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The Organizational Roles of the School Principal.
A Study in Management Strategies

Role organizacyjne dyrektora szkoły. Studium strategii zarządzania

Организационная роль директора школы. Исследование стратегии управления

The topic of the school principal's organizational roles is one of the problems which, so far, have not been adequately covered by reasearch in management and organization of education. The result of a scientific enquiry here is really modest. There predominate studies of normative and didactic character. Relatively few are the attempts to study in depth individual questions [1]. Most authors openly declare their true objectives by stressing that they are striving at „depicting the actual state of things", suggesting means and possibilities of improvement etc., and occasionally comparing that picture with the model held desirable.

The characteristic trait of such works is general handling all the nonconformities, so far as the „desirable" model would go, as pathological phenomena, with the suggestion to eliminate them for the sake of „efficient" organization. The obvious assumption here is that once the case under our study is so much different from the proposed model — hence it must be bad, and subsequently needs cure. Many reasons are

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[1] Consult i.a.: Z. Radwan: *A model of a headmaster.* „Instruction and Education" 1975, No 13, B; L. Goik: *Organization of the headmaster's work: the aspect of organic functions of a governing post.* Katowice 1980, IKNiBO; Z. Koszacka: *Director's own work organization in elementary school.* In: Governing an educational institution (in the light of theory of organization and governing), Wrocław 1976, IKNiBO; W. Goriszowski: *Social determinants on realization of diverse organic and controlling functions of a leading post in education.* in: Governing education and school, ed. K. Podoski, Wrocław—Warszawa 1980, Ossolineum; W. Kobyliński: *Conditions to efficient organization of a headmaster's task,* II ed. Warszawa 1984, IW ZZ, W. Kobyliński: *Functions of a headmaster in theory and in practice,* Warszawa 1981, WSiP.

found for lack of success like: inadequate konwledge or skill, lack of proper resources etc., and not infrequently an irrational dislike to solutions which the theory of organization can offer. Numerous authors of the works mentioned above seem to believe that there are extant „scientific solutions", which, if applied, would readily guarantee success. And, vice versa, any deviating from the prescribed model must needs cause organizational tension and various difficulties.

There is ample reason to promote the thesis that handling the problem in such a fashion is hardly right and that the theoretical and practical efficacy is likely to be minimal. First of all for the reason that almost every phenomenon viewed today as „good" may carry in it an element of pathology, hence our procedures aimed at stabilizing it may further develop that pathology. And, just the other way round, a phenomenon that seems negative may carry a nucleus of positive transformations in future. Such is the case with conflicts, which not so seldom become real *„spiritus movens"* in the development of organization?

Second: classifying what is „good" and what is „bad" is to a certain degree subjective and quite often is solely dependent on the standpoint assumed by the viewer, on his place within the structure of the system etc., and even more on the nature and scope of organizational functions carried out by him. It is obvious that there are bound to be differences between the perceptions of a phenomenon by the headmaster or superintendent, a teacher, a clerk in school administration, by pupils and by their parents. Their interests are not identical, if they are not contradictive altogether. They issue from the dialectical nature of social life in which there occur never ending collisions of diverse forces moving and counteracting. In such clashes people always try to find the most fortunate respective solutions[3]. It may denote choosing the more precious value, or reducing to a minimum the potential loss[4].

Third: in the existing concepts of studies of the problems under our scrutiny here there used to prevail a static model of the principal, who

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[2] Confer: K. B o l e s t a - K u k u ł k a: *The concept of organization games.* (in:) *Contemporary theories of organization,* A. K. Koźmiński ed. Warszawa 1983, PWN, p. 239.

[3] There is no attempt in this statement of evaluating human nature, the author simply assumes that the individual, as a participant of a certain system goes on being a thinking creature and therefore he inclines to get upper hand during a collision with a partner without running too great a risk (whose goal is similar to his). See: J. D. W i l l i a m s: *The perfect strategist,* Warszawa 1965, PWN, p. 37.

