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## **EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP - A PERSPECTIVE BEYOND MANAGERIAL PROCESSES**

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### **Abstract**

There is a growing concern amongst critical theories of leadership that school leaders are placed somewhere between system policies or procedures and some ethical concerns about supporting and caring for the well-being of teachers and students. On the one hand, the newly developed theories of leadership emphasise the principal's abilities to empower teachers in school improvement, but also to share roles and responsibilities in data management, school network development, and vocational learning. On the other hand, system procedures that dictate managerial approaches to institutional development aim to increase the accountability of the school principal. Therefore, the moral ontology of leaders, their reflective abilities and their desires for creative and transformative actions challenge the side effects and intentions dictated by system procedures. A review of current research on educational leadership highlights the relative limitations of management when it comes to addressing expectations and requirements that do not meet human and social dimensions. Indeed, the relationships between in-school and out-of-school educators are instilled in ethics and values, key elements for school principals in developing skills and improving their school.

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## 1. Introduction

The two concepts - leadership and educational management - are distinct areas, but which are becoming increasingly connected in the context of educational practice. In part, this link reflects the leadership role that inspectors, principals, and others with formal administrative functions have come to hold in the various processes that govern the education system (Cranston, 2013). Thus, as actors, these leaders not only help shape the interpretations of decision-makers on educational challenges but are also tasked with implementing policies in schools. Thus, researchers have increasingly considered the impact of educational practice on processes and have gone so far as to suggest that leaders develop policies from their various administrative practices (Honig, 2003). A review of recent policies finds that many are based on educational reforms, such as increasing pressure to improve the performance of poorer performing schools. Or, these education reform policies require fundamental changes in the work of educators and reflect the growing awareness of educational organisations about previous shortcomings of the processes and procedures aimed at the same indicator.

Despite this intersection of educational management and leadership, there is still considerable divergence between areas, both at the background level (i.e. what we study) and methodological level (i.e. how we study them). Indeed, we should look no further than most school principal training programs, which often focus on either leadership or management, but rarely on both. Many learners are not guided to see leadership as situated in a specific educational context, nor are they encouraged to explore how it can be, in itself, a product of local educational practices. Many training programs present the practice of leadership as a byproduct of management policies, and do not invite learners to consider how leaders' actions influence, shape, and possibly lead to the creation of a particular system procedure or the implementation of a new institutional development strategy. Thus, questions about the connections between management and leadership are not yet fully explored. The curriculum proposed by the training programs focuses primarily on issues arising from the legislative process, the generation and distribution of resources through various mechanisms, economic factors, the identification of students' needs and the effects of large-scale reforms. Learners are invited to apply managerial perspectives from economics, political science, psychology, public affairs, sociology, and other traditional academic disciplines.

Few researchers in the field of leadership and educational management have explicitly described how these areas should complement each other, how their research could be brought together to study common lines of investigation, and what topics they could explore collaboratively, as part of a common research agenda. So, educational management research may include the study of policy designing, implementation, its effects, and cost-benefit analysis. Desimone (2009) noted that “policy research may include the study of policy formation, implementation, effects, and cost-benefit analysis” (p. 163). Instead, much of what educational leadership entails is based on “a limited set of methodological approaches” (Young & Crow, 2017, p. 8) that include descriptive qualitative case studies, surveys and cross-sectional studies that are often anchored in the specific contexts of principal training programs. Many of these approaches help to generate descriptive reports of local intervention programs, but do not contribute significantly to the broader discourse on educational policies that influence leadership processes, nor do they help us understand how the latter can support, on a larger scale, improving educational management processes.

### **1.1. Defining our issue: Romanian school leaders or managers**

We will focus our approach on training programs for public school principals in Romania. If in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States or Austria there are mechanisms for training school principals - academic training, job-shadowing, mentoring, in Romania the leading positions in the education system are based on the volition and desire of teachers. And the training usually comes after getting the managerial position.

So how do you become a school principal. In Australia, for example, vocational learning opportunities for current and aspiring leaders are set in the Learning to Lead Effective Schools Program, which offers 19 programs for leaders, deputy principals and principals. Each program meets fundamental principles based on evidence from educational research and best practices, which have been identified by the Department of Education and Training (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2018). The 19 programs are commissioned by higher education institutions and other professional development providers, along with coaching, mentoring and job shadowing programs, funded nationally and in line with priorities and leadership development strategy at central level (Department of Education and Training, 2022).

In Europe, the content of training and insertion programs for leaders, deputy principals and principals vary from the development of knowledge and skills on the basic legislative, administrative and managerial content needed to function at a basic level in a school organisation, to developing leadership skills, able to raise the standards of school performance of students. The content can be based on traditional managerial disciplines (Hungary) or on individual school contexts complemented by coaching (England). Most programs seem to try to combine theoretical and practical knowledge and last from 12 months to 2 years, depending on the country.

