PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM†

Summary: The aim of this paper is to determine the effects of the implementation of the program “School and the public” on the organization of the school system in the period of program implementation from 2009–2014. and the level of communication between the education system and the public.

Methods: 694 respondents fulfilled the questionnaire for the training participants used in actual research, and prepared by the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Upbringing, intended exclusively for the Center for Professional Development of Employees. The collected data were processed by descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel and the results obtained are presented in tables and graphs.

Results: The fact that the large percentage of participants (more than 90%) spoke positively about the program speaks in favor of the claim that employees in education are aware of the need for personal training and engagement in communication processes between the educational institution and the public. CONCLUSION: Participants’ answers clearly indicated the obvious improvement of communication between the educational institution and the public through the affirmation of the work of the institution itself, as well as the establishment of a positive image and solving important issues and problems in the functioning and work of the institution.

Keywords: Communication and professional communication; Educational institution; Identity and image of the institution; Levels of PR (Public Relations) activities; Internal and external public.

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1. Introduction

Communication processes include different ways of conveying the messages of the participants, with the aim of achieving communication. It is known that communication is as old as civilization. Historical reviews show that the exchange of information influenced public opinion, but also the course of social events. The need for communication has not changed, but the forms and ways of communication have changed. The modern way of life requires adaptation to new ways of professional and everyday communication in different systems of the social community. According to Vreg (1991) communication exists between living beings only, so the transfer of information between inanimate beings (e.g., the transfer of data in computer systems) doesn’t belong to the concept of communication. Human communicate through symbols (this distinguishes it from animal communication). All definitions of communication indicate the importance of information exchange and the realization of communication. Fast and efficient action of employees in the educational system is the essence of communication in order to achieve the goals of the educational system and nurture a positive image of the institution. Certainly, participants in communication, in addition to the topic that is in focus, should also have knowledge of psychology, anthropology, philosophy, linguistics and other sciences and fields, in order for the effects of communication to be more effective. Public relations in the educational system imply the regulation of interpersonal relations in the system itself, interpersonal relations between teachers and parents, teachers and students, teachers and outsiders. Thus, the development of all the listed levels of interpersonal relations creates opportunities for better communication between schools in modern society, in accordance with the basic principles of ethics.

The communication system is a very complex process and requires a lot of effort, education and thoughtful steps. “Depending on the information experience and attitude, as well as depending on the needs of the recipient, the same information can be received in the range from increased reception compared to expected), to absolutely negative” (Jokić & Mikić, 2008, 53). Everything becomes important for the successful progress of an organization in business communication. The two parties leading the conversation should have mutual trust and respect, not to be passionate, to feel satisfaction because they have the opportunity to present their views and ideas, to be guided by a higher idea that is realized on the spiritual plane, and that is, of course. success of the institution, successfully completed communication and personal satisfaction and upgrading. Considering this problem speaks of an insufficiently researched topic, relations between people are complex and require a lot of effort, and learning. It is necessary to insist on feedback, because feedback allows communication participants to determine the clarity of the message. Certainly, “with feedback, the communication process becomes a conversation or two-way communication” (Jokić &
Mikić, 2008, 57), and the roles of communicator and receptionist change. With feedback, the communication process becomes two-way communication or conversation. In the process of communication, words without meaning and logic should not be piled up, but the message that is delivered and interpreted should be clear and thoughtful, recognizable and mentally connected with the experience of the recipient. Communication will be successful if the communicator and the recipient, ie the sender and recipient of the message, know the functioning of the communication process. Also, it is necessary to have knowledge about your personality, as well as about the people with whom the communication process is performed. Sigmund Freud’s discoveries about the levels of personality consciousness: consciousness, sub consciousness and super consciousness (ego, id and superego) (Trebješanin, 2000, 44–45) help us. A good communicator should know which part of a person’s personality he is addressing and in which circumstances and situations a certain level of consciousness dominates.

In contact with the media, personal contact with journalists is extremely important, i.e. „personal channels that are very important in business communication” (Kotler, 1988, 638). Teams in educational institutions can formulate a model of communication with the media.

The aim of this paper is to determine the effects of the application of the program „School and the public” on the organization of the school system in the period of program implementation from 2009–2014. and the level of communication between the education system and the public.

