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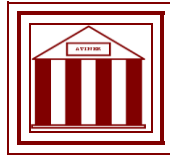
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Abstract

The educational management theory still needs ideas and concepts that can help to better understand and describe, but also stimulate the organizational development of schools. A good example for this is the concept of leadership is It has been used in discussions aiming to define skills and competencies of people responsible for school management, especially since the early 1990s. Regardless of this fact, it must be noticed that the educational management theory still needs ways of thinking about leadership that would be adequate for educational contexts. The author argues that the attempts to define educational leadership have to reject the attitude of transferring theories and concepts from the general management theory and start from pointing out core educational values and building a specific understanding of educational leadership on that basis.

The author proposes to put individual human development and learning as the core values defining educational leadership. The problem is that core educational values can be defined in a different way. In this case it it crucial to identify different understandings of core values among professionals responsible for leading educational organizations, since different understandings can influence people's actions.

This paper presents the results of the research on the understanding of development and learning among school heads in Polish schools. The research was carried out with the participation of a group of headmasters taking part in a project that tries to build a new model of school head professional preparation, induction and continual professional training.

This paper shows different perspectives on these values and tries to discuss practical consequences on different ways of understanding.

Keywords: Educational management, educational leadership, core educational values.

Introduction

The interest in bringing the concept of leadership into discussion in the field of the educational management theory and practice has grown significantly during the last decade. There are at least two important reasons for this. Firstly, leadership focused on the values and aims of schools and organizations can help us to understand and face challenges of contemporary schools better than management, which is focused on technical aspects of everyday life (Bush, Bell, Middlewood, 2010). Secondly, there is a growing number of evidence that leadership is one of the most important factors contributing to the students' achievements and outcomes (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, Hopkins, 2006: Robinson, 2007; Robertson, Timperley, 2011).

The problem is that leadership in general and leadership in education or educational leadership are difficult to define. The general management theory, where the leadership concept first appeared, is full of different concepts of leadership. Avery, for example, looking from the perspective of the general theory, describes four different types of leadership: *classical* leadership based on force, authority and personal strength of a leader; *transactional* leadership based on interpersonal skills of a leader; *transformational* leadership based on creativity of a leader seen as a change agent; *organic* leadership that tries to engage and empower every member of an organization as a potential leader in his/her area of organizational life (Avery, 2004).

Numerous authors tried to use those concepts in the educational field by simply transferring them to describe school leadership. Some paradigms were (or still are) especially attractive for such attempts. The transformational leadership paradigm, stresses the active aspect of leadership as the key factor in organizational changes, which are core processes in contemporary educational organizations, seems to be one of the most frequently used (Precey, Jackson, 2009). Also the paradigm named by Avery organic suits well the educational context, stressing the leadership potential of every member of an organization and using the metaphor of a living organism that underlines learning and developmental processes necessary while building the collective leadership potential in an organization (Mazurkiewicz, 2011; Dorczak, 2013).

Regardless of the fact that some theories have features that are attractive from the point of view of educational organizations, they were developed to describe leadership in other contexts and because of that, they are not adequate to educational leadership that needs to be defined understanding the specificity and complexity of educational processes in schools.

Specificity of Educational Leadership

There is a need in education to build the understanding of leadership that is based on the clear sense of educational purposes. Various attempts of conceptualizing educational leadership, even using ideas from other contexts,

tried to define such leadership describing the specificity of core processes within educational organizations. Those processes were also seen differently. Instructional leadership theories put emphasis on the management of curriculum or instructional programme (Hallinger, Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, Heck, 1996). Some later authors call it pedagogical leadership that has to be focused mainly on creating the conditions for teaching and learning in schools (Bush, Glover, 2003). More recent approaches stress learning at different levels as the main and crucial aspect of educational leadership (MacBeath, Dempster, 2009). The focus on learning as the main aspect or the core value of educationally specific leadership dominates the discussion on leadership in education. It seems that such focus on learning is a necessary but not sufficient condition when trying to define educational leadership adequately to the sense of purpose of schools as organizations and to the needs of educational processes.

Another important value that needs to be taken into consideration is individual human development. Leadership focused on learning alone (without individual development as the dominant value) may result in undervaluing the interests of developing (learning) an individual that may be abused to serve learning interests of a group, teachers and leaders as professionals, interests of school as an organization or needs of the society on local, national or even global levels (Fielding, 2006).

Individual human development and learning constitute the core set of values that are central to educational leadership. They have to be accompanied by other values that are crucial in defining the contemporary understanding of educational processes. First among them is the value of community and interaction, as the leadership itself emerges out of the interaction of individuals (Spillane, Halverson, Diamond, 2004). It also needs communication between individuals as a value, especially professional communication, which is important for learning and development of those involved in educational interactions (Komives, Lucas, McMahon, 2007). Last but not least, among the central educational values there is the value of inclusion, that demands focus on creating conditions for everyone to become actively involved in all possible processes in schools (Ryan, 2006; Mac Ruairc, Ottesen, Precey, 2013).

