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## Education in crisis? Task and development of educational leaders

**Abstract:** Author of this paper attempts to show that crisis is often a result of ideologies promoting anti-social values and ways of functioning within social sphere. Together with difficult challenges of contemporary life it creates conditions of operation for societies and educational institutions. Vision of education and educational leaders need to be changed accordingly to diagnosed needs that shows necessity of dialogue, reflection and focus on learning. Author argues that time of the crises opens people for change and although it is difficult we need more cooperation and trust in order to successfully modify leadership and management mechanism and processes. It is proposed to concentrate in the development of leaders on five areas of leadership development and also to start common discussion on aims of education and educational leadership.

**Key-words:** leadership, leadership preparation, leaders' role, crisis, development.

### Crises as a human product

We live in the era of crisis. When one starts to think about reality surrounding us and about times we are experiencing that is the crisis what immediately appears as one of the most important issue – defining contemporary life. The negativity of that state is increased by cacophony of voices. Economists talk about financial crisis, sociologist about crisis of trust, crisis of solidarity and modern societies, priests preach about crisis of faith, political scientists analyze the crisis of democracy and government, educators discuss school's crisis, and that is not closed list of visible and possible crisis. We could continue that counting but it would not be developmental approach. What is needed instead? We need answers to the questions about roots, consequences and possible solutions of this

crisis. Questions and answers especially, because crisis and disappointment, instead passion, excitement and desire of development, became fuel for public discourse. Chaos and lack of stability stemming from the climate of fear and negativity create serious threat for societies and for education (although we should not forget that in the same time crisis create also an opportunity – for example a starting point for reforms).

In this paper I will discuss the role of educational leaders in the times of crisis. I will try to show the logical path from the reflection on reality through the postulate of paradigm shift in educational leadership, and exploring mental models, ways of thinking and critical tasks of educational leaders to the recommendations for the process of leaders' preparation.

In order to understand the real leaders' work we need to understand the context in which we work and struggle to survive the regular life today. We cannot ignore the powerful globalization processes, which are constantly widening, deepening and speeding up connections across national borders (between individuals, groups, institutions, ideas). People, ideas and goods moving freely bring social, ethnic and cultural diversity. Individuals and information, facilitated by technology, flow more easily across the globe than ever before. The global economic balance is also changing and it is fundamental transformation in the balance of economic power and world finance. In the same time the magnitude of global inequality is still increasing. Other global challenges like climate change, societal changes, urbanization and pollution, obesity and diseases connected with it, crime and safety, changing role of women, shifts on labor market, transformation of families and childhood [Trends Shaping Education 2013] shape the condition of our life. It is also important how Internet has transformed our style of live visible for example in shopping, banking, doing business or education and also in the way civic disobedience is organized (advertising illegal demonstration through Facebook or Twitter during Arabic Spring or recently in Turkey).

It is interesting that although we (as human kind) are developing faster than ever in history, sometimes that development seems to be empty, without meaning – not bringing significant changes in quality of people's lives. Maybe the reason is connected with lack of important aims and understanding of that development. For example one of the most critical crises we experience today is an economical crisis, which is closely tied not only to serious economic problems, but also to the crisis of certain ideology. That crisis depends on the situation, in which we are strongly attached to the ideology that leads us to inevitable catastrophe because we are not able to negation the intellectual order that is a foundation of neoliberalism and dictate of "the free market". In 2008 Alan Greenspan, earlier leading for 19 years US Federal Reserve and promo-

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ting the idea of free market, standing in US Congress in order to inform about sources of the crises admitted that he used his ideology of free market for forty years and it worked, but today he is in shock because his ideology failed [Patel 2009]. Raj Patel claims that the idea of free market is present in every civilization and we should not question it. The problem has risen when the profit instead needs became the driven force on the market. The conviction that society works the best when market has an absolute freedom in its eagerness to gain profit and market works the best when has complete freedom is an ideology. That ideology does not bring what I postulate at the beginning of this paragraph: important aims. Profit for sake of profit will not build anything useful for the whole society. Unfortunately, that ideology was created and supported by those the strongest. In order to change it (aimless and unfair societies) we need paradigm (ideological) change.

