The Institution of Educational Project Coordinator and the Development of Collaboration Networks in Modern School

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Abstract: This paper constitutes both a proposal and an urge towards an innovative pedagogical approach concerning the development and the function of a network that could be suitable to succeed educational institutions being extroverted towards society, as well as educational system effectiveness to face upcoming needs and challenges constantly uprising.

Key words: collaboration, networks, educational project coordinator

1. Introduction

Educational Project Coordinators' (E.P.C.) responsibilities and duties, as described in article 3, paragraph 16 of the Unified Regulation of Operation of the Regional Centers for Educational Planning and Educational Project Coordinators' special duties and responsibilities(R. 4299/18), involve that E.P.Cs collaborate with students' associations, the teachers' unions, the public participation bodies, other educational institutions, the Local Government, the Parents' Associations, the cultural and scientific associations, scientists and local community factors in relation to their needs and their present potentials, within the framework of their responsibilities and the role of each body in order to optimally achieve the aims and objectives of education and to strengthen the school's relationship with the social and cultural environment.

Dynamic collaborations between schools and communities create the necessary conditions for the environmental, social and economic vitality of a place. Through this perspective, the motivation of all students to join the wider group is encouraged (Aloni, 2011). Lehman and Geller (2004) express the view that when students experience a sense of "belonging" and "co-belonging" and satisfy the need for personal control and power in the factors that form their daily lives, they acquire an optimistic mood and tend to develop altruistic feelings. All of the above constitute the appropriate background to exceed the limits of individual interest for the benefit of the collective good.

Educational organizations, in general, do not operate in isolation from their wider social environment. Their action, function and general existence are intertwined with it. Each school unit is interconnected with the wider society in a two-way service relationship. The boundaries of the school are therefore permeable, not inaccessible, on the grounds that what exists within the school penetrates and diffuses into the environment (Canevaro, 1999). Conversely, everything in the environment enters the marginal area of the school. The social environment can be

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favorable, friendly or unfavorable — hostile, simple or complex, general or specific, stable or unstable. However, in any environment, each school unit is called to manage its limits, to formulate the appropriate strategy so that it can react to each environment dynamically and creatively (Everard & Morris, 1999). When students interact as dynamic members of a community, they create and strengthen bonds both with each other and with the place, as they see themselves as part of a unit with a past and a future (Eisenhauer et al., 2000).

2. What Networks Are and How They Work

Networks are a new concept in education. They contribute to the implementation of innovative actions that approach the objectives of the curricula and the modern educational aspirations. The cooperation of educational organizations mobilizes students in the context of the wider social environment as they are now influenced by factors such as political, cultural, economic, technological and the current demographic components. Besides studies of the social climate or school environment sometimes provide us with an alternative approach to the effect of society rules and values on student performance (Banks, 1987).

Networking is a modern concept that clearly differs from traditional educational models. These achieve the implementation of innovative strategic options in conjunction with the development of two-way communication activities. The communication developed by organizations receives, creates and transmits information, knowledge, values and skills across the spectrum of the social environment (Gotovos, 1985). Networking is therefore a systematic establishment and management of "internal and external interfaces", with which either through a message or a coordinated action, educational organizations or special groups manage to achieve common goals (Chapman, 2003).

Utility, features, types, and networking are issues that nowadays concern all stakeholders in the educational process. This socialization is determined in the direction of activating the student instead of the passive attitude, self-action instead of the inactive attitude, cooperation instead of individualism, participation instead of marginalization in general school issues (Konstantinos, 1998).

To date, it seems that the contribution of social factors in the educational and teaching process is important. It is found, however, that in this direction there is room for development in the cooperation of the involved bodies (Tsabarli et al., 2002). Social and political actors, mainly at the local level, usually participate in and resolve economic issues while remaining outside the real essence of the educational process.

3. Prerequisites for Network Application

The school is not only a place for the provision of knowledge but must provide opportunities for participation, interaction of ideas and perceptions. Networking should be a voluntary collaboration, felt and experienced by its partners, based on parity and not hierarchy. Partners must choose to achieve common goals (Chapman, 2003).

