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DECENTRALIZATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESISTANCE
IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

The current changes and reforms in the pre-university education system have made schools shape their own managerial vision.

This research shows an analysis of how school managers relate to the decentralization in the pre-university education system. The methods used to measure the attitude towards the main categories of reforms pinpoint high correlations between the decentralization reform, continuing education and quality in the pre-university education system. This research illustrates the presence of some conservative tendencies that can be changed through an educational-formative process so as to optimize teachers' attitude toward educational reforms. Learning how to change has been vital in this research, which allows us to support and propose an education of the school organization and its members through and for change. The respondents realized that, in order to put into practice this goal, the school must activate its mechanisms of strategic management which are meant to lead the educational actors towards a continuously engagement in the development and reconstruction process of school and professionalizing the teaching career.

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1. Introduction

The activity of the educational system is taking place in a more and more globalized environment, subjected to change, competition and to new demands.

We are already used to say that the educational change means automatically the reform process that the Romanian school is passing through.

The Romanian school needs to face the present day challenges, by approaching the educational change from the perspective of the new organizational development wave. From the perspective of the organizational dynamics, school has become a new force in implementing the new through learning („learning organization”), this being the main mechanism to improve school (Diaconu, 2008). The problematics related to the learning organization represents a research topic for many specialists (Johnson & Howell, 2009), who are emphasizing the school’s orientation onto two directions that depend on each other, “an organization which learns” and “an organization which promotes and produces learning”.

From the perspective of the integration in the EU and because of the more democratic life held at all social levels, the decentralization of the educational system has become a necessary and inevitable condition.

2. Problem Statement

The studies performed by specialists in the Sciences of Education (Niculescu, & Adumitrăcesei, 1999; Urse, Neagu & Stoica, 2002) show that the Romanian school has the capacity to adapt, it has succeeded in facing new demands and in assuming the responsibility of change on all its levels. If at the beginning the rhythm of change was quite slow and the ideas and the values had a progressive evolution, today we can see a permanent dynamics. The social changes have determined educational changes and vice versa. Many of these changes are complex, sudden, etc., and therefore the individuals and the social institutions must be prepared, they must perceive them correctly and they must learn to adapt to the new, to build up the ability to change as a result of the organizational learning processes. School has all the conditions needed for the process of change: in the sense that “it teaches”, this aspect deriving from the need to progress and to answer to the real challenges of education “to produce learning” at the individual level. These aspects are inter-connected, so any educational change focuses both on the institutional development and on the human professionalization.

The decentralization perspective has resulted from the presence in the system of the following needs: the need for public liability, for implementing democracy into the educational system, for transparency in the decisional act, for institutional autonomy, for putting to good use the human resource, for improving activities and for increasing the performance, for increasing the quality and the relevance of the educational offer, for improving the access to education and for offering a sense of equity, for stimulating innovation, the professional responsibility and the public liability.

By implementing the decentralizing reform, we assist at a complete redefining of school as an organization. This aspect is reflected also on the quality of education which values the rapport between the real needs of the individual and those of the community.

While reflecting over these aspects, we might emphasize the fact that this change must represent the main element for each school and local community. The changes taking place at the institutional level

are now both cause and final product of the school organization. We might say that just now change has taken an institutional aspect.

The decentralization as it was foreseen by the institutional reform of school, changes also the role of the school management, which is completely different from the old practices. Many of the school managers need to gain new competences, abilities specific to organizational leadership.

Starting from the observation made by Bogathy (2002), according to which organizations do not change for the sake of changing, but because they are part of a far bigger developmental process and they must react to new changes, demands, occasions that appear in the field, in the adapting process to the educational change, the teachers must accumulate new knowledge, use new methodologies, improve the degree of competence, and change their attitude towards the organizational way of the instructive-educational act. We emphasize once more the observation made by Ilin (2001) at a general level that there cannot be any real change without a change of attitude.

