The Need for Coherent Educational Policies in School Institution Management

Ana-Maria Bolborici

Abstract: The presentation aims to emphasize the acute need for the existence of coherent educational policies in educational institution management. It is anchored in the concrete example of these concerns in Romania in recent decades. Pre-service and in-service training of school managers is argued as a necessity. A possible professionalizing of this occupation is highlighted, following examples derived from a brief presentation of the problem in the world. A curricular approach aiming at educational managers’ training within a concrete program of master’s studies existing at Transilvania University from Brașov is presented synthetically. Some universally valid aspects of this training are highlighted. The presentation stresses the idea that all these aspects must be understood in depth both by the educational policymakers, by the curriculum designers, and by those who implement the respective curricula. Awareness and accountability in this field increase the effectiveness both of school managers’ pre-service training and implicitly the quality of the educational approach at all levels of the education system, from early education to higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The educational phenomenon is a social phenomenon of development, formation, and building of people as subjects of action, knowledge and values, through communication and exercise, through shaping their behavior and integration into activity and social relations.

The educational phenomenon takes place implicitly and explicitly in society and takes three forms of education: formal education, non-formal education, and informal education (Niculescu, 2007, p. 22).

In this context, educational management implies a concrete form of leadership focused on the educational process, organized explicitly in school institutions or other types of institutions, including the family.

2. THE NECESSITY TO DEFINE SOME KEY CONCEPTS

The core concepts implied in this paper are intensively used in the literature, but sometimes with differences in their meaning. This is the reason for a brief presentation of the meanings of their use within this paper.

School leadership workforce realities require taking a new approach to attracting, supporting, and keeping principals. In addition to traditional managerial responsibilities such as coordinating
school building maintenance, organizing schedules, and taking inventory of curriculum, a critical role of today’s principal is as the instructional leader (George W. Bush Institute (2016)).

Talking about educational institution management, we must focus on the essential role of school leaders; so, we have the manager / the leader.

In Seven Steps to Efficiency, Stephen Covey quotes Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis as stating: managing implies doing things right; leading means accomplishing the right things. Let’s examine what defines the manager/management and the leader/leading (Stephen R. Covey Quotes. (2012)).

Manager and leader are two concepts sometimes used as synonyms but distinguished by specific notes, being different concepts, the words manager and leader are metaphors representing the two extremes of a continuum. The manager tends to represent the extreme of the continuum that focuses on the aspects: analytical, structured, controlled, deliberate, ordered, and the leader tends to represent the focus on the aspects: visionary, experimental, flexible, with less rigorous control, creative (Niculescu, 2002, p. 1).

The manager is often more seen as the strategist because he must evaluate the previous managerial cycle and prognosis (for establishing a mission according to a shared vision); he is also in strategic planning; he does the macro-level organization and the final macro-level assessment, as well as makes decisions and provides circulation of information.

The leader establishes: operational management, works with people (at the tactical level), details the strategic planning in sequences or areas, forms teams, leads operationally, prevents / resolves conflicts, evaluates sequentially and motivates people.

We can conclude that the manager is the person who uses his mind to solve the perspective and current problems of the organization he leads, and the leader is the person who brings emotional experiences to the management activity to support solving the same problems (Niculescu, 2002, p. 1).

Thus, management involves climbing the ladder of success; leadership means putting the ladder on the right wall.

Building and maintaining effective schools’ institutional management depends on having talented leaders. This is especially true for schools, where strong principal leadership is critical to promoting student achievement.

According to research, principals are second only to classroom instructors in terms of importance as a school-level factor determining students' academic attainment (George W. Bush Institute, 2016, p. 4).