The school community is a clear and organized framework for social interaction. Given that the modern world is portrayed as a pluralistic and multicultural reality, the modern school must organize the educational work in such a way that students think, decide and take action in terms of acceptance, cooperation and mutual respect (Tsironis, 2008). At the same time, they should be encouraged to clarify, criticize and review their personal values, attitudes and behaviors (Flogaiti, 1998).

A modern school, which promotes the "principle of communication" and wants to operate on such a basis, pursues its objectives beyond learning and undertakes innovative processes through network connections. It

properly designs, calculates, respects, envisions, engages in processes with actors of the immediate social environment, with the aim not of isolating him, but of establishing him in his social environment, his recognition and acceptance of his work by the society that surrounds him (Tsabarli et al., 2002).

4. Network Targeting

A key and important element is the goal or common goals of the networks, which will be specific, clearly prioritized and accepted by everyone. In order to create a network, the partners must know the purposes it serves, how the set of goals will be achieved and under what specific action plan they will be implemented. Stakeholders need to determine:

• The goals; to plan and organize and work for their implementation within a specific schedule, which can be observable and measurable.

• The type of activities.

• The alternative means by which the objectives will be achieved.

• The intermediate and final control procedures in the context of activities (Everard & Morris, 1999).

However, the members of an organizational unit of the network should be aware of:

• The degree of trust in their relationships.

• The ways of implementing the specific program.

• The variety of activities developed during the implementation of the objectives

• The schedule of meetings and the representatives who will participate in these meetings (Van Aalst, 1999).

• The balanced relationship that should exist between the components of the network. This necessary balanced relationship can contribute to understanding the coordinating role between members.

• The actions, activities and decisions of the collaborators based on consensus and mutual respect.

• Network participants multiply their sources of information through a form of external communication and expand the possibilities of access to information.

• Schools can achieve more by creating voluntary creative collaboration through networks than through the old standard bureaucratic structures.

Schools, parents and guardians' associations, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, and other local bodies could participate as organic members of the networks (Tsigas, 1994). Educational organizations from other regions could also participate in these networks. Cooperation in programs of Environmental Education, Health Education, Culture, Theatrical Play or any other innovative pedagogical activity is proposed as particularly effective.

Networks enable the implementation of innovations through the multiple exchanges of ideas, information, resources of cooperation as well as competition that prevail between the network operators. The partners, without losing their autonomy, can on the one hand form stable supportive relations with their immediate environment and on the other hand give the "opportunity" of one body to "latent knowledge", thus opening the gates in the local community (Athanasoula-Reppa, 1999).

The interaction in the classroom is not limited to the role of teacher - student. In this direction, the importance of special educational activities with experiential and team-like character is highlighted. Pedagogical approaches, "learning through experience" and "learning through discovery" can be based on a formal and non-formal education environment (Tsironis, 2008).

5. Quality Characteristics of Networks.

As already mentioned, educational networks differ significantly from the usual traditional forms of school operation. In the context of modern educational policy, networks present a refined and essential quality with features such as:

• The equality and equal distribution of responsibilities between the members of such a network, the creation of links between the involved bodies, so that on the one hand the needs of the bodies are covered and on the other hand the role of a school unit is highlighted and their support from the wider social environment is ensured (Polychronopoulos et al., 2000).

• The voluntary participation of the partners without the expectation of monetary benefits.

• The self-management of networks with forms of power that is not rigid and bureaucratic.

• The division of processes from the beginning to the end of a common goal, in a climate of reciprocity, with common ideas, values, attitudes and perceptions. Thus one learns from the other, multiplies their knowledge, expands their learning and scientific horizons. That way, they can improve themselves on their mistakes and learn to overcome their weaknesses through the experiences of others. This makes it easier for them to realize their identity, role and position so that they can implement innovative activities on educational issues.

• The central position of a school unit that can highlight issues such as "how close it is to the society that surrounds it, how close or far it is from its goals to redefine its course" (Everard & Morris, 1999).

• The range of geographical area they cover and the ability to respond to the interests of their members (Petronioti, 1995).

