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Editorial: Educational Leadership to Change the World

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Editorial: Educational Leadership to Change the World

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I n the last issue of IJELM we suggested that, in order to obtain good outcomes, educational leadership should be at the same time instructional, transformational and distributed. This new issue of IJELM expands some of these concepts, specially the last two, and it also expands the context in which leadership is performed: from the top to the middle and bottom of organizations.

Two of the articles of this new issue of IJELM are related to distributed leadership and the development of Professional Learning Communities in schools. Another article deepens into the world of transformational leadership offering a new perspective of this type of leadership, the transformative perspective. In a very similar sense, the last article develops the transformative nature of dialogic leadership, a concept that is at the same time new and old and which possibly we are going to hear about a lot from now on.

With each new article, it becomes clearer that leadership is not a position: a person is not a leader because he or she has been appointed to the top of an organization but because she (or he) has been serving other's needs. Leadership is something that followers give to some other persons on a day-

to-day basis and something that can be found all over the organization and not only right at the top.

All the articles share the extraordinary potential of leadership to change the lives of people (children, parents, teachers, principals, deans) and ultimately to transform the world. This can be the leitmotiv that penetrates all this new issue of IJELM.

This is the thesis defended in the first article by Professor Carolyn Shields. Shields expands the idea that leaders matter defending that a transformative leader can make a difference on the war against poverty and illiteracy. Shields adopts an optimistic and proactive point of view and overcomes the deficit thinking that abounds in the educational profession. She converts the negative discourse into a new kind of thinking plenty of possibilities for those less fortunate children. Justice, passion, inclusivity and democracy are other features that impregnate the article, and the idea of a more equitable distribution of power inside the schools.

Shields illustrates her clear argument with two splendid cases of two different children in the United States which share a label, that of being poor and disadvantaged. Her argument is that education and transformative leadership can overcome these difficulties.

In the second article, Antonio Bolívar from University of Granada, in Spain, proposes a research related to shared leadership and Professional Learning Communities. The professor from Granada suggests that schools should provide opportunities to share knowledge and experiences among teachers in order to become Professional Learning Communities. Bolívar is concerned about how to generate collectively the capacity of improvement inside the workplace and how to make this improvement last for a long while. So, he writes about building school capacity offering opportunities to learn within a particular context and focusing on results. Bolívar relates this building of school capacities to leadership and observes that leaders should take care of the development of capacities within their educational settings. Using a mixed methods research, he proposes some tools in order to describe if the school leaders are creating the conditions and capacities that their schools require to be Professional Learning Communities.

As it is the policy of our journal to permit articles in English or Spanish, we are publishing for the first time an article in this last language. We think that our Spanish readers from Spain or Latin- America will enjoy reading

Bolívar, one of the best known Spanish academics on leadership, in his own language. We apologize for the inconveniences.

David DeMatthews, in the next article, explores also distributed leadership in Professional Learning Communities but in this case from El Paso, in Texas (USA). He writes from a different geographical context but shares a lot of ideas in common with Bolivar's article. This is one of the most amazing things than happens when editing a Journal: we can observe from first-hand how the academics from different parts of the world reach the same conclusions and how consensus is made little by little all over the world. DeMatthews presents a research based on a comparative case study of six schools in the United States that have been identified for having effective Professional Learning Communities. The findings are related to distributed leadership.

Last, but not least, is the article by María Padrós and Ramón Flecha from University of Barcelona, in Spain. They explore the concept of dialogic leadership well related to the transformative leadership that proposes Carolyn Shields. Padrós and Flecha are internationally recognized academics and researchers with a deep interest in educational change and in the development of strategies to help solve the problems of schools and communities. They define dialogical leadership as a kind of leadership based on dialogue, inclusion and in the involvement of all community members in order to transform schools, neighbourhoods and societies.

As usual, we always finish our journal with a Book Review. In this case, María Rosel Bolívar-Ruano comments a recently published book from Alma Harris: *Distributed Leadership Matters: Perspectives, Practicalities and Potential.* Again, the concepts of distributed leadership and Professional Learning Communities are mixed and combined in Harris's book showing that a more distributed leadership implies new ways of organizing schools.

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The War on Poverty Must Be Won: Transformative Leaders Can Make a Difference

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The War on Poverty Must Be Won: Transformative Leaders Can Make a Difference

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Abstract

According to reports, almost one billion children worldwide live in poverty, many of whom find it difficult to attend school on a regular basis. Moreover, when they are able to attend, they too often find themselves unable to succeed, falling farther and farther behind their more affluent peers. By attending to a number of relevant research findings, educators can reverse this situation. First, it is important to understand and address both generational and situational poverty by challenging and eliminating deficit thinking. We must understand the difference between a child's prior opportunity to learn and his or her ability to learn; hold high expectations of every child and provide them with a rich and engaging learning environment. To accomplish this, transformative leadership offers a way forward. It is also important to ensure our curricula, our pedagogies, and our policies are inclusive, that they acknowledge the lived realities of every child, and that they openly address the social and societal inequities that marginalize some and privilege others. Educators must become advocates, when necessary, for those who desperately need the advice and encouragement of a caring adult. Only then can we change despair into hope.

La Guerra Contra la Pobreza Debe Ganarse: Los Líderes Transformativos Pueden Marcar la Diferencia

Dr. Carolyn M. Shields, Professor
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Resumen

Según los informes, casi mil millones de niños en el mundo viven en la pobreza. A muchos les resulta difícil ir a la escuela de forma regular; y si tienen la oportunidad de asistir a clase, se sienten a menudo incapaces de tener éxito, quedando cada vez más atrasados en los estudios que sus compañeros más pudientes. Los educadores pueden revertir esta situación utilizando como herramienta de consulta los resultados de investigaciones pertinentes al caso. Es importante comprender el concepto de pobreza y saber abordarla, tanto en su concepto generacional como situacional, y de combatir y eliminar el pensamiento déficit. Debemos entender la diferencia entre la oportunidad que ha tenido un niño de aprender y su capacidad de aprendizaje; mantener altas expectativas de todos los niños por igual y proporcionarles un entorno de aprendizaje rico y motivador. Para lograrlo, es importante asegurarse que los planes de estudio, los métodos pedagógicos y nuestras políticas son inclusivos, que reconocen la realidad que viven todos los niños, y que abordan abiertamente las desigualdades sociales y las impuestas por la sociedad, las cuales marginan a algunos y privilegian a otros. Los educadores deben convertirse en defensores de aquellos que precisan desesperadamente el consejo y el aliento de un adulto comprensivo. Sólo entonces podremos cambiar la desesperación por la esperanza.

