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**SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND THE QUALITY OF THE
DIDACTIC PROCESS**

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Abstract

Before 1990 it had often been said that school is not as important as it does not result in production. One fact used to be overlooked though namely that school no matter where from gives society the most important production, without which society could not make progress and this production is LEARNING. Starting from this idea we can say that any school is appreciated in accordance with the quality of the learning it provides, which is reflected in the level of training of its students, in the way in which the latter can integrate into society. Following the same lines it is easy to observe that this training is the school's responsibility and by that we mean school managers, teachers, students and all the other compartments of the school. Learning as school "production" consists in students' performance and the latter is achieved in the lesson. We think, as so do others, that these three elements: learning, results and the lesson constitute the nucleus of a school towards which the efforts of its members should be devoted. The conclusion of our research as well as the conclusion of other researchers is that the quality of the school management or the management of any training institution and the way in which the managerial functions are put into practice influence the quality of the lesson.

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1. Introduction

To carry out managerial functions, requirements and responsibilities, represent an important goal for any manager, but especially for those working in the educational system. Why especially for those in our system? Because almost every member of our society is interested in this system, because a great number of children, young people and adults are included in this system, because they have parents, siblings, friends interested in the results of the educational process. Besides the progress of our entire society depends on the quality of education, formal non-formal or informal education. School is therefore a vital

institution in any society. School results are obtained through teachers and teachers are evaluated through their students' results. One cannot say that a teacher is very good unless one associates this evaluation with the results of the students the teacher taught. Pupils', students' and trainees' results are achieved through lessons and courses; hence the necessity that all the activities of the educational institutions should be carried out in such a way that they could provide the necessary conditions for the lesson to bring about the desired results. The manager who is aware of this will put in all the efforts to stimulate the lesson in the same way as the manager of a factory has the production as the main goal, for which he engages all the forces of the factory. As professor Emil Paun says "the production" of school is "learning" and the latter is achieved in class in the didactic process; that is why we consider that the school manager must be preoccupied with focusing the forces of the institution on "learning", as it can be seen in the diagram below.

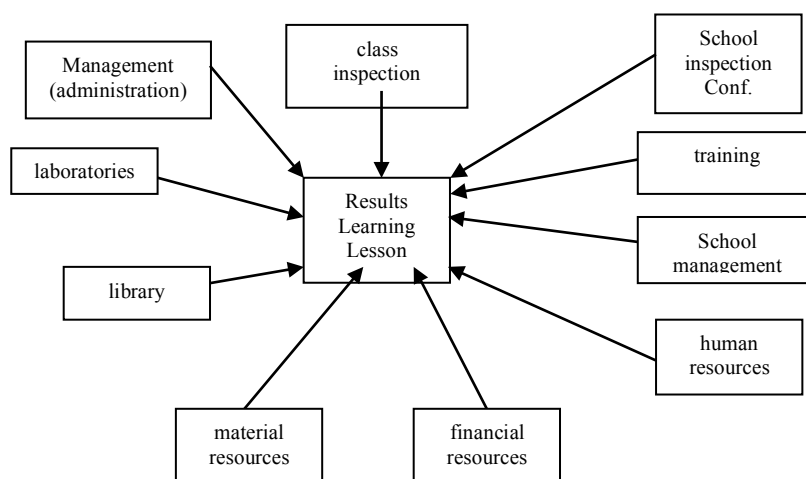


Fig. 1. Results Learning Lesson

2. Research Methodology & Findings and Results

In a questionnaire given to a few school principals to complete (the principals were part of a research sample batch) there was the question: "Do you feel responsible for the results obtained by your students?" To our surprise over 80% of the subjects answered "No". We felt compelled by curiosity to continue the research on this topic and to find out what made them give this answer. Most of the principals we talked to said that those responsible for the results were the teachers, the students and the parents. Some completed the answers with additional information, saying that they had a lot of other problems in connection with the management of the school and did not have time to deal with the quality of the lessons. Going further we found out other causes such as: the training of principals does not include recommendations for observing and analysing lessons, the principal's time is occupied with all sorts of inquiries caused by complaints made by parents, students and teachers; a lot of students could not attend school regularly because of the condition of the roads, because the buses taking them to school broke down, because of poverty, etc. And these causes are obvious with some schools.

These elements as well as others made us carry out research on how managerial functions can be fulfilled in schools. As part of this research a questionnaire was applied, face to face discussions with the subjects involved were held and focus groups were organised especially at some training courses.

Interesting conclusions could be drawn in connection with initial training (pre- service training) and continuous training (in-service training). First of all, 72% of those who attend school management training courses, said that they attended the courses to get credits; 21% said that they were preparing to become managers; 7% did not answer. From informal discussions it became clear that some attended the management course because they could not enrol for other courses.

