p.146).

Given that the empirical grip of the CoP is difficult, as it’s a dynamic phenomenon that occurs around certain shared practices, as well as

the complexity of identity issues demands large-scale, multi-method approaches, we focus only on two aspects of identity, as captured by Wenger, that is identity as negotiated experience, and as community membership (Wenger, 1998) in regard to the structural features of CoP theory. The first aspect implies that we define who we are by the ways we experience our selves through participation, as well as by the ways we and others reify our selves; the second aspect means that we define our selves by the familiar and the unfamiliar (ibid, p. 149). Therefore, we assumed that dealing with the LD of the child is a common issue that parents/teachers experience; “community” is connected with the roles that the parents/teachers hold in the educational process, because roles are interconnected with the position the member holds, parent or teacher, and his/her accountability in the CoP (Botha & Kourkouta, 2015), while interacting with other members; parents and teachers are role players that participate in the CoP (ibid), committed to promoting children’s learning. Thus, we examine parent/teacher perceptions on their identity-roles, when parents/teachers are engaged and participate in activities, such as an IEP or home/school related activities, within a CoP.

We assume, in line with the theory of CoP, that the following four features make possible to explore parent/teacher role-identity in mainstream settings:

1. parent/teacher perception of parent/teacher role in the education of the student with LD,
2. parent/teacher goals in the education of the student with LD,
3. parent/teacher understanding-description of the student’s LD,
4. parent/teacher engagement in shared practices.

#### **Parent/teacher identities in educational contexts**

Understanding identity and the issues related to it is a challenging endeavour (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), not only because the notion of “*identity*” has different meanings (Oruç, 2012) in literature, but also because “*identity*” as a relational phenomenon is constantly reconstructed (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). “*Identity*” is the way we identify ourselves, while performing with others in social

environments (Stets & Burke, 2014). It is a multi-faceted entity, "a set of meanings that defines individuals in the terms of the roles they occupy, the social categories or groups they belong to and the individual characteristics that define them as unique persons" (ibid, p. 412). In this study, we explore how parents of students with LD and teachers of those students may identify themselves as members of an educational CoP.

CoP theory is profoundly connected with the sociological aspect of "identity". According to Wenger (1998), community membership and negotiated experience of the "self" are key features of identity in CoPs. This means that "identity" is not solely what we think of ourselves, but immerses within participation in communities; hence, participation in joint enterprises becomes a mode of membership (ibid). In this study, parent/teacher identity stems from the alignment with other CoP members, parents or teachers and from the negotiation of the ownership of the meaning that defines the CoP, such as the education of students with LD in mainstream schools.

Another important aspect related to identity notion is the *role-identities* which constitute a key source of identity characteristics. As Burke & Tully (1977) argue, "identity" is the internal component of a role-identity, while "roles" are the external part of it, whilst Tajfel & Turner (1979) emphasize that category membership, e.g. being a "parent" or a "teacher", influences the person's perceptions of his/her in-group/out-group relations and conducts. *Role-identities* help us understand who we are, when occupying specific roles in interaction with other persons; the "roles" the person plays and who that person is (*identity*) are tightly knit, because we usually answer to the question "who am I?" including role descriptors as self descriptors (Thoits, 1991). A person's multiple role-identities are significant, because they guide the person toward life situations within social context.

In educational environments, CoP members are called to co-act according to their role within the education system, bringing along together different perspectives that may contribute to community evolution, developing "modes of belonging" and constructing common identity (McLaughlin, 2003). In this aspect, roles may facilitate parent-teacher awareness of teacher-parent contribution, co-ordination and integration in tasks that concern students with LD so that to

attain a shared goal. Participation and reification of parent/teacher identities in the educational processes of students with LD are acknowledged as complementary processes, related to ongoing varieties of engagement (Viskovic, 2006). In this study, we explore if parent/teacher membership, engagement in shared practices unveil parent/teacher roles, thus their role-identities, within school context.

Parent identity is a multi-dimensional term. The terms "parenthood", "parental involvement" and "parental role" describe aspects of parent category identity. Parent identity is the sum of self-meanings attached to the parent position/role and to other roles related to it (Stueve & Pleck, 2001). "Parenthood" and "parenting" are both associated with child's support, behavioural and pedagogical control (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005). "Mothering" and "fatherhood" are social constructs associated with the roles, rights, and responsibilities of a "parent". "Parental involvement" relates to "parental role", which refers to parent responsibilities towards the child, because "parental role" is constructed through parental involvement in children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). In this study, we focus on parental role in the education of children with LD; this will provide an insight of parent role-identity in educational settings.

