Educational and Communication Leadership as a Dynamic and Lever for the Improvement of Educational Units

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Abstract: Through the present work, an attempt is made to highlight the role of educational and communication leadership, in times of intense adversity. A similar case is the one we are experiencing in the last year, with the appearance of the Covid-19 virus, which brought about an unprecedented health crisis around the world, which had an impact on the social, economic and educational level. More specifically, the educational community was called upon to deal with the effects of the crisis by activating new mechanisms of distance education, unprecedented for the data so far. To support the educational community, the contribution of the educational leadership was important, which had a supportive and guiding role. One can reasonably consider that educational leadership is a barometer for the proper functioning of educational institutions and expresses moral, social and educational standards. It operates on the basis of important concepts, such as the application of principles and values, the development of trust with all teachers, but also society itself. A methodological approach based on the bibliographic research, the text analysis and the connection of the research findings with the current situation was used to highlight the issue. The work is based on the study of secondary sources and texts. Then, examples of good educational leadership practices are presented and proposals for support for the organization and administration of education are submitted.

Key words: leadership, trainers, educational institutions

1. Introduction

After the Covid-19 virus pandemic and the changes brought about by the health crisis in all sectors of society, education could not remain unaffected. The educational units, as places that favor the transmission of the disease, proceed to distance education that is far from the physical space of learning, while digital learning is adopted.

The digitization of the educational process changes the learning context, requires flexibility in education and contact with new tools and learning methods. In short, the rapid development of technology requires new learning approaches, skills and training, so that there is flexibility and adaptation to new conditions.

To achieve this, it is necessary to readjust the education system, which will cultivate the necessary skills to meet the demands of the global social and educational reality. In an age accompanied by a multitude of educational changes, educational systems are responsible for shaping people who will be possessed by elements such as autonomy, creativity and innovation. As Primikiri (2020) states, education systems must be the most powerful

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machines for developing skills and adapting to the demands of the 4th Industrial Revolution.

In order to keep up with the social and technological developments, which modify the educational needs, reform changes are required in order to adapt in a timely and effective way to the respective social developments. Any reforms make it necessary to have a communication leadership that will promote flexibility and be a lever of social adjustment. In order to be effective, managers need to have in addition to knowledge of educational management and a set of skills, including communication.

2. Methodology

The research adopted the qualitative research method and utilized the research tool of the literature review. Qualitative research is suitable for small-scale research, where research hypotheses have not been adequately analyzed by the scientific community (Bryman, 2008). Through this, the approach and analysis of the subject under investigation can be achieved. It is required to answer specific questions such as why and how an event occurs, while allowing a more detailed analysis of the process.

Initially, the literature was reviewed or otherwise the literature was researched, so that the researchers, on the one hand, could follow the developments around the projected subject and, on the other hand, formulate new ideas. For this purpose, secondary publications on the subject were selected, such as studies, articles, reports of institutions, e-books and texts from websites (Probonas, 2015). The article is followed by a presentation of examples of good educational leadership practices and proposals for support for the organization and administration of education. The purpose of the study is twofold, first, to present and evaluate the practices of the educational leadership and, then, to submit proposals for the improvement of the educational process.

3. Educational Process

The formation of a healthy educational environment is a precondition for the school to have a fundamental reference point for life, learning and work (Koukoumbliakos, 2020). In order to protect public health and limit the spread of COVID-19, the political leadership in cooperation with the educational leadership chose distance education in order to protect educators and learners from the pandemic. According to Lionarakis (2001), distance education is the education that teaches and activates the student how to learn on his own and how to function independently towards a heuristic course of self-learning. In this way we give a qualitative character to the concept, while at the same time we introduce both a multifaceted dimension, thus giving a multifunctional character, which consists of pluralism in the principles of learning and teaching as well as variety in the means of education and communication. Given that distance is not a deterrent to quality since it has now been eliminated. These criteria and the assumption of application of an educational model of distance education which is characterized by diversity, flexibility and student-centeredness, lead to the confirmation of the view that its application in educational teaching is necessary, applicable and useful (Lionarakis, 2006).

It is a fact that technology improves access to knowledge, providing elements of flexibility, which are not accompanied by space-time constraints. At the same time, distance education with the use of digital tools of distance, modern and asynchronous education provided the possibility of communication, interaction and cultivation of digital literacy of learners (Poulios, 2020).