2. Methods

This research deals with the effects of the application of the program „School and the public” on the organization of the educational system in the period of program implementation from 2009–2014. and determining the level of communication between the education system and the public.

Authors offered organizational solutions and proposals for activities that would improve school communication and to systematically regulate public relations in specific schools and in real time. The empirical part of the paper relies on the attitudes and opinions of seminar participants on communication within the institutions in which they are employed.

Totally 694 respondents fulfilled the questionnaire for the training participants used in actual research, and prepared by the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Upbringing, and intended exclusively for the Center for Professional Development of Employees.

The collected data were processed by descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel and the results obtained are presented in tables and graphs.
3. Results

Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents about the implemented program „School and the public” and the processed content.

Table 1. Questionnaire for training participants of the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Upbringing (Center for Professional Development of Employees, n.d.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Completely agree</th>
<th>Chiefly agree</th>
<th>Partially agree</th>
<th>Chiefly disagree</th>
<th>Completely disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The topics / contents envisaged by the program have been realized</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The way of working on the training provides learning and professional development of the participants</td>
<td>96.3%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The previous knowledge and experiences of the participants are taken into account in the implementation of the training</td>
<td>98.2%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The training was held according to the scheduled schedule</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Attending this training will help me improve my own work</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The implementers know the area to which the program relates well</td>
<td>97.8%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The implementers actively communicate with the participants and give them feedback on the work and the products of their work</td>
<td>99.2%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The implementers encourage the acquisition of knowledge of the participants and give answers to their questions</td>
<td>98.1%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Working conditions (space, technical support) enabled the successful implementation of the training</td>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The entire organization contributed to the successful implementation of the training</td>
<td>99.6%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research of internal factors is done in order to better understand the behavior and communication process that takes place within the educational institution. It refers to the behavior and communication of school management and to the behavior and mutual communication of employees.
Respondents (N=694) answered the questions in the percentages shown in the following survey:

1. Has the „School and the Public” program influenced the formation of new models of communication organization in your educational institution?
   a) not 2.1%
   b) partially 7.2%
   c) yes 90.7%

2. The institution has established communication teams at:
   a) lower level 4.9%
   b) middle level 8.6%
   c) higher level 85.8%
   d) did not establish 0.7%

3. Has the institution become more „visible” to the public?
   a) not 1.5%
   b) partially 6.6%
   c) yes 91.9%

4. The institution has created a positive image:
   a) not 6.3%
   b) partially 15.9%
   c) yes 77.8%

5. The new organization of the public relations institution has improved the work of the institution:
   a) not 1.3%
   b) partially 8.6%
   c) is largely 90.1%

Graphic presentation of the answers of the surveyed respondents during the implementation of the program „School and the public”:

**Graph 1.** Answer to question “Has the „School and the Public” program influenced the formation of new models of communication organization in your educational institution and to what extent?”
Graph 2. Answer to question
“The institution has established communication teams at”:

Graph 3. Answer to question
“The institution has become more „visible” to the public”:

Graph 4. Answer to question
“The institution has created a positive image”: 
The fact that the largest percentage of participants (more than 90%) declared positively about the program confirms the claim that employees in education area are interested and aware of the need for personal training and engagement in communication processes between the educational institution and the public.

4. Discussion

In this paper, we deal with the effects of the application of the program „School and the public” on the organization of the educational system in the period of program implementation from 2009–2014, and determining the level of communication between the education system and the public. In specific schools and in real time, we offered organizational solutions and proposals for activities that would improve school communication and to systematically regulate public relations. The empirical part of the paper relies on the attitudes and opinions of seminar participants on communication within the institutions in which they are employed, and research shows that more than 90% agree that establishing optimal interaction among employees is a condition for achieving basic communication. Also, research shows that in our country and the region, given the needs of communication in modern society, more and more thought is being given to strengthening the competencies of school management in the field of management and public relations. Specialized schools and public relations agencies are being opened in the world in order to strengthen the communication and managerial activities of the school management, which speaks of the importance of public relations. The National School Public Relations Association NSPRA1 and the American Association of School Administrators AASA2 have the task of improving education through the development of school communication. These organizations provide support to school management and provide examples of fruitful work by providing communication training to
school representatives in the field of public relations across America. This public relations association (NSPRA) has been dealing with this for more than eighty years (since 1935). A serious NSPRA program indicates that “public relations in education is a planned, systematic management function, designed to improve the programs and services of educational organizations. They rely on a comprehensive, two-way communication process involving the internal and external public with the aim of encouraging and promoting a better understanding of the role, goals, achievements and needs of the organization (National School Public Relations Association, 2002). These models are taken over by educational institutions in our country in the region with the aim of achieving better communication with the public and a better position in creating an image.