Palabras clave: liderazgo, justicia social, pobreza, educación, pensamiento déficit

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A recent Oxfam report captured the attention of many educators and researchers worldwide when it proclaimed that the richest 85 people in the world possessed more wealth than half of the world's population (Fuentes-Nieva & Galasso, 2014 p.1). The statistic is staggering. A group of people that one can gather together in a room the size of a university classroom holds more wealth than half the world's population! The report also asserted that "seven out of ten people live in countries where economic inequality has increased in the last 30 years" (with the US leading the way) (Fuentes-Nieva & Galasso, 2014, p. 3). In fact, over three billion people—almost half of the world's population—live on less than $2.50 a day. Children comprise 2.2 billion of the world's population and one billion—almost half of them—live in poverty. Further, according to UNICEF, 22,000 children die each day due to poverty (Shah, 2013).

Despite the United Nations' longstanding mandate for free, universal, elementary education, over 120 million of the world's children never have the opportunity to attend school at all; and many others who struggle to attend school on a regular basis find it difficult to achieve academic success. Indeed, almost a billion people worldwide, most of them poor, were unable to read a book or sign their name at the beginning of the 21st century (Shah, 2013). What is important, as Bailey (2014) acknowledges is to understand that

> Through no fault of their own, poor children live in more dangerous neighborhoods and attend underperforming schools. They are increasingly less likely to complete high school and college and more likely to live in poverty as adults. Over 40 percent of children born to parents in the lowest quintile of family income remain in the same quintile as adults. (Bailey, 2014)

We have long been aware of this situation. Over 50 years ago, American President Lyndon Johnson said in his inaugural State of the Union Address:

> Unfortunately, many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty, and some because of their color, and all too many because of both. Our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity.… It will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won. (1964)

Today, 50 years later, the need to address the issue of poverty is as pressing as ever, although in many countries it is an issue that polarizes and divides people politically. Some in the United States, for example, believe that the country does not have a poverty crisis; others think that helping the poor serves to rob them of a work ethic and to create a culture of dependency. Still others argue that the poor are increasingly falling behind their peers, both in the United States and globally, and that something must be done.

The issue of child poverty is, therefore, of pressing interest internationally, and of critical importance to school leaders everywhere who must grapple with the question of how best to educate all children and perhaps especially those living in poverty. In this article, I will first examine how, using concepts drawn from research, including the concept of transformative leadership, educators and educational leaders can create more socially just and inclusive environments for educating children who live in poverty.

Poverty and Education

Poverty is defined in numerous ways and with many different statistics depending on one's context. What is important to know is that globally, "1.4 billion people in developing countries live on $1.25 a day or less" (IFAD, 2011), that "842 million people—or one in eight people in the world—do not have enough to eat" (State of Food, 2013), and that "66 million primary school-age children attend classes hungry across the developing world, with 23 million in Africa alone" (Hunger, 2014). In general, in the United States, a family of four attempting to live on $23,300 a year is considered poor. By this calculation, 46.5 million people, over half of them children, live in poverty in what is generally referred to as the richest country in the world.

Moreover we know that when children are poor or worse, homeless, they attend school less frequently, if at all; they face less school success, they change schools more often, experience higher push out or dropout rates, suffer poorer health and nutrition and so on (Love, 2009). But one thing is clear; children who are living in poverty do not care about these statistics. They only know they are hungry, or that they have no bed to call their own, or that they can barely remember when their parents last had time to hug them. Certainly, they wonder why they can't do things the other children do.

They do not understand that poverty is a social problem that can and should be addressed by society; they simply think something is wrong with them or their family. Thus, by every measure, society is failing a large number of children and we, as educators, are failing these children if our schools do not serve them well. Because children do not choose to be poor, educators must take a stand.

Too often educators declare that we can't be social workers – and we cannot. We say we cannot teach kids who come from dysfunctional or disadvantaged families—but we must. We know that the greatest predictors of school success are the socio-economic status of families, and the parents' levels of education (Duncan & Murnane, 2013). But this means that unless we intervene—and make no mistake, education is an intervention—we will continue to fail our poorest and most disadvantaged children.

In this paper, I will describe some of my personal experiences, examine some research about teaching and learning, and share the stories of two individuals who illustrate the two basic kinds of poverty and the impact education may have. But first, let me describe the eight tenets of a concept called transformative leadership (Shields, 2009, 2013) which I believe offers a useful approach for educational leaders wanting to make a difference in the lives of impoverished children.

Transformative Leadership – A way Forward

Often educational leaders, both those in formal positions of leadership and those who are in less formal teacher leadership roles, enter schools in which the playing field is not level, and in which some groups of students (in this case those living in poverty) are disadvantaged. Rather than tinkering around the edges of change, a transformative leader first acknowledges the need for deep and equitable change. Once this need has been acknowledged, it is important to help those in the organization to deconstruct knowledge frameworks that perpetuate an inequitable status quo and to reconstruct frameworks that promote inclusion and equity. This includes, as we will see later, the elimination of deficit thinking and the acceptance of the lived experiences of all children. The third tenet of transformative leadership is a focus on democracy, liberation, equity, and justice. This requires that schools be organized and operated in ways that set children free from the constraints of poverty and that permit them to complete on a more level

playing field. The next tenet of transformative leadership is to address the inequitable distribution of power. This posits that schools must become more inclusive, listening to more voices, and accepting more forms of knowledge than is often the case. It means that educators must differentiate between a child's prior opportunity to learn that may have been constrained by family circumstances and his or her innate curiosity and ability to learn. Fifth, transformative leaders recognize that schools confer a public good as well as private good. In other words, having a good education may offer to individuals the opportunity for greater lifetime earnings and a better career, but it also offers general societal benefits. For example, a higher level of education results in overall better health and savings on health care, less crime, fewer people incarcerated, and a higher level of civil engagement. Thus, educating all children, including the most disadvantaged becomes of critical societal importance. The sixth tenet of transformative leadership is the need to balance critique with promise. It is easy to discuss and criticize what is wrong; it is much more difficult to change circumstances to offer the promise of a better future to children. This may well require that transformative educators take on the roles of advocates and sometimes even activists, always speaking on behalf of those who may have difficulty speaking for themselves. Finally, transformative leadership requires educators to have moral courage. Speaking out on behalf of those who are sometimes disadvantaged because they are perceived to be less meritorious is not always easy. Changing schools, curriculum, or policy to be truly welcoming and inclusive for all sometimes brings with the attempts, complaints from those who are afraid their own power and privilege will be diminished.