However, it is particularly important that the development of the learning process follows the standards of e-tutoring programs which, according to research by Doukakis and Michalopoulou (2016), have similar characteristics

to standard teaching but are applied remotely or in the inverted classroom model. where the student studies on his own with the help of digital media and the internet and completes the learning in the classroom (Koutsouba et al., 2017).

Therefore, it is a fact the positive correlation of Information and Communication Technologies with education, in order to offer educational technology in learning (Mitropoulou, 2015). The essential form of communication, between the instructor and the learner, is considered a necessary condition and result of the collaborative learning process, which extends to issues that concern not only the educational subject but also their personal life (Boyle et al., 2010).

Information and Communication Technologies contribute to the creation of a satisfactory environment of communication, collaboration and creative possibilities, highlighting to a large extent the communication role of the teacher participating in distance education, so that he can satisfactorily compensate for the shortcomings of lifelong interaction. The reshaping of a new learning environment presupposes the support of a broader framework that determines the conduct of learning.

The educational leadership has weight and has a decisive role in upgrading the quality of the educational process. In the case of effective leadership, significant scale changes occur in the respective educational environment (Leithwood et al., 2004). It is a fact that the educational leadership does not come exclusively from high-ranking executives, such as school principals, but also from individuals who have the ability to influence the internal and external environment of a school. Educational leadership involves a continuous process, which inspires, motivates and influences all members of the educational community, which aims to improve the education system while improving educators and learners (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

4. Expressions of Good Educational Leadership Practices

Initially it is necessary to present a case study that will highlight the good practices of educational leadership. The reasonable question now is "who are the educational leaders?" Teacher leaders are considered to be teachers who have undertaken teaching tasks, while at the same time undertaking leadership and organizational actions outside of teaching in the classroom. Therefore in this sense all teachers are considered potential educational leaders (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Of course, leadership is important to have the ability to influence the team in order to realize its vision or a set of goals (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

The concept of educational leadership includes four dimensions, which are not independent of each other, but are influenced by each other.

In particular, the four dimensions of educational leadership include (Berg & Zoellick, 2019):

a) Legitimacy, which is an essential and necessary condition of leadership, as it is estimated that it stems from the strength and will of the teachers themselves.

b) The necessary support, which is provided both by the teachers themselves and by external actors for the necessary fulfillment of the required work, which is logically related to the required time, the quality of the provided education and the necessary available resources.

c) The purpose, which consists of the teaching provided, the result produced - learning - and finally the promotion of the desired change.

d) The applied methodology through which the educational leaders try to influence their educational environment.

Example 1

Many could emerge as the hallmarks of good educational leaders. But the most important and most common of these are the persuasion, the motivation, the inspiration that will awaken the participants, the flexibility when the circumstances require it and the specialization of everyone in their field. What is different is the way we approach and collaborate with teachers and learners (Danielson, 2007).

Under certain conditions, an educational leadership has the ability to positively influence the performance of learners, when it focuses on improving the quality of learning, the transmissibility of teaching but also on the training and education of teachers themselves (Robinson, et al., 2008).

Many leaders in their efforts to increase the productivity of learners use tactics that ensure alternative learning practices but also the enrichment of the curriculum by introducing new and more flexible programs.

Example 2

The best acceptance and integration of the changes results through expanded collaborations with the other teachers, the guardians of the trainees, but also the trainees themselves. Of course, this effort often involves increased risk and often hides a veil of doubt and doubt for many (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). However, the whole effort is worth it. After all, experience has shown that this is how most reforms start. Of course, through this process, everyone becomes wiser, they receive feedback, as not only do they contribute to the educational process, but the teachers also receive through it, as all the participants become part of this process.

Experimentation, the introduction of new educational models and curricula, risk-taking, and even challenging by colleagues are part of the actions of the educational leadership aimed at improving the results of the learning process (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015).

Heads of educational institutions need to create an environment that encourages initiative, and promotes a culture that creates opportunities for all teachers to acquire skills and competencies that will help them develop and take on more responsibilities (Danielson , 2007). In particular, nowadays where the utilization of new technologies is considered necessary as it emerges as crucial for distance education. After all, in order for the educational leadership to bring substantial results, it is important to spread a relationship of trust and cooperation between the supervisor and the other teachers.