3. Research Questions

Although it is a highly topical concept, dominated by changes and challenges, the change in education is proving to be a difficult process because of the deep psychological implications at the level of both individuals and school organization. The studies developed for this purpose are far from enough. There is a growing need for new justifications regarding the accelerating changes in the educational field. Analyses become deeper when discussing about the attitudes of both teachers and students towards educational reforms.

As far as the organizational development is concerned, the change in education aims to develop the capacity of the Romanian school to meet the current challenges. An objective analysis or a diagnosis of the education system is required in order to have a correct orientation of the changing direction and innovation. In addition, it is important to study and revise the traditional aspects, the acceptance of change and how to implement it.

The main questions in the education system diagnosis were:

What are the perceptions of the human resources (teachers and students) regarding the teaching profession?

What is the satisfaction level of teachers on the teaching profession?

What is the satisfaction level regarding the implementation of the decentralization reform and its dimensions in the pre-university education system?

Although all aspects, stages and implementation models put their mark on the process of educational change, we believe that priority should be changing attitudes through education by respecting the acting principle and a pro-change direction; thus, leading to newness, involvement, competition and cooperation anticipating the future and empowering the human resource to promote quality in the education system.

4. Purpose of the Study

To identify the attitude towards the educational reforms and towards the problems related to change represented the first diagnostic step of change. Starting from the stages of the change process

(preparation, diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation), we are going to illustrate the intervention process so as to change the attitude of the main educational actors involved in the pre-university education. In the first stage that we have called “preparation”, we have identified the problems, causes, and the conditions to accomplish the educational reform. In the debates held with the teachers, we have identified the real purposes of education at a pre-university level. We have focused during the diagnosis stage on the aspects related to success conditions, emphasizing the favourable circumstances in implementing change. We have worked hard on developing a motivational profile which should help implement the reforms.

During the training program we have focused on the development of analytical abilities and of those needed to interpret the phenomenon of educational change and of improving the teachers’ attitude towards reforms. Our purpose was to convince them of their capacity to implement and control the change program and to determine them to apply this formative approach, and to promote change and educational reforms.

5. Research Methods

This study is part of a complex investigating effort which was based on the research - action method which illustrates the change in the attitude of the teachers that are part of the pre-university education. This type of research has allowed the analysis of the change phenomenon by using scientific methods which emphasize the attitude towards the importance of the educational reform in the pre-university education. We have used the enquiry method based on a questionnaire (Reasons for the attitude shown towards the educational changes), the semantic differential of the attitude towards the reforms from the pre-university system, focus-groups, all of these implying a qualitative analysis of the different experiences, opinions, perceptions and attitudes shown by the teachers towards reforms. The formative experiment was used with the purpose to change the teachers’ attitude towards implementing reforms in the system.

Participants in this study were 200 students in the 3rd and 4th year of study who have completed the psycho-pedagogical module of the Department for Teacher Training, “Lower Danube” University from Galati and 600 pre-university teachers from Galati, Braila and Buzau county, who were students in the post-university programs: module II program, PIPP program and Master of Educational Management.

The collected data were subjected to statistical procedures such as frequency analysis, validity analysis of applied questionnaires and differential analysis (via T Test for independent samples).

The methods used in this study were group interviews and survey-based questionnaire. The instruments used by the author to collect data (four in number) selected by a previously difficult and laborious endeavor are instruments that have proved their psycho-diagnostic value in time and were used properly according to the methodological norms in effect. The selection of these instruments has enabled the entire and complex measurement of variables endorsed by objectives and assumptions.

6. Findings

The decentralization and the institutional autonomy are perceived by the educational actors as “real instruments which ensure efficiency”. They have all easily understood why it is important for each

institution to be capable to take its own decisions regarding its development, by defining its mission and value and also by fulfilling its general educational objectives.