In a CoP educational framework, apart from parents, teachers are also considered as a significant factor of success of all students. Being a "teacher" involves the role of the teacher and the individual's adoption of the professional teacher identity (Meierdirk, 2017).

Undoubtedly, forming a "teacher identity" is a complex culturally-based process, (Oruç, 2012). It is associated with the educational and affective areas of students' learning. Teacher identity traits within a professional community and social contexts are continually changing and are associated with the *roles* teachers hold in professional communities. A "teaching role" encapsulates what the teacher does, while teaching, whereas a "teaching identity" is more personal and indicates the way the person identifies with being a teacher and how s/he feels as a teacher (Mayer, 1999). In this study, we explore how parents/teachers perceive "teacher identity" through the "teaching role".

We assume that parent/teacher of children with LD perception(s) of their identities will emerge through the exploration of their role(s) in

the education of the students with LD in mainstream schools. To achieve this, we set up the following research questions:

1. How do parents/teachers perceive parent/teacher role in the education of children with LD?
2. What kind of goals do parents/teachers set?
3. Do parents/teachers believe that they perceive alike the difficulties of the children? Do they describe them in the same way?
4. Is parent/teacher identity reified into mutual engagement in shared practices?

**Methods**

*Participants*

Twenty mainstream elementary schools located in an urban area of Attica were selected, because they were public schools and served

students with identified LD. These students attended the pull-out program and their parents/teachers were willing to participate in the research.

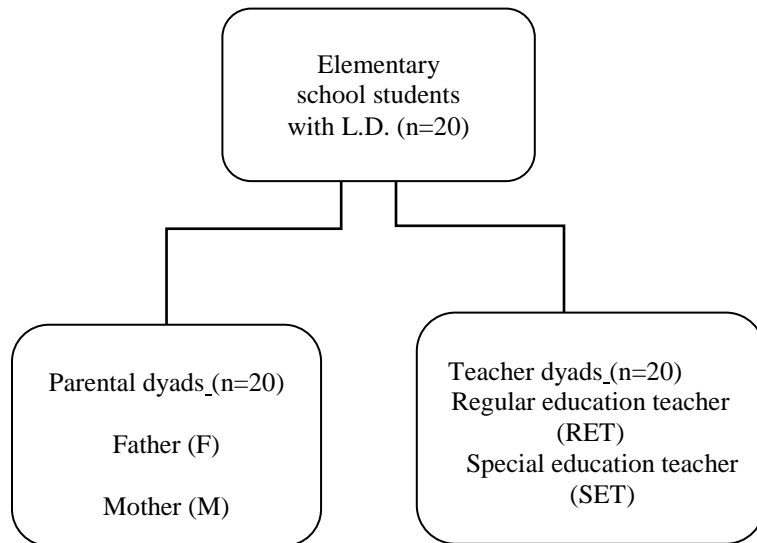
The researchers after having informed personally parents and teachers about issues of confidentiality and anonymity, they created a “unit” of four participants per school which comprised two dyads related to the same student with LD: the parental dyad (mother/father) and the teacher dyad (regular/special education teacher); in total, there were twenty units (see, Schema 1).

The study involved twenty mothers, twenty fathers, twenty regular education teachers and twenty special education teachers of twenty children with LD.

A detailed structure of the sample of this study is provided in Table 1.

*Schema 1.*

The parental/teacher dyads formed for the needs of this study



*Method and analysis*

Semi-structured interviews were adopted, because they allow researchers to obtain “direct” explanations for parent/teacher perceptions of their relationship within educational settings through a comprehensive speech interaction (Laluvein, 2010). Dyadic analysis was chosen, because it may provide “a unique lens through which one may view the dynamics of mutuality and reciprocity between individuals involved in a collective social practice of a potentially

conflictive and contradictory nature” (ibid, p.183). Giving both to parents and teachers equal space to articulate their perceptions on their roles in the education of children with LD, we attempted to set light not only on their identities/roles, but also on the perplexity which characterizes their interactions. The dyadic approach offers the researcher two different lenses to analyze parent/teacher perceptions and viewpoints on their roles-identities, when children with LD are involved.