As far as the quality of the training courses is concerned, 52% of the trainees appreciated them as being very interesting, 42%, as interesting and 6 % as uninteresting. With regard to the content of the courses, 12% of the trainees found it too theoretical and over the level of understanding for some of them, 32% found it just theoretical and 56% considered it was a mixture of theory and practice in various proportions. What is interesting is the big difference between the evaluations provided by the trainees at the end of the courses and the answers given to our questions.

In connection with the themes tackled in the school management training courses, 71% of the trainees found it necessary to have a course on the methodology of teaching various subjects, as it might be useful for guidance and counselling when it comes to the principal's duty to observe a number of lessons.

Before dealing with managerial functions, it is important to review the roles of the school manager for whose fulfilment an appropriate theoretical and practical training is required being known that management is both a science and an art. Among the managerial roles, the most important could be that of:

- Representative of the entity which manages schools (the state, the employer, the economic agent, a religious entity, etc.). In this position the manager enforces the laws of the country regarding education, the rules and regulations concerning the management of schools and educational institutions;
- Representative of the educational community of the institution whose manager he/she is in relation to other organisations in the country or abroad;
- Authorising officer and material resources manager;
- Decision maker in matters regarding the institution whose manager he/she is;
- Mediator between the members of the institution;
- Evaluator of the activity of the members of the institution and so on and so forth.

In order to fulfil these roles and functions, the manager must acquire specific management competences, which consist of specific knowledge, abilities in the domain and attitudes and values referring to the entire management activity. He/she can get the knowledge from training courses; without knowledge his management would be based on intuition, on other people's experience, on chance, etc.

One can acquire abilities through knowledge put into management practice. Those who rely only on intuition cannot achieve scientific management or the type of management suitable for the institution whose manager they are. Attitudes are formed through self-education, and the values each of them holds

were formed through education before they became managers, and are liable to change and completion through self-education.

In order to have an efficient management it is necessary to carry out the managerial duties consciously and this is achieved if the manager knows equally well both the science and the art of management and leadership. Only in this situation are the managerial functions correctly fulfilled. Our research has revealed certain interesting aspects relevant to the matter being discussed.

One of the questions related to the planning function was: "Have you developed a vision and a mission for your school?" The answers were as follows: 54% said "No", 31% had developed only the mission and 15% had both the vision and the mission, approved by the members of the institution.

When asked: "What did you rely on when you drew up your managerial plan?", 17 % of the subjects answered that they took into account the results of the previous year, 62% used the previous results, the teachers' proposals and also the perspective on the future development of the institution and 21% used the previous plan.

Discussions and focus groups revealed that in most cases instead of deadlines the activities/tasks were recorded as "permanent" and under the heading "Who is in charge?" there was often the answer "all the teachers". Some interlocutors were taken by surprise to hear that "in this case the managerial plan tends to become the school rules of procedure".

Another aspect revealed by discussions and focus groups was the fact that a number of plans contained activities which did not have in view the lesson and implicitly learning. They were related to different festivities, visits, trips, performances, competitions, etc., which have their importance but learning requires more space.

All the subjects mentioned that the plan had been approved by the teachers in the school teachers' meeting.

The managerial function which is better regulated through instructions, methodologies and rules is carried out in better conditions. The subjects who answered the questionnaire knew what this function means (the management of the pupils/students, the management of the teachers, the management of the other school compartments) - 100% -, but when asked "How do you develop relations between these groups?", 89% answered correctly and knew what they had to do. On the other hand, the other 11% did not have a clear idea of what duties each group had; nor did they know that their main preoccupation was to ensure the best conditions so that learning could happen in the most appropriate way. The latter part refers also to the coordination function which regulates the relation between decisions and actions, so that all the compartments should be functional and all the goals achieved.

School managers sometimes wish they implemented certain new elements in teaching, in the relations with the students or in other areas. When they come up with such ideas in their institutions they need to answer the following questions: Why should we change things? What results will we get? Do I need to do this? (as I am older in this position). Such situations occur because it is well known that people oppose the idea of change for various reasons, among which there are: the fact that they do not grasp the true meaning of change, that change brings about fear of the unknown, that the purpose of change is not known, that people do not respect their leaders, etc. The manager has to take into account these causes and to be prepared to explain them to his/her subordinates. Putting the new/the change into practice

largely depends on his capacity to motivate the staff. He has therefore to fulfil the function to motivate people. 75% of the subjects were aware of this function, but 29% did not know what this function consisted in.