Quality is an issue important to be considered in all human areas of activity and in education as well. Thus we are talking about the quality of the educational process on all levels of the educational system, the quality of human resources in education: teachers as educational managers and principals/directors/presidents/deans / as institutional/organizational managers, and quality management as a specific aspect.
The literature and mainly the practice raise a sensitive question: could quality assessment in education be a necessity or a burden? The answer is complex that involves the purpose and the way of doing this in the practical field. A likely answer could be highlighted by the following brief ideas. Quality assessment is a must in education, but it should be done wisely, focused on core aspects, and using relevant and easy-to-implement tools. Some core issues involved are: evaluating the design of the activity at all its levels (documents) together with the achieved results in the field and evaluating the optimal strategic approach.

The practice shows that the way the quality assessment is done now determines the perception of it as a burden. The reality shows that tons of papers are produced about quality, that an impressive number of commissions and committees are “stacked” with decisions in order to deal with quality, and an even more impressive number of files are lined up nicely on shelves to be “checked” by those who do quality audits.

The question is ”what” means the effectiveness behind these? Three phases/levels of training are considered in relation to managerial status and roles generally and, in this context, those in the educational field.

The question is what means the effectiveness behind all of these? We think that managerial action must be taken to avoid what the reports show, that all those efforts of writing papers and so on are without sense.

Pre-service training (preliminary training) shows preparation for actually assuming the role before holding the status that entails that role.

In-service training involves the preparation to fulfill the role of holding a managerial status after assuming this.

Continuous training implies consistency between the previously specified forms in successive updating stages.

3. A CONCRETE EXAMPLE OF CONCERNS ABOUT EDUCATIONAL MANAGERS' TRAINING IN ROMANIA AND THE WORLD IN RECENT DECADES

There were no explicit theoretical concerns for managerial aspects of education in Romania, before 1990. Some so-called continuing training programs for school directors could be found. They were a kind of in-service training approach for the already-named directors. Without pre-service training, it is not what to be followed up on.

The interest was slowly born in the 90s of the last century. In 1995, a doctoral thesis was defended at the University of Bucharest with a topic belonging to the field: Long, Medium, and Short-Term Strategies for Educational Managers’ Pre-service, continuing, and in-service training. Its author, a scholar from the Universitatea Transilvania of Brașov, was also the first trainer of a group of school managers from Romania in a summer school – for 41 directors of Teachers Centers directors (Casa Corpului Didactic). The trainer was Professor Rodica Marian- na Niculescu.

After this initiative, more and more concerns emerged in this area all over the country.
At the *Transilvania* University in Brasov, prof. Rodica Mariana Niculescu, the first Dean of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, started the first decade of this century a program aimed at pre-service training through a master’s degree for school managers.

Such programs have developed in several universities in the country. Later, multiple *continuing training programs* were developed for school managers at different universities in the country. Now we can speak about a serious concern in the field.

### 4. PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF SCHOOL MANAGERS IS A GENUINE NECESSITY

A lot of debates in papers, and conferences show and argue the necessity of pre-service training of school managers/institutional or organizational managers named differentially over the world (principals, directors, heads, etc.)

University or other principal pre-service training programs should recruit and select only aspiring leaders with the desire and potential to become effective principals in local schools (Turnbull et al., 2013, p. 12).

According to Kelly Garrett (Executive Director of The Rainwater Charitable Foundation): *The job of school principal may be one of the toughest in our nation—and one of the most valuable. High-quality school leaders are in great demand and there are strong calls for principal preparation programs to meet the need more effectively. If we want to turn around our schools and improve student achievement for all children year after year, we must address this leadership challenge* (Gretchen et. al., 2010, p. 8).

Capable leaders are crucial to establishing and keeping powerful organizations, and this is especially typical in schools, where principal leadership is essential to raising student progress. According to research, principals seem to be the second extremely important school-level part in determining student achievement following classroom teachers (George W. Bush Institute, 2016, p. 2).

![Figure 1. A Framework for Principal Talent Management](Source: George W. Bush Institute, 2016, p. 3)
Just as any other leader, an efficient principal plays an essential role in recruiting and keeping the top professors, setting ambitious objectives for their schools, and encouraging an attitude of partnership and sustained development.