*Table 1.*  
Demographic characteristics of the participants in this study

Characteristics	Parents				Teachers			
	Mother (M)		Father (F)		Regular Education Teacher (RET)		Special Education Teacher (SET)	
	n=20	%	n=20	%	n=20	%	n=20	%
Gender								
male					6	30.0	10	50.0%
female					14	70.0	10	50.0%
Age								
20 -30 years old	2	10.0	0	0.0	2	10.0	0	0.0
31 - 40 years old	7	35.0	4	22.2	6	30.0	7	36.8
41 - 50 years old	10	50.0	14	66.7	12	60.0	12	57.9
51 and above	1	5.0	2	11.1	0	0.0	1	5.3
Studies								
Junior high	6	30.0	9	42.1				
High school	10	50.0	6	31.6				
University degree	2	10.0	2	10.5	5	25.0	4	21.1
2year degree					10	50.0	14	68.4
Master	0	0.0	2	10.5	4	20.0	1	5.3
PhD					1	5.0	0	0.0
else	2	10.0	1	5.3	0	0.0	1	5.3
Years of teaching experience								
1 - 10 years					4	20.0	0	0.0
11- 20 years					12	60.0	3	15.8
21-30 years					3	15.0	17	84.2
31 and above					1	5.0	0	0.0

Having acquired a written permission by the Ministry of Education, eighty semi-structured interviews were conducted on an individual basis at a location of convenience for each participant. The interviews sought to explore the perceptions of parents/teachers in relation to issues that concerned roles, modes and quality of communication, decision making processes, as well as evaluation of parent/teacher practices in the education of children with LD. Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes, was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Specifically, the interviews consisted of four parts:

- The first part included questions about parent/teacher perceptions of their role(s)/identities in the education of children LD (see, Appendix 1).

- The second part concerned questions about modes and quality of communication between the parents/teachers of children with LD.

- The third part included questions about parent/teacher involvement and collaboration in decision making processes.

- The fourth part contained questions about the evaluation of parent/teacher practices in the education of children with LD.

For the purposes of this study, we focused on the analysis and presentation of the data concerning only the first part of the interview, namely parent/teacher perceptions of their role(s)/identities in the education of children LD.

The interviews were processed with thematic analysis, a process that encodes qualitative information (Boyatzis, 1998), and further identifies, analyzes and reports patterns within data (Braun and Clark, 2006). After having read the transcribed interviews, the first researcher wrote memos so that to reduce the raw information deriving from the interviews. Approximately 15% of the interviews and the memos were read and re-read in order to give

preliminary thematic codes. Four elements characterized each code: (1) elements identifying with the theme, (2) indicators so that to “flag” the theme, (3) references that described any qualified or disqualified element relevant to the theme, (4) a short title that described the essence of the theme. Then, a further examination of 15% of the interviews and memos followed so that to decide if the preliminary thematic codes were valid and correct. The existing themes were constantly revised into new more appropriate ones that were named according to the theme they captured. Then, the second researcher performed reliability tests on the results so that to enhance the credibility of the initial thematic coding. Both researchers had more than 85% agreement on their coding results. The following five themes prevailed which are used to report the findings in line with the main research questions:

1. Parent/teacher perception of parent role in the education of students with LD.
2. Parent/teacher perception of teacher role in the education of students with LD.
3. Parent/teacher goal setting, concerning the education of students with LD.
4. Parent/teacher understanding and description of student’s LD.
5. Parent/teacher engagement in shared practices.

### Findings

#### *Parent/teacher perception of parent role in the education of students with LD*

With regard to their responses, a substantial number of teachers and parents mentioned that supporting the *learning* of the student with LD *at home* was a significant feature of parent role. This involved reading, monitoring and helping the child with his/her home assignments as well as other scholar duties:

We read together history, physics, so that Athena would learn how to organize her reading (M18)

The parent must monitor the child’s reading; the parent must constantly monitor the child’s reading so that s/he could acknowledge his/her child’s progress (RET09)

The *emotional/psychological support* of the child was highly rated by the majority of the participants. It was reported that a parent should encourage the child to continue his/her effort to overcome his/her difficulties, reward the child

when needed, and applause his/her accomplishments:

