

EDUCATIONAL WELLBEING IN RELATION WITH LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

In the current educational context, marked by deep, complex and rapid transformations, rethinking the concept of educational well being takes on special significance, being considered the fertile ground for a quality education that favors outstanding performance on multiple levels for all educational actors. The fundamental objective of the paper consists in highlighting the importance of the development of educational well-being at the level of each entity, as a trigger of performance, in direct correlation with authentic leadership, which is responsible for creating a positive socio-emotional microclimate favorable to ensuring well-being in every school. The research methodology is based on the scientific investigation in the specialized literature, through the analysis of numerous articles, studies, indexes related to this field, published between the years 2020-2023 and indexed in international databases. Also, the database was completed by applying a questionnaire addressed to teachers from schools in the South-West Oltenia region, in order to identify the concern of the educational leadership and each educational actor in the creation and development of the educational well-being.

KEYWORDS: *innovation, leadership, quality, wellbeing*

DOI: 10.24818/IMC/2023/02.13

1. INTRODUCTION

Substantial and deep transformations in the world we live in leave their mark on the educational system in general, which requires rethinking and reconfiguring the innovative aspects of education. New models of educational management and leadership must focus on creating and developing the well-being of all involved, from all backgrounds and educational levels, leading to innovation on multiple levels, fostering improved outcomes, cost efficiency and equity.

The reconfiguration of management, spaces, time, people, technologies, represent necessary premises for a new, quality education, anchored in the reality of our days, which would create fertile ground for better, sustainable performances at the level of the entire educational system. Technology has great potential to drive innovation in education, and through new innovative digital pedagogies, the premises are created for creative and effective learning in a positive socio-emotional environment, with appropriate transformational leadership to facilitate the creation and development of well-being of all educational actors, with positive effects on educational performance and on the development of society in general.

Education systems are already moving towards more flexibility and differentiation, and this trend has been accelerated by the pandemic. Digital learning tools can enable schools to provide the diverse solutions they need. A more sophisticated perspective on the ways in which innovation

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occurs in education is required. Successful innovations depend on a collaborative effort by all actors and stakeholders both inside and outside the system with a common goal. Successful innovations in education often rely on strong horizontal professional collaboration and accountability within the profession. Again, we are talking about multi-faceted collaboration, where leadership is the driving force, thus ensuring fertile ground for innovation in education for the well-being of all involved. We can therefore speak of "managerial synapses", strong, viable and lasting with all the organization's stakeholders, which ensure all the necessary framework for improving the quality of education, a key factor in increasing organizational performance, in current context (Nicolescu & Nicolescu, 2022).

An innovative approach to education puts the well-being of students and teachers at the center of concerns, being considered the "heart" of the educational process, which constantly beats for the purpose of sustainable development of the entire educational system. It is a complex concept that incorporates a lot of factors, sometimes difficult to anticipate and control, very deep, having a huge area of coverage, resembling a huge iceberg.

2. METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire composed of 36 questions was formulated and distributed to high school teachers and directors in the S-W Oltenia region educational system. The questionnaire was completed during several meetings between the school teaching staff and the researcher, usually after an educational seminar. The participants were given a debriefing page describing what the study entails and the time it takes to complete. The participants were asked to give their gender, age, position (teacher or director) and whether their school was in the town (urban) or the countryside (rural). A tick box was added for giving consent to participation. After each question and at the end of the questionnaire space was provided for written additional information, suggestions and views. The questionnaire was composed of 8 questions relevant to school infrastructure, 8 questions on learning procedures and 20 questions on contextual relationships in schools. The participants were asked to answer the questions by referring to what they believe is necessary within the school environment in order to ensure social, emotional, educational well-being in their schools. A Likert-type scale of 1 to 5, ranging from total disagreement to total agreement, was provided as a basis for the responses. It is believed that no ethical considerations arise from this process, as total confidentiality of the data provided was ensured.