[4] See: J. G. M a r c h, H. S i m o n: *Theory of organization,* PWN, Warszawa 1964, and J. K u r n a l: *New look on the process of decision-making in management* „Organization Review" 1976 No 4—5.

tries to learn, more or less successfuly his organizational roles but whose reaction to requirements he is facing seems largely passive. The authors assumed that there exist a cluster of agents of external and internal, objective and subjective character which allegedly determined his attitudes [5]. Such an approach harbours, naturally a significant simplification of the problem. In reality, a principal is a genuine thinking creature and capable of thinking and acting independently, and whose attitudes are predetermined by an awareness of certain margin of freedom. That margin can be made use of depending on his actual assessment of chances to achieve success within given possibilities. The above mentioned agents are limiting his freedom of action, but they by no means place him in a dead end. Hence his actual attitudes are hardly 100% predictable. They also fail to be regulated by simple directional devices basing on determinist logic of cause and effect [6]. A closer observation of actual facts shows that individuals, pretending to comply with contents of directions or orders sent by their superiors fairly often enact their own concepts, preeminently the ones suiting their own evaluation of the situation, their computation of possible gains and losses, etc. They practice mimicry, sometimes employing extremely sophisticated strategies.

The term „strategy" is used here, obviously in a slightly different sense from that given it in most works devoted to problems of organization and governing. In the light of long stance tradition strategy denotes the art of conducting extensive, long-range enterprises of socio--economic or political character, or of military campaigns etc. In the present paper the author uses the term in a slightly modified meaning namely, coming close to the one used in the games theory.

In that theory „strategy" denotes „every complete plan of activities", which would „design certain defined course of action for all the possible events likely to determine results of such actions" [7]. In the context of games the events in question are the moves by the other player. The strategy employed by the participant is therefore such a conception of activities which would take into account a response to

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[5] The author of the paper once shared such illusions himself. See: W. K o b y-
l i ń s k i: *Functions of a headmaster...*, p. 53; W. K o b y l i ń s k i: *Indirect sources of inefficiency in the organizing his own work in the light of principal's own opinions* (in): Organizing — directing — motivation in schools. T. Pszczołowski ed., Warszawa 1983, p. 23.

[6] Consult: K. B o l e s t a - K u k u ł k a: *An introduction to Polish edition of* M. C r o z i e r, E. F r i e d b e r g: *Man and system. Limits to group activities*, Warszawa 1982, PWE, p. 12.

[7] J. Ł. G r z e l a k: *Conflict of interests. A psychological analysis*, Warszawa 1978, PWN, p. 15.

all the possible moves done by the partner. It can be defined as a con-
ception of developed player's attitudes, or — putting it simply — the
form of participation in the game developed by him[8].

One can raise doubts as to such an understanding of the term
„strategy". Is it grounded in discussing the tasks of a school principal,
in an analysis of the process of carrying out by him the assigned organ-
izational functions? The answer is going to be positive, if we take into
consideration that he is — indeed — in a situation largely resembling
that of a sports game or a social game, including even those which are
popularly labelled hazardous games. In the social system to which he
is a part there appears evidently incomplete accord or even an open
discord of interests, continuous flux of situations, a defined margin
within which individuals are acting, a hardly, if not absolutely unpre-
dictable reactions of the partners etc. All that makes for the situation
of uncertainty, so characteristic of all the games. The final result is,
obviously, hard to foresee. Note, too, that the behaviour of a school
principal, like that of his counterpart in organization is accompanied by
the ever unavoidable risk like in any game. He may win or he may
lose, or for that matter he can draw with a specific count of potential
gains and losses. This awareness of risk makes him act cautiously but
it entices him to take the game all the same. Willing to reach an ad-
vantagous result he is bound to take the risk of the game and to recog-
nize the given game.

The game in question is, of course, a social game, which slightly
differs from the games in the literal sense on which the classic theory
of games focusses[9]. Whereas in the latter the notion of game symbolizes
a conflict, almost a warfare, in the social game as well as in its varie-
ty — the organizational game there rests alongside a potential positive
cooperation. Putting it differently, in the game under scrutiny there
occurs not only an interaction and tendencies of forces at cross pur-
poses but also of certain initiatives taken coordinative groupwise by those
participating in the design, irrespective of occasional discrepancies and
conflicting individual interests[10].