A mom must be patient, rewarding and trying to help her child overcome his difficulties. She must feel satisfied even with the smallest accomplishment (M08)

A parent must be there for his child continuously, must guide and support him. He must be supportive, encouraging, and must help him with his homework (RET06)

An “unexpected” result was the small number of teachers and parents that believed *communicating with the teacher or a specialist* is an important feature of parent role, so that the parents could help the child with his/her difficulties. Also, few teachers related focusing on the child’s behaviour with the parental role:

We need to find someone, the teacher, an expert, so that he could show us how to help Fotis not only with his reading, but also with his behavior. We need to find a way to make the child share his problems with us (F01)

The parent must help Harry with his homework. The parent must ask the teachers how to help Harry, and must communicate with the teacher so that the parent could deal with the student’s LD (SET06)

The father should discipline his child, so that the child would learn to “respect” other people (parent, teacher, etc); the parent should teach the child the “boundaries” that exist between the parent, who is the “dad”, and himself, who is the “child” (SET03)

A considerable number of parents placed emphasis on *spending quality time with the child and engaged in other out-of-school activities* that would foster the child’s independency and autonomy:

School is not the main issue in our lives. We do things together with Spyros: we go to the theatre. This helps him a lot, because it broadens his horizons. I’m not the “teacher”; I’ve finally come to terms with this: I’m just the “mom”. And this is what I enjoy most doing with my child, spending quality time with my child, enjoying each other’s company (M11)

A significant minority of teachers associated parent-child interaction with clear homework assignments. Indicatively, a RET mentioned that “should the parent help Spyros with his homework, Spyros could do better at school” (RET11).

*Acknowledgement of children's learning difficulties* was the feature least mentioned by the participants. Specifically, few RET/SET teachers indicated that the parent should accept his/her child's difficulties so that s/he could ask for specialist help. Even fewer parents thought that they should acknowledge their children's difficulties:

The parent should be informed so that to ask for special provision for his child (RET15)

The parent should acknowledge the difficulties his/her child deals with so that s/he could ask for a specialist advice; he must be alert, always monitoring the difficulties of his/her child so that s/he figure out to whom to turn to for help (F09)

*Parent/teacher perception of teacher role in the education of children with LD*

A significant number of participants associated the teacher role with the *educational*, as well as the *emotional/psychological support* of the student. Specifically, many teachers and even more parents related teacher role to learning and teaching activities. In addition, almost all teachers and parents combined teacher role to emotional support of the child with LD so that s/he would take on more responsibility for his/her own learning:

I must encourage Nadia during the learning process, and make her believe that she can do things like her peers, that she is no different to them. I reward her with stickers for good practices; I soothe her worries; I boost her self-esteem, and I always applaud her efforts! (RET12)

The teacher must teach Nadia to write properly, must give her the chance to learn and participate in the learning process (M12)

Comparatively to the teachers, the majority of the parents distinguished RET role from SET role in children's learning. Specifically, the SET role was related with direct teaching activities, such as designing and implementing teaching specific to child's learning, as well as teaching/time management strategies, whereas the RET role was ascribed, besides teaching, to emotional support, encouragement, and promotion of the child's participation in the class:

The special teacher must teach Mike how to read and write, must teach him some learning strategies so that he could overcome his difficulties (M04)

The regular teacher must support the child. The regular teacher should show Anna that she loves her; she should encourage her so that Anna should build up her self-confidence and self-respect. The special teacher must teach Anna learning strategies in a playful way (M15)

The teachers argued that there is no differentiation about RET/SET roles. In fact, some RET and even more SET expressed the view that the "teacher role" unfolds around designing lesson plans that would respond to student's individual learning profile, simplifying the curriculum and teacher's instructions according to the child's educational needs:

The teacher must lower his/her demands, so that the child can understand the lesson and participate in the learning process; the teacher must apply differentiated teaching, must provide the pupil with assignments that are tailored to his needs (RET07)

I must support him educationally by teaching him techniques and methods so that he can improve his academic outcomes and bridge the gap between curriculum demands and the child's difficulties. I must also encourage him, because Harry has low self-esteem (SET06)

Features, such as the *student socialization*, *student discipline*, *evaluation of student's LD*, *teacher communication with parent* and *teacher collaboration with other teachers* were mentioned only by few participants.