It is the combination of highly effective teaching with highly capable school leadership will change outcomes for children in our schools—not one or the other but both (Gretchen et. al., 2010, p. 10).

5. MANAGING A SCHOOL OR AN EDUCATIONAL FIELD – A PROFESSION OR A TEMPORARY OCCUPATION?

An important question is raised whether managing a school can be regarded as a profession or a temporary occupation? Some important steps to becoming a manager of an educational institution are to be mentioned.

The following figure highlights these steps:

The recruitment pool is based on teachers with specifically requested years of teaching experience. From one state to another, there are distinct types of recruitment and selection (enrollment, elections, or contests for getting the managerial status in school/educational institution). But we can identify a two types of managers who consider this position temporary or a profession.

1. Keeping the managerial position for a defined time by distinct regulations is specific for a temporary occupation; the dominant characteristic is turning back to the teaching occupation / turning back from school manager status to educational manager one (teacher as a manager of the educational process with direct contact with the students).

2. Keeping the managerial job in different educational institutions (kindergartens, schools, universities, etc.) for a long period; this type of managerial job illustrates that the school manager performs this as a profession, not merely a temporary occupation.
There are two routes for a school manager. The first one is the one of a temporary status as an institutional manager in education and the second implies the professionalization for the status of manager in an institution of education (kindergarten, school, high school, university on different internal levels: top or medium management level). These two ways can be found in different meridians of the world.

The status of school inspector (differentiated in different spots of the world) is also reached following distinct steps, essentially represented by the following figure.

Concerning the recruitment pool of school inspectors, the recruitment/selection process to become a school inspector is certainly different around the world (thinking about the contest, the selection, the designation, and so on).

School managers (heads, principals, directors) can be certificated after following a new level of training (in university or other institutions as happen, for example, in the USA in some states, or without pre-service training for a higher managerial level. School teachers with specific requirements of experience/performance/training.

School inspectors can receive this status, like in the school manager's case, both for a defined period or as an achieved profession. So, keeping the managerial position for a limited time by specific regulations describes this position as a temporary occupation, or keeping permanently this status in different working places presumes that is a high level of professionalization.

These two ways can also be found in different meridians of the world. The issue of professionalization for the managerial status in educational systems around the world remains a controversial one.

6. THE SYNTHESIS OF THIS CURRICULUM INVOLVED IN THE MASTER’S DEGREE PROGRAM, EXISTING AT TRANSILVANIA UNIVERSITY FROM BRAȘOV

An important phase of designing this program was the analysis of necessity and the comparison of models existing in the world, considering the balance between their aim and the specific cultural context of their functioning. The second phase was that of establishing aspects to be
The Need for Coherent Educational Policies in School Institution Management

considered in designing the new master’s program, considering the local aims and the specific Romanian cultural context.

Thus, common issues found in similar programs from abroad have been considered for two kinds of reasons:
(a) ensuring similar training for managers of similar educational institutions. This is the condition for the effectiveness of the human resources movement specifically nowadays;
(b) ensuring the possibility of students’ motilities during the training for widening their vision.

From the methodological point of view, the program implemented metaphor and drama. These methods were constantly and effectively used within the teaching and assessing sequences; presentations of these aspects could be found in papers published in the Journal Plus of Education.

Some universally valid aspects of school managers’ training are considered in the master’s program. They are connected to several well-known concepts and managerial issues.

Good managers should be able to define and customize the generic mission for their own institution, understand the generic mission of the type of managed institution, and adjust it to the actual condition of the school environment. They must have a clear vision of the institution in the education system and the role of the organization as the engine of any institution. An effective person in a management role should act as both a manager and a leader. The person in charge must know how to choose collaborators in that area of activity where he needs support if one side is less strong.

A short selection of topics/ issues from the training program courses shows some essential topics. The designers of this program understood in depth the meaning of the school’s effectiveness when it is to performance in education, the necessary balance between the effort made to educate the generation/individual in a generation, and the effect got and reflected by the level of training of the graduates.

