MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE FOR KINDERGATEN

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Abstract: Influenced by diversity and the social phenomena's dinamics, the education receives new values today, felt from the early stages of schooling. Early education's promotion and the new Curriculum for kindergarten proves the fact that this start segment of the romanian educational system has really surpassed the other structures and continues to enjoy a constructive approach, based on communication, motivation, participation and training.
The change procees involves several different components which are also found at the kindergarten, in a special way. There are also obstacles which can stop the change process. Those can, however, be eliminated by finding solutions to them, in order for the children, their teachers and their parents to benefit from the positive effects of the educational change.

Keywords: change, change management, obstacles, organizational change, communication.

The diversity and dynamics of all the mechanisms that function at a social level also have direct repercussions over education. The whole of them can be felt from the first stages of schooling and implicitly targets early education.

In their quality as variables of the changing process, the preschool teaching institutes perceive the passing (fast or slow) from a specific of the educational endings to another. They try to manifest a balance at the level of contents offered for sculpting the most youthful personalities. For our educational system, in the lines of our New Curriculum for the preschool education, the availability of specialists to look for the best solutions is remarked today. The solution are sought for a timely education of superior quality, to offer answers for the multitude of question of preschoolers, but also to those of their parents/tutors/teachers, including the implementation of new instructive-educational contents, seen as an opportunity. Therefore, the level of preschool education has surpassed the other educational structures from the Romanian system. They enjoy a constructive approach, based on communication, motivation, participation and formation.

A change in education assumes a special relationship between variables, strategies and the stages of the process of change (Iosifescu, Ş., 2001).

At the educational preschool level, this relationship is particulised, the process of change reffering to the following aspects:

Variables:

 Identity – the changed phenomena
 Duration – the persistence of the introduced changes
 Direction – the way of change (evolving or devolving)
 Rate – the production rate of change
 Level – the location in the system

Phases of the change process:

 Unfreezing – the reduction of forces that conserve the actual behaviour, the recognicion of the need to change and improve

☐ Change – the development of necessities, attitudes and new behaviours, the implementation of change

☐ Refreezing – The stabilization of the obtained situation after the change through the intervention of the support mechanisms: politics, norms.

Strategies:

☐ The steps initiated and promoted at a national/local level.

The effects of the change process:

☐ Behavioural modifications – persuation, rewards, penalties

☐ Organizational manipulations

☐ The change of the organizational culture

☐ The introduction of the technological innovations

☐ The creation of stimulating environments: associations, agencies, foundations.

Particulizing, we are speaking of:

Table no. 1 (adaptation after Iosifescu, 2001)

Variables	Phases	Strategies	The effects of the change process
Identity- the changed phenomena: The introduction of the New Curriculum **Duration-** the persistancy of the introduced changes: Maintaining the New Curriculum **Direction-** the way of change: evolving **Rate** – the production rate of change Success rate **Level** – the location in the system of the preschool educational institutes	**Unfreezing** – Formation programme **The change** – the implementation of programmes at an insitutional level (at the level of microgroups) **Refreezing** – The New Curriculum, the refference point of the actual educational politics	**Politics** – The National Strategy of implementation of the New curriculum at a preschool level The Local Strategy of implementing a New Curriculum at preschool level Piloting a New Curriculum	**Behavioural Modifications**– timeline points of refference, acceptance of the attitude changes, the communicational registry **Organizatorical manipulations** – the capacity to apply new strategies in the group of children **The introduction of technological innovations** Valuing some educational software **The creation of stimulating environments:** developing partnerships with the local community

The process of change is not an easy one. People prefer the certitude and certainty and that's why any change can be and is looked at with fear at least. There are few who come and embrace change without any doubts whatsoever. The adaptation to change is gradual, each

individual and organization following a certain cycle of change, characterized by a series of steps or mandatory phases, described by C. Carnal (Iosifescu, Ş., 2001).

The composing phases of the change cycle (Năstase, M., 2005) are:

1. *Denial*: valuing the present and the situation that is to be changed. Denial is even more violent as the change is harsher and more unexpected. Here, the self-esteem (meaning the value granted for your own individuality) rises. Apparently, the affirmation of personality is made, firstly, by denying something – while the professional performance stays relatively constant.

2. *Defense*: frustration and defensive behavior: the individual starts by understanding the fact that this change is inevitable and that he has to deal with it. Both performance and the self-esteem are dropping at this point. From here results a very important consequence for the educational reform processes: it can't be asked, because great performance can not be "produced" in the early phases of change. That is why an early evaluation of a change brings wrong results.

