THE PROBLEM OF TRAINING OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES AND ITS SOLVING STRATEGIES AT THE CONTEMPORARY HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

N.Gehrke as far back as in 1991 proposed that in pursuance of more teachers to take the role of leaders the systematic attitude to this question is necessary and provided arguments that it is needed to begin preparing students for the leadership at high school. These and other similar arguments encouraged to look at training of the leadership competencies at the high school with greater attention. Therefore, in this leadership publication the role of high schools in the process of training of the leadership competencies is reasoned, the problem of training of the leadership competencies at high school is revealed as well as the main strategies of training of the leadership competencies at high schools are surveyed.

Keywords: Leadership competencies, leadership education

As claimed by A.W.Astin at al. (2000), high schools play an extremely significant role in creating and forming the quality of leadership in the contemporary society, whereas the leadership is one of the most important results of high education. It has been determined by scientific researches that each person has the potential for leadership while students in study years could improve and improve factually their leadership skills (Zimmerman-Oster, Burkhardt, 1999; Pascarella, Terenzini, 2005), whereas when leadership abilities improve, the social activeness of young people increases, energetic and positive character traits develop, and the participation in academic activity as well as in the activity of student organizations increases (Fertman, Van Linden, 1999; Benson, Saito, 2000; Komives, Owen, et al., 2005; et al.).

C.M.Wells (2010) reasons the idea that in order to develop the leadership of teachers the systematic activity is required, whereas the input of schools into it, that is to form the

mindset and train teachers for the role of leaders, is fundamental. C.Getz (2009) who described her experience in teaching the course of leadership at university stresses the prominence of this teaching and its significance in helping students to perceive what the leadership is, what it is necessary for, and how to become a leader. The psychologist P.King (1997) states that the education that helps a student to acquire skills necessary for the leadership should become one of the basic tasks of high education. This idea is reasoned also by J.P.Dugan and S.R.Komives (2007). The results of their accomplished research revealed that the students who had participated at least in the short-term programmes of leadership training are notable for stronger leadership competencies compared to those students who hadn't participated in such programmes. Statistically significant difference of valuational attitudes was distinguished comparing the students who had participated in middle-term programmes and those who had participated in long-term programmes with the students who had participated only in onetime lessons and those who had not participated in any programmes at all. The students who have studied the leadership are given to strive for communal aim, refer to the principles of fairness and consciousness, seek after harmonious team work, and through it positive social changes.

The importance of education of leadership competencies is recognized not only by scientists, but also by some high schools. For instance, some universities appreciate the significance of leadership and name such training of students that would enable them to participate successfully in the process of leadership and encourage the society growth (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, Burkhardt, 2001; Roberts, 2003). Recently, the leadership training in the study programmes of high schools as well as in non-formal activities has become a tendency and is recognized as substantial regardless of what speciality students are going to acquire (Riggio, Ciulla, Sorenson, 2003; Schwartz, Axtman, Freeman, 1998).

Thus contemporary high schools face the problem of how to acquire leadership competencies.

It is observed that when the importance of leadership started to be highlighted the majority of high schools included the leadership as a study subject; however, the theorists and practicians of leadership indicate that the leadership competencies and abilities of students have not changed a lot due to this. The gap between theory and practice of the leadership is indicated as the most frequent reason for that, i.e. students with acquired theoretical knowledge of leadership simply do not know how to apply it in practice (Middlehurst, 2008; Lindsay, Foster, et al., 2009; et al.). It is also denoted that the training of leadership competencies is a complex process since it works with the development and perfection of a

personality (Lindsay, Foster, et al., 2009). Convictions and experiences of students have strong influence on the quality of this process (Reed, 2004; DiPaolo, 2008), whereas each student has frequently an individual understanding of the leadership as well as different competencies and abilities necessary for the expression of leadership (Foster, Lindsay, 2008). It is problematic to find the strategy that would satisfy the needs and abilities of all students.

The problem solving strategies of training of the leadership competencies at high school. Leadership researchers notice that there is a lack of empirical research designed for the leadership training at high schools (e.g. Dugan, Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008). However, some researchers state that, recently, the growing tendency of such research has been observed. For instance, J.P.Dugan and S.R.Komives (2007) accomplished the research of training of the leadership competencies at high schools in the USA and revealed that in recent 15 years, especially since 2000, the main directions and tendencies of leadership training at high schools have been formed while it has been influenced by the succession of reasons, for example, the shift of leadership theories from features to relationship model, the reorientation of public sector employment and the application of team work principles, volunteering ideas and the establishment of socially active communities, the development of professional skills of leadership educators as well as the establishment of various leadership organizations and associations, the organization of conferences on leadership themes and the need for leadership educators.

Summing up the research on training of the leadership competencies in the study programmes of high schools three strategies recommended by the authors for the formal and non-formal leadership training are distinguished: (1) the promotion of involvement training of the leadership competencies into curricula; (2) the promotion of practical activity and (3) non-formal training of the leadership competencies.

There are various ideas on how the activities training the leadership competencies could be involved into formal education programmes. For instance, C.Brungardt et al. (2006), J.P.Dugan and S.R.Komives (2007), D.Eich (2008), M.F.Cox, O.Cekic, S.G.Adams (2010), et al. think that the leadership study subject or programme is necessary at high school. Such opinion is reasoned by the idea that students should at least get acquainted with the leadership theory as well as realize how the leadership could be educated. There are opinions found that the leadership study subject should provide the fundamental knowledge about the leadership theory and practice together with the knowledge what is the leadership necessary for, what

values should leaders use as basis, what competencies are needed in order to become an effective leader and how they could be trained.