According to George Soros we face market fundamentalism, what Potulicka [2010] explains as using market laws in areas which never should be considered as market oriented like education, culture, healthcare. Free market is treated as controller of everything but it is amoral and does not know the difference between good and evil, it knows only profit. This is democratic illiteracy. Connection between democracy and capitalism is weak because needs that capitalism and democracy aim at to fulfill are different. In capitalism it is individual need what is a priority and in democracy it is public need what is the most important, so the contradiction between logic of market and logic of democracy arises. Instead allies people become competitors. The Greenspan's "ideological mistake" is seen clearer.

Unfortunately, school as institution and so called educational market increase existing social stratification and unfair class structure, causing educational and social inequalities today. Educational systems are organized in a way, which supports existence of good and bad schools as something natural, while encouraging wealthy parents to send their children to good schools what makes a gap between good and bad schools wider (because their support and money). It is understandable that education follows the social priorities and expectations. Education is (and always was) closely related to the social context of the particular era. For example, today the employees' permanent competences have lost its meaning. It is no longer critical to be prepared before starting a new job, now it is more important to be able to learn needed competencies rapidly when particular situation appears. New ideal employee continuously acquires new skills. It is not what we can do but what we need to do which shapes organizations today. Flexibility, decreased hierarchy and not linear organization of work change the structure and organizational climate, and also, in general, it influences the basic rules of cooperation [Sennet 2010].

Needs and expectations might change over the time, expectation and school reality might differ significantly but to accept the discrepancy between services offered to reach and to poor students, to accept role of school in strengthening unfair social order means to close the chance for the development of the society as the whole. We need to understand that education is not an individual investment but a group, social, endeavor. This should lead us to the conclusion of quick changes even when we know that very often the attempts to improve the situation create new problems [Ball 2007]. In order to change the reality in different areas and on different levels, so also to change society and schools, we need significant paradigm shift.

It is much easier to reconstruct paradigms, which we use to explain reality, during times of turbulence and crisis than during times of stability and prosperity. This is a chance we were given by the today context – we know that we should change something. And that something is not a particular method or tools it is rather a holistic approach and perspective. Education and educational leadership should be included on the long list of areas expected to be changed and transformed.

However, it is as difficult to deny the need of a reform of education, as to find solid suggestions showing what should be changed and how. Stephen Ball [2007] notes that recently popular trends, appealing to market model (where workers' success depends on the ability of selling one's skills, knowledge and entrepreneurship on the global market) do not bring good results because of two reasons. Firstly, they often do not bring changes they promised. Secondly, they create new problems. New rules of creating wealth replace mass production logic of the Ford-like, industrial era with logic of flexible, knowledge-based production. However this process does not necessarily show new ways of the state's functioning. What is more frequently deregulation and privatization reduce state's opportunity of direct intervention on practical and ideological level. Cheap labor in mass production, without proper employee's protection has found its place elsewhere on a geographical and political map. Labor requiring low qualifications still exists, but in the sector of services (and is frequently bound to feminization of certain professions). As far as the second argument on new problems is concerned, Ball notes similarities between center-peripheries relations in global economy, and relations between top-ranked schools and school with the lowest stores in all rankings, especially in these educational systems which have experienced market-based reform [Ball 2007].

A special dualism in educational policy of many countries is clearly visible. On the one hand, importance of an individual and individual choices of every consumer are accentuated. On the other hand – there are references to the aims of policy concentrated on satisfying economic interests of the state.

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It is not known whether these priorities can be fulfilled in the framework of the same initiatives. Among typical elements of thinking about education and ways of its systematic improvement, we may find: a/ an idea to improve economic situation through binding education with employment, productivity and trade, b/ attempts to provide students with skills and competences useful in recruitment processes and work, c/ a movement towards direct control over curricula and grading, d/ initiatives towards reducing costs of administration and management in education, e/ growth of social influence on decision-taking process and pressure of market choice [Ball 2007]. These initiatives suffer of the lack of effectiveness because they are tied to the market paradigm, which created today crisis. In order to change reality we need to drastically extend and transform approaches that a base for our plans and actions. What seems to be promising direction of the transformation is starting to work with leadership paradigm and leaders understanding their obligations.