*Parent/teacher goal setting, concerning the education of children with LD*

The participants referred to didactic or multiple goals as well as to those goals related with the child's personal development. Specifically, in some cases, some parents/teachers referred either to clear didactic goals or mixed goals such as the acquisition of literacy mastery or learning techniques by the child, and teacher's emotional support to the child:

My main goal is to teach him learning techniques, so that he'll manage to read and write effectively (SET02)

I'm most interested in his being accepted by his classmates. The child's always in the outside. He's the black sheep of the class. I encouraged him to participate in class activities and to stand on his own feet. Literacy acquisition is my second objective (RET03)

I want John to read and write properly in a way that he can be understood (M07)

My main objective is that Mike learns how to read and write on his own; I want him to feel happy in the class. We support him all the way (F05)

Importantly, few parents, mainly the fathers, had very low expectations of their child's academic progress, while even less fathers stated no goals, because they did not believe in their children's efficacy in successful schooling:

I cannot set high educational goals for Vaso. I don't know. I'm afraid that she'd not cope with the demands of her class. She has low self-esteem (M19)

What am I to expect of Kostas? Not so much. I believe that studying in primary school is all he can do. I want him to be happy (F08)

A small number of RET and parent participants placed emphasis on goals that concerned the child's personal development and emotional well-being. These goals related to the development of self-efficacy, or self-esteem of the child, whereas few teachers referred to goals related to the development of social skills of the child:

I aim at the development of Peter's self-confidence; I want him to feel good with himself inside and outside the class (RET03)

Peter was the "black sheep" in the class. I aimed at his being accepted by his classmates. I wanted him to be a member of the class, to socialize (SET03)

My objective is to boost his morale so that Spyros will not develop any low self-confidence complexes in the class; instead, he must learn how to stand on his feet empowered, working on the maximum of his potentialities, organizing his time better (M09)

#### *Parent/teacher understanding and description of children's LD*

The majority of the teacher participants believed that they had developed a shared understanding of the student's LD with the parent:

There's no difference in the way the parents of Harris and me perceive his difficulties. The mother has acknowledged her child's difficulties; I believe that the father agrees with us (RET06)

Very few teachers, however, stated differently. Parents' high expectations of their child or parents' low level of education were two

of the main reasons offered by those teachers to explain why some parents associated the child's LD with stigma:

The mother takes the difficulties of her child as a stigma! It's so intense with her (RET05)

I believe that our difference in understanding her child's difficulties results from her low level of education (SET17)

The parents have great expectations of their children. It's difficult for a parent to realize that his child faces more difficulties than his peers do (SET 16)

In the same line as teachers, some parents reported that they understood, as the teacher have, the difficulties of their child. Few parents, however, believed that there was a mismatch of understanding, because the teacher had not acknowledged the child's LD in early stage or had no training in LD:

It was at grade 1, when the regular teacher insisted that it was too early for us to be concerned of his difficulties. It's the special teacher who proposed special provision (M01)

In my opinion, teachers have no adequate training; so it's difficult for the regular teacher to understand my child's difficulties. She can't understand that we're struggling at home to help him with his homework (M11)

All participants were able to describe the child's learning difficulties and few teachers and parents focused on the child's behaviour as well. However, in some instances there was a distinct different language used by teachers and parents to describe the child's difficulties. Teachers used a more "jargon/special" terminology, while parents, though being very descriptive, at times they had difficulties in articulating their child's LD with scientific terms.

#### *Parent/teacher engagement in shared practices*

A large number of home-based or school-based activities are considered as shared practices, such as the design and implementation of an IEP, joining parent/teacher projects or Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) attending parent-teacher conferences, parent nights, supporting learning at home, etc. Shared activities are the benchmark for a parent/teacher collaborative relation and the development of a "common identity". In this sense, the participant CoPs fell short. Few RET stated that although they had been informed, however, they were never invited by the SET or the Head to be



engaged in the IEP applied in the resource room. Some RET, as well as many parents were neither informed, nor invited to be engaged in an IEP, though the majority of the SET participants argued that they had informed a RET or a parent about the IEP. Few parents identified the pull-out program with the IEP.