In this study there were 105 participants, with 95 being female and only 10 males. There were no missing data and therefore all responses were used in the results. The mean age of the 95 female participants was 38.1 (min.22 and max 55) and for the 10 males 35 (min 22 and max 28) years. There were only 2 responses from school directors and therefore no data are presented for this category. Also, the limited responses from male teachers (10), does not allow further analysis. The research methodology is based on the scientific investigation in the specialized literature, through the analysis of numerous articles, studies, indexes related to this field, published between the years 2020-2023 and indexed in international databases

3. WELLBEING CHALLENGES

Compared to what was presented previously and based on the observations and interviews conducted with teachers and principals from schools in the urban and rural areas, it is noted that all the factors involved are aware of the need to ensure and develop this educational well-being, as a factor trigger and determinant for a better quality of education.

Research in wellbeing has been growing in recent decades (e.g., Diener et al., 1999; Kahneman et al., 1999; Stratham & Chase, 2010; Seligman, 2011) However, very early on in the research Ryff and Keyes (1995) identified that ,the absence of theory-based formulations of well-being is

puzzling' (pp. 719–720). The question of how wellbeing should be defined (or spelt) still remains largely unresolved, which has given rise to blurred and overly broad definitions of wellbeing' (Forgeard et al., 2011, p. 81)

Well-being is a subjective term with a number of definitions, such as: a dynamic state in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productivity and creativity, build strong and lasting relationships with others and contribute to their community (Foresight). The Mental Capital and Well-Being Project, (2008).

For some, well-being is about quality of life; for others it is a symptom of work-life balance. Well-being is important for organizational performance. It is diminished by stress, bullying and harassment. (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 230) see well-being as a seesaw, "when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to cope with a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges rather than resources, the seesaw sinks, along with their well-being, and vice versa. Well-being is at the same time growth-oriented, motivation, fulfillment, self-confidence, and the assumption of long-term goals by both students and teachers. It means "functioning well, on several levels - cognitive, social, spiritual, emotional and physical" (Seligman, 2011). It is a difficult and long-term process that requires a whole-school approach, good planning and organization, teacher and principal training, so that the school grows over time as a home of well-being. This approach brings about major transformations that will impact children's adult lives.

From the perspective of positive psychology, we can talk about subjective well-being that refers to all types of evaluations, both positive and negative, that people make regarding their lives. Thus, we can talk about reflective cognitive evaluations, such as life satisfaction and job satisfaction, interest and commitment, but also affective reactions in response to various events, such as joy and sadness. Thus, subjective well-being is an umbrella term for the various assessments that people make regarding their lives, the events that take place over time, their physical condition, as well as the conditions in which they live" (Diener, 2006).

Two measures of well-being are found in personal and societal well-being. The former refers to a satisfying life and positive functioning with positive feelings, while the latter refers to supportive relationships, trust, and belonging (Day & Gu, 2019). Subjective well-being that promotes reported life satisfaction and psychological well-being influence longevity, extending it by 4 to 10 years (Kirkwood et al., 2008). Feeling appreciated is an aspect of well-being. It is therefore a cause for concern that TALIS 2018 found that, on average, across the 48 participating OECD countries, only 26% of teachers agreed that their profession is valued in society (OECD, 2018).

4. LEADERSHIP – A KEY FACTOR IN ENSURING WELL-BEING

But all this cannot be achieved without authentic leadership, which sets in motion all the gears in the educational space. So we see the importance of wellbeing for the school workforce and the key role that leaders play. Attention to well-being has become increasingly pertinent as a result of the pressures placed on schools by the COVID pandemic. A human resource management is an essential element for educational organizations, playing a critical role through its impact on organizational viability and relative performance (Boxell & Purcell, 2017).

It is important to establish a number of connections, such as: the links between workload and well-being; identifying the negative effects of overload on well-being; exploring how the workload, wellbeing and resilience of the school workforce can be improved; highlighting the role of leadership and leadership styles in supporting the sustainable development of organizations.

It outlines ways in which leaders can lead staff to create organizationally, emotionally, socially healthy climates with a positive impact on the organization. OECD Studies on International Teaching and Learning (OECD, 2019) identify five strategic issues that leaders need to address:

- Selecting candidates with strong motivation and the right attitude to become lifelong learners and professional workers;
- Focus on induction and career mentoring;
- Working conditions and a school climate conducive to the well-being of teachers and students;
- Sense of trust and respect.