It is important to stress again that all those values make sense if they serve the individual development of everyone involved in educational processes and that without that they lose educational sense. Leadership based on a set of values, prioritized that way, with development and learning on top of the hierarchy can be called *developmental leadership* (Dorczak, 2012). The problem of leadership defined in such a way is that development and learning can be understood in many different ways leading to different practical consequences.

Understanding of Development and Learning

Developmental and educational psychology had and still have different theories about the nature of individual development and learning. Diversity of understandings can be found also in the thinking and professional practice of teachers, school heads and all professionals involved in school leadership. It is, nevertheless, important to understand different understandings and their impact on school practice.

When we take a closer look at the concept of individual development, we can find at least three different types of its understanding. The first approach can be called *mechanic theory,* because it uses the metaphor of a mechanism to describe the process, treats development as a continuous process of growth of knowledge and skills acquired through acquisition from the environment. Such understanding sees individuals as passive actors of that process, which is totally determined by environmental factors. Such understanding is deeply rooted in educational thinking and connected with the educational ideology known as the cultural transmission code. Educational practice built on such understanding, values traditional methods of teaching and tries to control the process and indoctrinate students. School leadership built on such understanding will tend to take forms close to the classical styles of leadership based on force and authority of a formal leader (Kohlberg, Mayer, 1972; Bottery, 1992).

Theories that understand individual development as a process of gradual growth of already given predispositions and talents use the metaphor of an organism, but they also stress that all aspects of development are determined by factors that are out of an individual's control. The difference is that the decisive factor is not the environment but potentials given before the development starts (for example talents transferred by genes). School practice built on such understanding has to focus on diagnosing the talents and creating the best conditions for their development but it also values the activity of students more. Such understanding of development is deeply rooted in educational thinking at least since Rousseau and is called *romantic theory* (op. cit.).

The third type of understanding, coming from the cognitive-developmental psychology, seems to be dominant in the contemporary psychological theory. It defines individual development as a process that is not predefined by environment or predispositions but as a creative process of reconstruction of both leading to the transformation of mental structures and the environment. Educational practice based on such understanding called *progressive theory* values interaction, communication, involvement or inclusion of all participants of educational processes and requires active engagement of both students and teachers in the process of mutual dialogue that is a central factor fostering individual development (op. cit.; Piaget, 1971).

The development of the understanding of the concept of learning is of course connected with the understanding of the nature of individual

development. Looking at different psychological theories, there are at least two or three ways of defining that process.

The first approach sees learning as a continuous process of acquisition of knowledge and skills that happens through stimulation from the environment and is visible in observable behaviors of learning individuals. Learning is understood as a very mechanistic process determined by stimulation from the environment and resulting in passive acquisition of already existing knowledge (De Corte, 2010). Such approach to learning corresponds best with mechanical theories of development and can be called a *mechanic* or *static theory of learning.*

The two other approaches to learning were initiated in the 1950s when cognitive psychology had developed.

Firstly, it had shown that people are not only acquiring knowledge and skills from the environment but that they are able to process information transforming it in an active way in their minds. Learning started to be understood as the process of knowledge construction and a learner is an active part of that process, able to interpret different information that he receives and to make sense of them (Mayer, 1996). Such approach to learning can be called *constructivism.*

More recent theories, developed in the late 20$^{\text{th}}$ century and influenced by the ideas of Vygotski, stressed that such a narrow constructivist approach isolates learning from natural environment in which it takes place and argued that learning is always undergoing in a specific context of social interactions and is the result of interaction between individual activity and social context or culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is no longer only an act of an active mind, but is a social and participative process. To underline the social nature of learning it can be called *socio-constructivism* (De Corte, 2010).

As it is clearly visible, different understandings of development and learning lead to completely different practical consequences. It is, nevertheless, crucial not only to locate both values as core for educational leadership but also to identify how the people involved in educational leadership understand them and then promote an understanding built on the contemporary psychological theory.

Research and Results

The research was carried out as a part of a broader diagnosis of competencies and thinking of Polish school leaders that was done to inform developments of the project "Leadership and management in education - design and implementation of a new model of headteacher's training" run by the Jagiellonian University in partnership with the Centre of Education Development (ORE).

The research group consisted of more than 100 (100 fully completed answers were taken into consideration for the analysis) school heads. The research was carried out in spring 2014. Headteachers that took part in that

research represent schools of different types: kindergartens, primary schools (age 7-12), middle schools (age 13-15) and secondary schools (age 16-19), from different parts of Poland.

The main aim of that research was to find out how school heads understand and define the basic educational concepts of individual human development and learning. In order to reach that, they were asked to give in writing a short description of their understanding of those two educational values/concepts.

The collected material was then analyzed in order to classify different understandings of both values.