At the same time, we were interested to analyze whether providing a substantial set of information about the reform and an educational endeavor by attending a specialized course - *Education for change* - will lead to positive changes of the attitude towards reforms in education. The results obtained showed the following:

- the general attitude towards the implementation reforms, was initially negative (in the pretest), but after participating in training courses on educational reform issues, this attitude has changed in a positive way. These results shows that the teaching staff have fully realized the need for change after passing through a complex process of assimilating some knowledge, which led to cognitive and emotional consistency of their attitude. These issues have generated a significantly more positive attitude towards educational reforms.

Based on the findings that illustrate an orientation towards the positive extremity, it was observed an increasing effort and willingness to sustain the need for an educational change, to prove and implement the changes promoted by the reform.

All these aspects have become prerequisites that trigger a pro-change behaviour.

- as far as the attitude towards the implementation of decentralization reform in the education system is concerned, although initially it was negative (in the pretest), after participating in the training program it has changed positively, increasing significantly. Teachers have realized that redefining school as an organization and what quality in education means is imperative in a modern education. They practise their attitudes, beliefs and skills in order to develop institutional development projects, educational projects, aiming to develop the strategic capacity of the school.

The influence of the variables *formative program (with application in the experimental group and no application in the onlooker group)* and *experimental conditions (pretest-posttest)* on the variable *attitude towards the implementation of education decentralization reforms in the education system*.

The above-mentioned results shows that although the pretest subjects in the onlooker group had a more favourable attitude towards the implementation of decentralization reform in the education system than those in the experimental group, after taking part in training programs on the issue of educational changes and education for change, in the posttest the subjects in the experimental group had a more positive attitude towards the implementation of the decentralization reform in education than those in the onlooker group. On the other hand, with the passage from the condition of the pretest to the posttest, the general attitude towards the implementation of decentralization reform in education grows in intensity in a positive way only for subjects in the experimental group (not for onlooker subjects), i.e. those who have participated in the intervention program.

We have observed an exponential increase in the interest shown by the management team for diagnosis, projection, planning and implementation of programs which contribute to the development of their school institution. School is still the one that needs to focus also on the motivation and the accountability of the teachers so as to implement these new strategies.

Only the reality of the educational change in the Romanian school still underlines the presence of the conservatory tendencies towards change, an aspect that determines the acceptance of change only on the declarative level, or many times we wonder if the teachers are sincere when displaying attitudes in

favor of change. From the research we have done, we may conclude that many experienced teachers do not admit the fact that they are reticent to change, even if in their speech expressions such as ‘using the old didactic methods, the pupils succeeded in obtaining remarkable performances’, ‘no matter the strategies used, the active learning makes the process of teaching-learning a superficial one’ can be found, a fact that illustrates the lack of confidence, the fear of failure, the ignorance, the habits or the incapacity to tolerate ambiguity etc.

Another aspect following the same pattern is the fact that, even if all the teachers have been trained in the direction of optimizing the teaching activity, we have encountered cases in which some teachers keep permanently the old practices. We might conclude in this case that the resistance to change can manifest itself in a hidden form. These aspects are representing real barriers for the implementation but also for the analysis of educational change.

We will encounter these realities in the Romanian school as long as the changes will come as external requests. One possible strategy for removing the resistances, the defensive attitudes towards change might address the conversion of the new elements into old, but substantially ameliorated practices. We have noticed that this procedure proved itself efficient, because it has been perceived as a preventive change which makes possible to avoid unbalances and created a feeling of stability. This way, the individuals did not pass through that identity crisis and managed to activate an intrinsic motivation and desire to develop one’s own person but also the school organization they were being part of.

