

## ELEMENTS OF PROFESSOR'S TEAMWORK IN SCHOOL

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*Cooperation between two or more people means they are able to work together at a task, using communication and helping each other. It is unanimously accepted that, by cooperation, individual and group performances increase with positive effects in cognitive, affective and social areas. However, many people prefer to work in an individual or competitive system, ignoring the advantages of cooperative activities. In school, the situation is the same and, even if numerous professors agree with the advantages of cooperative learning, just a very few of them encourage it in their pupils. In the present study, we tried to identify the level at which professors want to cooperate with each other, giving in that way a good example to their pupils. The sample was composed of 60 professors who teach in an inferior secondary school from 5 villages from Bihor County, Romania. The questionnaire was composed of 32 items, which try to establish how deep interpersonal relationships are between professors from the same school and the way in which they cooperate with each other, helping pupils to learn more effectively. The results prove that, even if all professors accept that team-work could help pupils to increase their academic performances, only several teachers practice it in their current didactic activities.*

**Keywords:** cooperation, pedagogy, pupils

### The problem

Cooperation / teamwork represents one of the most important modalities to make different activities effective. So, teamwork has numerous advantages from a cognitive point of view (increasing intellectual efficiency), an emotional one (increasing the intrinsic motivation for work), and a social one (developing positive interpersonal relationships or social skills) (Popa, 2010).

Most often, teamwork in school is represented by cooperative learning. On the first impression, this process looks very simple and means to arrange pupils in small groups composed of 3-4 members, who have to solve a common task. But the reality is more complex and superficial approaches of cooperative learning in school (expressed by confusion regarding the way in which these didactic strategies could be put into action, by lack of trust about its efficiency, by isolation policy promoted by many schools or teachers and, not finally, by their reticence regarding cooperative learning and preference for individual or competitive one) could create the premises for failure of

that educational vision (Popa & Laurian, 2007:39). On the contrary, cooperation in schools tries to promote superior academic results, positive interpersonal relationships and good mental health. But if professors want cooperative learning to become effective, they should respect its basic principles: positive interdependence, individual responsibility, promoting positive interpersonal relationships, social skills and group evaluation. More than that, professors should understand the way in which that process is working (Slavin, 1995:27). It is very important to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom and in school, based on mutual confidence among educational actors. Different conflicts between pupils (which could be considered normal in a school) can be effectively solved using those acquired social skills. On the other hand, the main techniques which can be used by teachers to stimulate cooperative learning are the following: homework checking by each pupil himself or for his colleague, engaging in discussions, instruction or summing, learning / understanding / writing texts, solving of different ideas conflicts, projects or group portfolio. In the present paper, we don't intend to make a specific analysis of this phenomenon, remembering that cooperative learning (like that of the entire educational process based on critical thinking) represents an excellent opportunity to involve pupils in didactic activity and to diminish any "apathy" related to the school (Blândul, 2005).

But even if they accept that cooperative learning is very important for all pupils, many teachers haven't developed the necessary skills to apply this type of didactic strategy in daily activity. This happens because in initial training courses for didactic staff, a big accent is put on individual or competitive learning, but not on a cooperative one (Mitchell & Weiler, 2011:54). This is the reason why numerous researchers suggest various training courses for didactic staff who want to improve their personal skills for cooperative learning or teamwork in school. In this sense, M. Baldwin and Keating (1998:291-309) organized a few workshops for professors who taught in inferior secondary school to help them to develop their communication, solving problems or teambuilding skills. The didactic strategies used in those workshops included role-playing, oratory, university lecture, giving examples, organizing different common activities in which pupils had a specific role and so on. In 2000, W. D. Nance proposed a program named *System Analyzed and Design* (S.A.&D.) to develop competences of cooperation and leadership for educational projects managers. The author used new Technology of Information and Communication (e-mail, www etc.) to encourage cooperation among professors in virtual environment. A. C. Rule and Patricia Kyle (2008:291-295) suggested a program to stimulate the cooperation at the level of the whole school, involving pupils, teachers and parents as well. The main activities referred to involving parents in the educational process, editing a weekly or monthly newsletter, for every class to debate interesting and actual topics, celebrating together different events from school life and so on. The authors observed that in such type of school interpersonal relationships among educational actors improved considerably and academic results of pupils did as well. Also the program named DISCCRS (the Dissertations Initiative for the Advancement of Climate Change Research) proposed by R. B. Mitchell and S. Weiler (2011:55-62) addressed for PhD Students wants to promote cooperative learning and changing attitudes of the whole society regarding this subject.