It is indicated that leadership subjects should be involved into the study programmes of first years. Some authors by their research reason the idea that only one study subject is not enough for the effective training of leadership competencies, i.e. in order to train the conflict management, decision making, job and time planning and other competencies corresponding activity should be involved into other study subjects (Brungardt et al., 2006; Dugan, Komives, 2007; Cox, Cekic, Adams, 2010; et al.). There are the opinions found that the discussions on socio-cultural issues could help to train some of the leadership competencies in study years. It is claimed that the discussions on more miscellaneous themes help to train communicational abilities and the abilities to express thoughts, educate the ability to reason and justify one's opinion and, at the same time, listen attentively to another opinion as well as search for and seek compromise (Dugan, Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008; Arellano, Torres, Valentine, 2009; et al.). Similarly, the importance of application of active teaching methods is emphasized   (Haworth, Conrad, 1997; Chickering, Gamson, 1991; Day, 2001; Arellano, Torres, Valentine, 2009; et al.); the idea that study activity and work in teams should be organized in such a way that as large number of students as possible would have a chance to be a formal leader and evaluate the significance of taking the responsibility (Dugan, Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008; et al.).

Another strategy of the leadership training distinguished by leadership theorists and practicians is the practical work in which students have a possibility to be leaders, i.e. the practical work during lectures, study practice, internships, activity in various communities, etc. The significance of it is motivated by the following statement: the leadership is learned by acting in it. During practical work students have a chance to take responsibility, organize a team, plan and distribute tasks, motivate a team for their fulfillment, test different leadership styles, and compare the leadership in different contexts and situations. This helps to train organizational skills, plan, realize the significance of values and team work, control emotions, and train self-confidence (Day, 2001; Brungardt et al., 2006; Dugan, Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008; Cox, Cekic, Adams, 2010; et al.). According to V.Šernas (2005), practical activity helps to transform speciality knowledge into living knowledge by independent purposeful applying of knowledge in practical activity of a specialist. Therefore, it is relevant to guarantee the close interaction of theoretical and practical preparation, knowledge and abilities as it is the basis of corresponding competencies of future specialists. Speaking about practical activity, the idea of mentor involvement into the process of training of students'

leadership competencies is raised. The influence of mentoring on better leadership achievements of students is based on scientific research as well. It is thought that mentors (last year students, teachers, supervisors of practices and internships, and other persons with bigger experience) help students to create relations with high school, motivate to involve more actively into academic, artistic, sport activity as well as the activity of student and youth organizations, learn new skills and behavior, and realize the particularity of a chosen speciality (Day, 2001; Brungardt et al., 2006; Dugan, Komives, 2007; Scandura, 2011; et al.).

The researchers of training of the leadership competencies indicate that these competencies are trained effectively not only in the process of formal education, but also by participating in the activities of non-formal education. It is stated that the participation of students in student and youth organizations helps to realize the significance of meaningful participation and learn to work in team. Leadership practicians suggest their students to choose at least one organization and delve into its activity, objectives, try to combine one's personal ambitions and the aims of an organization and learn to become a team member (Dugan, Komives, 2007; Cox, Cekic, Adams, 2010; et al.). J.P.Dugan and S.R.Komives (2007) denotes that formal leaders of student and youth organizations more frequently have stronger leadership abilities, more often have the features characteristic of leaders. In the works of several authors one more idea on training of the leadership competencies is found that is the cooperation of high and regular schools. Leadership educators agree unanimously that the student experience from regular school when entering high school has a particularly significant role. That's why it is suggested to develop cooperation with schools, organize mutual projects, conferences, seminars, etc. In this way it is aimed that students as early as possible would realize the importance of meaningful leadership, its essence, and begin to get ready for it (Dugan, Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008; et al.).

Regardless of what ideas of leadership training are raised, majority of authors emphasize the necessity of creation of learning atmosphere at high school beneficial for the leadership of students. It includes the organization of studies, the involvement of students as well as the professionalism of teachers. The research reveals that the students having educators – leaders, who are strong in leadership theory and practice and are able to motivate, reach much higher learning results and, at the same time, have stronger leadership qualities. It is also important to create such learning environment in which students would feel themselves safe and would not be afraid of expressing their own opinion (Dugan, Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008; Cox, Cekic, Adams, 2010; et al.). Besides, (self)-evaluation of the leadership competencies of students is significant. This would help to realize one's positive

and negative features, systemize abilities, knowledge, and evaluate the lack of what knowledge and abilities is present (Dugan, Komives, 2007; Eich, 2008).

Conclusion

Thus the question of training of the leadership competencies at high school was started to be raised a couple of decades ago but it began to be analyzed basically only several years ago. Both scientists and the same high schools reason the necessity to train the leadership competencies of students at high schools. Foreign authors who have analyzed the training of leadership competencies of students from different study programmes at high school distinguish and highlight some strategies of formal and non-formal education. Nevertheless, it has to be agreed with the research conclusions done by C.Brungardt et al. (2006) that the strategies of training of the leadership competencies at different high schools are basically similar, whereas it is complicated to evaluate the efficiency of separate activities fulfilled as they have been fulfilled only for a decade. B.Z.Posner (2004) reasons the difficulty of evaluation of educational strategies also by a large gap between the leadership theory and practice.

Yet still none of the ideas of training of the leadership competencies is considered as superior than others. The creators of post-industrial leadership paradigms notice that after the change of understanding what the leadership is, i.e. after it has started to be evaluated as the process of cooperation, the educational strategies become different as well. The only thing that remains is to agree with the thought of J.Rost (1991) and D.V.Day (2001) that the concept of training of the leadership competencies alters and the education could not be based on only one discipline but the integrated strategy needs to be applied.

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