### **Crisis as motivation factor for leaders**

Preservation or change – this is a dilemma, solutions to which determine the educational reality. What societies really want from schools - protecting unfair status quo, supporting existing order, “improving” reality as it is or rather creating conditions for radical transformation, questioning the situation and showing direction of action that would lead towards equality and solidarity? School should become important and independent player in the game of interpretation of reality.

Educational leaders face numerous and difficult challenges, which are impossible to overcome because of limited imagination, destructive mental models and lack of support in leadership development. Probably, the stereotypical approach to leadership, in which it is connected to strong individual with high expert knowledge and skills, vision, and ability to attract large groups of people to that vision, should be replaced by the model connected to cooperation, participation and creativity. Changes of the social and virtual cooperation impact the way of learning and also create new tasks for leaders. Today leaders should become anthropologists focusing on the groups, rather than (as it has been so far) psychologists focusing on individuals [Gobillot 2009]. Gobillot [2009] talks about an appalling trend of lowering the understanding between generations, about trend stressing the fact that expert knowledge can be found not only inside, but also outsider organization and about the trend of losing concentration, which is seen when it is more and more difficult to engage people in the discussion about the most important aspects of the organization, when there is less and less time for it. Finally, Gobillot stresses influence of the democratic trend, manifesting itself in the fact that it is less and less probable

that the leaders might control resources and people personally and directly.

In the time of crisis leaders need to improve their skills of supporting people within organization in seeking the sense of their actions and in surrounding world [Sułkowski 2005, pp. 77–85]. Through the interpretation process they convey senses and offer structures in their chaotic environment. In the era of crisis it is necessary to support leaders and candidates for leaders in their development in different way than it is done right now. Leaders should have to feel power to create and modify their reality. It is important for leaders to understand that we have ability to decide about it how does our world looks like. Accordingly we need to set new goals and to invent new forms of fulfilling them. We, all together, need to start with the basic questions not only about leaders' roles in teaching and learning process, but also about future and opportunities we want to create.

Agreeing that we might create and modify our world truly means that we accept constructivist point of view, what needs to be connected with approval of several assumption used by social constructivists. Leaders need to utilize the critical approach to knowledge and concepts recognized as understandable per se. It was never useful approach to accept ideas and facts without critical reflection, but today, after numerous crisis created by lack of reflection, we are morally obligated to question carefully every initiative. Leaders should understand and acknowledgement that our knowledge about the world depends not only on history, but also on culture, so should belief that our knowledge is created, sustained and updated during social processes that might be complex but always involve people and their minds. The basic and critical feature of leaders is recognition that knowledge and actions are closely related, and linked by the feedback resulting from reflexivity [Rapley 2010, s. 26], so critical reflection is one of most needed qualities in the time of crisis.

Knowledge of our own attitudes and ability to put our opinion in theoretical context gives a possibility of specifying the standpoint, rational access to experiences and opinions of other people, justification of the practices used and intellectual tool to recognize, analyze and evaluate various issues and problems we face. When we understand context, structure and sources of our own concepts and theories, there is a possibility of their development in a reflective and conscious way. It is then easier to justify and explain the action taken and protect yourself from fashionable trends and pop-theories [Brookfield 1995].

During time of the crisis it is much easier to convince people that they need radical changes in order to create an environment in which the opportunity that crisis might appear again will be smaller. Those changes should shape our thinking and the way we see and understand the world. We need transformational learning, which concerns changing how we know, how we

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take and interpret information and experiences. That will help us to manage the adaptive challenges we face. Too often we focus on technical capacities and challenges of the institutions or situations. For technical challenges however we may identify both the problem and the solution or experts who may help to solve the problem. Unfortunately, many of complex challenges are not easy to solve – we face profound challenges classified as adaptive when we cannot identify the problem or solution [Heifitz, Linsky 2002]. They require greater internal capacity and constructivist approach.

