

# NEW MODEL OF SCHOOL HEADS PREPARATION, INDUCTION AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN POLAND

R. Dorczak, G. Mazurkiewicz

*Jagiellonian University, Institute of Public Affairs, Department of Educational Management  
(POLAND)*

## Abstract

During the last few decades there is a growing interest of management issues in the area of education. Educational systems started to require management competencies from school heads and universities all over the world developed different types of courses to train and prepare school heads and school managers from different levels of the system. In the early 1990s, Polish educational system introduced the requirement of at least postgraduate course on educational management as a prerequisite to become a school head. The programmes and content of those postgraduate courses, as well as the whole area of educational management, were and unfortunately still are dominated by managerial perspective of 'hard' or 'technical' skills and competencies, to say nothing about the fact that they were designed more than twenty years ago and have not changed since then.

It is then clear that the challenges of the contemporary world and a growing complexity of organizational problems in educational context raises the question of adequate management or/and leadership of schools that not only balances 'hard' and 'soft' skills and competencies but also creates proper conditions for educational processes that are specific and cannot be managed or led using expertise that was developed in other areas.

The paper tries to give a description of the current state of school heads preparation and professional development in Poland using the data from research on existing cycles of educational management training for future school heads. Showing their limitations the authors present a proposal of new complex model of such preparation, induction and continuing professional development of school leaders based on a broad definition of educational management and/or leadership that focuses on learning and development as the main values important for educational organizations.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Educational system in Poland, as in other countries has, till eighties of past century, neglected the necessity of thinking about management in schools. Teachers, heads of schools and others working in the area of education preferred to be focused on educational problems and the public or political representatives were not interested in management of educational organizations at all. Political processes of late seventies and early eighties of the last century had led to introduction of managerial thinking to public organizations. Neoliberal ideas invaded public sector and educational organizations in eighties introducing the issue of management in public organizations and in education. It was especially easy because professionals in public organizations such as teachers did not want to be involved in that managerial discussion and practical activities [1]. Also in academic circles in Poland as well as in other places around the world theory of management in education was and in most places still is dominated by managerial thinking [2].

In early nineties, together with political transformations and introduction of free market economy in Poland, people thinking about educational reforms started to raise the issue of educational management. Development of that issue, both in practice and academic discussions, was from the very beginning dominated by managerial ideas influenced by neoliberal approach treating all public organizations in the same way as business ones.

In such an ideological atmosphere Polish Ministry of Education had introduced educational law that required from candidates for headteacher's positions in schools to go through either postgraduate course or certified (by local educational authorities) training programme on educational management. Since then it has been obligatory for every person taking position of school head in Poland [3].

## 2 PREPARATION OF SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS IN POLAND – EXISTING PRACTICE

Educational law in Poland concerning regulations of school heads preparation was established under very strong influence of managerial thinking about educational management. Looking from the formal perspective, it gives future school heads two possibilities to get required managerial training: special training courses in management in education run by Teacher Training Centres and other Training Centres or postgraduate studies at universities and higher schools of other type.

First type of training can be organized by any type of training centre (not only educational ones) and has to be planned and run according to general curriculum framework set up by Ministry of Education. According to that regulation such training programmes have to last at least 210 teaching hours and have to deliver precisely prescribed programme in certain areas. Ministerial regulation allocates certain number of teaching hours to every programme area listed. Detailed framework can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Obligatory curriculum framework of “Management in Education courses” run by Teacher training Centres and other Training Centres

No.	Modules	Teaching hours
1	General management theory	6
2	Educational law	18
3	Psychological aspects of management in education	16
4	Management of organizational change	12
5	Quality management	26
6	School administration	30
7	Curriculum planning	40
8	Organization of school reforms	16
9	School in local environment	16
10	Practical (managerial) training in schools.	26
11	Seminar (to prepare dissertation)	4
	Total	210

Source: based on Ministry of Education regulation

According to analysis of all such courses offered in academic year 2012/2013 there were 79 Public Teacher Training Centres and 114 Private Training Centres (some of them from business sector without educational experience) offering such courses in Poland and there were in total more than 200 such training courses offered (approximately more than half of them were not run because of lack of candidates). The same analysis shows, that vast majority of such courses use traditional method of lecture to deliver knowledge even in practical parts of the training that are run by invited school heads who also give lectures on practical aspects of school management.