Looking at the value of individual human development three categories connected with three theories of development described above were used to analyze and classify subjects' understandings of that value : *mechanic* understanding, *romantic* understanding and *progressive* understanding. The result of that analysis is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Types of Understanding of Individual Human Development (n=100).*

	Type of understanding Individual Development	Frequency
1	Mechanic understanding	27
2	Romantic understanding	31
3	Progressive understanding	33
4	Unclear	9
	Total	100

Source: own research

The statements given by the subjects as definitions of development included elements that allowed to classify them using predefined categories in most cases (91 out of 100 definitions). As it is shown, all three types of understanding were identified and there are almost no differences in frequency of their appearance in that group of subjects. It is interesting that progressive understanding that is dominant in contemporary psychological theory was identified in the thinking of one third of the research group only.

The statements that did not allow classification (given by 9 subjects) were too general or too philosophical and had no elements that could be associated with one of the three theories of individual human development. The subjects stated for example that individual development is:

- "like the process of searching for values"
- "searching for aims"
- "reaching important levels of progress"
- "growing awareness of life"
- "realizing one's dreams"
- "a never ending story that lasts for life"

Such expressions made it difficult or in fact impossible to identify the type of understanding of the value of individual development.

When the value of learning was concerned, the categories were based on three theoretical understandings of learning as a process: *mechanic or static* understanding, *constructivist* understanding and *socio-constructivist* understanding. The results of the analysis of the statements concerning the concept of learning given by the research group were very surprising and interesting. They are included in Table 2.

Table 2. *Types of Understanding of Learning (n=100).*

	Type of understanding Learning	Frequency
1	Mechanic or static understanding	72
2	Constructivist understanding	24
3	Socio-constructivist understanding	4
	Total	100

Source: own research

As it appears, when defining learning most of the head teachers (72 subjects) used statements that included elements typical for the mechanic understanding of learning. Defining learning they used expressions such as:

- "…is the process of acquisition of knowledge and skills"
- "… is a gradual process of discovery of collected knowledge with help of a teacher"
- " …is a growth of knowledge in somebody's memory"
- "…is the process of transfer of knowledge from different sources to students memory"
- "… like programming, the more there is in your head the more you can do"
- "…is connected with experience that gives more and more knowledge".

The statements were classified as the mechanic type of understanding when the subjects stressed the importance of knowledge acquisition or transmission from one source to student's mind or memory and did not mention anything about active approach to that knowledge or its transformation during the process of learning.

When subjects add something that can be treated as a suggestion that the process of learning and the acquisition of knowledge is an active process of knowledge construction or knowledge development the statements were classified as the constructivist understanding (24 subjects). Expressions typical for such definitions were for example:

- "…is the process of building individual's understanding of the world"
- "…is developing the human mind ability to understand the world"
- "…is a creative process of memorizing and broadening what was memorized"
- "…is building your own set of knowledge on the basis of the knowledge given by the world"
- "…is the process of development of one's mind ability to comprehend".

Only four subjects in the research group defining learning expressed the thought that learning is the effect of social interaction and that it needs interaction to happen. As there were only four such definitions, they may be all cited:

- "…is an interactive process of understanding the world and all information that comes from it; it always happens between student and teacher or other students that are necessary to learn"
- "…happens when you meet other people either in person or through their thoughts in books"
- "…is a social process of knowledge construction helping people find their place in the human world"
- "…happens through student teacher interaction that helps change student's mind".

It is very significant that the understanding of learning that is dominant in the modern educational psychology theory but also dominant in the educational leadership theory – the 'leadership for learning' theory (MacBeath, 2009; Townsend, MacBeath, 2011) defining learning as a social, interactive process of knowledge negotiation and/or construction, is so rare in the thinking of headteachers from the research group. Even when we add those understandings classified as constructivist understanding they still constitute less than one third of the group.

When we compare the results of the analysis of the two concepts, it may be argued that the concept of development is understood more diversely and the mechanistic understanding of that value is less frequent (only 27 subjects) than it is with the value of learning that is understood mostly in the mechanistic way (72 subjects).

Conclusions

The majority of the contemporary attempts to define the specificity of educational leadership agree that it must be built on core educational values. At the same time most authors argue that learning is the most crucial value that

has to constitute educationally specific and adequate leadership theory and practice (MacBeath, 2009; Townsend, Macbeath, 2009; Mazurkiewicz, 2011). Some other authors express the importance of the individual human development value and propose to locate it at the heart of thinking about school management and leadership (Piaget, 1971; Kohlberg, Mayer, 1972; Łuczyński, 2011; Dorczak, 2012). The results of the presented research show the importance of taking into consideration the value of individual human development as central and superior to the value of learning. It must be of course accompanied by learning but, as it was discovered in the presented research, learning can be understood in a way that is more static and passive than the understanding of development. Learning is an important part and factor of development but only serves the purposes of development and if not, it is not worth valuing.

It seems that these concepts of leadership theory and practice need to rethink the relation between individual development and learning as core values important for educational leadership.

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