### **Crisis and educational leadership**

Schools should not work on maintaining the existing unfair reality but fight against it. Mike Bottery [2004] shares concerns connected with threats arising from the consumerist approach to life observed in modern societies. While pointing out dangers, which pose threats to civil society, driven by the ideology of having and buying, i.e. consumption taken to absurd levels he stresses the fact that schools not only do not oppose but participate in. The belief that shopping instead of political and public involvement will make us free individuals is a false belief. The consumption will never make us free and is rather an escape from civic duties. Educational leaders should raise question such as: What is a relationship between social justice and the distribution of public resources and goods? [Giroux 2011, p. 72]. Reducing democracy to a metaphor of “free” market always will hinder the democratization process and schools have to be very aware of that consequence.

Educational leadership should enable people to think, act and reflect in the way that mirrors their authentic involvement and responsibility. Only ethical practice, real passion and important purpose give people reason to act authentically and responsibly, so leadership should be focused more on issues of emotions and motivation than issues of effectiveness and profit. The later will come when people are authentically involved. In order to secure appropriate climate within organization educational leadership should be characterized by constant search for ways of building a community, vision of an organization and specific (for the organization) approach to the tasks. These “ways of building an organization” refer to and manifest in various areas. Here are the most important ones:

- Reflection on conditions of functioning, community’s needs, social trends, philosophy, approach to teaching process, which results in activities adequate to the context (ACCURACY). In an organization with a high leadership potential, there is a conviction about the rationale of action, a desire of searching new solutions and an acceptance of mistake that might happen due to activity, not disregard.

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- Concentration on the process of learning and development (LEARNING). In an organization with a high leadership potential a goal is clear and accepted. In every aspect of organization's activity a priority of members' learning is visible.
  - Constant support and demand for participation of all the employees in decision-taking and dialogue, which define directions of activity (PARTICIPATION). In organizations with a high leadership potential employee's talents are revealed, a desire of taking more responsibility than the necessary minimum can be observed, a readiness to take part in all the events connected with institution's activity is visible.
  - Ability to act as a service reflexive towards people and institutions (SERVICE). In an organization with high leadership potential there is a climate of trust and support. A desire to help in solving problems is a visible priority. Official hierarchy is very flattened, respect and prestige is gained in relations with others, not due to a position.
  - Respecting autonomy and diversity, even if difficult and different from mainstream (DIVERSITY), In an organization with high leadership potential an ability to use all the resources, also divergence and diversity is clear. Rules of autonomy let treat this divergence as an asset, not a burden [Mazurkiewicz 2011].

It is important that people taking part in and responsible for education leadership process are aware of multitude of elements necessary for final result of institution functioning and teamwork. Gaining such awareness is a moment when a development of leadership potential, of an individual or a group may start. Unfortunately, as it appeared in my research from 2010 of school principals focusing on paradigm of leadership, in which they operated, in everyday life, in practice, there is no place for being reflective or visionary. Only 3% of respondents in my research (school principals) admitted that their everyday tasks are somehow connected with setting goals, creating a vision or integrating others around tasks. On the other hand as many as 48% head-teacher unambiguously talked about tasks and behaviors, which enabled to assign them to a category of classical leadership, which is focused on ordering, assigning duties and controlling. If we add head-teachers presenting intermediate types of leadership: classical-transactional and classical-visionary, we will receive a group of 81% head-teacher who participated in research, who act in a quite authoritarian way to manage administrative issues -- control, regulations, finances, providing facilities, making renovations, and also sometimes training teachers, but almost never touching the issue of students' learning, pedagogical theories and instruction, or critical reflection of the educational process and surround-

ding world. Quite exemplary are two of the statements. First: *A head-teacher is responsible for safety of building, so they must know that it is obligatory to have a complete technical documentation, technical, inspections, chimney, gas, fire inspections etc. Evacuation plans to be prepared* and second: *A fundamental role of a head-teacher is pedagogical supervision, but they almost do not have time for it* [Mazurkiewicz 2012].