Leaders have an important role to play where effective learning-centred leadership can make a significant contribution to student outcomes by: setting goals and expectations; strategic resources; planning; teacher and curriculum evaluation; promoting professional development and providing a well-managed supportive environment (Timperley & Robertson, 2011). School leaders should encourage critical review of existing working procedure and exploration of new approaches. Therefore, the organizational cultures that leaders help shape are crucial:

- The workforce in schools is strongly influenced by favorable environments;
- Leadership styles that support thriving, non-toxic environments are crucial;
- Sustainable and healthy school environments are related to leadership style;
- Supportive environments are shaped and built by school leaders;
- Professional development opportunities contribute to well-being and performance;
- Workload and welfare must be assessed at a strategic level.

In general, leaders must place their actions in the context of promoting greater sustainability, include the well-being of the workforce and act ethically with integrity.

Leaders have an overwhelming role in supporting everyone involved in the goal of Ensuring Wellbeing. Thus we can think of a model based on five basic elements, according to Figure 1.

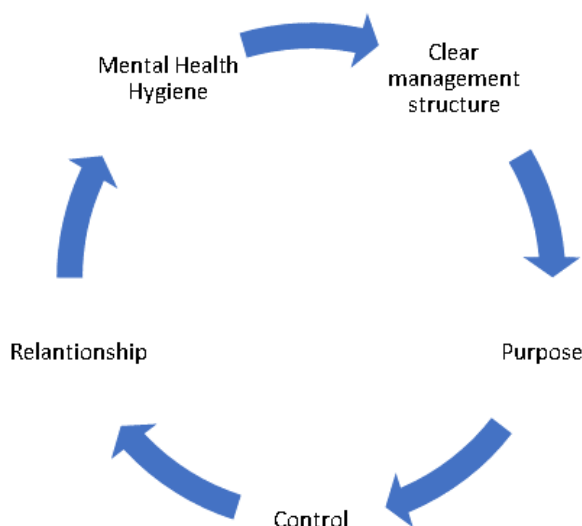


Figure 1. Ways to support the staff
Source: adapted to Education Support (2022)

Thus, in terms of clear management structures we can exemplify as follows (Education Support, 2022):

- Encouraging staff to establish a work routine – but this should not be rigid, but should be given as much flexibility as possible to allow people to manage childcare and other personal demands,
- Prioritize objectives weekly,
- Permanent information of the team; Teachers face new and difficult problems. They will need support to reflect on these issues and deal with the emotional impact.

Regarding the purpose, we note:

- Supporting staff to maintain a clear sense of purpose – why they are there to do what they do (meaning of purpose);
- Supporting teachers to focus on how they can help students stay connected to the school community.

Control as another way of providing staff support refers to the fact that all teachers like to have a sense of control to some extent. Managers must encourage staff to distinguish between what they can and cannot control. Thus they cannot control to a large extent: Learning outcomes; The extent to which families respect the school's approach; The normal standard of safety and protection. They can control when they consider the areas where they can make a significant difference:

- Showing concern for their students;
- Providing ongoing support and feedback.

From a relational perspective, given that education is a deeply social profession, we must have good collegial relations to promote teacher resilience. Thus we note the following aspects:

- Helping staff identify which colleagues can energize and support them and encouraging them to contact and connect with these colleagues.
- Development of a two-way flow in the school or university network, sustained and supported.

Good mental health hygiene is important to keep everyone well. Managers must encourage staff to take care of themselves and must model this behavior by emphasizing: creativity in everyday work, practicing gratitude (focusing on what is positive), accepting uncertainty, accepting and understanding negative emotions. That is why leaders and managers in the educational space must focus on aspects regarding: ensuring the well-being and resilience of the entire school by providing leadership in a psychological format, supporting the values of responsibility, honesty, integrity, leadership, objectivity, openness and selflessness; improving the main learning purpose of the educational entity.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistics performed on the data collected is presented by the sum of responses grouped in the 3 categories of questions, i.e., infrastructure, learning procedures on contextual relationships, since the data were not sufficient to differentiate between individual questions. The responses to the questionnaire are shown in Figure 2 and 3.

