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Educational leadership - selected notions

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ABSTRACT

It is obvious that the best investment in a human being is to invest in education. Thus, current reality forces essential transformations in the sector of education. This is related to a new role of a school principal as a leader. The article proves that leadership in school is a significant factor that is reflected in quality of school operation, and the fresh look on the school means that a school principal is expected to not only manage but also play leadership roles.

Keywords: management, educational leadership, educational staff, school principal roles

“Everyone who thinks about improving the leadership potential in their organization (school),
needs to think about how to start the processes of critical reflexion
and discourse about this organization and its surroundings”
(G. Mazurkiewicz)

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in the global, varied, unstable world that is full of crises, but also amazing opportunities, especially in terms of technology. It is obvious that the best investment in a human being is to invest in education. Thus, current reality forces essential transformations in the sector of education. Today's school needs reflexion, openness, involvement and the ability of continuous learning. This is related to a new role of a school principal as a leader. Purpose of the article is to show that the management in education forces the need to raise the topic of

educational leadership urgently, both in the theoretical and practical sphere. The deliberations are based on literatures studies, results of empirical research and conclusions from the analysis. The article stresses specificity of a new role of a school's principal, as the attempt to meet the contemporary challenges that is a basis for multi-aspect approach to the role played by the principal, especially as a leader, brings fruits in a form of improved quality of work at school.

2. THE NOTION OF LEADERSHIP

The notion of leadership is applied in various sectors of life. Analysis of literature of the subject confirms that scientists from various fields of science strive for a precise description of this phenomenon in response to constant challenges that organizations and their leaders need to face. Currently, it is emphasized that management and leadership are inseparable categories.

J. O. Kotter [9] believes that there is a need to strive for balance the category of leadership and management, as only this conditions adequate development of an organization. Similarly, G. Yukl and C.R. Hickman [7,21] point that leadership and management are mutually complementing processes.

J. Pierce and J. Newstrom [14] determined leadership as a dynamic relationship between leaders and their followers, changing in time. Aslo T. Wren [22] believes that leadership should be understood as a relationship of influence between leaders and their supporter, facilitating achievement of social and group objectives.

C. Day [3] claims that leadership is focused on development of relationships thanks to the common feeling of sense, exchange, learning, focus on the target and awareness of the need for a change.

While S. C. Smith and P. K. Piele [17] see the leadership as a manner to force subordination, a form of persuasion, a mechanism for achievement of goals, a result of interactions, a mean to build a structure, negotiations of authority.

According to M. DePree [4], leadership is not a profession but faith, state of heart, art, a collection of adequate actions undertaken as a result of deep thoughts.

J. Madalińska-Michalak [11] determined four ways of understanding leadership:

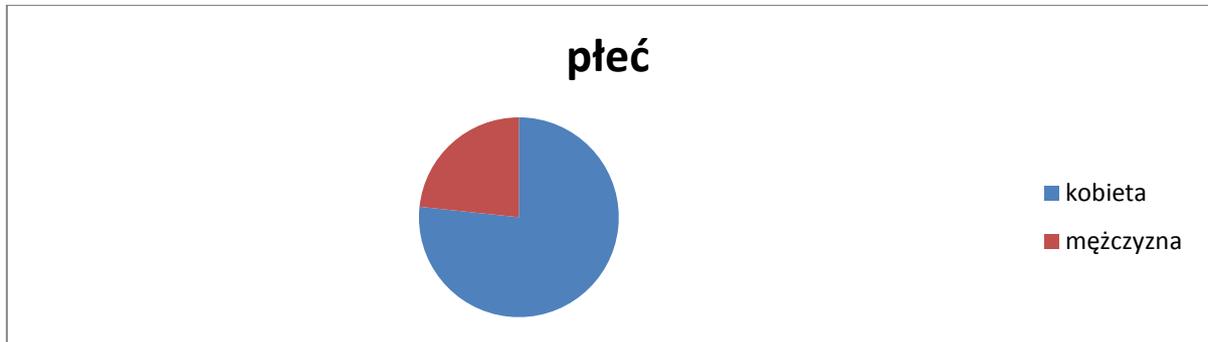
- as a feature (focus on individual qualities of a unit),
- as a skill (the ability to get others involved in the process of achieving a goal),
- as a social relationship (emphasis on relationships of influence between leaders and their followers),
- as a social process (a series of changes in a specific time).