3. *Exclusion*: anxiety caused by the unbearable present; the future, however, starts to be looked at with some confidence; the acceptance of reality begins and also direct, constructive participation at the change process. When the individual starts to "change the cards", this thing is due to that it's been understood that "things can't go on like this anymore", because performance, as well as the self-esteem are at their lowest level.

4. *Adaptation*: it works both ways – of the change to the individual and of the individual to the change; it's realized with difficulty, nonlinear, the performance rate rise slow, which often results in anger and dejection.

5. *Internalization:* the new system is eventually created; the new processes, as well as the new relationships between people are accepted, tried and adapted; the new behavior becomes "normal", (Năstase, M., 2005) which results in "rebuilding" the performance and the self-esteem. Now the individual is prepared for a new cycle.

Barriers in the way of change – solutions to remove those barriers
Barriers in the way of change at individual level

People activate various barriers in the way of change, which have to be known and approached. The opposition to change is not a "disease", because it is natural, until a certain point. Each teacher has to be aware of these barriers in order to overcome them without causing dangerous dysfunctions, irreconcilable conflicts and major frustrations.

J. Adams şi C. Carnall have described the main categories of barriers which appear in the way of change:

a. Perceptual barriers:

- *the saturation* owned to the overloading of some perceptive channels and to the tendency of not using all the perceptual channels;

- *the stereotyping*: the ilusion of perceiving something in a certain way and then not to be able to perceive it in any other different way

- *the false target*: the difficulty to isolate the message or the issue from the mass of irrelevant signals or informations or the contrar tendency of determining the problematic area too strictly.

b. Cognitive barriers:

- *the ignorance*: the lack of a correct information;

- *the previous matter*: sticking to a way in which the matter was fixed for the first time;

- *the inflexibility* of the intellectual strategies or the automatic, repetitive, without reflection use of the same strategies;

- *the substitution*: the illegitimate replacement of a new problem with an already known one and, therefore, applying the usual solving strategies;

- *the selective retention*: only those ideas/arguments which correspond to a known theory are accepted.

c. Personal-emotional barriers:

- *the whim*;

- *the habit*: preference for something that became familiar;

- *dependence and conformism* of the group's opinions, of those of the co-workers, but most importantly, of those of the bosses;

- *the authoritarianism and dogmatism*: the authoritative people don't accept the changes from the outside, unless they are proposed or supported by the bosses;

- *the risking fear* and the incapacity to tolerate ambiguity: we feel safe only if we have to do with certain certitudes; incertitude leads to:

- losing the self-confidence, which compensates with the need to maintain an invariable and favorable image of self ("good boss", "eminent teacher", "competent person" etc.)

- looking for the affective safety in the past, for example by adding to the revolutionary models: "back to...";

preoccupation for judging and not for generating ideas: when the idea is new and the dates are incomplete, we tend to find "con" arguments instead of "pro";

- the inability to "incubate" the ideas and the wish to find quick solutions: insufficient reflection leads to rejection or uncritical aproval of the new ideas.

d. Environment barriers:

- *homeostasis*: all the systems, including the social ones, tend to maintain the existant balance;

- *the lack of support:* the change or the new solution to a problem are seen as threats for individuals, groups, organizations, these blocking the new ideas through ignorance, ridicularization or excess analasys;

- *unnaccepting critics:* many people, even those generating the new ideas, can create blockages through fanatic support of their own conceptions;

- *„self realized prophecies"*: opinion polls and social predictions have the "brave" tendancy of self realization – their knowledge conducts their efforts in a specific direction, from which their predictions are also confirmed;

e. Cultural barriers:

- *taboos*: the problems that can not be approached and discussed also remain unsolved;

- *„substitutional censorship – of the Super-Ego"*: applying ethical-moral norms perceived in childhood from authoritorial adults stops the exit from a certain conceptual and cultural mindset, inducing blind respect for tradition;

- *the fundamental intelectual assumptions* of our European society, of greek-roman and of christian tradition like:

☐ „only ration, logic are good and sentiments, intuition, pleasure and games are bad"; however, many valuable ideas and fundamental discoveries have been the result of intuition or positive sentiments, of the satisfaction produced by the effort made; this assumption is the acceptance by associating with the sex: men are rational and women are intuitive.

☐ „Resolving problems - individual, group, social – is a serious business which can not be taken lightly", a sense of humor is an esential characteristic of creativity.