I've personally developed an IEP for him. I had discussed about it with the mother, not with the regular teacher (SET03)

Yes, there's an IEP on writing skills development. We focus on writing at the moment. The IEP is exclusively mine and the child's as well in accordance to mainstream class curriculum. The regular teacher is informed about it, about what we do here. (SET11)

I guess there is an IEP, but I am neither aware of it, nor of its content. (RET02)

Besides the pull-out program, I am not sure that there is something else for Vaso. (F19)

Fotis was going to the resource room alone. What is an IEP? We attend the pull-out program. (M01)

Merely half of the teachers and parents mentioned that they were not engaged in any out-of-school activities with the parents/teachers. Many participants reported parent-teacher conferences about children's learning and home-assignments. Mostly, actually mainly the mothers reported that they were involved in preparing the home assignments with their children, whereas few fathers mentioned activities, such as sporting.

Some participants acknowledged that they were mutually engaged in school activities, while others claimed the initiative of parent/teacher invitation. All participants, however, mentioned school invitations to parents for communication, such as parent days, parent-teacher meetings every trimester at school. A limited number of mothers mentioned that they were engaged in serving the lunch for children voluntarily or they participated in the school council. The majority of the fathers underlined that their wives were mostly engaged in school activities.

I have shown to the mother how they should prepare home assignments (RET02)

The mother and I usually discuss at the school yard about the difficulties of Leftheris; there are also the parent-teacher discussions about home-assignments, the parent-teacher communication night early in October, once a month we run parent day (SET09)

My wife is involved in school activities. I can't make it with the work and all (F14)

## Discussion

In this study, "*identity*" was defined as the set of parent/teacher roles in social interaction between parents and teachers, as participation and membership in shared practices of an educational CoP that concerned the education of children with LD, where "practices" constitute socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain (Wenger, 1998). The findings revealed that most parents/teachers of children with LD viewed similarly their roles. However, identity is not only what we think about ourselves or the others; it's a lived experience of participation and reification in specific communities (ibid).

Specifically, in regard to parent/teacher perception of parent/teacher role in student's learning, the findings indicated that the participants associated to a great extent both parent/teacher role with the provision of educational and affective support to the child. In terms of parent "identity" in the CoP this means that parents acknowledge their role as emotional, involved and responsive to the feelings of their children in times of distress (Smits, Soenens, Luyckx, Duriez, Berzonsky & Goossens, 2008). Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse (2009) agree that parents' roles are connected with encouragement and emotional support, besides helping the child to be successful academically. In terms of teacher "identity", this means that a significant part of teacher role is related with the emotional support of the child. Indeed, the pedagogical side of teaching is often considered as more important than the didactical and subject matter side (Beijaard & De Vries, 1997). Furthermore, supporting "parenting" and "learning at home" are both closely associated with parent/teacher role, illustrating all activities in which parents/teachers should be engaged so that to ensure educational provision to the child as well as home-school partnerships (Epstein et al, 2007). However, instruction by itself does not cause learning; it creates the context where learning takes place (Wenger, 1998); in this regard, teachers become educational resources for learning in more complex ways (ibid) than approaching a subject matter.

Associating the emotional support of children with LD with parent/teacher role is important, because the research has indicated that the low

self-esteem and self-efficacy of children with LD have a great impact on their academic performance, their social interactions with their peers, as well as with the manifestation of negative emotions, such as depression, embarrassment, anger, etc (Cavioni, Grazzani & Ornaghi, 2017). Thus, children with LD may need an extra support by their parents and teachers to path successfully their way not only to learning, but also to adulthood.

In most cases, parents/teachers believed that they had shared goals, which is an important finding, because CoPs thrive, when the goals and needs of the community intersect with the passion of its members (Wenger, 1998). Admittedly, children do better in school, when parents/teachers share goals and play complementary and supportive roles (Epstein et al, 2007). However, some parents stated low expectations or no goals for their child's education, due to his/her academic difficulties. According to Eccles & Harold (1993), besides parents' perceptions of their role and teacher failure to understand parent role in children's education, children's educational achievement may frame parental involvement in school; thus, parent expectations or low performance goals could refrain the inclusion process.