When it comes to educational leadership, there are also plenty of definitions. Louis et al. [10] highlight that leadership in school occupies a second place as a factor that brings the pupils' success in education (after the manner of teaching in a class). Other researchers, e.g. Rutherford [16], Thomas et al. [20] consider high-quality leadership at school as a condition for operation of an effective school, contributing to cooperation of all participants of the educational process. The multitude of definitions confirms that scientific knowledge on leadership is still incomplete, non-precise, open to discussions in both theoretical and practical dimensions.

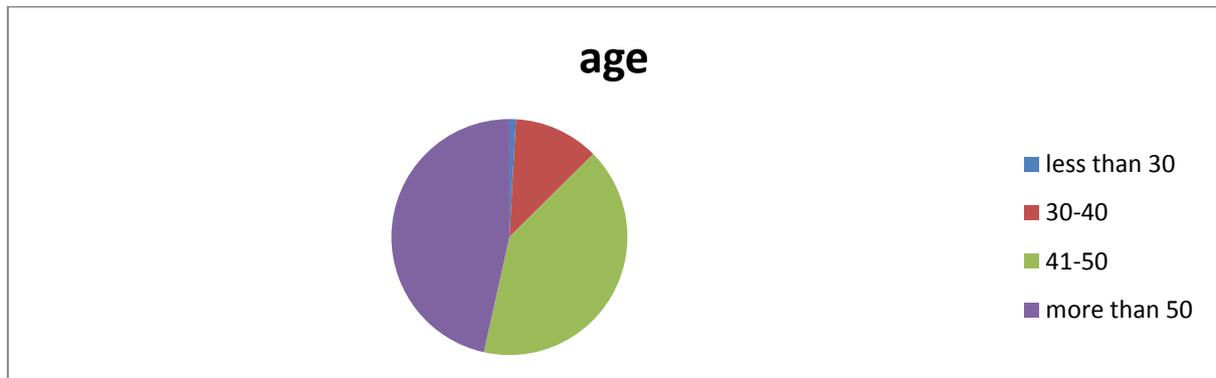
3. WHO IS A CONTEMPORARY PRINCIPAL IN A POLISH SCHOOL?

A legal situation of a Polish school principal and their duties are provided for precisely in various educational documents: in the Act on the Education System, Teacher's Chart or regulations by the Ministry of National Education [8].

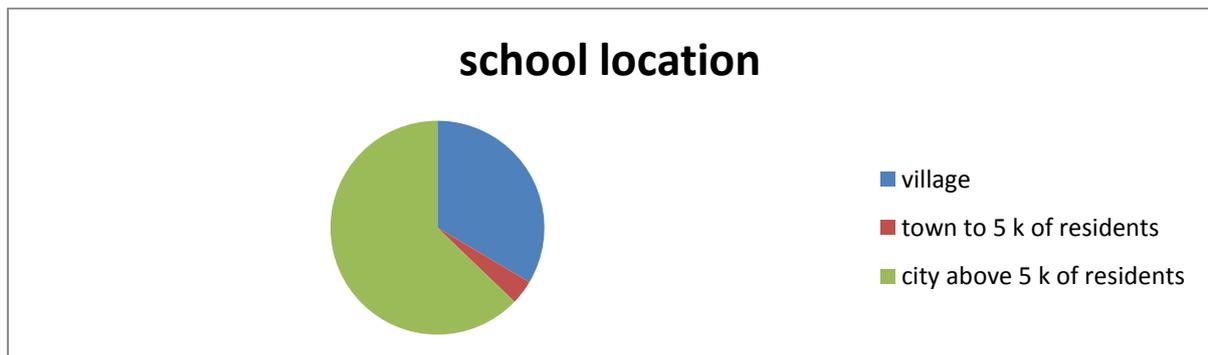
But what is an image of a typical principal in a Polish School? The below diagrams show that statistically this is a woman, more than 40 years old, working in a facility located in a city with more than 5 thousand residents.



Source: own work based on data from the Ministry of National Education for 2014.



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Nowadays, educational leadership is a field of special significance. Various European documents [13] emphasize the priority treatment in the field of education of the leading role notion in education. OECD lists the following barriers in development of educational leadership: aging of managerial staff, non-interesting working conditions and an expanding scope of duties imposed on school principals, and points to an opportunity to improve the situation: improve working conditions, change the manner of principals' preparation, create adequate systems of education and improvement and help in development of leader skills.