Furthermore, it has been scientifically concluded that, from the systemic analysis point of view, the school manifested the tendency to preserve its equilibrium. Even if in the first stages of change there can be found incertitude, by implementing and transposing the reform measures into concrete actions and becoming aware of their importance, balance can be restored. It is important to mention the fact that promoting change in the conditions of a defensive attitude towards change and of behaviors resistant to change is impossible and pointless, because change is only possible in conditions of attitudes for change and proactive behavior. We might conclude that the success of the process depends on the quality of the preparation for the process of change. We should not apply the change until we have not managed to develop behaviors in favor of change. These aspects are being directly dependant on the involvement of the individuals in promoting change, in transforming them into agents for change. In order to determine them to get involved quickly in the promotion of change, the motivations for resistance need to be smashed and transformed.

In the teaching institutions in which it was not successful to understand the importance of this aspect, conflict situations have been registered, the teachers always being less motivated, considering themselves as being involved in inefficient changes and perceiving the implementation and promotion of the educational changes as a burden.

Following the analysis of the school organization, we would underline another aspect that has been neglected by those involved in changing the education system that refers to the “incapacity” of school to train the pupils and the teachers for coping with the organizational changes and also with the social changes. The reality illustrates that the teaching institution focuses still excessively on the results pupils get and less on the aspects that trigger educational change (professional training, efficient climate etc.)

7. Conclusion

Starting from this point, we might claim that, due to the opportunity offered by the decentralization of the teaching system, the school is able to create its own future and to take permanent care of its own organizational development, of the culture of the school organization and of the human resources it has. This aspect needs to become a permanent preoccupation, because school needs to become credible, by having a coherent culture oriented towards the social values, it needs to be prepared for the future changes in the education system and the social one.

Like any other type of organization, school needs to be analyzed frequently from the organizational climate point of view, of the determining factors that are illustrating both the negative and the positive climate. The negative aspects can be visible immediately, we are able to measure the degree of professional satisfaction of the people in the system, we can notice difficulties, causes, aspects of the climate in school that are not proper for the development of the individuals from the school organization. Starting from the conclusions, the school manager must use motivation strategies on the education actors, construct and create a positive organizational climate. The type of climate is very important because it can be in the same time a cause and an effect of the development of the organization. Also, the manager should include on the list of his preoccupations the creation of a communication network inside the organization and with the social environment.

In the school organization there have been many important changes during the years, but they have manifested themselves discontinuous, this is why their management has been difficult. First it was necessary to reduce the dysfunctions and then to manage the new reforms. It is difficult also due to the fact that the experiences accumulated are more like “obstacles” for change, a limitation of perspectives, of the vision upon change, a fact that tends to lead to resistance. In order to prevent the triggering of these resistance mechanisms, each school organization, together with all the education actors and the beneficiaries of training should draw its own vision of the future of the institution they are being a part of and review the old strategies and then identify all the means necessary for the implementation of change.

In conclusion, the change and the development of the school organization represent a new challenge for the school. We might claim that these also have an adequate response and wish to develop and structure their own evolution algorithm.

The education actors, apart from the fact that they are the receivers of changes in the first place, should become also the actors and agents of change, get engaged in an effort of trigger and promote education changes on all the social levels. In order to reach that desiderate, we claim that there is a need for a program of initial and continuous training in education for change. This program might shatter from the initial phase some tensions generated by change and being backed by diverse causes. The teachers will be able to implement and promote the education reform after they had the minimum initiation in the domain of education for change. Reflecting upon these aspects, we might say that there is a need for the formation of specialists in the problem of change and its management, in such a way that the action level can be started. Such training might contribute to the creation of compatibility between the ways of thinking and action, might encourage the promotion of the creative strategies, develop proactive and prospective competences in all the people involved and preoccupied with the educational reforms etc.

The manager has the obligation to put change into practice through the real transposition and the management of the reforms in education on all the levels of the school organization in the most effective way. These aspects are insufficient due to the amplitude and the rhythm of the changes in education and society. There is a need for planning the future of the school organization he is leading and for an anticipation of the changes. The previous experiences in management are insufficient and we might even dare to claim that they are an obstacle in the path of change. We would also add another very important aspect concerning the capacity of the manager to analyze the process of change from several points of view, so he will have access to the management of change.

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