Practice shows that in our country there is no established way of organizing educational institutions in terms of public relations and that in recent years there has been a growing awareness of the need for professional communication. People, who run educational institutions, especially if they have gained professional experience abroad, are increasingly insisting on the principles of responsible communication within the educational institution, setting standards. With the aim of raising the level of organization, institutions are increasingly forming teams that deal with marketing, institution identity 1, presenting interesting activities, student success, but also teaching staff, organizing professional lectures, meetings with scientists and the like.

Public relations are developing and building gradually in educational institutions. The professional experience of the authors of this paper shows that the good functioning of the institution in the field of public relations requires education of employees or experience in the field of management and communication (to have adequate education, to know the problems of media business, to work in the media and the like).

1 The authors formed teams for media and cultural and public activities in their school and actively participated in promoting the school and its values, creating the identity and image of the school (they are still team leaders today). Today, the Medical School has its own identity, it is recognizable in the region for the quality of work, good teachers, versatile and rich life, but it also enjoys a great reputation and respect at the national level. In other words, she built a good image.

2 One of the authors of the seminar, Valentina Zlatanović Marković, was engaged in radio and television journalism, and with her experience in media business she contributed to the work of the Media Team and the Cultural and Public Activity Team at the Medical School. Also, the author continued her cooperation with the media in which she was employed, but she also established cooperation with the media in the region. She participated in the city project “Everything is easy when you know how”, preparing more than thirty participants for stage and media performances through cooperation with the regional television “Lion”. The author was part of the team for redefining cultural policy in the city of Užice, but also a participant in numerous seminars dealing with the culture of speech, stage performance, psychoanalysis of art.
In the process of realization of the „School and the public” program, the participants pointed out that they themselves unfoundedly critically assessed the work of the media and media representation of other, „less interesting” institutions and that they behaved irresponsibly towards the idea of cooperation with the public. Only when they engaged themselves in the field of promoting the work of the institution, the interest of the media appeared. The authors of the seminar recommended the participants to form a team (for the media, for cultural and public activities, for management) in their institutions with a good vision of the future of the institution, its place and role in social reality. In accordance with the vision, the possibilities of available human forces and resources for a good strategy and cooperation with the media are considered. The idea of the existence of such a team can come from the head (manager, dean, director) of the institution, but even when he is not the initiator, his support and faith in the team is necessary, because it always gives good results. Without that cooperation, there is no success. This would mean that the institution (formed team in the institution) creates news and events, chooses topics, contents and participants, integrates them into one complete story that should be presented to the public. The public response to an action is a good recommendation for new activities. One should always strive for new ways of presenting activities and adapt them to the understanding and comprehension of the chosen target group. It should not be forgotten that the publicity of work is the obligation of every institution.

Recent research shows that the new reforms, in addition to the good sides, have some negatives: reducing the number of educational institutions, closing faculties, high schools, majors, profiles, so that their survival depends on the number of students interested in enrolling in that institution, that is, from the positive image of the institution in public. Therefore, it is necessary to work on teacher education and interest in participating in various forms of social engagement that will affect the positive image of the educational institution. In order for the educational institution to be visible, it is necessary to be open to the public, to plan its activities, to learn to present its work in the best way (Sinanović, 2020).

It is necessary to define the target public because it is desirable to communicate with a specific target group at a certain, specific moment. As it is known that there are priorities in the selection of target groups, it should also be known that in the modern world, changes in society are dynamic and fast and that it is therefore necessary to act faster in the field of communication and in educational institutions. In our time, everyone needs to hear about it (promotional) voice, regardless of the type of activity in which it is engaged. Those who place goods, services or ideas, as well as those who struggle with competition (commercial, political, creative, sports or personal), are equally interested in improving communication with the environment and thus increase the „chance of acceptance” (Pavlović & Aleksić, 2011, 6).
Today, research among public relations experts is generally accepted as an integral part of the planning, implementation and evaluation of public relations programs. „Experienced communicators have an undivided attitude that positive human thought and a correct attitude towards the recipient(s) is a basic condition and precondition for successful communication” (Jokić & Mikić, 2008, 407). In understanding the message in the communication system, it is important to accept the content so as to increase life affirmation, freedom of action and transition from the mental to the practical level. Conversely, messages may limit the recipient. „He understands and remembers them, but he does not let them out of his mental sphere. They serve him more as a specific warning, than as signals that should be followed by one’s own work and creativity, that is, by overall activity” (Plenković, 1983, 142–143).