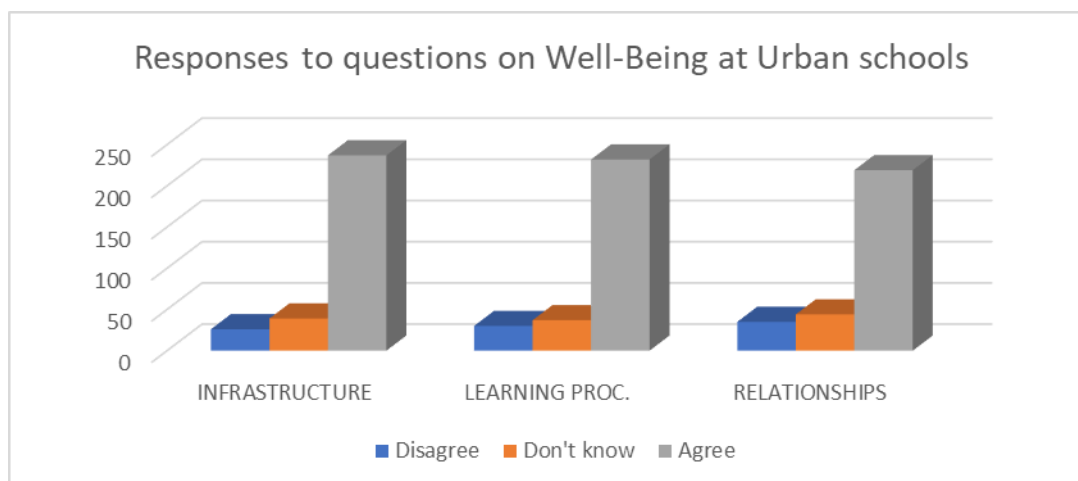


Figure 2. Responses of female Professors in Urban Schools in the S-W Oltenia educational area

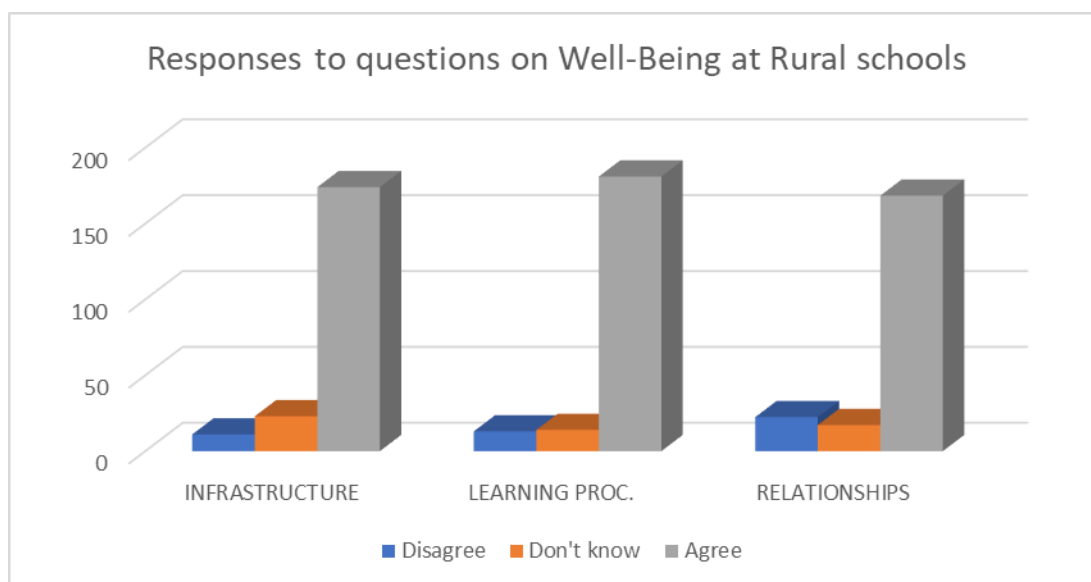


Figure 3. Responses of female Professors in Rural Schools in the S-W Oltenia educational area

For statistical purposes we grouped the participants according to age, creating 3 groups: female Professors of age between 22 and 35 years, female Professors of age between 36 and 45 years, and female Professors of age between 46 and 55.

