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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLES AND PUPILS' SCHOOL RESULTS

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the relationship between teachers' leadership styles and their pupils' school performances. A number of 280 teachers involved in the pre-university education and 370 students participated in this research. The data was collected by using the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid. The results following the conducted study support the conclusion that the most efficient leadership style manifested by a teacher in the classroom, which has superior school results, is the democratic-participative style. According to the data, it was found that other two styles are also productive, namely the authoritarian and the median styles in relation with the minimal/passive and the indulgent/populist styles. Leaving from these results, the teachers are encouraged to focus their interest and attention equally towards the two dimensions: tasks and people, and thus to consciously commit to the characteristics of a democratic/participative leading style. Some special interest is manifested also in the area of classroom management during the process of instruction.

Keywords: Leadership style; school performance; pre-university education.

1. Introduction

A teacher's leadership style, along with the teaching or assessment styles, represents an essential compound of the educational style. On this line, more and more research studies aim at identifying those leadership styles that prove to be most efficient in achieving superior school performances. In reference with the concept, the specialty literature has provided numerous definitions, yet we need to specify the fact that all those definitions are based on the same common element, and that is a form of power or

influence which dictates future actions (Donaldson, 2006; Gardner, 1990; Marzano, Waters and McNulty, 2005; Morrison, 2002; Schmoker, 1999; Zaccaro and Klimoski, 2001).

By the concept of leadership, we understand „the dynamic process within one group, in which one individual determines the others to contribute voluntarily to the accomplishment of the group tasks in a given situation" (Cole, 2004, p. 51). In Little's vision (2000), leadership „is an empty term when there is nothing to lead, when there is nowhere to go and there's no one who will follow" (p. 395).

We shouldn't leave out another perspective in defining the leadership style, namely that of the factors imprinting the dynamics of an organization, even school. Among these factors, there may be found, according to Fodor (2009), „performance, psycho-social climate, cohesion, the quality of human relationships, degrees of conflictuality, members' degree of satisfaction, individuality and group creativity, also the developing potential of the organization" (Fodor, 2009, p. 133).

A teacher is considered to be the manager of the classroom of pupils. The teacher considered in this position, leads the class of pupils, brings his or her contribution and identifies himself/herself with the community of leaders (a role adopted by the other teachers); he or she contributes with his or her actions to an increase in the quality of education materialized in the accomplishment of the educational standards, of the educational ideal, and determines the achievement of superior results (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001; Durant and Frost, 2003; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003; Pugalee; York-Barr and Duke, 2004). Leading the didactic activity is generally accepted as an essential key role in accomplishing school performances by pupils. Some specialists are drawing attention upon the fact that school leaders are responsible for the students' academic success (Silva, Gimbert and Nolan, 2004), and we refer here to the school management (director/ school manager), and also to the teachers – as leaders of classes of pupils.

From the perspective of teacher's responsibilities, Doyle (1986, apud Martineau et al., 1999) states that the former has to have in view, on one side, the transmission of information to the students in complete accordance with the requests previewed by the official curriculum documents, and on the other side the class management, and we should understand by that the establishment and negotiation of rules and norms of behavior inside the classroom and the school environment in general. The way in which the didactic activity is elaborated and carried out varies from one teacher to another, as it is strongly influenced by the teacher's qualities, personality and pedagogical philosophy. Thus, a certain style/way of leadership is outlined, which is expressed through personal notes – manner of work, way of action and behavior.

Our investigation starts from the premises that there are two essential dimensions defining the leadership of activities, as they are previewed in the Blake–Mouton Managerial Grid: the preoccupation for task (in our case, the objectives, the educational standards and the academic performances) and the concern for people (human relationships), both being considered positive. In this order of ideas, the high achieving type of leader – the teacher, has to manifest preoccupation for students, and also for the tasks/objectives he or she has to accomplish. Most generally speaking, the concern for students suggests the teacher's intention to form and maintain quality interpersonal relationships, and the task orientation refers to the importance given to the accomplishments of pre-established objectives, and thus the accomplishment of academic performances and the formation of desirable competencies.

In short, the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid used in this study allows the prediction of a stylistic typology which comprises five styles, as follows:

- *The authoritarian leadership style.* It translates by an excessive focus on task, in our case on objectives and standards, on the building of competencies and a reduced concern for pupils.

- *The democratic leadership style* is also found in literature under the name of participative-reformist style (Puiu, 2011), a teamwork type of style, team leader (Blake and Mouton, 1978), integrating leadership style (Mora, 2008; Bass, 1990), team-management or teamwork (Molloy, 1998). The defining note of this style resides in the increased interest for task and also for people.