5. Conclusion

Having in mind the theoretical knowledge, through the practical realization of the seminar and the conducted survey on the extent to which the realization of the “School and Public” program influenced the formation of new forms of communication and creating a positive image of the school in public, concrete and expected results were achieved. The answers of the seminar participants clearly indicate that there are clear and measurable effects of the implementation of the “School and the public” program in the educational institutions that were covered by the program. The large percentage of participants (more than 90%) declared positively about the program, and answers clearly indicated the obvious improvement of communication between the educational institution and the public through the affirmation of the work of the institution itself, as well as the establishment of a positive image and solving important issues and problems in the functioning and work of the institution. It should be emphasized that the employees recognized the importance of raising the organization and internal capacities in the work of the institution in order to achieve the goals and tasks of the program. Sugestion of the implementers of the seminar program is that the interest of employees in education for this topic should be affirmed and harmonized with modern tendencies in the field of public relations as a significant type of future activity of educational institutions.
Appendix

SCHOOL AND PUBLIC PROGRAM

1. TOPICS

1.1. Topic 1.
PUBLIIC RELATIONS (PR). INTERNAL PR

Content: Public Relations (PR) – définition. Bringing the school closer to the citizens and establishing good relations with the social environment. What is the school known to the public for? What is its specificity? What do people think first when the name of the school is mentioned? Target audiences - concept. Creating and maintaining public contacts. Public relations goals. Levels of public relations. Basic level of PR. Internal PR: Employees - the first and important target group of PR. Public appearance of the school (school employees): at school, in the social environment and in the media. Public appearances of school employees: in the classroom in front of students, in the classroom in front of parents and in the team - at meetings and sessions. Key elements that enhance internal PR.

Activities: short lecture with power point presentation, organizing a workshop consisting of three groups. Each group was given a topic and roles. Topic of the first group: The first school day in the new class. Topic of the second group: The first parent meeting. The topic of the third group: Educational and disciplinary measures, item on the agenda at the session of the Departmental Council.

1.1. Topic 2.
BASIC LEVEL PR. RULES IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION OF SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

Content: Basic level of PR – defining the term. What can users and customers notice when they make contact with the school? Respecting the rules in business communication - the obligation of school employees as business people: how do you communicate with students, colleagues and clients (parents, business partners), are you kind and smiling, do the people you work with have the impression that you are open, professional and that you are able to provide the necessary information. Achieving harmony with the environment, which gives the school a good rating: people who contact the school in any way must always get the impression that the employees at the school are open, professional and represent a responsible educational institution. Providing information about the school - a living word and by phone in direct contact with customers, newsletter, school newspaper, school website...
Activity number 1: seminar participants individually describe situations in contact with people who are in public work, in which they felt uncomfortable. Discussion.

Activity number 2: participants work in groups. Each group has its own task within the topic: designing a school newspaper or school website.

1.1. Topic 3.
INTERMEDIATE LEVEL PR. VISUAL IDENTITY AND MEANS OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Content: Method of school identification. Visual identity - defining the term. Means of visual communication: logo, business cards, school brochures, information materials... Objectives of the middle level of public relations - to provide each interested person, at any time, in an appropriate way, with basic information about the school, which affects credibility and creates more favorable picture of the school.

Activities: Group work. Seminar participants participate in the workshops following the given precise instructions. The first group designs flyers, the second group logos, the third group business cards. Distribution of existing means of visual communication to seminar participants, as ideas for future work (from the professional experience of seminar lecturers).