There are no precise rules concerning the issue who can teach on such courses. Usually, among teaching staff of such training courses, there are randomly invited university experts, school inspectors from local educational authorities and experienced school heads. The system of external quality control and assessment of such courses does not exist. More than half of existing school heads in Poland went through that form of managerial preparation [4].

Second form of school heads preparation are postgraduate studies run by universities or other higher education schools such as Polytechnics, Higher Vocational Schools, etc. They have much more freedom to decide about curricula of such postgraduate courses. The only regulation says, that they have to last at least one academic year and have more than 210 teaching hours. In academic year

2012/2013 universities and other higher schools offered 126 such postgraduate programmes in different parts of Poland. Most of them were not run because of lack of candidates.

Due to relatively big freedom of designing curricula of such postgraduate studies there is a very big difference between programmes offered as far as content, methods of teaching and distribution of hours are concerned. Typical postgraduate studies are in their general structure almost the same as training courses described above. Most of them last between 210 and 250 teaching hours, curricula usually contain the same issues as listed in regulations for courses offered by Training Centres described above. The only difference is that they also offer specific modules that are typical for Department offering the course. Polytechnics include for example modules such as Information Technology in School Management; Pedagogical Universities add modules on Alternative Pedagogies or Methods of Teaching Adults and Catholic University module on Ethical Issues in School Management.

Again, as it is with training courses, there is no quality control or external assessment of such postgraduate courses. Generally speaking, regardless the fact that general framework is the same, such forms are in details very different and there is no coherence in preparation of school heads when we look from the perspective of the whole educational system. In practice it leads to situation that school heads in different parts of the country are prepared in completely different ways and consequently they work differently offering students different learning conditions that leads to inequalities and raises the issue of social responsibility and justice.

In addition to that it is necessary to point out that, when we look at such issues as induction and continual professional development of school heads, the situation described in the area of preparatory courses and studies is similar. There is no coherence and continuity, content and methods are randomly selected and there is no systemic monitoring and assessment of different initiatives in that area.

One may say that the system of professional development of school heads does not exist in Poland or that it is far from what is needed. It becomes especially visible after more than twenty years of experiences with described forms and methods of school managers preparation.

### **3 MAIN CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL HEADS PREPARATION**

There are at least two major challenges that Polish educational system faces in the area of school heads preparation and development.

First one is connected with issues described above. There needs to be built the coherent system that allows to select, prepare, induct and support continuing professional development of school heads. Existing forms of training and support are not coherent in that sense as well as they are not coherent looking from the perspective of the whole educational system or the country. In order to support better educational management future school heads have to be selected and prepared in a systematic way, they have to be supported while starting their work as school heads during so called induction period, they have to be monitored and supported during their work as heads continuously in order to create best possible conditions for professional development. Educational authorities on different levels have to create institutional and material conditions for such coherent model of professional development if we want all schools to create best environment for learning to all students all over the country (similar challenge can be identified on European level too).

Second, equally important challenge is connected with domination of managerial approach in thinking about running schools. Complex environment of contemporary schools and the nature of school as organization needs introduction of the leadership concept to thinking about running schools and preparation, induction and development of school heads.

Modern school management is not possible without school leadership, they are two interlinked aspects of good school development for the good of the learner [5]. What is important to stress, is the fact that educational context needs specific understanding of leadership. The concept itself and different theories of leadership were developed in the area of general management theory and they need to be applied to school leadership with caution. Concept of educational leadership have developed stressing the importance of such core educational values as teaching and learning [6,7] as well as stressing the importance of schools being learning communities[8] and school leaders being socially active as change agents in school local communities and society in general [9]. It also needs

to be understood as having the value of individual development as central and crucial for every decision and action in school leadership and management context [10].