Example 3

When a leadership emerges that provides an educational process that is methodically and supportively supported for the recipients then the trainers are greatly facilitated in the performance of their duties, while at the same time the learners themselves assimilate faster and perform better. It has been observed that teachers who are called to take leadership positions are charged with extra stress in their attempt to cope, significantly straining their relationships with their colleagues. However, many of them gain more self-confidence and higher professional satisfaction when they take leadership positions. This leads them to seek even more opportunities to take responsibility (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Penetrating and understanding the concept of educational leadership encourages many educators to think and take on leadership roles (Phelps, 2008). Educational leadership provides heads of educational institutions with a satisfactory appreciation of the depth of experience they need to gain in other areas of study programs and teaching disciplines (Robinson, 2006).

5. Characteristics of an Educational and Communication Leadership

At this point it is advisable to point out that in assuming leadership positions, it is observed that gradually, the

initial social contact between colleagues, changes over time into a relationship of professional mandates and expectations. A negative result of educational leadership is the creation of an ever-increasing sense of alienation of relationships between colleagues, mainly due to the orders they receive from time to time, which can affect their relationships (York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Educational leadership, especially nowadays, must be a priority, because (Wenner & Campbell, 2017):

- inspires those who design educational policy and implement educational reform,
- contributes significantly to the formulation of educational Curricula,
- through educational leadership teachers remain active in teaching, while at the same time having the opportunity to take on additional leadership responsibilities.

It is necessary for all teachers to realize that leadership is not enough to rely solely on the heads of educational institutions, but that teachers themselves must assist in this task because they often acquire extensive responsibilities, both inside and outside the classroom, as the function of the teacher is constantly expanding (Hamzah, Noor, & Yusof, 2016). After all, change management requires educational leadership to focus on the purpose of change through targeted actions and strategic change choices (Cooper et al., 2016).

Especially nowadays, where distance education is a means and a solution to reduce the spread of the virus and protect public health, change management is crucial and necessary. Communication is a key tool for managing this change, but also for crisis management. Therefore, the educational leadership, in order to achieve its goals, must include the means of communication in its strategy.

6. Conclusions

Based on the above, we understand that the heads of educational institutions are the ones who must create a safe environment, through which they will emerge (Danielson, 2007):

- the encouragement for additional use of opportunities for professional growth and development.
- the freedom of expression and circulation of new ideas and different views,
- encouraging the taking of initiatives and related actions and taking the appropriate risk in the proposed actions,
- The educational leadership and its actions, moreover, do not only concern the internal bodies of the educational institutions and what takes place within them, but are also influenced by external factors — mainly the local community - associated with the respective educational institution through their activity.

The situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic caused changes in the educational field, which to a large extent can be considered irreversible. At a time when educational systems are experiencing a storm of new tools, tools and teaching methods, and as the organization of new learning environments is deemed imperative, the need arises for actions that will contribute to the development of teachers' knowledge and skills. But even in this case, the role of leadership is catalytic, since it is the factor that through its communication skills, reflexive actions and the necessary guidance, will play an important role in shaping a dynamic and constantly evolving environment.

The data presented by distance education brought the educational community faced with a learning environment that was significantly different from traditional learning environments. The contact with the electronic distance teaching and learning, which with the data so far seems to have a supportive role in the learning process, requires the cultivation of new skills and further training of teachers. These elements, however, depend to a large extent on the decisions of the institutions and the mediating role of the educational leadership. In a centralized

education system, such as the Greek one, it is important to create communication channels between both teachers and teachers-leadership and, consequently, the competent institutions, in order to achieve immediate activation, in order to find solutions. Communication will be the path for the modernization of the Greek educational system and the rapid adaptation to global developments.

In conclusion, in educational systems, communication is a dynamic and two-way process that aims to improve the quality of education provided and adapt to the needs that arise. Thus, a communication leadership is not only an end in itself to deal with a crisis, but an element that must characterize the leaders of the educational systems and all stakeholders in any action they implement, with the ultimate goal of achieving continuous development and training of human resources.

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