Monitoring is an organised and planned activity aiming to watch and check to what degree the goals and the managerial plan are achieved over a period of time. So managers check to what extent the staff of the institution manage to accomplish the tasks in a coherent manner by observing the target level of performance; this would allow the manager to start taking remedial measures in order to achieve the expected results. From discussions we have learnt that managers are asked to participate in so many activities outside school that it is very difficult for them to carry out this function in normal conditions.

Some works in the field mention the function of control and evaluation for our educational system; this function used to be called the function of control and evaluation, but for some time it has become the function of guidance, control and evaluation. We consider the latter to be the more appropriate name; only the order of the words should follow the order in which the actions actually occur: the function of control, evaluation and counselling. The managers participating in the focus groups also found it appropriate as they perform the control through observing lessons and then during the discussions with the observed teacher, they evaluate according to scientific criteria. Analysing the answers to the questionnaire it could be found that all the managers (100%), but more the assistant managers than the principals, have class observations (actually they are compelled to do that by law), 52% have an analysis immediately after the lesson, 48% do that when they have time, while 100% appreciated that the analysis takes place in a collegial atmosphere. The discussions also revealed that for some the analysis meant “telling the teacher whether I liked the lesson or not”, about 51% said that they followed the criteria in the regulations and 15% said that they also had their own criteria. Only 11% were preoccupied in their analysis with the progress or regress of the teacher in relation to the latter’s previous lessons.

In their focus groups the principals mentioned that they could not observe all the teachers in one school year and the assistant managers said that they focussed more on the teachers who had recently come to their school, on young teachers and teachers with problems, while teachers generally considered as good or very good are left aside because of lack of time.

3. Conclusions

Taking into consideration all the aspects presented so far, we conclude that there is need for change in the management in education.

Firstly we should define what school management is and what its prerogatives are, which should lead us to establishing the necessary competences. These competences must be decisive in matters of staff recruitment and selection.

Secondly before getting the job or immediately after, the people in question should attend a training course in which theory and practice should occupy equal space or even more space should be allotted to managerial practice.

The next step would be monitoring the newly appointed managers for a period of time by specialists in the field (a kind of mentors for managers).

Another aspect which should be resolved is the time in which the manager could hold the position, as whether it is for 4 or 8 years, the manager must also have a number of classes. If he gets the position for an undetermined period of time or if the managerial position is professionalised, the manager can be exempt of classes. In this situation it necessary to have an assistant manager who could control and counsel the teachers.

We think that there is no institution which can work coherently and efficiently unless the function of communication is carried out appropriately; through this function the manager ensures the communication channels within the institution, the forms of negociation in case of conflict or educational crisis, the ways to communicate with each and every member of the staff. It is interesting that the managers who answered the questionnaire considered that they communicated well with all the colleagues in their school, some of them justifying that through the fact that they were not on bad terms with anybody (6%). The answers were pretty diversified: 4%, “the others obey me”; 11%, “ I use a suitable style of communication”; 6%, “ I don’t waste time talking too much”; 42%, “ I organised channels of communication”; 31%, I know how to negotiate.”

We have realised by now how managerial functions are carried out in the educational system. We think it is time for a change of conception, for a new vision of the managerial function.

The documents regarding planning and the measures proposed should have in view school “production”, that is training and educating the students/pupils and the activities included in the plan should show to what extent they can contribute to student development at every level. These aspects should definitely draw the attention of all those who propose measures for the managerial plan and of those who control and assess. Firstly, this document should start from a deep analysis of the results of the respective school an analysis not only of the figures reflecting students’ performances, but also the causes of certain failures, of the dysfunctions of certain areas of activity. The new document should contain measures to eliminate these causes and drawing up of the document should be a coherent and efficient process reflecting the problems of the school.

Although the organisational function is generally carried out correctly, a thorough analysis shows certain aspects which could be improved. Thus the commissions on different problems are usually organised in such a way that each teacher could have a responsibility and not as a result of an analysis of the competences of the respective teachers followed by an appointment in that commission in which they could wholly fulfil their potential. These commissions are organised in accordance with the school’s problems and so they should not be the same in all the schools.

The questionnaire revealed that likewise the coordination function is carried out correctly. Certain aspects were single out in discussions and focus groups. Some managers do not believe that it is alright to delegate responsibilities as they lose some of their power while the people holding those responsibilities can become potential substitutes, may be better appreciated by the other members of the staff, etc. In fact delegating responsibilities is a very good procedure for at least two reasons: firstly one person cannot deal with all the problems of a school and secondly each of the teachers holding responsibilities can attract supporters to contribute to the achievement of the school objectives.

The coordination function does not rely only on these aspects but also on implementing what is new, on ensuring the relations between the different compartments of the institution. The two functions

regarding organisation and coordination act together to improve learning through: making every compartment work correctly, applying the appropriate decisions so that the “production” of the institution rise to the quality level established, etc. In order to make that happen the manager must be convinced of their usefulness and attract other members in the same direction.

