

1 Examination Performance and School Management

The management role

A simple sociological analysis of schools today would identify three main roles:

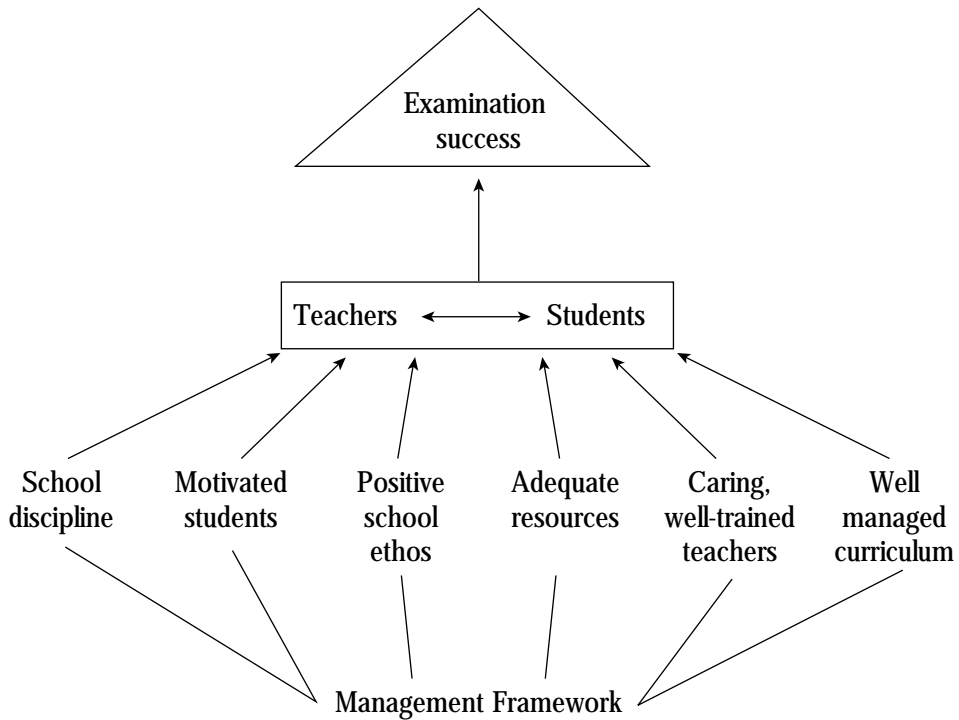
- managers
- teachers
- and learners or students.

The roles are not necessarily mutually exclusive, though each has its own specific functions and responsibilities. The teacher and student roles are, of course, an enduring feature of all schools. But management as a distinct role may be seen as a relatively recent development; or at least management used to be a more limited and peripheral function in most schools. In the past management was not expected to play much of a part in the actual process of education. Whatever was achieved in the classroom, including examination success, was attributable primarily to the mutual effort of teacher and students. This accorded with the Aristotelian model of education, with its emphasis on the centrality of the teacher/student relationship. But the Aristotelian model has been criticised for leaving out of consideration the potential contribution to educational success of any wider structure or way of managing resources and relationships within the school environment. Accordingly, there has been a shift in educational philosophy in recent years towards recognising the importance of co-ordinating and supporting the individual efforts of teachers and students through, for example, the work of a school management team.

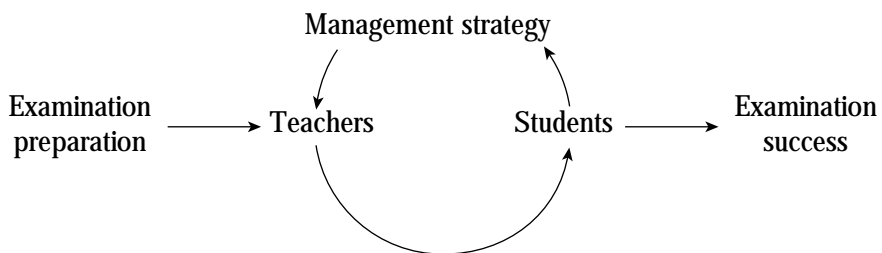
In short, there is now much support for the role of the school manager as a key player in the process of developing the skills and talents of young people. But it is still early days, and there is much to work out about how management teams can best contribute to the overall effectiveness of the school. In terms of public examination performance, for example, a good school management team will be acutely aware of the importance of providing an appropriate framework within which teachers and students can work to achieve creditable results. But they may need to reflect at length on what this framework should involve and how it can be integrated with the other aims and principles of the school.