The specific nature of this game is additionally reflected in the lim-

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[8] Confer: M. Crozier, E. Friedberg: *Man and system. Limits to group
action*, PWE, Warszawa 1982, p. 110.

[9] A concise exposition of the games theory can be found in: J. D. Williams:
The perfect strategist..., *op. cit.*; R. D. Luce, H. Raiffa: *Games and decisions*,
PWN, Warszawa 1964; G. Owen: *Games theory*, PWN, Warszawa 1975.

[10] Co. K. Bolesta-Kukułka: *An introduction to the Polish edition of
M. Crozier*, E. Friedberg: *Man and system...*, *op. cit.*, p. 11 and The same: *The
concept of organization game*. in: Contemporary organizational theories, *op. cit.*,
p. 241.

iting influence of a number of organizational principles on attitudes taken by individuals. Especially significant are the binding norms or organization structures, formal range of power etc. They actually design the repertory of conceivable behaviour indicating, among others, the strategy to be singled out for the sake of participation in the organization beneficial to the individual involved. Such limitations, however, are never likely to deprive the player of a chance to freely choose the form of behaviour. In general there is a possibility for him to react differently from what is expected of him within the system. He can disregard the limits imposed by the system. Obviously not every player enjoys indentical possibilities. Each of them, however — to quote M. Crozier and E. Friedberg — can afford „playing with his role, making use of the elements of potential uncertainties, incongruities and contradictions [11].

The notion of individual behaviour within organizations being manifestations of games being played there, signals the need and possibility to employ new approaches to studying the problems on our hands here. As the fundamental agents in styling the attitudes of individuals within a system are their strategies the latter should be given most of the researcher's attention. There follows the necessity to give the floor to the participants of the game, to assess as closely as is possible their aspirations and calculations, the range of decisional freedom, limitations to them etc., and first of all the real range of their actual power of control. It is probably immaterial here whether the data acquired in this way are „real” and in accord with the actual state of things. Even if they seem to contradict the common sense they do deserve attention being sources of knowledge about strategies employed. What clearly follows is the variety of methods and instruments used in the process. Only by reconstructing from inside — to quote our French authors — the logic of situations perceived and experienced by the actors themselves (ie. those taking part in the organization-footnote by W. K.) enables revealing the data contained in the logic, and in the light of these the seemingly abnormal attitudes of the actors acquire sense and significance [12].

For the above reasons the author of the present paper has attempted to clarify: whether at all, and which strategies are enacted by school principals in the course of carrying out their organizational roles, and why? [13] The specific objects of interest in this case were: the handling

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[11] M. C r o z i e r, E. F r i e d b e r g: *Man and system...*, op. cit., p. 98.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 425.

[13] Resulting from the conducted research the author assumes that a school principal plays the following organizational roles: organizing the didactic-educa-

of office hours by the school principal, his collaboration with the members of teachers' groups headed by him, as well as cooperation with the representatives of the school environment in its entirety. To determine which strategies are possibly dominant under the present educational circumstances and whether the existing state of things harmonises with the social interests was a very important research problem which dictated our focussing on the organizational questions. The author then attempted to word some propositions on the basis of the conducted research in regarding the further development of organization and administration of education.

The research was done in 1976—1985. In the first stage of it the author was using sheets of autoobservation by the school principal of his working day. They were completed by 252 respondents in 11 voivodships within a uniform stretch of time for all of them (18—30 April 1977). The information gathered in that way was further supported by questionnaire polling, which involved 285 school principals in May—June 1977. As the information obtained in that way — despite the abundance of the material thus gathered — did not provide a satisfying answer to a number of questions considered important, the author decided to continue the research in 1979—1985 using methods and instruments better suiting the problems involved. The method of strategy analysis proved really useful. The research covered more than 1000 individuals. Directors of schools of various types and the supervising representatives of educational administration as well as teachers constituted the group which was thus approached. The documentation for that stage of research makes jointly 510 filled out questionnaires, 952 sheets of interview and discussion records, 312 autoobservation sheets (case studies), as well as 402 seminar papers, diploma papers by the postgraduate students in organization and administration of education.