6. In the Direction of Forming the Groups of Neighboring Schools

After the placement of the Educational Project Coordinators (E.P.C.) and the relevant decisions of the PDE for their schools of pedagogical responsibility, the Directorates of Primary and Secondary Education were called to gradually define the groups of neighboring schools of their competence.

The development of collaborations with teacher collaboration groups seems to be part of the overall planning for the operation of the school units. The focus of educational policy seems to agree that good educational outcomes depend not only on classroom instruction but also on how teachers work together. The model that is preferred is "the school that discusses" and "the school that cooperates" and in this direction, the role of E.P.C. becomes nodal. In article 3, par. 16 of the Unified Regulation of Operation of the Regional Centers of Educational Planning (PE.K.ES.) and of more specific duties and responsibilities of the Coordinators of Educational Project (Law 4299/18), it is provided that the E.P.C. visit the school units and the E. C., cooperate with the Principals and the Teachers' Associations, at the level of the area or Group of Schools and/or school unit, and provide them with their scientific and advisory support in matters of educational function and pedagogical practice.

According to law 4547/2018 article 48 par. 2, the Teachers' Associations of the school units (when there is no Deputy Principal), must meet and choose a teacher who together with the Principal will represent the school in the meetings of the groups of neighboring schools.

The term "teacher collaboration group" is used to denote a group of teachers of different or even the same specialty, who work collaboratively, meet regularly and aim to improve teaching in order to achieve better learning outcomes for students.

The implementation of such partnerships creates positive results, regarding:

• the reduction of didactic isolation

• the decentralization of power

• the disclosure of sources of information and ideas[1].

Teacher collaboration teams will be structured on two levels:

1. In the formation of working groups of teachers at school level

2. At the level of school unit groups.

School-level working groups will meet and collaborate on the following objectives:

• the joint planning of teaching

• the exchange of ideas and teaching material

• the evaluation of the results of the implementation of the planning of the educational project.

School groups will work together to succeed:

• the teachers' associations of the school groups be in constant information with each other

• training initiatives and actions

• participation in various pedagogical programs, exchange of ideas, proposals and reflections on the development of initiatives and actions for the solution of pedagogical issues, focusing on the process of collective planning of the educational project (Law 4547/2018 article 48 par. 2).

7. Conclusions

Actually, with the creation of networks in education, any activity that is implemented as an action plan (project), does not only activate the close school environment. The school operates with partners from its immediate social environment, values its existence and is recognized through its social space.

It is a great success for the school today to be able to mobilize its students, to provide them with opportunities for action, having at the same time managed to maintain a satisfactory degree of interest. Students' activities can contribute to creative questioning, free expression of their disagreement and pave the way for the cultivation of critical thinking. Students have the opportunity and time to reflect, to explore hypothesis and to draw conclusions by systematically engaging in the various issues they approach. And this is done not only on an individual, but mainly on a group level (Anastasatos, 2005).

Communication is two-way and goes beyond transmitter (teacher) — receiver (student), cultivating complementary communication. Collaboration and solidarity of the group replace the competition and individualism of students, which usually prevail and students have the opportunity to exchange views, to disagree, to co-decide and jointly act. Their relationships are strengthened and all of them are active either as a joint group — class or as individual groups, depending on their interests and goals - aspirations they set (Matsagouras, 2000).

The "school-out-of-school" dipole, although it has been alleviated, still exists, with the result that students often either identify with the school, refusing any approach to social reality or vice versa. The creative contact of the two poles, which is achieved, has only positive effects, both on the correct formation of the children's character and on their better future social course. Parents, local agencies, etc. are transformed into active figures in the school environment, giving it a different perspective.

Teachers are no longer alone, but have as partners (directly or indirectly) a large group of people with a wide

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[1] http://www.fresh-education.gr/groups-of-collaboration-teacher-team-in-schools-ka/.

variety of knowledge and interests. Both teachers and learners are active participants in the learning process and a form of communication is developed (Matsagouras, 1994), the content and relationships of which have a positive effect on the outcome of the educational process. Many activities are transferred outside the school, which, coming out of isolation, emits and receives messages from society and participates in the developments on a case-by-case basis. This process of de-marginalizing the school and connecting it to social events, works liberatingly for the student, who now places them in the society to which they belong organically.

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