Linking that challenge with the first one it is important to point out necessity to built new, more coherent model of school heads preparation and development with such new approach stressing value of specifically understood leadership and creating courses and modules helping to develop leadership competencies of future and existing school heads.

#### **4 NEW MODEL OF SCHOOL HEADS PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Polish Ministry of Education decided to start work towards new model of school heads preparation, development and support. It initiated the project called “Leadership and management in education – design and implementation of new model of headteacher’s training“, that is focused on building such new model. It has started in July 2013 in cooperation between Jagiellonian University and Centre for Education Development.

The project aims at development of coherent curricula, contents, teaching and learning methods as well as teaching materials in three modules, for three different groups or levels of school leadership development. They are as follows:

**First module** will be addressed to all who want to become school heads in future,

**Second module** will be addressed to heads of schools that has just started their headship and need support during induction period;

**Third module** will be designed for experienced school heads that need continuous support and training during their professional life in their position.

Three modules will be different in teaching and learning methods and approaches, in lengths and formal structures, teaching materials and forms of organization. What will make them coherent is firstly the idea of continuing professional development that goes through different stages but has to be seen as one process and take into account necessity of connections between different phases and secondly coherence will be connected with the fact that all three modules will try to develop set of the same educational leadership competencies.

The list of leadership competencies was based on theories of educational leadership and on diagnosis of Polish headteacher’s competencies. They were grouped in six broad areas. Below there is a list of those areas with examples of competencies to be developed during learning experiences prepared as parts of each training module for three different target groups:

- **Educational leadership** – understanding specificity of educational organization, understanding of basic educational values and; building school culture, design of school programme, building school vision and mission, leading organizational change; etc.;
- **Learning and teaching** – understanding learning and its conditions, building resources for learning, developing individuals and teams for learning, linking school with environment to use its resources for learning, development of professionalism, evaluation and development based on its results, diagnosis of students needs and development, etc.;
- **Educational policy** – understanding the place of school in different contexts, building links with the world outside school, building social potential supporting learning in school, influencing social and political processes important for school, active citizenship for building school potential, influencing and leading educational policy in local and global contexts, etc.;
- **People in organization** – recruitment and selection of teachers, induction to team and school as a whole, diagnosis and development of potentials of teachers, development of cooperative skills, building participative decision-making, building material resources supporting development of teachers’ potentials, etc.;
- **Strategic, legal, financial issues** – strategic planning, collecting, analysing and using information, negotiation and communication, dealing with conflicts of different type, using educational law for good of learning and teaching in school, material resource planning and development, etc.;

- **Personal development** – understanding oneself, diagnosis of own potential and limitations, professional knowledge development, development of own social and communication competencies, dealing with stress and burnout, linking with other professionals for own professional and personal development, etc.

The process of design and development of training materials for three target groups has just started in July with participation of a group of more than 50 experts from different areas of educational management, leadership and education in general but also from other fields such as training and coaching centres, business and administration, professional bodies, trade unions, local and central educational authorities, etc. By the end of February 2014 three modules will be ready to start pilot training of three target groups of several hundred participants in each of three groups: candidates for school heads, newly appointed school heads and heads with some years of experience in that professional role.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

System of preparation and professional development of people responsible for running schools needs to be completely transferred. Such challenge seems to be central for all educational systems as school leadership is one of most important factors contributing to quality of learning and school improvement focused on that quality. Transformation needed has to be built on concept of school leadership as added to the concept of school management. Acceptance of leadership concept requires its understanding adequate to the specificity of schools as organizations. That allows to formulate lists of leadership competencies that suit needs of learning and individual development as core values when thinking about schools as organizations and school leadership or management. Only then reform of formal system of preparation, induction and professional training and support for school heads can be successful.

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