## The objectives

However, there are not many professors who have access to these kinds of courses and who can develop such kinds of competences. In Romania, the problem is more complicated, because only a small percentage of teachers can benefit from this type of training. In such circumstances, in the present study, we intend to identify the level in which professors agree to cooperate with one another to solve different problems that they confront in school. The specific objectives for the present research are the following: (1) to identify how teachers ask / offer support for a colleague who is in difficulty; (2) to identify the level of cooperation among colleagues in order to solve existing problems in school and (3) to identify how teachers cooperate among themselves to support students in need.

## The sample

The research was conducted in schools from a rural area: Avram Iancu, Bogei, Carasau, Les and Șuncuiuș (Bihor Romania). The group of subjects was composed of 60 teachers (N = 60). The number of subjects was divided in equal percentage between those 5 schools. Thus, in the school from Avram Iancu 8 teachers were interviewed, at the school from Bogei - 11 teachers, at the school from Carasau - 14 teachers, at the school from Les - 16 teachers and at the school from Șuncuiuș – 10 professors. Of these, 37% had tenure in education, 42% - second degree, and the remaining 21% first degree. 58.6% of the subjects were female and 41.4% men.

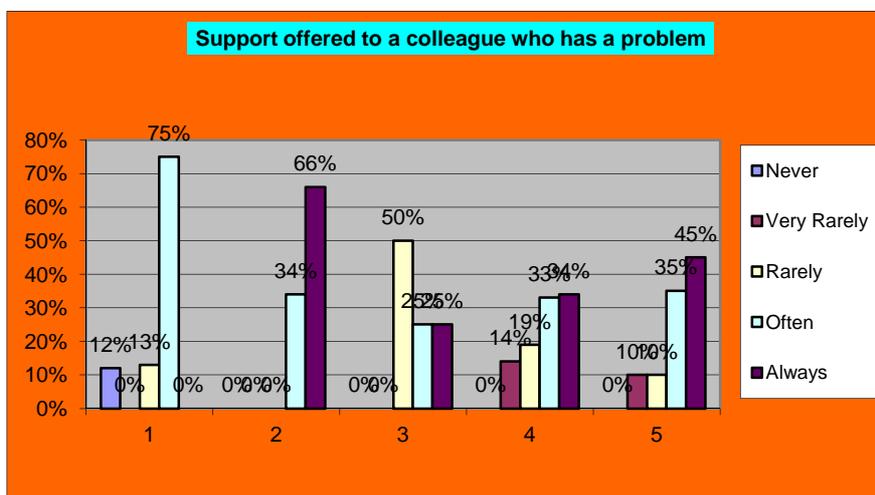
## The research methodology

To conduct this research, the group of subjects was administered a questionnaire consisting of 32 items, which investigate the ways of collaboration between school and family educational crisis management, cooperation among teachers and extra teaching etc. This questionnaire was administrated during the academic year 2010 / 2011. Quantitative interpretation of the results was done by calculating the frequency responses of subjects and presentation of obtained data was performed as histograms.