The dimentions of organizational change

Organizational change is approached in specialized literature from two perspectives:

The first aspect is the necessity a holistic approach of school organization – from the system to the individual unit. It starts from the idea that any school organization has more dimentions that can be approached separately, but also integrated through reforming strategies:

☐ The "productive" dimension – the school institution as an "educational enterprise"

☐ Human dimension: kindergarten as an institution of formation

☐ Structural dimension – kindergarten as a formal organism

☐ Political dimension – kindergarten as a place of public debate

☐ Systemic dimension – kindergarten as an open system

☐ Cultural dimension – kindergarten as a culture producer.

The second aspect reffers to certain conditions that need to be fullfilled in order to start an organizational change. After the majority of authors which focused on this issue, the conditions for change are:

☐ *Effectiveness*: any educational change must be brought to the level of real educational practice. Therefore, change does not become real only if it reaches the level of educational practice, of the teacher-student relationship and of the teacher's performances (evaluated not only internally, but also externally).

☐ *The strategic accent on human resource*: teachers are the ones that hold the essential role in conceiving and, foremost, in achieving and evaluating change. Next to them (directly and/or through representatives) must be students, parents and community representatives and of the civil society in general. Besides, the investment in "intelligence" is the most rewarding and represents the "cheapest" way of accomplishing a social change.

☐ *Comunication*: educational change has chances of succes only if many channels of communication are opened in the inside and outside of the school system and if there is a total transparency in the taking of decisions (including the strategical ones). Identifying people and institutions which can make "communication links" that can ease or block the communication process is a necessity.

☐ *Motivation*: „the actors of educational change must be motivated to achieve, through incouraging innovation, rewarding the new practices and recognising "the right to fail". This is one of the many challenges of the new educational reform: how can you determine people with older experience to do new things – especially if that experience has been considered, so far, successful.

☐ *Participation*: involvment, direct or through representatives, in the reform efforts of all the interested parties, including at a strategic level, is a condition sine qua non of any social change. Lack of participation and of "the sentiment of property" blocks the initiation and adoption of reformed ideas.

☐ *Coherency*: concentrating under the aegis of a new vision of change, of all punctual programmes, present and future ones.

☐ *Expertise:* utilising in conceiving, achieving and evaluating change of the known expertise, without any political, ethnical, professional or any other type of biasing. The decision factors will take into consideration all the possibilities provided by experts (groups or individuals). Also, educational research must benefit of as many financial resources as possible.

☐ *Formation*: without the main actors of the reform, the teachers (but not only them) to be forged in the spirit of change, without them be encouraged to renew their attitude, conceptions and professional behaviour and without being formed to become "performers of highly social services and proffesionals in education", change has every chance to fail.

Groups of interest

Another issue that must permanently remain in the attention of change promoters is the taking in consideration of four groups of interest. Often, belonging to one or the other category is ambiguous or hidden. There exist four groups of interest in any change process: *„Who holds the power?", „Who has something to win?", „Who has something to lose?", „Who holds the information?".*

At the level of each group, including the professional one, there exists a method of propagating the change:

☐ 4% are the innovators
☐ 18% are those that follow the innovators
☐ 32% consist of the timely majority
☐ 32% is the late majority
☐ 6% are the conservers.

Education can no longer be limited to the inducement of a reactive and efficient adaptation of education to given situations, as it must obtain an effective-proactive adaptability, needed for existance and development in a society constantly in change:

- not only the adaptation to the environment conditions, but also the anticipation and influence of those;
- not only the answer to external factors, according to individual edowment ("reaction"), but also building, creating conditions for an optimal development, through a process of transactional type ("pro-reaction")
- not only reaching some objectives in the given conditions of costs (=efficiency), but also performing some roles and updating some competences, as diversified as possible, in existent, predictable and/or possible situations and contexts (=effectiveness).

The specialists in the theory of change consider that change in the domain of knowledge is the easiest to achieve and it takes the least time to do so. Following right after are attitudes and individual behavior. The hardest to change are the group behavior (especially the professional one) and the organizational one.

Michael Fullan (1992) indicates a series of "advices" concerning the managers from education, as following:

- understand the culture of the organization before you try to change it by formation.
- value the people you are working with and promote their professional development.
- promote what you think it's valuable.
- openly express what you consider as valid.
- promote team-work.
- offer alternative action ways.
- use birocratic means to facilitate participation and not for restricting it.
- realise conexions with the community.

In conclusion, for each of the specialist from the Romanian Educational system, from the segment of preschool, we give the following suggestions:

1. Create your own vision concerning the change in order to know what you want to implement.
2. Express the belief in you own vision.
3. Act accordingly – act according to your belief.
4. Really realise the change, by a consequent behavior.

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