In this study, many parents/teachers have agreed to their understanding of the child's difficulties. In few cases, the teacher had not acknowledged the child's difficulties in early stage; thus, disagreement between the parent and the teacher emerged. However, one should consider that teachers, comparatively to the parents, relate with children for limited time; thus, teachers may have limited information about the child's difficulties which may be a barrier to inclusion, along with the lack of training on inclusive practices. Interacting regularly, members build relationships, develop a shared understanding of their domain. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that homogeneity is the hallmark of a CoP or conflicts between members never occur (Wenger, et al, 2002). It depends on their competence to interpret their domain and share understanding of its meaning.

As far as parent/teacher engagement in shared activities is concerned, the findings indicate that parents/teachers were involved in school-based or home-based activities, e.g. parent-teacher conferences about the child's academic progress or parent-teacher

engagement in preparing home-assignments. In regard to parent/teacher engagement in the design or implementation of an IEP, there is low evidence about both parent and teacher involvement in IEP. The literature indicates that the perception of a person's role-identity may be associated with his/her expectations not only of his/her role (Stets & Burke, 2014), but also of his/her counterrole in social environments, for example, being a "parent" or a "teacher" in school settings. Having a specific role-identity it may also explain the person's tendency to control the resources that derive from his/her role, while interacting or negotiating with other members of the particular group (ibid). This may explain why the SET implemented the IEP without any contribution from parents and RETs. Parents and teachers learn how to perform, while interacting within school settings, according to the set of existing norms, because each counterrole bares specific meanings and expectations in regard to the person's performance and encounters in social environments (Stets & Burke, 2000). Therefore, parents/teachers may conceive school more as the teacher's domain of expertise and responsibility so that to conform to school norms and less as a CoP, where encouraging parental contributions is a "good" pedagogic practice.

Wenger (1998) sustains that we do not only produce our identities through the practices we are involved in, but we also identify ourselves through practices we do not engage in. The evidence revealed that the mothers were more engaged in their children's education; this is an asymmetry between mother and father engagement. "*Motherhood*" was more associated with "*parenthood*" than "*fatherhood*" (Simon, 1992); thus, parental engagement becomes a source of belonging and a source of mother/father identity in a CoP.

## Conclusion

Overall, we find that CoP may work as a research tool so that to define parent/teacher role-identities and relations within educational environments, as well as a baseline to promote inclusive policies. Parents and teachers of children with LD associated their role-identities with educational/affective support of these children. However, only special education teachers were engaged in practices, such as an IEP, which may frame not only effective home-school partnerships, but inclusion as well.

Engagement in shared school practices is a dimension of power, since parents or teachers afford the power to negotiate their experiences and to shape their efforts into a joint enterprise towards inclusion. In this way, parents and teachers may construct an identity of competence in school settings, which was not obvious in this study. Therefore, parents, teachers, specialists and policy-makers need to view inclusion as a synergy, as the product of a joint enterprise so that identities of reification, participation and collaboration occur in educational environments.

Membership in a CoP translates into identity as a form of competence (Wenger, 1998), and

identity is defined as the power to belong, to claim a place with the legitimacy of membership, identifying and being part of the community. Therefore, the dual nature of power emerges, and it is reflected in the interplay of identification and negotiability between parents-teachers, regular-special teachers, mothers-fathers. Our results argue that, although parents and teachers identified children's difficulties and were involved in their education, they did not advance their relation into a collaborative partnership. Overall, due to limited shared practices, parent/teacher participants had ambiguously constructed a "common identity" in educational CoPs.

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### Appendix 1

The research template through the theoretical lenses of CoP

CoP structural characteristics	Key themes	Protocol questions	
The Community	parent/teacher perception of parent/teacher role	How do you as parent or teacher perceive parent/teacher role in LD children's learning?	Question 1
The Domain	The common concern: the LD of the student	Do you know if ... (student's name) is dealing with some kind of difficulty in his/her schooling? Of what kind? Could you, please, be more specific so that to describe the LD that s/he is facing?	Question 2-3-4
	Shared understanding	Do you as parent or teacher believe that the teachers/parents have developed a shared/different understanding of the child's LD? Why is that?	Question 5-6
	Common goals	What kind of goals have you set as a parent/teacher for the education of ...?	Question 7
The Practice	Shared tools	Are you aware of an IEP designated for ..... (student's name) education?	Question 8
	Membership - mutual engagement in shared practices	Do you as parent/teacher share equal responsibility of the IEP? Of what kind?	Question 9-10
		Are there any in-school/out-of-the school activities that you are engaged in? Of what kind?	Question 11-12