- *The indulgent or populist leadership style (*Country Club). According to this style the accent is placed on people, on creating a comfortable work climate, on establishing harmonious relationships in classroom, at the expense of objective accomplishment.

- *The passive/minimal leadership style* presupposes very low interest in accomplishing objectives/school performances and building inter-personal relationships.

- *Median leadership style* is placed in an area of equilibrium between the intention to accomplish the assigned objectives and to create a reasonable mood in the context of the classroom of pupils.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present study approaches two objectives. On one hand, it aims at identifying teachers' leadership styles and on the other hand it tries to provide an analysis of the relationship between teachers and the level of pupils' school performances. In addition to these objectives, our intention for this study is to answer a pedagogical interrogation more and more often met, namely *what exactly are the characteristics which define the most efficient and productive leadership in order to achieve superior school results*?

3. Methodology

3.1. Measures

In relation to the established objectives, the Managerial Grid by Robert Blake-Jane Mouton (1978) was used in order to approach two dimensions: the concern for people and the concern for task.

The appliance of this grid (which involved completing it by teachers in group target) necessitated some minor changes at the conceptual level, which involved replacing specific corporate environment concepts such as "employees", "people", " team "," organization "," subordinates ","co-workers" with specific educational environment concepts such as" students "," classroom "," teacher"," school ".

After analyzing and interpreting the results obtained by filling the adjusted Managerial Grid we could identify five leadership styles as follows: the passive/minimal leadership style, the authoritarian leadership style, the democratic participative leadership style, the indulgent/or populist leadership style and the median leadership style.

3.2. Participants

Two batches of people were formed for this study. The teachers' batch was made of 285 subjects who are active in the pre-university education in Romania; they were distributed by genre as follows: 66%

women (N=189) and 34% men (N=96). The second batch was represented by the students summing 370 subjects, 201 girls and 169 boys respectively.

3.3. Procedure

At the beginning of the academic year the questionnaire was applied to identify the leadership styles, and at the end of each semester the students' school results were collected. The average of marks for each discipline was estimated for the whole school year.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Identification of Teachers' leadership Styles

The first objective represents the identification of leadership styles of the teachers who participated in the study. We provide, as follows, the results collected by using the Blake-Mouton Managerial Grid (1978):

Table 1. Results regarding leadership styles - Frequencies

Leadership style	Frequency
Minimal/ passive	39
Authoritarian	98
Democratic/ participative	75
Indulgent/ populist	58
Median	15

If we analyze the data presented in Table 1, we notice that the authoritarian leadership style is predominant (N= 98); its defining notes are the excessive focus on task, in our case the educational objectives, the building of competencies and a reduced concern for pupils and relationships. This style is also characterized by a precise monitoring of activities and school performances carried out, by a unidirectional and formal type of communication, by imposing strict rules which permanently accompany the accomplishment of tasks. We may anticipate the fact that this style, focused mainly on the accomplishment of tasks, proves to be less effective in getting superior academic performances by students as it neglects the aspects regarding relationships, which are vital for the harmony of the classroom in all its aspects. On a secondary place, there is the democratic/participative leadership style (N= 75) defined by the teacher's increased interest in task (the accomplishment of educational objectives, and the development of desirable competencies), but also in people (interpersonal relationships). A teacher who uses this style will pay attention to obtaining superior results, but also to the interpersonal relationships built in the classroom. A frequency of 58 answers is set up for the indulgent/populist leadership style, according to which the accent is placed on people, on creating a comfortable work climate, on establishing harmonious relationships in the classroom (teacher-pupils, pupils-pupils), at the expense of the accomplishment of educational objectives. Most often, the educational reality proves the

fact that pupils appreciate this style, which confer legerity and liberty, as the accomplishment of school obligations is placed on a secondary plan.

Further on, the data analysis also underlines other two styles: the passive/minimal style (N= 39), according to which there is a very low interest for tasks and people and the median leadership style (N= 15), characterized by the attempt to maintain a balance between the accomplishment of academic performances and a reasonable mood.

4.2. Analyses of Relationship between Leadership Styles and School Results

By this study we aimed at identifying those leadership styles which prove to be efficient in achieving superior academic performances. Thus, after we identified the leadership styles of teachers who participated in this study, we resorted to some comparative analyses using the ANOVA simple analysis technique. In order to emphasize significant differences, we choose to make some post-hoc comparisons by using the Games-Howell test.