One view might be that the best way to establish a framework for examination success would be to concentrate on achieving those things which in general contribute to a well run school, such as discipline, good personal relationships, well trained and caring staff, motivated students, etc. In this way the right background conditions within the school would exist for teachers and students to focus on the task of achieving good examination results.

The diagram below summarises this approach:



Certainly, it is right that managers should focus on creating the appropriate background conditions for effective teaching and learning within the school, not least because this is important in achieving good examination results. But it may also be worth going beyond this level of support by adopting a proactive approach. This would involve formulating a management strategy for how to co-ordinate and inspire the individual efforts of teachers and students as they prepare for vital public examinations. In other words, the management team would be involved directly in applying measures that can reasonably be expected to enhance the professional standards of teachers in preparing students for examinations, and to encourage the students to meet their own targets and aim higher still. The diagram below illustrates this proactive approach:



The key feature of the proactive approach is that there is a partnership between managers, teachers and students in the process of preparing for public examinations. Management has a planning and co-ordinating role, promoting effective procedures and strategies, and monitoring progress.

Motivation Checklist

Name of student:.....

Subject:

✓ or X

1 The student is keeping up with the work for the course.

2 The student has access to the required study resources.

3 They are receiving appropriate encouragement and support from the course teacher(s).

4 Their work is not affected by any personal problems.

5 They are coping with the academic demands of the course.

6 Their relations with other students on the course are satisfactory.

7 They have a good rapport with the course teacher(s).

8 The student receives appropriate support from parents.

9 They are not unduly concerned about future prospects.

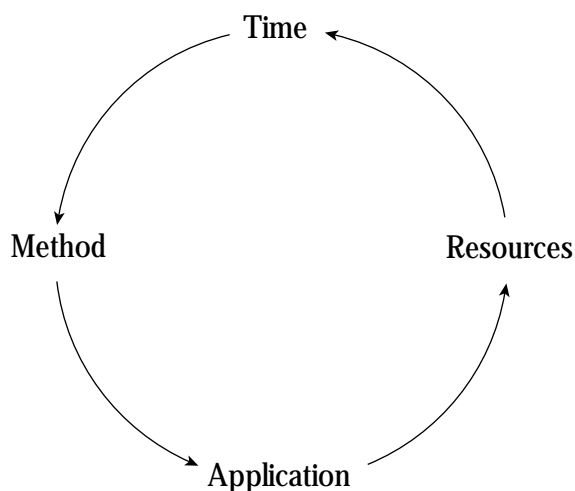
Tick here if you are satisfied that the student generally is enthusiastic about the course and focused on his/her work, and you are aware of no reasons for concern about his/her well-being in relation to the course.

Comments:

8 Revision

There is a lot to be gained in terms of examination success by ensuring that provision for revision forms an integral part of course planning. This requires a structured approach which locates opportunities for deploying appropriate revision strategies within the wider context of course delivery and teaching practice. The detailed arrangements are probably best left to individual teachers and departments to determine. However, the broad elements in successful revision planning can be regarded as generic, and so the school management team may consider that it would be a valuable exercise to invite all course teachers to take account of these elements when identifying strategies for helping their students to revise effectively.

Four considerations in particular are worth focusing on as the basis for a balanced and logical approach to revision planning: time, method, application and resources.



The key elements in revision planning

Time

Revision strategies need to be located within a timeframe that is both practicable and efficient in terms of making the best use of the available opportunities to motivate the students and help them practice key skills in preparation for the examinations. Planning is essential in order to avoid the undesirable situation where revision sessions are slotted in only if time is available at the end of the course. The timetable needs to be organised from the outset so that designated blocks of classroom time can be allocated to revision practice. Consideration might also be given to the point that ideally revision should be an ongoing process throughout the course.