The sum total of information obtained helped to reveal the image of the principal's task largely remote from that functioning in the literature on organization and administration of education. It turned out that individuals involved, when carrying out their assigned organizational roles were behaving in the way resembling the situation of organization game in general. Their specific activities were predominantly rational and logical when looked upon in the context of existing limitations. The persons under our study did not demonstrate their real intentions, objectives, calculations and interests. On the contrary, they

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tional process in his school; tutoring and educating his staff, bringing into effect the educational policy of the state, teaching and acting for the environment as a social activist. For that consult: W. K o b y l i ń s k i: *The organizational roles of a school principal*, „Problems of education in the country" 1984 No 2, p .100—7.

tried to conceal and mask them, and not infrequently kept doing their best to fool the surrounding. Practices resembling those in the world of nature could be observed there. As is generally known some species when facing danger or spotting a chance to overcome the adversary, change the colour of their skin, or their behaviour, stay immobile etc., as if pretending not to be the creatures they actually are. The results of our study allow for a generalizing statement that there are revealed certain regularities and certain prevailing tendencies in the conduct of school principals. A significant majority of persons under study demonstrated tendencies to prevent a defeat (downfall) foregoing, instead of succumbing to all the chances to get maximal success. School directors preferred stopping at „little gains" to entering „full game" loaded with formidable risk. They seem to have preferred defensive strategies though there were numeros adherents to offensive strategies as well.

Typically, the individuals assessed demonstrated unequivocally the tendency to employ the task strategy the „work oriented" (directed) one to the detriment of integration strategy which would satisfy diverse needs of the teachers. There abounded cases of demanding from the subordinates execution of their tasks „at any price" without taking into account the amount of effort which would secure positive carrying out of those tasks. There could be observed a tendency to categorically and specifically formulate tasks. There followed, however, no better, or more harmonious, completion of the tasks. Diverse forms of neglects in the functioning of the basic categories of school activities could be observed instead.

It was found too, that there were many among the individuals involved who would opt for the strategy aimed preeminently at giving the formal law „its due" throughout the carrying out the actual roles of the school principal (bureaucratization). And, despite that no director opted for it directly, (every fifth of them) putting it in statistical categories) demonstrated tendencies to solve dillemmas poised before him, those being concrete organizational problems in a highly bureaucratic way. The characteristic trait in it was that even in case of solving relatively simple problems many of the respondents, when asked to give their respective answers, tended to „deepen study of the question", „to convene a session" or „a meeting", or to „gather materials and opinions" etc; in short — to postpone a definite solving the problem. The bureaucratic strategy is, undoubtedly, not to be recommended or immitated as it does not encourage an adequate i.e. coinciding with the social expectations ways of handling thier assigned organizational roles by school principals.

There were observed as well not a few cases of resorting to non-

-productive strategies, some of them possessing obvious parasitic characteristics. It has been found that in some cases the persons involved displayed maximal opportunism thus guarding their own personal interests to the detriment of the welfare of their school, their teachers and youth. There were many who followed the philosophy of „follow the wind", „never lean out", „tell the superior only what he wants to hear" etc. Such concepts have obviously little in common with conformance in the positive sense, which stands for ability to adapt to the existing conditions in order to more thoroughly and adequately cope with their tasks, to avoid unnecessary conflicts and to create a suitable atmosphere in the teachers' collective. What is found is a conformity which would tolerate, by adapting, to any state of things, under any circumstances within any arrangements, configurations provided they only permitted an easy advancement or offered chances to achieve certain advantages at the cost of other people [14].

The question arises: why such a fair number of school principals resorted to the above negative strategies? The answer can hardly be unequivocel and complete. As the range of our study is so far rather modest it is only fair to frame some hypotheses. It looks highly probable that one of the fundamental causes dwells in the imperfections of the instruction-educational system itself. In brief: the system has been promoting docile and submissing individuals who would succumb to the formal school tasks whereas ambitious and courageous ones have been being unduly curbed.

Let's concentrate for a moment on the assymetry of stimuli acting on a school principal. The situation which ensues is: „rewards, even in case of outstanding achievements are generally insignificant (the situation of the performer changes but to a slight advantage as compared to that of his colleagues) but the penalties for even slight deviating from the binding assignments and rules can be truly Draconian" [15]. In case of failure the principal can be removed readily from the post as an individual who „failed to prove his qualities" („frustrated the hopes" of his the appointers), and even in case of maximum succes his gain is meagre.