1.2. Topic 4.
CRISIS PR

Content: Defining a crisis – an unstable or decisive period from which a school can emerge with a changed status and reputation, whether it is an improvement or deterioration. The importance of identifying key publics in order to form key messages: general public (citizens) and professional public (educational institutions, Ministry of Education, donors, associates). Methods of communication in crisis situations: oral and written means, direct and indirect, announcements, conferences, TV and radio appearances, bringing journalists to visit the school... PR plan in crisis situations: good strategy (brief overview of where we are, where we are going and how we will get there), preparation of materials for the media, organization of training for key people and positions in the school.

Activity number 1: ROLE PLAY – division of roles for group work. Crisis situations at school, adolescent pregnancy, injuring students in a fight on an excursion or at school, stealing a uniform or money at practice or at school.

Activity number 2: Working in groups. Press statement or press release about the event, keeping in mind the identification of key publics in order for the right message to preserve the integrity of the school and the identity of students, participants in the event.
1.3. Topic 5.
HIGHEST LEVEL OF PR. ORGANIZING ACTION
ON SCHOOL PROMOTION: MEDIA APPEARANCE

Content: PR activities - a thoughtful, planned and constant effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between the organization (school) and its environment. Vision and strategy in organized action to promote the school: purchase of advertising space in the media (advertisements in newspapers, radio and TV spots), press releases, interviews, press conferences, campaigns (presentation of the school in the Open Doors action).

Activity number 1: Short lecture with power point presentation. Working in groups. Topic: Designing an Open Door action (present directions and emphasize the importance of introducing new directions or demonstration classes, presenting the results of students and teachers in local and national competitions, school participation in cultural contents of the city, presentation of extracurricular activities, humanitarian actions in school realization of importance for local middle).

Activity number 2: Media appearance. Participants work in groups – ROLE PLAY. The first group received material and instructions on verbal and non-verbal communication in the TV studio - rules of conduct in front of television cameras. The second group designs the guest appearance in the television studio on their own, without any instructions. Theme of the show: Report from the excursion. The final part of the activity involves drawing a parallel on the success or failure of the group, emphasizing the importance of adequate preparation for media appearance.

The final part of the seminar: Recapitulation of the presented concepts and messages and recommendations on the application of knowledge. Final test. Comparison with the introductory test. Observing the differences and the level of training of the seminar participants. Drawing conclusions. Discussion. Filling in evaluation sheets and surveys. Distribution of certificates of completed seminar.

Figure 1. School in interaction with communication factors

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3 Figure 1 from the book School of the Future (Belgrade, 2012, p. 24), a publication of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development in cooperation with Microsoft.
In this section, we presented the program „School and the public”, which we implemented in primary and secondary schools in Serbia. Given the dynamics and development of modern communication, the ways and forms of school presence in public life are also changing. Content could be added to this program - the school’s Instagram page, the school’s Facebook page, where, in addition to regular school results and activities, useful information related to school life could be found (which proved very necessary at the time of the epidemic measures).

**Literature:**

ODNOSI SA JAVNOŠĆU U OBRAZOVNOM SISTEMU

Sažetak: Cilj ovog rada je utvrđivanje efekata realizacije programa „Škola i javnost“ na organizaciju školskog sistema u periodu realizacije programa od 2009–2014. i nivo komunikacije između obrazovnog sistema i javnosti. Metode: 694 ispitanika ispunilo je upitnik za polaznike obuke koji je korišćen u aktuelnim istraživanjima, a koji je pripremio Zavod za unapređivanje obrazovanja i vaspitanja, namenjen isključivo Centru za stručno usavršavanje zaposlenih. Prikupljeni podaci su obrađeni deskriptivnom statistikom u programu Microsoft Excel i dobijeni rezultati su prikazani u tabelama i grafikonima. Rezultati: U prilog tvrdnji da su zaposleni u obrazovanju svesni potrebe ličnog usavršavanja i angažovanja u komunikacijskim procesima između obrazovne ustanove i javnosti govori i podatak da je veliki procenat učesnika (više od 90%) pozitivno govorio o programu. Zaključak: Odgovori učesnika jasno su ukazali na očigledno unapređenje komunikacije između obrazovne ustanove i javnosti kroz afirmaciju rada same ustanove, kao i uspostavljanje pozitivnog imidža i rešavanje važnih pitanja i problema u funkcionisanju i radu institucije.

Ključne reči: Komunikacija i profesionalna komunikacija; Obrazovna institucija; Identitet i imidž institucije; Nivoi PR (odnosi sa javnošću) aktivnosti; Interna i eksterna javnost.