In the following sections, you will see how these eight tenets, taken together, form the basis for a way to address the needs of all children living in poverty.

A Personal Awakening

I first became aware of the impact of poverty on children's education when I was a young teacher in the remote village of North West River, Labrador, in northern Canada—at the time accessible only by cable car or boat. Many of the children came from very poor and, even more remote, coastal

communities and lived in a Grenfell Mission dormitory during the school year.

Sonny sat at the back of my 7th grade French class, slouched over, inattentive, hair falling over his face. I tried everything: I cajoled, I begged, I ignored him; I yelled, I threatened, I gave him detentions. Nothing seemed to convince Sonny that he should learn to conjugate "avoir" or "être." He did not do his homework; he did not respond in class. Finally one day, in exasperation, I said, "Fine, if you won't do your work now, come to my house after school and we will do it then." And to my surprise, Sonny came. We sat at my dining room table, working on irregular French verbs, when suddenly Sonny blurted out, "I just found out that my Mother was married Saturday." As he talked, he shared that he had been living with his mother, a welfare recipient, in a small house in a nearby village. She had become involved with a man who took a dislike to Sonny and kicked him out of the house, forcing him to live in an unheated shed behind the house in the frigid Labrador winter weather. A welfare worker discovered that Sonny was living alone, in this unheated shed, and took him to the dormitory in North West River. And the day before my class, he had learned his mother had married her new man.

At the time, I was not aware of the pervasive and abject nature of child homeless or poverty, but I immediately understood how ridiculous it was for me to expect Sonny to concentrate on French verbs when he had so many other, more important things, on his mind. What I also learned was that once I began to know him, to listen to him, to let him share his fears and details of his lived experience, he began to pay attention, to do his homework and to learn. He never became a star pupil, but he did pass 7th grade French. As the years pass, the image of Sonny remains firmly etched in my mind. He reminds me of the importance of getting to know our students as individuals, as people with lives outside of school that are important to them, of attempting to understand school from their perspective, and of the importance of not giving up on a single one of them—as we attempt to educate all children.

What Do We Know?

So what do we know about educating impoverished children? We know that a number of things do not work: good intentions, pity, low expectations;

deficit thinking or blaming the victim; new, packaged programs (by themselves); technical solutions that simply move pieces around; transmissive, repetitive pedagogy; a singular focus on testing and test preparation; any emphasis that narrows the curriculum; or even more teacher-assistants and more remediation. Educational leaders will, therefore, need to consider effecting deep and significant change to make our schools more equitable. They cannot simply ensure that their schools are running efficiently, but must help their teachers to reconsider a number of beliefs and assumptions, particularly those related to poor children. The good news, however, is that we know a number of things that do work—and the even better news is that most of them do not cost a lot of money. They do however cost in commitment, in effort, and sometimes require the very hard work of addressing and changing our belief systems.

What works begins with building relationships, as Sonny taught me long ago. It continues as we understand and build on the strengths or cultural capital of each child and create an inclusive, socially just school culture. To do so requires educators to ensure that school is for all children and that each student knows he or she is valued and respected. It demands that we hold high expectations for each child and provide them with enrichment instead of low-level remediation. This may seem counter-intuitive if students seem to lag behind their more advantaged peers, but if we simply engage them in slow, repetitive, and often boring remedial approaches, they will never catch up. What less advantaged children need is to become excited and involved in higher level activities so they will be able to learn and compete with their more advantaged classmates. These changes do not simply happen but must be modelled and emphasized by the leaders in every school.

In the following paragraphs, I provide some research-based suggestions related to these assertions to demonstrate how educators can better support students from impoverished settings and ensure they are able to succeed in educational environments today.

Two Kinds of Poverty

Educators must understand that there are basically two kinds of poverty—situational and generational (Jensen, 2009, 2013). Moreover, each has different characteristics and requires different educational strategies to assist students to succeed.

Situational poverty. Situational poverty is often temporary, and is usually caused by a crisis of some kind. It may ensue after an environmental disaster (flood, hurricane, tornado) that may have caused the destruction of houses and material goods; or it may result from a family member having severe health problems that have strained family resources, or it may perhaps occur as a result of a breakdown of the family unit, again due to death, disease, or divorce. Many adults experiencing situational poverty may be very well educated and even have engaged in professional careers; nevertheless, situational poverty has a severe impact on the well-being of every family member. It creates stress, unhappiness, and disadvantage and it has a serious and deleterious impact on the ability of children to concentrate and perform in school as well as on the possibility of parents providing support and assistance for their child's education.

In other words, the trauma of situational poverty may bring with it shame, an inability to concentrate, and a feeling of worthlessness. Gabriel[1] was a child of situational poverty caused by political unrest in his home country. He grew up in Managua, the capital city of Nicaragua. The youngest of five children, Gabriel's early life was relatively comfortable. His father made a decent living as a government engineer and his mother owned a hair salon. However, the family's comfortable life-style was shattered when the Sandinista regime took power from the Somoza dynasty. In the mayhem of military combat, two of Gabriel's uncles were killed and his father became a target of the Sandinistas who confiscated nearly everything the family had so worked hard to build. Gabriel explained:

> That was when my parents knew it was time to leave the country. We escaped on foot; I remember my dad holding me so tightly as he carried me across the river. After weeks on the road, we finally arrived in Miami, Florida, to join relatives who had immigrated previously.

