Curriculum as an Instrument in Developing Leadership in Modern School Practice

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The article addresses one of the objectives of the curriculum development – the assurance of leadership in the teaching/learning process in classrooms that is influenced by new technologies entering both our national economy and school practice, and by changes in the perception and the way of thinking of the young generation. The views of future teachers that were studied show that educational leadership for qualitative teaching/learning is described by the following principles: acknowledging the learners' experience and learning practices; preparing the learners for life in its broadest sense; recognizing non-formal learning combined with the formal one; promoting the learners' independent and autonomous learning; estimating the learners' needs in compliance with their learning activities and learning achievements; planning the activities and managing assistance to encourage learning.

Keywords: curriculum, leadership in education, new generation, modern school

Introduction

Education in school practice takes place in a completely new informative environment (social nets, digitalization) and is oriented towards the future, which cannot be clearly characterized and described. It is also influenced by rapid development of digital economy. Digital economy, which is today's reality, changes convincingly the society's habits and influences its economic and social structure as pointed out in the exploratory opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee 'The Digital Market as a Driver for Growth' (European Economic and Social Committee 2012). It is clear that the future will require people with confidence and skills to meet the challenges posed by fast and far-reaching change (Donaldson 2009). Statistical data from Eurostat reflect digitalization of the young generation. In 2010, more than 91 % of 16–24 year old people, 76 % of 25–54 year old people and 40 % of 55–74 year old people were using Internet more than once a week (Eurostat 2011). So, new communication technologies have really

TABLE 1 Use of Internet for Social Networking, Learning, civic and Political Participation, by Age Group, EU-27, 2011 (% of individuals)

Activity	Age			
	16–74	16–24	25–54	55–74
Participating in social networks	37	78	42	8
Consulting wikis	39	62	44	23
Reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues	12	25	18	6
Taking part in online consult. or voting to define civic or political issues	6	7	7	4

NOTES Adapted from www.eurostat.eu.

become an essential part of their life. These technologies are also used in learning.

The above mentioned affects the content and implementation of the curriculum as well as the teaching/learning process in the classroom. Prensky (2001) mentions many significant changes in the perception of today's students. These changes include unequal speed of perception compared to the traditional one, parallel processing of data compared to the coherent one, perception of an image before perceiving the text. Children prefer role plays; their fantasy dominates over reality, etc.

School practice has become more modern; it has changed together with the society. At the same time, the teaching/learning process and its management actually have not changed during the last century while the learners' way of thinking and perception have changed and are changing under the influence of new technologies putting forward new approaches in curriculum development and new principles in developing educational leadership in the classrooms.

The previous studies have proved that the basic components of curriculum development are the selection of the content and planning of the process (Andersone 2007) therefore its effective development that corresponds to the development of science and society is very important for qualitative changes in school practice, i. e., the perfection of the teaching/learning process, improvement of teachers' competence, etc. In Latvia, like in many other European countries educational standards and curricula have been reorganized. Digitalization of economy, globalization and re-structuring of economical branches are important factors that challenge the transition in education and emphasize this change as one of the most significant problems of social development. Thus one of the targets of curriculum development is ensuring the effectiveness of the teaching process and by doing so improv-

ing the management as the school managers develop the qualities of leaders.

The goal of the present study is to describe the curriculum development as an instrument in developing leadership in modern school practice. The method used in this study is the analysis of literature and the survey of 24 prospective teachers.

Modern School Practice

The background assumption of the transition of a modern school practice is not only its responsibility for providing the classroom with modern technological equipment but also reaching appropriate achievements in the teaching/learning process which is provided by relevant management – profound changes in education are impossible without profound changes in management. New generation technologies are entering schools. 'Microsoft Surface' and 'SMART Table' are two examples demonstrating the future view of a school black-board and desk combination. A computer makes a desk, and a big touch screen makes a table plate. Students can see their tasks for the day and their home tasks on the touch screen; they can draw shapes, do maths tasks, write their comments or play intellectual games with their classmates. These targeted manipulations provide qualitative management of the teaching/learning process as well as effective meeting of the learners' needs. Rapid development of technologies forces teachers to follow their students' digital life style, acquire skills necessary for modern school environment, which make the teaching more effective. Initiatives directed to increase the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education usually are restricted by the possibility of installing the equipment in the classroom. At the same time their influence on the teaching/learning process and its management is often neglected. To solve this problem, three pedagogical dimensions of leadership can be applied: stimulation of the students' intellectual development; providing the classroom with qualitative and modern learning environment; facilitating the learners' understanding of importance of their activities (Ayers, Dinham, and Sawyer 1998).