Scientific research and practice [12] confirm that educational leadership has great potential that supports the process of learning and development of educational institutions. This requires greater concentration from the leaders on the learning process and popularization of the participation leadership. The most significant matter in today's school should be change in understanding of educational leadership, which cannot be related only to the school principal. The leadership process taking place at school should be related to strategic thinking and participation in tasks. [2] It is necessary to take well-thought actions and anticipate in the environment - full of changes where the school operates, what results in long-standing development. It allows the school to create values, undertake new challenges, co-exist with the surrounding world. Currently, leadership [1] in school is defined as a set of competences that allow to manage the process of influencing others and oneself to achieve the assumed objectives together. The processual character of changes caused by leadership functioning in a school is pointed by numerous researchers. [1,15,18]

It is worth stopping for a while on the problem of roles that are ascribed to the school principal, and which reflect the complexity of an educational organization management. The previously listed educational documents confirm that the following functions are related to the position of a school principal: [8]

- managerial (a principal is at the top of the workers hierarchy in a school or a facility, they are responsible for it, for realization of tasks and use of public funds);
- administrative (issuing administrative decisions, administering the material and non-material school resources);
- managerial (managing public finances during realization of upraising, didactic and care-giving actions);
- leadership (the principals' task is to take care of development of the qualities ascribed to leaders, which are a basis for success of changes introduced in the organization).

The above-mentioned deliberations confirm that work of a school or educational facility principal in Poland is related to various roles - managing, administering, leading, educational leadership - that influence the quality of work improvement in the facility, where they are employed.

4. REACHING THE PERFECTION

School as a public organization operates in public space. Increasingly more is being required from a contemporary school - however it cannot play its functions without effective leadership. There is no a single and perfect educational leadership model. New solutions are being systematically introduced to the Polish educational system, which require the manageri-

al staff to constantly develop. School principals are educated in the scope of theory and methodology related to their functions. An element that is criticized is the managerial staff educational system in schools, thus it is necessary to build an adequate system for their education and development. School leaders need some self-reflexion on their role in the educational system and function of school in the contemporary world. Development of leaders is a long-standing and complex process.

Currently, there is not many information regarding work quality of Polish schools and educational facilities principals. Interesting data is provided by analysis of reports drawn up by J. Pyżalski on systems for education and improvement of educational managerial staff. The most important findings [15] on principals of Polish schools and facilities on the background of 24 countries that take place in the research are:

- results above the average are achieved in the scope of: management focused on the education process, management related to formulation of school objectives and adjustment of adequate programmes, and in the scope of direct supervision over the teaching process;

- results below the average are in the scale of management by procedures and responsibility for a school towards the educational authorities, parents and other social partners.

Thus, Poland is a state where the most popular is the management style focused on teaching, with low results in the scope of administration. And how does the matter of novice principals look like in other countries? These courses adopt three forms:

- countries where education of principals takes place after a given person is awarded with the position (Germany, France, China);

- countries, where one of the formal conditions for participating in a competition for a principal position consists in presenting an initial course certificate (Scotland, Russia, Canada, USA);

- countries, where those interested in a career as a principal are offered preparatory courses that might decide about success in the recruitment process, but do not give clear qualifications to take the principal function (the Netherlands, New Zealand, Denmark, Swede, Norway). [23]

Proper preparation of managerial staff in the educational system requires adequate specification of their key competences. Quality of managerial staff in schools is a key factor that contributes to the school success. [5] Therefore, it is highly significant to expand the managerial competence with leadership competence that go beyond the administration competence. [6] There is a need for changes in preparation of school principals for their work, because they are the ones who ensure effective process of learning for pupils and development of employees.

5. CONCLUSION

A contemporary school is not capable yet of completely dealing with new challenges of the dynamically changing world. Today's shape of societies is conditioned with globalization and modernization processes. Leadership in the 21st century is not an easy task. Principals must face organizational, legal, ethical, economic factors, political expectations, pedagogical

expectations, technological challenges... Richness and complexity are basic features of school reality. Significance of management and leadership has been especially strongly emphasized in recent years for effectiveness of school work. The article proves that leadership in school is a significant factor that is reflected in quality of school operation, and the fresh look on the school means that a school principal is expected to not only manage but also play leadership roles.

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