The trauma of having to leave everything, of knowing his uncles had been killed and of having to escape to a new country where everyone spoke a different language and where everything was unfamiliar would obviously affect Gabriel's school performance. And this is also the experience of many immigrant and refugee children today. Some have moved to a new country; others have lost their homes and are living in temporary housing in more familiar settings, but all have experienced trauma, loss, and even the death of

a loved one. Educators must consider how experiences such as this affect the ability of children to succeed in school and find ways to offer encouragement and support.

Generational poverty. On the other hand, Sophie[2] comes from generational poverty. Sophie describes how she grew up with parents who were on welfare and thus, who struggled to put food on the table. And she describes how in school, she was the "lost little girl at the back of the room whom teachers ignored." She states that immediately she could "feel the prejudice" at school, as she heard her teachers whispering scornfully when she had been absent, that she had "gone with her parents to pick up their welfare cheques."

Sophie comes from generational poverty. Like many others in this situation, as she grew up, she suffered from malnutrition, generally poor health, and had a lower vocabulary and less general knowledge of the world than Gabriel. Her parents, and their parents, had struggled to make ends meet and to support and care for their families. In school, Sophie was ignored, neglected—a nobody (she says). Generational poverty affected her motivation, her speech, and her general knowledge. Her parents were poor, so they had little time or energy to help her; however, no-one expected them to do anything different. The family was written off as unimportant.

Gabriel began school in the United States as an English language learner. He was quiet and shy and struggled to learn English and to interact with his classmates. The school considered him to be learning disabled and by the time he was in 3rd or 4th grade, tracked him into a self-contained classroom for students who were considered learning disabled (LD). He explained:

> I really didn't think school was that hard because the teachers didn't really care about giving us much homework and stuff; they all thought we were LD and couldn't learn anyway. I didn't have to try that hard, I mean the teachers didn't really expect much of us.

Sophie described more of her school experience. One year, when she was 14, for reasons she does not reveal, she was forced to quit school in the middle of the school year. The following year, when she was assigned to the same math teacher with whom she had not succeeded the previous year, her father, never comfortable going into the school, summoned up his courage and went to see the principal. Unfortunately, the blunt response was that

Sophie could not learn and that the school was simply babysitting her; so, the teacher to whom she was assigned did not matter.

Sonny had experienced the impact of both generational and situational poverty. His mother's history of little education and of being on welfare combined with his sudden new living situation in a shed all seemed to make school success unattainable. Like Sophie and Gabriel, he had not chosen to be poor; his poverty and living situation were not his fault. All three remind educators that we must never make a child feel embarrassed or ashamed because he or she is poor—whether the poverty is temporary or long-standing.

Eliminating Deficit Thinking

Unfortunately Sophie, Gabriel, and Sonny were victims of a phenomenon that is commonly known as *deficit thinking* (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005; Valencia, 1997). You have seen and heard it frequently in your schools—you know, "These parents don't care. These kids don't try. They will never amount to anything." In fact, I was once conducting some research on the Najavo reservation in SE Utah and asked teachers, during an interview, what would help the children learn. To my surprise one teacher responded, "Better parents." These assumptions are examples of knowledge frameworks that must be deconstructed by educational leaders. Both are incorrect and extremely destructive and must be addressed by any educator wanting to help impoverished children succeed. We know, from Sophie's father's visit to the school and from Gabriel's parents' sacrifices, that both families cared very much.

Research shows that "the single most important factor in the academic achievement of minoritized children is the active rejection of deficit thinking on the part of the principal" (Wagstaff & Fusarelli, 1995). The key is for the educational leader to set the example, to challenge instances of deficit thinking wherever and whenever they are observed, and to ensure a schoolwide change of perception. We must never treat differences as though they are inherently deficiencies. Educators must never make assumptions that children cannot learn based on their parents' levels of education, home language, general knowledge, or their current financial situation. Sophie and Gabriel written off, left to languish in a public school classroom. But unlike so many other children from impoverished situations, both were

survivors, in part because of a later fortuitous interaction with a caring adult. Unfortunately this is also too often the case. Children from impoverished situations too often fail to succeed because they lack an understanding adult who supports, encourages, and even advocates for them.

Ability vs. Opportunity: High Expectations for All

If leaders are to ensure that education liberates children from the effects of poverty (the third tenet of transformative leadership), it becomes important to help teachers differentiate between a child's ability to learn as opposed to their prior opportunity to learn. Consider the following situation which I present as a metaphor for what too often occurs in schools and classrooms worldwide. Assume that Sophie entered kindergarten and was given a sheet of paper and told to paint a picture. She may have enthusiastically dipped her brush in one pot of paint, and then another, and still another; but as she continued, her excitement might have turned to dismay because the bright colors turned to a kind of muddy brown. No-one had taught her to clean her brush between colors. Linda, in contrast, may have come from a home where her parents had money, time, and energy to paint with her, teaching her to use a different brush for each color or to clean the brush well between colors.

Too often, without considering the child's prior opportunity to learn, we make snap decisions: "Poor Sophie. She is so far behind; she is such a weak student. We'll have to put her in a remedial class, while Linda, on the other hand is such a gifted artist….!" Recall this is a metaphor that is repeated in numerous situations—math class, reading, social studies. We make assumptions based on current performance rather than ability and, instead of taking the few minutes required to show Sophie how to clean her brush, we relegate her to a lifetime of lowered expectations and remediation. Moreover, too often, our approach is to place students from poverty in remedial situations where we exacerbate the situation by giving them flashcards, drill and kill, or slow sequential bits of information—teaching them in ways that are so slow (and boring) they will never catch up but always remain behind. Yet research has clearly demonstrated (Jensen, 2013) that it is the opposite that is required. Children who are from impoverished home situations learn best when they are in a rich, stimulating learning environment.

This is supported by numerous studies that have shown that children from poverty, especially generational poverty, need language-rich, stimulating, and welcoming environments (Gorski, 2013). They need engaging activities to take their minds off their home situations, to immerse them in the excitement of learning, and to teach them what they have not been able to learn at home. Unless we captivate these children's imaginations and hold high expectations for them, they will never "catch up."