Teachers acknowledge that in the modern school learners understand the impact of current changes in the social processes and their importance for the future educational and career opportunities, and it is facilitated by digitalization of the school and society, globalization processes in society and education, challenges

dictated by the necessity to increase competitiveness and sustainability not only in the state's economy but also in each person's career.

Leadership for Qualitative Teaching/Learning

The underpinning principles of leadership in a modern school that provide a qualitative teaching/learning process and that are used in the present study are the ones suggested in theoretical sources (Johnson and Johnson 1991):

- Clear, positive communication during which a mutual process of information exchange is going on;
- Mutual trust allowing to manage, establish, and maintain various situations;
- Constructive management of arising conflicts.

The Internet blog 'Answers' was used for the study. The following question was asked: 'What is your understanding of high-quality teaching and learning?' Byron Samuel (22) answered: What I understand from high-quality teaching and learning is that the students are taught by highly qualified teachers who do not just have appropriate education in the subject they are teaching but they also have a valid experience in that field as well. Only a teacher with such abilities can teach their learners how to acquire the skills they need to compete in their field of career today.

Qualitative teaching/learning is aimed at meeting students' needs and interests therefore appropriate leadership becomes more and more topical.

The survey of 24 prospective teachers indicates which principles of successful educational leadership they consider the most important and which principles are strongly related to a qualitative teaching/learning process. Principles of appropriate leadership in the teaching/learning process suggested by James and Pollard (2006) have been used to identify the views of these teachers. The data are presented in table 2.

Prospective teachers' views on principles for educational leadership for qualitative teaching/learning can be ranged as follows: Acknowledgement of learners' previous experience and learning (the most important – 83%); Preparing the learners for life in its broadest sense (75%).

Respondents have also mentioned: Approving the role of non-formal (out-of-school) learning within the formal learning pro-

TABLE 2   Prospective Teachers' Views on Principles for Educational Leadership for Qualitative Teaching/Learning

Principles	n	%
Prepare the learners for life in its widest sense	18	75
Offer the acquisition of the chief spheres of knowledge	7	29
Acknowledge the learners' previous experience and learning.	20	83
Plan the activities and manage help in order to encourage learning	11	46
The estimate of the learners' needs is in compliance with the learning activity and the result	11	46
Promote the learners' independent and autonomous learning	14	58
Facilitate the learners' communication during the learning process, the enrichment and exchange of knowledge	8	33
Approve of the role of non-formal (out of school) learning within the formal learning process	15	62
The teacher himself keeps learning	9	37
Develop an effective learning environment	9	37

cess (62%); promoting the learners' independent and autonomous learning by creating an effective learning environment (58%) as important principles.

Deeper examination shows that prospective teachers are ready to meet the needs of the younger generation by taking into consideration the peculiarities of their perception and learning habits. Teachers also recognize the vision and traits of a modern school with its changing tools and modern technologies as well as expanding possibilities of learners' non-formal education.

Curriculum as an Instrument in Developing Leadership

Curriculum as a crucial component of any formal educational process addresses the main changes in education such as what students should learn and be able to do; why, how, and how well they should do this. In the past, the curriculum was designed merely from the perspective of its cultural transmission functions with its structure consequently reflecting discrete areas of knowledge. Due to the complexity of today's continuously changing world, the contemporary approaches to curriculum development far exceed the traditional understanding of curricula as merely plans of study or lists of the prescribed content.

So, the principles for educational leadership for a qualitative teaching/learning process are important for modern school practice, thus the curriculum should be developed in accordance with them. The requirements for the principles are imbedded in the

questions suggested by Akker (2003). The answers to the following questions will guide teachers in the curriculum development:

- Aims and objectives – Towards which goals are they learning?
- Content – What are they learning?
- Learning activities – How are they learning?
- Teacher's role – How is the teacher facilitating their learning?
- Materials and resources – With what are they learning?
- Grouping – With whom are they learning?
- Location – Where are they learning?
- Time – When are they learning?
- Assessment – How is their learning assessed?

There are different approaches to the development of curriculum in modern school practice. Here are four of them which are used the most frequently in educational leadership for a qualitative teaching/learning process (Visscher-Voerman and Gustafson 2004):

- instrumental approach;
- communicative approach;
- artistic approach;
- pragmatic approach.