Everyday activities of the head-teachers, who took part in a research, duties they perceive as fundamental, are a far cry from the duties of an effective head-teacher<sup>2</sup> enlisted by Marzano and his colleagues [Marzano, Walters, McNulty 2005]. Sadly, one can have an impression that in Polish schools the most burning questions are: controlling and disciplining teachers, filling documents in, and bigger and smaller renovation works. There is very little reflection on the role of educational leaders in designing and ensuring conditions for teaching and learning, or promoting life-long learning. Of course there is possibility that external world demands it from people assigned to the position of school leaders but is it situation we need and desire? What systemic changes must occur, to make head-teacher take responsibility for learning process? [Mazurkiewicz 2012].

### **Crisis and educational future**

To face contemporary challenges we need open and creative people on leadership positions, who also understand the critical tasks and issues of educational leadership. It is necessary to prepare a new type of leaders. I suggest, inspired by Blanchard, that the educational leader should be defined as a person who,

<sup>2</sup> Affirmation, or recognition and celebration of successes; promoting change, or an agreement for disturbing school's balance to reach intended effects and preventing sticking in the same place for years; appropriate rewarding, or noticing differences, using flexible ways of rewarding, showing examples of excellent work in all cases; communication, or caring about efficient communication between all the students and teachers; caring about culture which directly influences students, that is reinforcing culture which directly and indirectly influences learning process and students' achievements; taking care of discipline; flexibility, that is adapting to current needs and situations; concentration on priorities; explaining convictions, or a discussion to define convictions about education, school functioning, duties of teachers and showing their value and usefulness; inviting teachers to contribute; commitment in the issues related with teachers (curriculum, methods, grading); intellectual stimulation, or ensuring teachers know the newest theories, good practices, researches' results or literature useful in their work; knowledge of the best practices in teaching, that is constant learning, knowing effective practices and guidance in this area; monitoring and evaluation, that is appropriate designing of a process of information collection to achieve a valuable feedback; optimistic attitude, or consciously constructed optimism as an important feature of an effective school; order, that is avoiding chaos and uncertainty on what should be happening; relations, or caring about effective, professional relations at school; connections, that is organizing relations with external environment – teachers, authorities, the whole community; means, or rather its readiness to be used; sensitivity to context, that is an awareness of what determines current situation of a school; visibility, that is maintaining as frequent a contact with all the employers, students and teachers and other stakeholders as possible [Marzano, Waters, McNulty 2005, pp. 41–61].

above all, has the power to persuade and reveal the potential of others, what is possible because such a leader is able to take an appropriate attitude towards himself/herself, the world and the school. Leadership is the ability to release others' abilities to perform tasks as well as possible and at the same time with the sense of reasonableness, dignity, respect for others and satisfaction [Blanchard 2007]. An educational leader shares his/her power and since he/she is a motivator at the same time, encourages others to use their own potential for the cooperation to be the best. Leadership involves the ability to build a team whose members cooperate and are orientated towards the achieving of objectives [Reinhartz & Beach 2004] which were generated from the inside of the institution, by the team.

The leader must try to follow those several instructions and remember about the value of self-knowledge, necessity to support others in discovering and developing their potential. Leadership is not tangible and is rather a social creation; it is a notion that exists in a particular social and cultural context. Attempts to understand the leadership are often accompanied by numerous myths, which does not help create a new concept [Avery 2009, pp. 26–27]. Educational leadership for new times needs constant reflection on the reality, discussion on the context, analysis of the conditions the leaders function in and an appropriate serving attitude towards colleagues which makes it possible to support them in the performance of tasks and make them aware of their own potential, scope of power and responsibility, so that they could participate in the process of taking decisions and be ready for co-leadership.

Leaders need to start a serious conversation about values of democracy, solidarity and fairness. A public debate on what education we want and what leaders we need. Only then there will be a chance to create society we really want and adequate school system, which will be able to face future challenges. It is crucial to achieve a well-understood and accepted vision of society and school, so leaders need to internalize the role of facilitator of that process. I strongly believe that discussion should be focused on moral purpose of school, on building trust, promoting deep inquiry and seeking evidence and also focused on learning and intelligent design of the learning environments.

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