Table 2. Significant differences of school results in relation with the teaching objectives - Post Hoc comparisons

(I) Leadership style	(J) Leadership style	Mean Difference (MD) (I-J) School results (Games-Howell)
Minimal/ Passive	Authoritarian	-0.79[*]
	Democratic/ Participative	-1.45[*]
	Indulgent/ Populist	-0.18
	Median	-0.93[*]
Authoritarian	Minimal/ Passive	0.79[*]
	Democratic/ Participative	-0.65[*]
	Indulgent/ Populist	0.61[*]
	Median	-0.14
Democratic/ Participative	Minimal/ Passive	1.45[*]
	Authoritarian	0.65[*]
	Indulgent/ Populist	1.26[*]
	Median	0.51
Indulgent/ Populist	Minimal/ Passive	0.18
	Authoritarian	-0.61[*]
	Democratic/ Participative	-1.26[*]
	Median	-0.75[*]
Median	Minimal/ Passive	0.93[*]
	Authoritarian	0.14
	Democratic/ Participative	-0.51
	Indulgent/ Populist	0.75[*]

[*]significant to $p < 0.05$

The results following the investigation emphasize a series of statistically significant differences. As a start, we will draw our attention towards the statistically significant differences between the

democratic/participative leadership style and the pupils' level of school training in comparison with the minimal/passive leadership style, the authoritarian and the indulgent/populist styles. According to this situation, teachers who manifest concern for the two dimensions of style (task and people), facilitate the achievement of superior academic performances among pupils. The characteristic note of this style consists in the increased interest both in task (meaning the accomplishment of educational objectives and building competencies) and people (inter-human relationships). In other words, the teacher manifesting this style, which proves to be most efficient and productive, pays attention to the achievement of superior school results by successfully accomplishing the educational objectives, and also to the interpersonal relationships built in the classroom. The participative teacher shows an innovative and creative spirit proves to be available for communication and setting clear directions and educational strategies; he or she promotes a very high degree of participation and stimulates team work, and also manifests concern for the needs and interests of those he or she works with.

When we refer to the manifest concern for pupils we may invoke the following characteristics:

- Empower pupils 'creativity and participation in decision making,
- Interest for pupils' well-being and needs,
- Cultivate the ongoing development interpersonal relationships,
- Stimulate work team (Mora, 2008).

Further on, the analysis of data reflects significant differences also on the level of teachers who show an authoritarian leadership style, in comparison to the minimal/passive and indulgent/populist leadership styles. Using an authoritarian leadership style supposes an excessive focus on task, in our case on the educational objectives and standards and a reduced concern for pupils. On this line, the exclusive focusing upon tasks is associated with the achievement of superior school results. Thus, regarding the school education, authoritarians have proved to bring productivity and effectiveness in comparison with the minimal/passive and the indulgent/populist styles. We can understand the emphatic preoccupation for task through the following characteristics:

- priority for the accomplishment of educational objectives and tasks,
- increased importance of planning: firmly setting of tasks, efficient time management, permanent monitoring of activities, excessive control of pupils,
- identification of challenges, which, most of the time, take the shape of tasks having a high level of difficulty,
- continual improvement of activities (Mora, 2008).

Last but not least, is the medial leadership style, which ensures a balanced management of activities, and facilitates the accomplishment of superior results, a condition that is not valid when we consider the minimal/passive and the indulgent/populist styles.

5. Conclusions

The idea of this study is based on simple interrogations: which is the leadership style a teacher should use in order to increase the quality of school education? What characterizes an efficient leadership style? Teachers' interests are multiple. They are interested in choosing the most adequate teaching means and methods, in creating evaluation situations that will induce less anxiety, and will bring superior

results, in managing efficiently the academic time or conflicts, etc. Some special interest is manifested also in the area of classroom management during the process of instruction. Here we think of the two dimensions of the leading style that stood at the basis of the study: the concern for tasks, by which we understand the accomplishment of educational objectives and development of desirable competencies and the concern for people, meaning the human relationships. It didn't take long for the answers to the initial interrogations to appear. Thus, according to the analyses that were made upon the batch of teachers formed for this study, the most productive leading style is the democratic/participative style. The proof consists in statistically significant differences against the minimal/passive, authoritative and indulgent/populist leading styles and of course in pupils' superior school results. In other words, if the teacher is focused on the efficient accomplishment of educational objectives and development of competencies (focus on tasks) and also on creating a high quality and stable academic climate through the development of inter-human relationships (focus on people), the chances that pupils will obtain superior academic performances are ensured. According to the existing data, it was found that other two styles are also productive, namely the authoritarian and the median styles in relation with the minimal/passive and the indulgent/populist styles.

In conclusion, leaving from these results, the teachers are encouraged to focus their interest and attention equally towards the two dimensions: tasks and people, and thus to consciously commit to the characteristics of a democratic/participative leading style.

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