Create an Inclusive Curriculum

Another key to reaching children in poverty is to attend carefully to the assignments we give and the homework we require and to ensure that every child has an equal opportunity to succeed. If, for example, a science teacher asks a group of students to read the electric meters on their homes, to record the peaks and valleys of electrical use, and to graph the results over a week, many in the class will likely succeed, but children like Sophie, Gabriel, or Sonny would not be able to complete the assignment as given. Gabriel, for example, recalled his early years in Florida, saying:

> My father worked three jobs, mostly washing dishes, because that was the only work he could find. He never slept; he worked so hard just to put food on the table; we were so poor. We lived in a one bedroom apartment, can you imagine? All of us slept in one room. But, somehow, my mom and dad always found a way to provide for us. I know now how hard they struggled and I owe them so much.

He may not have been able to complete the original electric meter assignment because they lived in an apartment that did not have a separate meter. Similarly Sonny could not complete the assignment because he lived without electricity. Yet, both could certainly have contributed to the work. In fact, despite the fact that a friend had told him he was not smart enough to learn about computers, Gabriel had succeeded in teaching himself some pretty advanced skills—skills that resulted in some of his teachers actually asking him to fix their computers. So he could have graphed the results, written the description, and contributed in many different ways. But no-one recognized his ability. Even the teachers who asked for his help with their own computers somehow did not make the connection. And unfortunately, if

a teacher does not introduce these and other choices into an assignment, children from poverty will always find themselves on the borders, wondering how to fulfill the course requirements.

It is difficult to leave it up to every teacher to imagine each child's life outside of school, to provide alternatives, to give choices – for working alone or in groups, for assignments that require extra materials and those that don't, so that every child can succeed. Hence, this must become a matter for schoolwide dialogue and reflection. Time at staff meetings could be allocated to investigating barriers to children's success. It must not simply be children from better educated, middle-class families who can succeed. No child should ever have to summon his or her courage and approach the teacher, embarrassed, hoping no one else will hear him say, "I can't afford this. Can the school help?' or "I can't do that assignment; may I do something else?" It is up to educators to know our students, to understand their situations, and to build in alternatives so every child knows he or she belongs in school.

Let me provide a further illustration. A friend of mine who works with children who are homeless once told me about a small sixth grade boy whom she was tutoring. His class was studying the "United States" and each child was asked to pick a state, develop a report, and bring food typical of that state to share with the class. He worried, reflected, and finally chose Florida, because he believed orange juice would fulfil the requirements of the project and that he could afford juice for the class. Imagine his devastation and my friend's anger, when his teacher told him juice was not a food. He was not trying to avoid the work. He desperately wanted to fulfil each requirement, and, for a moment, thought that he had found a solution. We must make school work accessible for all children. We must also not make it more difficult or even impossible for some already challenged children to accomplish. Every time we make a child ask for an alternative—"I don't have an electric meter," "I can't afford food—or a book, or this field trip"— we are giving them the message that "school is really not for the likes of them." They are just being babysat—they truly don't belong–and we certainly don't believe they can succeed. Moreover we do this for children from impoverished settings from day one—remember Sophie says she "felt the prejudice." School leaders must know what is going on in their classrooms and must ensure that attitudes and practices like these are addressed and eradicated.

Otherwise, we will continue to send children from impoverished settings the message over and over, day after day, week after week, year after year—that school is not for them—and then we are surprised when they drop out of school (we should more accurately say, are "pushed out") at higher rates than their peers. In fact, 16 to 24-year-old students who come from low income families are seven times more likely to drop out than those from families with higher incomes. This is unacceptable and we, educators, can help to turn this around (Jensen, 2013).

Become a Patient and Caring Advocate

Just before Gabriel turned 16, he walked into a social security office, seeking employment. He was ready to quit school, believing he "*was not smart enough to graduate.*" He had internalized the deficit thinking of his teachers and failed to acknowledge that his ability to recite long strings of computer code, link whole apartment buildings to a single Internet connection, and restore crashed systems in a matter of minutes were indications of the intelligence and skills he needed to succeed. Fortunately, a friend of mine was working in that office, recognized Gabriel's ability, and had the patience and determination to work with him, until he finally believed he could be successful. Gabriel had simply accepted what educators had told him as matter of fact, internalizing the labels they had placed on him and repeating them at will to explain why he could not learn. In fact, it took many months of working with him and offering support and encouragement for my friend to finally convince Gabriel to talk to his 10th grade teacher about attending college. Once she began to advocate for him, however, the struggle was not over as other teachers and even the school administrator were not convinced. Once again, educational leaders must put policies in place to remove barriers to children's attainment, rather than to support marginalizing placements.

For Sophie, it was a crisis later in her own life—her husband leaving her with two small girls and her own desire to learn to read so she would be able to read notices sent home from her daughters' teachers—that made the difference. She describes how she gathered her courage and went back to school at night to get an equivalent high school graduation certificate. In her night classes, she encountered a teacher who understood how to make learning engaging and fun. She explains how they laughed and studied, and

how, for the first time in her life, she knew she could learn. In fact, at one point, her night-school teacher told her she should consider going on to university because she would make a wonderful teacher. Despite Sophie's incredulity, the teacher persisted, telling her that her own experiences would give her empathy and understanding. Yet Sophie resisted, explaining how she was dumb and could not do math—until suddenly she realized she was repeating all the negative messages she had internalized over the years.

For both Sophie and Gabriel something wonderful happened. They encountered a teacher who understood them, believed in them, and advocated for them. For both of them, the caring adult came into their lives very late. Gabriel was 16 when he met my friend in the social security office; Sophie was an adult with two children when she encountered a supportive night-school teacher. Having a caring, knowledgeable teacher who understands how to help children learn must not be the luck of the draw. It must not be a rare occurrence. It is what every child deserves. And it must happen from the earliest school experience. Gabriel's teacher was convinced to go to the dean of the school, and to argue for him to be placed in regular classes. At first no-one wanted to move him, but finally, they agreed. Gabriel took night school classes for two years and also attended summer school, but he finally graduated. Sophie went on to university and is now a successful elementary school teacher, motivating and assisting her students, and advocating at every possible moment that teachers "believe in every student."