Romania has a bureaucratic management system of education - the principal has the general responsibility for the functioning of a school, within a wider system led by the central bureaucracy (Aalst, 2002). The roles within the school are quite clearly determined. Teachers operate in relative isolation from each other, collegiate relationships are appreciated, in the sense that teachers are considered educational experts and left to their own devices, rarely disturbed in classrooms. The principal is seen as a *primus inter pares*, the first among peers and he / she is responsible for overseeing compliance with legislation, regulations and directives at central or local level and is responsible for using the resources of the institutions. This person has a lower degree of teaching responsibilities and deals with resource management, communication with parents and other elements of the education system

Thus, a redefinition of the insertion training and the initial/pre-service training of school principals is required, an approach focused on leadership skills. Such an approach would increase the effectiveness of management processes in educational institutions, would support schools in the innovation process by increasing the degree of autonomy and accountability of teachers. Thus, we aim to identify a functional model, based on local practices, transferable in a possible way to train educational leaders of the Romanian education system.

## 2. Research Methods

In order to achieve our goal - to outline a training module for school principals, based on leadership skills, we chose to compare three training programs, already existing in the professional development market. We will focus on the following variables: training duration, proposed contents (syllabus), evaluation of the training program.

The thesis we start from is that in order to have highly qualified school principals, we should design leadership development programs based on leadership. Using leadership methodology (helping future school principals understand the context of their schools, the complicated mapping provided by data analytics and its power to innovate, how to build functional teams by identifying individual talent and coaching, etc.) - we can hope to improve school management and move towards a reform of education in Romania. School challenges fluctuate rapidly in an unstable climate - we face bullying / cyberbullying (a national policy is already being sought around this issue), racism, discrimination, poverty and war. In addition, the absence of dedicated leadership positions within Romanian education system, lowers the quality of leadership, while also increasing the degree of instability considering the fact that key school actors (principals, inspectors) risk being changed along with political power (Kitchen et al., 2017) Therefore, school principals need to have a set of skills to ensure that children's learning and safety are supported, that community values are healthy, that equity policies and ethics are at the top of the school's priority list. And they can only achieve this through strong leadership skills. Of course, learning management tools and strategies, collecting and understanding data - all these managerial skills are required for running a school properly. And they should be found in a comprehensive professional development program, run by a university, along with mentoring, coaching and effective school practice (job-shadowing).

In collecting our data, we rely on document review. The document we have chosen is the syllabus of the three professional development programs, as described in the course books (Lazăr & Leahu, 2020; Mățã et al., 2018) or diploma supplement describing the content of the training program. Thus, by taking a closer look at the information provided, we can suggest a new form of organisation and evaluation for a pre-service program for leadership. Reviewing existing documents facilitates a better understanding of the requirements for such a program as well as its form of organisation. There are advantages of document review data collecting technique: it is relatively inexpensive, it secures a solid source of background information, it is unobtrusive and provides a behind-the-scenes look at the three professional development programs. The issue we might encounter having chosen this technique is that it could be biased because of selective information.

Ideally, leadership development would begin at the teacher level and continue for candidates for the position of principal and deputy principal, including in the first year of office. Continued professional development would increase and then build on the system's experience resources - an increasing number of experienced leaders would be available for a more mature understanding of job requirements, effectiveness criteria and market opportunities. Also, a human resources pool would give access to highly skilled leaders, through training programs, to transfer their knowledge and wisdom to junior leaders, while they themselves gain additional refreshed perspectives through mentoring and coaching (Pont et al., 2008).

### 3. Research Questions

In the light of bringing management and leadership practices in a relevant pre-service professional development program, a few questions arise: What would be the benefits of said program for the institution, according to the directors' evaluation reviews. If educational leadership practices are contextualized, how can one determine which of them are sustainable and replicable. To what extent are educational managerial policies and procedures influenced by leadership styles. Why should principals and deputy principals follow leadership and management programs in formal education before gaining such a position in their organization. How can effective school leadership be best developed and supported. What policies and practices would be most appropriate for these purposes.

We should always keep in mind that there is no model of leadership that could easily be transferred across different schools, different educational levels or systems. Leadership practices are dependent on contexts and encompass managerial processes as well.

### 4. Findings

Leadership can be defined as an ability/activity, or method of leading a group of people toward a goal or position in which the end result can be achieved. Management is the coordination and organisation of various activities of a business process in order to achieve the vision and mission of an organisation. Management and leadership involve working with people and apply to them- subordinates for the first (hierarchy) and followers for the latter (teams). The two create both the foundation of the organisation and its functional structure. Management and leadership influence the structure and work environment and are concerned with achieving goals. The main concern of management and leadership is to allocate available resources in such a way that they can be used efficiently and effectively.