Analysis of the responses according to the age groups (not presented) showed no statistically significant differences, indicating that age does not play a significant role in differentiating the opinions of female professors in either rural or urban schools.

The result presented herewith indicate that the professors at schools in the S-W Oltenia area are informed and are strongly supportive of the principles and methodologies pertinent to wellbeing in the educational system. Their responses overwhelmingly support that social, emotional and educational relational conditions at the school level are important in order to create and develop the well-being of both students and teachers leading to the improvement of learning outcomes and school success. There is no statistically significant difference in relation to age or whether the school is in a rural or urban setting. This finding is highly promising indicating that teachers are eager to apply new methodologies and organizational practices and tools in their schools, to achieve

higher educational outcomes. At the same time, all participants understand the importance of authentic leadership based on novel approaches in the sphere of humanistic, psychological, innovative social relationships in the school coupled with the most advanced management tools, thus attaining effective and efficient education goals.

This research highlighted some questions, which received increased numbers of "disagree" and "don't know" responses, compared to other questions in the applied questionnaire. These findings, although not conclusive, indicate that issues pertinent to the school setting, i.e. classroom conditions, existence of dedicated and properly equipped spaces for the relaxation of students, and teaching staff, regular meetings and areas for parent and teacher meetings, involvement of parents, knowledge on stress creation and ways of helping students who feel stressed and how school management can improve its own managerial capacity, need to be faced and tackled with novel approaches and tools. Finally, the question concerning the existence of an own system of rewards for the employed staff (such as: letters of thanks, diplomas, support given for scientific activity and professional development, the awarding of honorary titles of teacher of the month/year, etc.), was highlighted as an issue that needs to be further studied in order to find ways of creating a system where by teachers are given incentives in order to apply novel systems in education and educational management in the future.

Of course, other issues have not been studied in the research presented herewith. For example, an important issue highlighted in recent studies centers on the suggestion that distributed leadership across teams seems to be more successful than what we know as "traditional" leadership. Based on studies that indicate that leadership has been shown to be a characteristic that can be grown and advanced by learning and collaborative actions within the school staff, it is suggested that further research has to be performed in this novel approach to "collective" leadership. The findings hopefully will indicate ways and approaches to shape policy on both the individual and organizational, to achieve shared goals and probably the role and interconnectivity of other organizations, such as universities, government, school personnel unions, etc.

Finally, the author intends to start a large-scale quantitative study on teacher autonomy in so far as, it seems that teachers are also important, working hand-in-hand with the school leadership to set and apply goals that increase the social mission of the school. This will align performance management, professional growth, autonomy and communication, to the goals set by a collective approach and give us the opportunity to gain a greater appreciation and understanding through continued research of the impact of how people feel, in order to have an impact on pupil well-being and outcomes.

6.CONCLUSIONS

Managers and leaders of educational entities have an obvious role in establishing an organizational culture that positively promotes the well-being of students and teachers. Leadership based on principles and values clearly supports the well-being of all involved. Thus the leader must build a culture of well-being and psychosocial resilience within the team, becoming aware of their own feelings, fears and motivation and demonstrating trust, transparency and integrity. It is also necessary to prioritize time and resources, treat all team members fairly, recognize the role of each member, encourage the expression of positive emotions even in difficult situations (for example, gratitude, mutual support, determination, pride and optimism), Assertive communication, open, assessing risks and sharing them with team members to jointly find ways to reduce the effects of risks, empowering team members, developing empathy and kindness in action to reduce tension and encourage team cooperation, supporting staff on multiple levels in order to you would help everyone to flourish; mutual support in each other; collective and collaborative leadership; modeling with calmness, kindness and compassion any difficult situation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was partially supported by the University Constantin Brancusi of Targu Jiu (grant number 22/20.03.2023)

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