They approached the way to scrutinize everything that was done as a school manager; self-management being an important section of training. From this point of view, the approached issues are the managers' responsibilities as self-manager and managers and leaders of others.

Self-management is very important and the first condition for effective management is highly controlled self-management. A lot of topics are related to self-management and need to be carefully analyzed by everyone who wants to be a good manager, like time management (is important to think carefully before every action), stress management (with an accent on causes, symptoms, possible ways of solving), assertive behavior (to be strong/explicit / firmly / wise / in control, not influenced), team management, conflict management and managing meetings.

Management of time, stress, the assertive behavior are topics of interest within the training program. The entire issue of self-management is considered a difficult “road” but a necessary condition of the quality of managing others.

Conflict prevention and resolution is a delicate issue for any manager, so he can follow a few steps in finding solutions: recognizing the genuine conflict and making the difference between conflict and dispute of ideas; understanding the causes of the conflict; action against causes
– prevention of an open conflict; opening an inevitable conflict and managing the resolution by putting together the actors and facilitating the negotiations – solving conflicts; concluding to further preventing further conflict solutions.

Another essential idea is that the manager and leader should act as effective team builders, which means taking into consideration some important rules:
- clear goals, well-defined priorities, well-structured and shared tasks, and responsibilities;
- frequently analyzed and reviewed actions;
- open communication lines are obvious;
- ensure the development of each member as a condition of the effectiveness of the team;
- acceptance that disputes of ideas are sources of success and they are not avoided if occur;
- team leader and team members are in consensus;
- team acts in a trusting and opened to help the climate.

The educational / school manager (head of school or teacher) is faced, in his activity, with the need to know and exercise an important number of managerial functions:

1) Functions with sequential and consecutive action during a reference managerial cycle:
   a. functions centered on the size of the task: analysis-diagnosis; organization (made at the beginning of the managerial cycle but with action throughout it); design (planning and programming); program implementation (operational management, control, sequential evaluation); final assessment.
   b. functions centered on the human dimension: organization of groups (performed at the beginning of the managerial cycle but with action throughout it); team building.

2) Functions with constant action throughout the managerial cycle:
   a. functions centered on the task dimension: decision; the circulation of information (the need to build the alternatives involved in decision-making);
   b) functions centered on the human dimension: motivating people; participation, personal development of each individual; the negotiation; preventing and resolving conflicts. (Niculescu, 2002, pp. 8-9).

From the point of view of the institution and organization management, serious attention has been focused on the in-depth understanding of the action of managerial functions within a managerial cycle.

The issues of conflict management, people’s motivation and personal development, meeting management, and the promotion of the educational institution within marketing dimensions have an important place in training not only from the theoretical point of view but as aspects of the educational practice. Using the mentioned pedagogical methods together with others like building and analyzing cases or specific methods of critical thinking always connected to real life, the program ensured an anchor of the managers training into reality.

7. CONCLUSION

The school management is basically where the managers adjudicate school operations and daily tasks of colleges. The duties of a manager at a school vary depending on the school, however, the essential requirements are the same for all organizations. In the particular case of the school manager, he works for the growth of the students and the employees and designs a plethora of activities to develop the level of education of the kids/students.
In conclusion, the action of managerial functions and the quality of their manifestation in the organization's structure largely depend on the manager. A genuine school manager should be well-trained to act for the benefit of the well-being of the staff room, for a positive and stimulating school climate. The school or the educational area managed by a school manager or an inspector should please the community, which can easily become an effective partner. All these are determined by properly trained managers and happy direct beneficiary users, kids, young students, teen students, and adult students.

In an educational institution, the head of its life is highly important. The school manager is important both to open the kid’s eyes to the beauty and importance of education when he or she just entered an educational institution and to keep an open door for the old teachers who served the school their entire lifetime.

References