Instrumental approach is based upon systematic analysis and development of programs. The answers to the following questions are sought (Tyler 1949; Taba 1962):

- Which objectives should education aim at?
- Which learning experiences are most suitable for attaining these objectives?
- How could this learning experience be organized effectively?
- How can we determine whether the objectives have been achieved?

In *communicative approach* the emphasis is laid on the involvement of and discussions with all the interested parties concerned – developers of programs and implementers of programs, specialists in the corresponding spheres, parents, school leavers, etc. (Walker 1990). Firstly, the interested parties express their view on the problems, come to an agreement about the most essential things, then they generate ideas concerning the potential solutions and agree

upon the preferable solution, transform it into the description of the final product or a developed curriculum.

Artistic approach requires a creative approach on the part of curriculum developers, which is based more on subjective understanding of the objectives of the curriculum and the learners' needs. The teacher plays the main role in this approach (Eisner 1979). Here emphasis is laid on the creative interaction in a particular context in order to satisfy the learners' needs in a meaningful way by constantly developing the curriculum.

Pragmatic approach is directed to the curriculum product (knowledge, skills, practical availability). Curriculum development takes place in close interaction with the local practice and its users. Formative assessment plays an essential role in attaining the desired result (Goodlad 1979). J. A. Comenius has also drawn attention to the fact that 'it is necessary to teach only things, which bring apparent benefit' (Komenskis 1992) The choice of the approach to curriculum development is determined by many reasons. The more attention is paid to the learners' practice in classroom the broader are the possibilities of the artistic approach. On the other hand, when we think about the context and the final product the pragmatic approach is more suitable. However, on the macro level instrumental and communicative approaches are more frequently used.

The principles for educational leadership for a qualitative teaching/learning process used by prospective teachers to develop a curriculum can be grouped around the four approaches. The analysis of theoretical sources and the exploration of future teachers' views concerning the four approaches to leadership for a qualitative teaching/learning process reflect ways to develop a quality curriculum of a modern school. Effective curriculum planning and development is described in table 3.

Prospective teachers prefer instrumental and pragmatic approaches towards the development of curriculum. Their background knowledge and experience influence their understanding of importance of the curriculum in school practices when the curriculum is used more for students' knowledge and skills' management rather than for the teaching/learning process itself. Certainly, the choice of an approach towards curriculum development is determined by various factors, which are not only the teacher's conception but also a clear vision of the school development, understanding of the needs of the new generation, development of the society, etc. If we pay more attention to the students' prac-

TABLE 3   Connection of Approaches With the Principles for Educational Leadership for Qualitative Teaching towards Development of Curriculum

The name of the approach	Connection to the principles for educational leadership for qualitative teaching/learning	Prospective teachers' opinion
Instrumental approach	To plan activities and to structure assistance to facilitate studying. To offer the acquisition of the main knowledge areas. To prepare students for real life in its broadest meaning.	To plan activities and to structure assistance to facilitate studying. To prepare students for real life in its broadest meaning.
Communicative approach	To promote students' communication during the learning process, their receiving and exchange of knowledge. To recognize importance of informal studying, i. e., of studying outside the school. To facilitate students' independent studying.	To recognize importance of informal studying, i. e., of studying outside the school. To facilitate students' independent studying.
Artistic approach	A teacher makes effective studying environment. A teacher studies all the time. To assess students' needs according to studies and their results	To assess students' needs according to studies and their results.
Pragmatic approach	To recognize students' background. To assess students' needs according to studies and their results. To recognize the importance of informal studying, i. e., of studying outside the school.	To recognize students' background. To recognize importance of informal studying, i. e., of studying outside the school.

tice in the classroom, then artistic approach and communicative approach give opportunities to use the curriculum as a tool for developing leadership in modern school practice.

Conclusion

Needs of the new digital generation and the management of the teaching/learning process, where the curriculum serves as an effective tool in the hands of a competent teacher characterize modern school practice. Teachers and, even more, future teachers use the previous experience for analysing the curriculum development possibilities and educational leadership for ensuring a qualitative teaching/learning process. So, closer attention is paid to instrumental and pragmatic approaches towards curriculum development. At the same time, students living in the globalized world, using new technologies and sometimes even surpassing their teachers in getting information, are studying at schools. It is essential for today's teachers to manage the teaching process, to assist their students in arranging their knowledge and sifting the information they get. So, artistic and communicative approaches towards curriculum development become more and more popu-

lar. In these approaches students' digital skills are used for getting new knowledge. However, these approaches are especially challenging for teachers.

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