Performing the motivation function, managers can positively influence the quality of the teaching-learning-evaluation process, on condition that they have the information regarding a new type of lesson, able to meet the requirements of students today. Through the relations they have with the teachers, through the visits and observations of lessons, managers can motivate teachers to approach the lesson in a different way, to foster a different kind of relations with students and parents so that learning can act differently on the student.

The function of control, evaluation and counselling is extremely important in ensuring the quality of teaching and learning; that is why we insisted from the beginning on the need to train managers in the methodology of teaching. By observing lessons, evaluating lessons and counselling teachers useful things can be achieved in the field of learning, ranging up to different teaching approaches according to different classes, depending on the students’ problems in each class.

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Appendix

A. Questionnaire

Regarding	Questions	answers
The planning function	Have you developed a vision and a mission for your school?	yes – 15%; No – 54% (mainly in the countryside); Only mission 35%.
	What did you rely on when you drew up your managerial plan?	-results from the previous yearr -17%; -previous results, teachers’ proposals and future development-62%; -used the previous plan – 21%.
	Is there a need for a weekly plan?	Yes - 79%; No – 21%.
	Who must approve the planning document?	-the managing council and the teachers’ council-67%; - the managing council -15%; -the teachers’ council -18%.
	Must this document be drawn up before or after the school inspectorate does?	-before-48%; -after-52%
The organizational	How did you organize school at	-the students in classes-100%;

function	the beginning of the school year?	-teachers in commissions and subject departments-100%; -the others in different compartments-100%.
	How did you ensure the relations between groups?	-right answers-89%; -do not know the tasks of the groups-11%.
	Can this function be delegated?	Yes-69%; No-31%.
	How do you organize the commissions on different problems?	-according to where they entered their names-42%; -I consider that each teacher should be modern-58%.
	How do you select the coordinator of subject departments and commissions?	-teachers' choice-42%; -appointment-36%; -by taking turns-22%.
The coordination function	How do you achieve the coordination of the institution?	-delegate functions-92%; -directly-8%(in small scools).
	How do you select the people you delegate responsibilities to?	-they enterbtheir names for that-42%; - appointment -29%; -consulting the teachers-29%.
	Do you accept coordination through representatives?	Yes-28%; No-72%.
The motivational function	What do you know about the motivational function?	-that it is-71%; -I don't know very well-29%.
	What does this function consist in?	- motivating students to learn-32%; - motivating teachers to enter the class-37%; -awarding prizes-31%.
	Do you need special training to carry out this function?	Yes-31%; No-69%.
	Can knowledge of psychology help to carry out this function?	Yes-56%; No-44%.
	Do your teachers need motivation to promote change?	Yes-43%; No-57%.
The function of control, evaluation and counselling	Do you observe lessons?	Yes-100%
	Do you manage to do the required number of class inspections?	Yes-71%; No-29%.
	When do you make the analysis of the lesson?	-immediately after the lesson-52%; When I have time-48%.
	Do you observe pedagogical criteria when evaluating a lesson?	-I observe the criteria in the regulations-51%; -I also have my own criteria-15%.
	When you evaluate do you refer to previous evaluations so as to compare the results?	Yes-11%; No-89%.
	Have you been contested after class observation?	Yes-12%; No-88%.
	Do you establish certain objectives when you intend to observe a class?	Yes-14%; No-86%.
	Who accompanies you when you observe a class?	- the assistant manager-26%; - the head of the subject department-48%; -nobody-26%.
	The communicative function	Can you say that the communicative function is

	carried out correctly in your school?	
	What does this function consist in?	-I am on good terms with everybody-6%; -ceilalti ma asculta-4%. -I use an appropriate style of communication-11%; -I don't waste too much time talking-6%; -I have organized channels of communication-42%; -I can negotiate-31%.
	Can you evaluate the quality of your communication?	Excellent-50%; Very well-38%; well-12%.
	Have you had complaints about your communication?	Yes-16%; No-84%.
	Who do you find more difficult to communicate with?	-with the teachers-28%; -with the parents-51%; -with the admin staff-21%.
The quality of training courses	Why do you attend training courses?	-for credits-72%; -I am preparing myself to become a manager-21%; -I don't have any opinion-7%.
	How do you evaluate the training courses?	Very interesting-52%; Interesting-42%; Uninteresting -6%.
	How do you evaluate the content of the training courses?	-too theoretical-12%; -only theoretical-32%; -theory and practice together-56%.
	Do you think that a course on the methodology of teaching is necessary?	Yes-71%; No-29%.