Are there any chances, and if so, of what nature, to overcome the undoubtedtly negative social phenomena unveiled by the enquiry? Can they be eliminated or tempered in order to secure for the principal

[14] Co. K. D a s z k i e w i c z: *A Discourse on Bad Work*, Warszawa 1974, p. 110, KiW.

[15] See A. K. K o ź m i ń s k i, A. M. Z a w i ś l a k: *Certainty and Game. An Introduction to Theory of Organizational Attitudes*, PWE, Warszawa 1982, ed. 2. p. 28.

situations conducive to better steering his school in the procedures of carrying out the objectives for which the school was designed? What actions to recommend to help playing more succesfully the organizational roles? The literature of the subject offers many attempts at answering these questions, and their likes, more adequately, but most of them fail to secure desirable results. It is best reflected in the sceptical attitude of school principals to them. Most of them view those attempts as too remote from the life realities, too abstract and therefore by their nature not promising in school practice (impracticable).

The current concepts typically assume certain virtual models, which a school principal must invariably adhere to in order to play his diverse roles well. The concepts however do not allow for situations when following those models is not possible, the less for ones when the application of them would be pointless. Every single activity, even the one which is ideally organized runs the risk of the results being in direct contrast with the expected ones. The ultimate objective of „efficient organization" assumed at *a priori* for efforts to explain the provenance of the phenomenon, and even less for an effective counteraction. It seems that the concept of the organization games theory which is the object of our study offers a much better chance. It promotes scrutinizing and elucidating, and subsequently improving and perfecting the process of school governing, the strategies employed by the school principal sharing the benefits.

The author of the present paper does not intend to word any specific directions or any practical solutions. Theoretically and practically they could be of little use both in theory and practice. His intention was to indicate general directions and research possibilities. He also wants to draw attention to a number of dilemmas which have been brought to surface by the above mentioned research, and which are connected with organizing and governing in education.

The fundamental dilemma is contained in the question: is it possible to reconcile, and in what manner, the otherwise non concurrent drives in the director's personality — his desire to be personally successful (his right to do so cannot be denied) and, on the other hand, his striving at having the social objectives of an education-edificational (humane and instructional education institution) positively enacted. These two tendencies — as it is generally known — do not tread the same paths, and can occasionally stay in open contradiction. The situation may generate harmful perilous benumbing of motivation in the school principal's performance and determining the effects of his organizational roles.

Another problem arising out of that is, what should be done to encourage the principal to continuously choosing selecting values in the practice of governing his school, to promote the ones most critical at the given moment socially? Once the system of orders and prohibitions, of stimuli and arguments has proved futile, and sometimes generating their opposites it is recomendable to look for other solutions, promising better results. Therefore the theory of organizational games seems likely to work better if its rules and principles are courageously applied. The game — as the results of our insight are testifying — is actually practised in educational institutions. Very often it parades in disguise of „sticking to" model attitudes prescribed in directions and regulations. As a matter of fact the games theory seems ubiquitous and in most situations it regulates human attitudes promoting choices of the organizational games theory provenance (accomplish the task).

The author is far from imputating that everything and all the elements found in the principals' organizational roles enactments was solely of the game theory provenance. Surely, in many cases the individual's behaviour within organizations is predetermined by other rules, and even those contrary to the rules and principles which are binding in organization games. Some individuals, for instance decide to practice attitudes to which they are accustomed, or which carry for them a specific value sanctioned by tradition culture or custom, religious beliefs or ethico-moral values professed by them. But the existence of such attitudes is by no means contrary to the existence of game. They are complementary rather than antithetical (contradictory) situation. Right are the authors who insist that only when these are studied and used jointly they will enable understanding and perfecting of systems of human actions. The factor game must not be totally eliminated, it should be studied and improved in its course. Especially desirable is to make it productive so that it could bring definitely positive social results [16].

Do there exist any chances for that, what are they, and what are their feasibilities in the light of the above research? Truly, the author's proposition of perceiving the roles of a school principal has not yet been developed enough to be used in conceptualization of some given modes of proceding or to allow practical solutions. It seems however, that even at present some conclusions can be made as suggestions which can be worth the attention of the organizers and researchers on education, especially relevant in cases of selection, evaluation and training school principals.