## The results

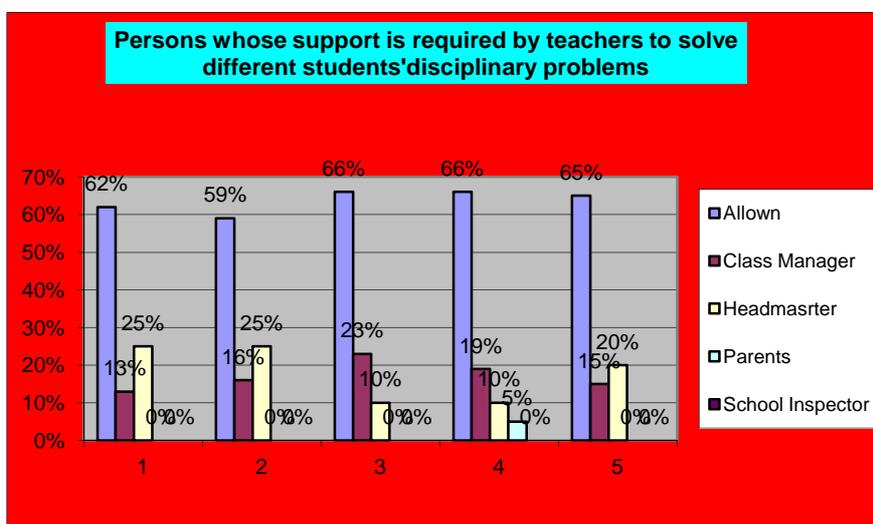
The obtained results of our research are presented in the following pictures (1 = School from Avram Iancu, 2 = School from Bogei, 3 = School from Carasau, 4 = School from Les and 5 = School from Suncuius).

Picture 1



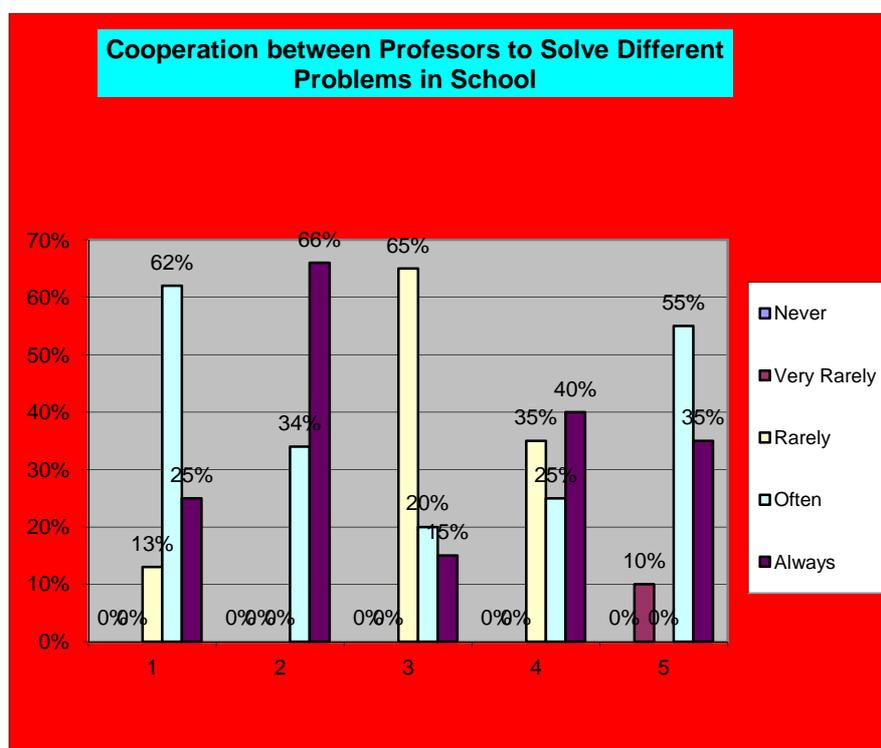
Analyzing Picture 1, we see that most teachers are willing to assist each other when one of their colleagues needs help. The best at this point are teachers who teach in schools from Bogei (66.66%) and Şuncuiuş (45%), who always answer to the demands of their colleagues, while in contrast, there are the teachers from the schools of Avram Iancu (12.5% - never) and Carasau (50% - rarely). In the first case, we can talk about a big school with many teachers, some do not even know each other, while the Carasau situation is reversed, meaning that few teachers teach here, mostly commuting and thus having no time to know and communicate with each other. Overall, the results are good and most teachers help each other when needed.