It may be that as you think about children in your classes who are not succeeding, you are comparing them to Sophie or Gabriel and thinking that they just don't seem as motivated. But, I urge you to remember Sonny. I thought he wasn't motivated either, but as I developed a caring relationship with him, he wanted to uphold my trust and worked hard enough to succeed. I also think of my own adopted son, who suffered (I learned much later) from fetal alcohol effect—and seemed very disinterested and unmotivated at school. I often had to drag him out of bed in the morning, or force him to return to class after lunch—but when he had to get out of bed at 5 a.m. to meet his friends to catch the bus to go skiing, my urging was no longer needed. He was motivated to do what he wanted and believed he could do. He was not motivated to try when he believed he would fail.

Acknowledge Children's Lived Realities

The message is that we must acknowledge the lived realities of every student and ensure that each feels fully welcomed and accepted at school. No-one should have to hide who they are or what their situation is. No student should be made to feel ashamed of his or her circumstances or his or her parents. No student should have to ask for a modified or different assignment. And we must ensure that our rules as well as our classroom practices and pedagogies are fair.

Thus, we must carefully examine our school policies, including our approaches to discipline, because in an attempt to ensure a calm and safe learning environment, many schools have developed inflexible policies that disadvantage children who are already disadvantaged. One common policy is to suspend students who fight or swear. Yet it is important to examine the consequences, and to determine who is disadvantaged by such a policy. When a child comes from a middle or upper class home with professional parents, he or she is likely to have learned to use appropriate language and specifically not to swear in inappropriate situations (for instance, within earshot of adults). When a child lives on the streets, hearing swearing as a matter of course, seeing fighting as the only way to solve problems, it becomes much more difficult to self-censor language and behavior at school. We must reflect on how to teach appropriate behavior without punishing some children for behavior they have learned to think of as normal. Unless and until we make sure every child is valued and not punished for their lived experiences, we have lost the education battle before it has begun. Thus, as I have suggested elsewhere (Shields, 2003; 2009), it is important to ask several questions, every time we create a policy or make a decision:

- Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged?
- Who is included and who excluded?
- Who is privileged and who marginalized?
- Whose voice has been heard and who has been silenced?

School leaders must examine policies for unintended consequences if we are to overcome the inequitable distribution of power and to ensure that every voice is taken into consideration in every school.

Discuss Social Conditions Openly and Explicitly

I recently listened to a group of older teenagers discussing their own experiences with poverty. What struck me was how they all believed their situation was isolated, that there was something wrong with their parents and their families. No-one had ever discussed poverty with them; and, growing up, they claimed they had no idea poverty was a social phenomenon—something that could and should be widely addressed. This is important. Our school curricula must become inclusive; they must recognize social issues as well as individual challenges. Educators must be willing to discuss the hard realities of our society as well as its lighter side; otherwise children will never know that poverty is a social condition that should be addressed instead of just something wrong with their family. A group of us once conducted research in a small school attended by both middle class children and their peers who lived in a nearby trailer park. One day, after the local paper wrote an article in which a number of families were described as living in poverty, the school received calls from several more affluent members of the community objecting to the characterization. So the 6th grade class decided to take on the question. Here is just a little of the conversation recorded by the school principal (and previously reported in Smith, Donohue, Vibert, 1998, p. 149):

J: I don't know if we should talk about violence in our community

D: Are we saying that poverty and violence are things we should not talk about? I'm just asking…

V: And violence and poverty are things we have to talk about if we want them to go away. The thing is, it isn't personal … and people taking it that way makes it worse—sort of like there's some shame in being poor.

T: But the article says "many" and "many" sounds bad… like shame or blame…

K: But, poverty is not poor people's fault and not having everything you need shouldn't make you feel less of a person.

Engaging in open dialogue is one way to help children understand the true nature and the extent of poverty as a social reality and hence, as a war which must be won. Leaders must ensure that teachers not only teach the formal curriculum but that they understand the importance of teaching

children about social issues; they must not consider this as wasted time as we work to ensure every child sees himself or herself reflected in the curriculum and classroom discussions.

Concluding Thoughts

The previous sections of this article have emphasized some steps educational leaders can and must take to ensure that children from impoverished settings have a more level playing field at school. First, it is important to understand and address both generational and situational poverty by challenging and eliminating deficit thinking whenever and wherever we find evidence of it. We must never assume that a child's prior opportunities to learn prescribe his or her abilities to learn; and we must hold high expectations of every child, providing a rich and engaging learning environment. To accomplish this, it is important to ensure our curricula, our pedagogies, and our policies are inclusive. We will need to acknowledge the lived realities of every child, openly address the social and societal inequities that marginalize some and privilege others, and become advocates, when necessary, for those who desperately need the advice and encouragement of a caring adult.

In other words, we must begin to exercise transformative leadership—to effect deep and equitable change whenever and wherever it is needed. We must change inequitable knowledge frameworks, overcome the inequitable distribution of power, and emphasize the public and private, the local and the global impacts of poverty as well as the potential of education to overcome them. It will take the ability to critique and to identify inequities as well as the ability to find and implement solutions that offer promise. It will take willingness on the part of educators to move beyond our comfort zones and to speak up and speak out whenever necessary, raising our voices on behalf of those who need us to walk alongside them.

If we fail to make these changes, impoverished children will continue to fail in greater numbers, to drop out of school in greater numbers, and to attain lesser educational outcomes. Making these changes to ensure that schools become more inclusive and more socially just has been shown to improve the educational outcomes of all students (Shields, 2009). These are steps that all educational leaders can take, wherever they may find themselves—in district offices, in formal school leadership, or in the

classroom. It does not take extra resources, so everyone can participate, but it does take everyone! Each educator and educational leader must summon his or her moral courage and act. No-one can assume it is someone else's responsibility. Educating children who live in poverty is a moral act. Failing to educating them is also a moral act—of omission. Educators cannot wait until social policy overcomes poverty, for this may take generations and too many children are lost each day.

Ultimately, Sophie fulfilled her dream and rewarded the faith of her teachers. She became a teacher—and pleads with all educators to "believe in every child." She explains that when "there are people who believe in you, who help you, who encourage you, you can do anything." Gabriel recalls how his father never slept, working three jobs just to put food on the table, how all seven of them lived in a one-bedroom apartment, and slept in one room. He acknowledges how much he owes his parents for their love and sacrifices which became the motivating force that helped him rise above the station in life assigned to him by the school. And now, he is working toward a Masters' degree in Information Technology while he enjoys his career as a Network Administrator and director of network administration for a luxury resort corporation with locations around the world. In fact, ironically, when my friend recently spoke with Gabriel, he was relaxing in his own private hot tub on the patio of his $3,000/night suite overlooking the Caribbean Sea from Anguilla. Each of these examples demonstrates the importance of educators developing strong and supportive relationships with the children in their schools.