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[16] *Ibid.*, p. 138.

The essential problem in selecting the cadres of administrators as is generally known — is to situate the right men in right places. Once it has been established that there abound so many elements of game in managing schools it seems appropriate to take that into account at the stage of screening the candidates for such posts. It is critical to find if the individual is going to play a productive game and does not show traces of tendency to break the rules accepted, will not adjust the rules of the game for the sake of realizing his own private interests. A person of such a kind would generate socially undesirable phenomena, the more so, that the moment of obtaining a leading post formidably increases opportunities to play non-productive or clearly parasitic games.

There exists as well a necessity to continually study the mechanisms of games taking place, and to watch the players' attitudes. An array of sound, good, adequate to realities parameters is absolutely critical here. Those would be very helpful in coping with diverse goals by the principals. All the tendencies perceived as positive could be encouraged effectively, and those hampering development and breeding parasitism could be suppressed. On that ground it would be possible to attempt designing new modes of evaluating the school principal, as the currently used ones have proved far from perfect and not conducive to realizing social objectives. They do not facilitate to effectively eliminate from the game dishonest players, and at that impose excessive limitations for the talented and ambitious individuals. The main question is the lack of diagnosing presently the methods which would help recognize correctly and identify the attitudes which deserve support as „courageous and innovatory actions" promoting the educational interests vis á vis mere mistifications and merely marking time.

The above considerations help to single out a number of observations which can draw the attention of those preoccupied with either theory or practice in the realm of education, especially those studying problems of educating and developing school principals. The heart of the matter is that many a meritorious individual occupying the post fail preeminently for their lack of adequate knowledge and skills in conducting a succesful game. They have been prepared to work on the assumption that there exist ideal organizational conditions, which, alas, paraded in the imagination of the optimists alone. The actual context of educational institution and of the environment look fairly different: they abound in conflicts and contradictions, clashes of interests and attributes of power. It happens not seldom that the winners are not the ones who better guarantee social principles, and who have in that capacity insurmountable scores — but simply the skilful and smart play-

ers. Hence the closing lines of the present paper come to voicing the dilemma: Is the school principal to be educated with view to carrying out his diverse organizational roles or is he to be taught to play games adroitly and skillfuly but with the slant creative and productive?

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł zawiera próbę nowego spojrzenia na pracę dyrektora szkoły, pokazując jedno z ważnych źródeł jego rzeczywistych zachowań w procesie wypełniania różnorodnych ról. Owym źródłem jest realizowana przez dyrektora strategia. Przedstawiona propozycja nawiązuje do koncepcji autorów ujmujących problemy organizacji i kierowania w konwencji organizacyjnej gry.

Rozważania swoje oparł autor na wynikach badań empirycznych. Okazało się w nich, że w aktualnej praktyce oświatowej przeważają strategie defensywne, zadaniowe i biurokratyczne, niemało obserwuje się też strategii nieproduktywnych, a w ich ramach również pasożytniczych. Tego stanu nie można akceptować, jednakże do ewentualnych zmian trzeba nieco inaczej podejść. Zamiast zmieniać zachowanie dyrektorów szkół, trzeba zmieniać strategie. Autor wskazuje w tym zakresie propozycje pod adresem realizatorów polityki oświatowej.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Предпринята попытка по-новому рассмотреть работу директора школы. Показан один из важных источников его действия в процессе выполнения разнородных ролей. Этим источником является осуществляемая директором стратегия. Представленное автором предложение связано с концепциями, в которых проблемы организации и управлениа рассматриваются в конвенции организационной игры.

В работе использованы результаты эмпирических исследований. Оказалось, что в современной практике органов просвещения преобладает оборонительная, бюрократическая стратегия, очень часто не только неэффективная, но и паразитическая. Дальше это продолжаться не может, однако к возможным изменениям следует подойти иначе. Следует изменить не поведение (действия) директоров, а лежащую в их основе стратегию. Автор вносит предложения, направленные в адрес исполнителой политики в области просвещения.