Picture 2



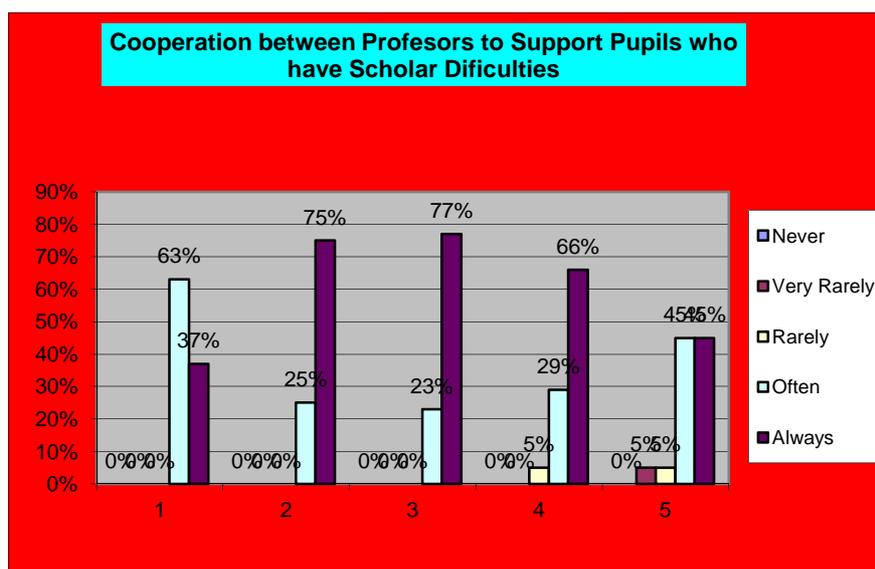
The most common problem of the teacher is disciplined student behavior management. Teachers try to solve these problems individually and only afterwards do they ask for help from the manager of the school and then, the class tutor. With one exception – at the school from Les - teachers do not want to outsource the problem by appealing to parents' support. This demonstrates a poor collaboration between school and family and could be interpreted as an inability of teachers to manage a situation that they would normally have to master. In addition, the management of students disciplined behavior appears to be a didactic problem, depending on teaching methods and education materials.

Picture 3



In terms of collaboration among colleagues in order to solve a didactic task in school, the data from Figure 3 validate those of the previous items. Thus, most teachers are willing to work together to solve various problems, but options depend on every school. The best results appear in Bogei and Les (schools that have management teams that know how to promote positive relationships between people) and worst still, at Carasau (limited number of teachers, working conditions are difficult, the weaker socio-economic and management style being several possible explanations). However, the results are encouraging and the teachers seem willing to support each other when they need it.

Pictures 4



The clearest results occur when teachers are asked about the manner in which they are willing to help students in difficulty (Picture 4). In every school they say they always do this (Bogei, Carasau and Les) and often do it (Avram Iancu). In this last school, there is a somewhat unique situation: only 37.5% said they would help students unconditionally, others help them often. Explanations could be the same as the previous items, the large number of students makes it difficult to have a perfect cohesion and the support and cooperation of teachers is done occasionally. However, it is very good that teachers give their best interest in helping students in distress.

## Discussion and conclusion

Trying to have a qualitative interpretation of obtained data presented in previous pictures, we can identify the following factors that could influence professor's teamwork in a school.

1. *The managerial style.* We can understand by this concept the way in which scholar managers relate with other professors from their school, encourage some positive relationships among themselves and promote cooperation in school (Nance, 2000). In those schools in which the headmasters are really involved in teachers' group life, the relationships among them stimulate collaboration, fellowship and mutual respect, that could increase the level of professors' performances and pupils' scholar results as well. The school from Bogei could be considerate as a positive example in this sense. On the contrary, when scholar managerial style is too authoritative or laissez-faire, the interpersonal relationships among teachers will be non-involvement and collaboration in the scholar groups will be more reduced compared with the first mentioned situation. In those schools in which professors seems to be less-interested to help one other and more preoccupied with satisfying their own needs, this could be considered a negative example in this sense. In conclusion, a democratic managerial style based on mutual respect and trust, is optimum to create a positive atmosphere in school, in which the didactic staff is to be interested in their own person and in their colleagues as well.