Unfortunately, Sonny did not find the continued support and encouragement he needed, and ultimately joined the hundreds of underserved youth who drop out of school and subsequently struggle to support themselves and their own families. Sonny's situation should not be the norm. Gabriel and Sophie should not be anomalies. They are all reminders that the war on poverty can, and must, be won. Even though, worldwide, income inequality is worse now than it ever has been, there is also hope because we know what it takes to help children like Sonny and Sophie and Gabriel succeed. We know that strong and effective leadership is important (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Sillins & Mulford, 2002). We know that when children are worried about their family situations it is almost impossible for them to succeed in school. But we also know that when they are in welcoming and inclusive schools, when their classroom

experiences are inviting and challenging, they can overcome their social situations and succeed. This must be the goal of every transformative leader.

We must put an end, as President Johnson said, to the lost generations of children who live on the outskirts of hope. We must do our part to bring the war on poverty to an end. The education battle can and must be won. As United Nations Ex-Secretary-General, Kofi Annan United Nations Ex-secretary Kofi Annan stated on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in 2006:

> The campaign to make poverty history—a central moral challenge of our age—cannot remain a task for the few, it must become a calling for the many … I urge everyone to join this struggle. Together, we can make real and sufficient progress towards the end of poverty.

As educators, we cannot solve all of the problems of disadvantaged youth and their families, but we can and must help them make progress. By exercising transformative leadership that attends urgently to the above strategies drawn from extensive research, we can, together, as Lyndon Johnson said, "replace despair with opportunity."

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] Gabriel is a friend of one of my doctoral students who sent his story to me, with Gabriel's permission. The words that are italicized reflect Gabriel's own words, although the material is not publicly available.
[2] Sophie's story is one I heard personally from a French Canadian woman at a conference in Montreal in 2009. It is also retold in French in a video made for a research project, *Supporting Montreal's Disadvantaged Schools*.

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Building School Capacity: Shared Leadership and Professional Learning Communities. A Research Proposal.

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PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Building School Capacity: Shared Leadership and Professional Learning Communities. A Research Proposal.

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Abstract

If schools are to meet the needs of students and achieve educational success, to achieve both goals simultaneously, they should provide opportunities for teachers to innovate, share experiences and learn together. Schools should thus be configured as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). This article links this term to building the collective capacity of the school through distributed leadership. It combines in a mixed design the description of the situation in Elementary and Secondary schools of Andalusia, with in-depth case studies, properly selected, that can show progress in their levels of educational success, according to the degree of distributed leadership development that promotes the development of the school as a PLC. We are more interested in practices that evidence success in education achievements rather than in good practices. One of the main aims of the research proposal is to identify and describe the conditions and processes in which direction's leadership enables the development of schools as PLCs.

Keywords: Capacity Building, Educational Leadership, Professional Learning Communities, Successful Practices

Construcción de Capacidades de la Escuela: Liderazgo Compartido y Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje. Una propuesta de investigación.

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Resumen

Si las escuelas están para satisfacer las necesidades del alumnado y conseguir el éxito educativo; para lograrlo deben proporcionar oportunidades para que los docentes puedan innovar, intercambiar experiencias y aprender juntos. Los centros educativos deben configurarse como Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje (PLCs). Este artículo lo vincula a la construcción de capacidad colectiva de la escuela por medio de un liderazgo compartido. Se conjuga en un diseño mixto la descripción de la situación en centros educativos de Primaria y Secundaria de Andalucía, con el estudio en profundidad de casos, debidamente seleccionados, que pueden evidenciar progresos en sus niveles de éxito educativo, según los grados de desarrollo de un liderazgo compartido que promueve el desarrollo de la escuela como PLC. Nos importa más que buenas prácticas, prácticas que documentan un éxito en los logros educativos. Identificar y describir las condiciones y procesos en que el liderazgo de la dirección posibilita el desarrollo de los centros educativos como PLCs es uno de los objetivos principales de la propuesta de investigación.

Palabras clave: construcción de capacidades, liderazgo pedagógico, Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje, prácticas de éxito.

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Desde la última mitad del pasado siglo se ha acentuado en la teoría del cambio educativo un cierto desengaño sobre las escasas posibilidades que las reformas externas, diseñadas desde despachos por expertos, tienen para cambiar la enseñanza. Lo constatan tantas reformas estructurales en educación y, sin embargo, el cambio de lo que verdaderamente importa (qué y cómo se enseña) ha permanecido invariable o impasible a lo largo del tiempo. Hace años, David Tyack y Larry Cuban (1995) publicaron un libro donde demostraban que, más que cambiar las escuelas, éstas habían cambiado las reformas. Entre nosotros, Antonio Viñao (2002) se ha hecho eco de la misma cuestión. A menos que se incida en las culturas escolares heredadas (la "grammar of schooling" según la expresión acuñada por Tyack y Cuban), y esto es un proceso lento de construcción, el cambio no ocurrirá. Por lo demás, recientemente, un buen conocedor y protagonista de las teorías del cambio educativo (Hopkins, 2013), en tono desengañado, ha dado cuenta de los mitos –en lugar de evidencias– sobre los que se han asentado las reformas educativas, que sería preciso deconstruir. En un país como España, tan dado a continuas reformas estructurales y de los pocos que aún confían en que pueden mejorar la realidad, esto es especialmente relevante.