Here is some data on the training programs analysed: a training program through the Casa Corpului Didactic, a program offered by a state university and a program offered by a non-governmental organisation, focused on training school principals. We will choose acronyms for the purpose of this study: PF\_CCD (for the training program offered by Casa Corpului Didactic), PF\_US (for the training program offered by the university) and PF\_NGO (for the training program offered by the non-governmental organisation).

**Table 1.** Duration

Professional development program	No. of hours	Period
PF_CCD	89	15.01 - 30.03.2021
PF_US	120	08.05 - 09.07.2021
PF_NGO	268	05.04. 2018 –31.07. 2019

**Table 2.** Syllabus

Professional development program	Management syllabus	Leadership syllabus	Complementary support
PF_CCD	Organisational strategies and operational management  Elaboration, application, monitoring and evaluation of diagnostic documents and managerial prognosis  Blended Learning- form of organisation	School leadership strategies in online school conditions	N/A
PF_US	Educational management - conceptual delimitations  Quality of the school processes  Effective communication in school organisations  Strategies for preventing and resolving school conflicts  IT in the management of the school institution	Conflict prevention, negotiation and resolution strategies	N/A
PF_NGO	Planning and decision making based on data and school context  Redefine, build, measure - tools for change management  The role of school principals in understanding and implementing change strategies for learning  Effective school management and change tracking processes	The foundations of change and the characteristics of successful leaders  Practices for personal and professional efficiency  Leadership of learning and teaching process  Emotional intelligence. The importance of relationships (teachers, parents, community)  Entrepreneurship and public speaking  Ethics-based leadership  The culture and climate of a school  Sharing vision and successful practices	28 hours 1 on 1 coaching  15 hours of 1 to 1 assistance for writing the institutional development plan

**Table 3.** Evaluation

Professional development program	Formative	Summative
PF_CCD	Open questions (10-15) at the end of each module	Submission of the final portfolio and completion of 70% of the modules
PF_US	Discussions based on the applications in each module	Final portfolio presentation, with a topic of your choice, from each module
PF_NGO	Individual tasks and assessment tools, applied in the context of the institution	Sharing session of the proposed approaches (cafe method) and presentation, in plenary, of the personal vision.

Analysing the time allotted for each program (table 1), we conclude that ratio cost vs. benefits (as in time dedicated to the program vs. the managerial skills acquired) all three programs converge towards the same amount of time. This suggests that an aspirant school principal may acquire some basic managerial skills, through a theoretical professional development program of three months.

Taking a look at the content proposed by the three professional development programs (table 2), we notice that the management dimension of each program has a similar approach. However, the leadership dimension is covered only by one program, thus offering a more consistent approach to the context of management processes. And, in addition, an array of complementary support upholds the endeavors of the aspirant leaders: coaching and one-on-one assistance for drafting his/her vision.

The evaluation process (table 3) is formal, not entirely relevant to the impact on the school itself or the post- training approach of the principal. It would be more relevant to carry out an analysis of post-participation school evaluation reports of principals that underwent the programs, which would also help to improve said training programs. Thus, we can validate the acquired management and leadership competencies. This analysis would also be relevant to determine the relevance of some educational practices in the school context.

Other data that might be relevant is related to the experience of the facilitators, the demographics, background educators of the participants. These are valid lines of investigation if we are to design a comprehensive insertion/pre-service leadership professional development program.

## 5. Conclusions

A possible first step in achieving a comprehensive professional development strategy for school leaders in Romania is to start from the principles of leadership in effective schools and to establish what we would like to be school leaders. And then to design a theoretical insertion / pre-service program led by universities (because this topic is a generous source of research, so necessary for innovation in education in Romania) along with practical training (job shadowing in school) and coaching, for at least 14 months: 3 months for theoretical training, on a blended-syllabus (both managerial and leadership instruments); 10 months for observing / understanding/participating in the leadership and management process and for collecting relevant data (from a real school, through observation activities and application of data collection tools) in parallel with a coaching program; 1 month to develop a school report but also his/her

own institutional development plan (with a clear vision, pro-active teams, inclusive equitable and learning- inducing environment, steadfast actions to implement leadership). And to complete the training of a school leader, it is vital to create a mentoring program as early as possible, along with a permanently connected community of practice.

A leader's focus will always be the learning process. And to ensure that the school provides authentic learning for its students, leadership skills need not only be acquired but passed on to the members of his/her team. "In fact, one of their major conclusions is that leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn in school" (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 26). And it is up to the faculty to provide solid classroom instruction, while the principal of the school should facilitate it by providing for the students and their teachers. Change will more likely occur when leadership is consistent at all levels- be it classroom or school management.

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