2. *Cultural ethos from school.* We could understand by this concept the general atmosphere from school, the interpersonal relationships among pupils, teachers and, also, both categories of educational actors, the attitudes, traditions and values promoted in school and so on (Orton, 2003:17). In those schools in which this mentioned cultural ethos is positive, the pupils and teachers accomplish with responsibility their curricular and extracurricular duties, are involved in scholar group life and so on, and we can talk about teamwork and collaboration among pupils (using cooperative learning strategies) and professors as well (encouraging some interpersonal relationships among them and help when their colleagues need that). On the contrary, in those schools in which the interpersonal relationships among educational actors are mutually rejected, the atmosphere in the school will be negative from the point of view of teamwork for professors and of cooperative learning for pupils.

3. *The number of teachers and pupils from a school.* The quantitative results sustain the idea that depth level of collaboration in school depends very much on the number of involved persons. Moreover, psycho pedagogical literature says that teamwork becomes effective when the number of persons who compose a group is optimum. If a group has too many, or, on the contrary, only a few members, its activity could be influenced in a negative way (Slavin, 1995). Similarly, if in a school there are too many or too few members (pupils and teachers) there could appear some difficulties to organize homogeneous effective groups from the teamwork point of view. This is the case in the school from Avram Iancu, where the number of professors and pupils are too large and they have no possibility to know and interact with each other at an optimum level. On the contrary, in the school from Carasau there are just a very few pupils and professors, not enough to create homogeneous and effective teams.

4. *Depth level of social relationships from a school.* By this concept, we can understand the particularities of interpersonal relationships between pupils and teachers, the type of existent affinity (mutual attraction, rejection or indifference), the sociometric status of every person in a group to which they belong and so on (Blândul, 2005). As we mentioned, these social relationships could be influenced by numerous factors such as: managerial style of scholar headmasters, number of persons from that school, specific to the didactic task that have to be accomplished in a school etc. On the other hand, depth level of these interpersonal relationships can influence the cultural ethos in the school and can create a positive or on the contrary, a negative atmosphere in that mentioned school.

5. *Socio-economic life standards specific for that area.* We refer here to the origin of the people who work in the school, at their economical level, social status, general life style, level of instruction, commuting between school and residence and so on. Our results prove that when those socio-economic condition are low, professors are more interested in solving their own problems than to help or cooperate with other colleagues (for instance in the school from Carasau). On the contrary, in schools where professors have a high level of socio-economic status and where the financial problems are not so complicated (the schools from Les or Suncuius), their interest for teamwork and collaboration for other colleagues significantly increases.

The knowledge of these factors, that can influence interpersonal relations and cooperation between teachers in the school, could be extremely useful and applicable also in other sectors. Thus, in any team, the management style and the way in which the leader knows how to exploit the personality of his collaborators, could moderate the relationships between them, helping

members to know each other better and communicate more effectively. Values such as mutual respect or trust, honesty, spirit of sacrifice, discipline and so on, can lead to more consistent team spirit and increase its performance. On the other hand, the number of team members is not so crucial, but the specific of tasks that they received is more important, according to the group's needs and individual personality. Last but not least, the results of teamwork depend on the satisfaction generated by the economic welfare of its members that is not so good for Romanian rural teachers. As we mentioned, these indicators are available across all sectors and regarding the applicability of obtained data from school systems of other EU countries, a comparative research would be extremely useful and represents an excellent opportunity to continue our study.

As a conclusion, according to the interpretation of quantitative and qualitative results of the conducted questionnaire, we can say that most teachers in the group of subjects are willing to cooperate within the team. Therefore, on one hand, they are willing to help and cooperate with a colleague to solve his duties, but on the other hand, they refuse their support to solve their own problems. However, all teachers are willing to help students, who have some scholar needs, that is, after all, their fundamental mission in education.

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