Dado lo anterior, en las últimas décadas, se ha destacado que la clave está en *promover la capacidad de aprendizaje* de los propios agentes y, especialmente, de los centros escolares como organizaciones, en una acción conjunta compartida (Bolívar, 2000; Tintoré y Arbós, 2012). El asunto, entonces, se juega en cómo rediseñar los centros escolares para que puedan incrementar, en lugar de inhibir, el aprendizaje profesional (Elmore, 2002). La referida pérdida de credibilidad de la planificación moderna del cambio y su posterior gestión han conducido a confiar en movilizar la capacidad interna de cambi*o* (de los centros como organizaciones, de los individuos y grupos), mediante la *construcción colectiva de capacidades*, para regenerar internamente la mejora de la educación, empoderando las escuelas (Bolívar, 2008). Un creciente cuerpo de investigación sugiere que un cambio real en las escuelas requiere el desarrollo de fuertes comunidades profesionales (Louis, 2006). La literatura y experiencias a nivel internacional señalan actualmente como la línea más prometedora de mejora el desarrollo de la escuela como una comunidad profesional, centrada en el aprendizaje del profesorado para la mejora de los aprendizajes de los estudiantes. A la vez, la construcción del capital social no se limita al interior de los centros

escolares, sino entre escuelas y con la comunidad (Haslam, Khine & Saleh, 2013).

Dos formas complementarias actuales de construcción de capacidades y empoderamiento de los centros escolares son la colaboración interna, por medio de Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje que potencian un liderazgo distribuido; y la colaboración entre escuelas y con la comunidad (redes comunitarias y asociaciones entre escuelas). En este contexto, un liderazgo distribuido en una escuela entendida como Comunidad Profesional de Aprendizaje (a partir de ahora, PLC, en sus siglas originales más conocidas: "Professional Learning Community") ha llegado a configurarse como una de las vías privilegiadas para la mejora de la educación (Bolívar y Bolívar-Ruano, 2013). Liderazgo, comunidad profesional y relaciones de confianza se han convertido en claves para el cambio de la cultura de la escuela (Louis, 2006).

Como hace tiempo vio Karen Louis (1994), el paradigma del "cambio gestionado" ha de sustituirse por el de *crear capacidades* en y entre los docentes. Los cambios deben, así, iniciarse internamente desde dentro, mejor de modo colectivo, induciendo a los propios implicados a la mejora de su práctica, mediante un *aprendizaje colegiado en sus contextos de trabajo*. Si se quiere mejorar, el foco ha de ponerse en las capacidades de la escuela. De entrada, conviene precisar lo que se entiende por "mejora" que, en una excelente formulación, es "la movilización del conocimiento, destrezas, motivaciones, recursos y capacidades en las escuelas y en los sistemas escolares para incrementar el aprendizaje de los alumnos. Estrictamente hablando, la práctica de la mejora es compartir un conjunto de prácticas probadas y su despliegue colectivo para un fin común" (Elmore, 2002: 13).

Construcción Colectiva de Capacidades

De este modo, actualmente nos preocupa cómo *generar la capacidad de mejora* en las propias escuelas y cómo hacer que sean sostenibles en el tiempo. Además de que los cambios deban generarse desde los propios contextos de trabajo de modo colectivo; el verdadero problema en el futuro no es tanto prescribir cambios, cuanto hacerlos *sostenibles* en el tiempo y espacio (Hargreaves, 2002). Vinculado con la sostenibilidad se sitúa la construcción de capacidades ("building school capacity") de toda la escuela para promover el aprendizaje profesional. Como señala Harris (2011: 626),

"sin una deliberada, intencionada y dirigida construcción de capacidades, cualquier intento de implementación, es probable que quede como una retórica de cambio, en lugar de una realidad".

Si la mejora escolar se juega a nivel de cada centro escolar, como hace tiempo ha evidenciado la investigación (Hopkins, 2001), no se producirá a menos que el profesorado –como comunidad profesional– aprenda a hacerlo mejor, lo que precisa su articulación por un liderazgo educativo, entendido de modo ampliado. La construcción de capacidades de la escuela se convierte en un factor crítico para gestionar el cambio (Harris, 2014). Este es uno de los mensajes principales en la investigación educativa más potente a nivel internacional. Será preciso, pues, analizar, describir y explicar las múltiples dimensiones que comprende (Stoll, 2009): crear y mantener las condiciones necesarias, la cultura y las estructuras; facilitar el aprendizaje; asegurar interrelaciones y sinergias entre todos los componentes.

Recogiendo ideas anteriores sobre el profesionalismo docente y la colaboración en cuanto dispositivos para mejorar las escuelas como espacios de aprendizaje para docentes y alumnos, Hargreaves y Fullan (2012) han propuesto "capital profesional" como concepto que engloba las dimensiones anteriores. El "capital humano" docente está formado por el conjunto acumulativo de habilidades, conocimiento y competencias desarrolladas por el profesorado tanto en su formación inicial como permanente en el contexto de trabajo. Muchos esfuerzos de reforma se han centrado en este aspecto del capital. Hargreaves y Fullan exploran en profundidad el "capital social", que entienden, siguiendo a Leana (2011), como la capacidad de los grupos para trabajar colectivamente hacia la mejora de la escuela, con unas relaciones de confianza y cercanía. El tercer componente, el capital decisional implica la capacidad para formular juicios y tomar decisiones, basados en la experiencia y la práctica, en situaciones complejas con diferentes problemas y casos, tan importantes en la profesión docente. Si el capital social puede aumentar el capital humano individual, no así lo contrario. La enseñanza no es una tarea individual, sino algo que se lleva a cabo conjuntamente con otros, como una comunidad, que requiere tiempo, apoyo, condiciones.

En su propuesta, como en otras investigaciones (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), las interacciones entre los profesores, basadas en una alta confianza y relaciones de cercanía, se convierten en un factor clave de la mejora escolar. Las "Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje", justamente, se inscriben aquí: junto al capital social, inciden en la dimensión profesional, dado que

colaborar no es suficiente, contamos con experiencias de grupos que funcionaron bien, pero no lograron los objetivos esperados. Conjuntando el capital humano, social y decisional, la clave del "capital profesional" es desarrollar, circular y reinvertir los conocimientos, dando lugar a una dinámica nueva en la profesión docente. Este capital profesional, entre otros, supone la responsabilidad colectiva, no la autonomía individual; la evidencia científica tanto como el juicio personal. La escuela como un lugar "donde los profesores comparten colectivamente la responsabilidad de todos sus estudiantes […], donde los docentes constantemente se preguntan juntos por el aprendizaje y sus problemas […], donde los docentes disfrutan activamente ante los retos, al tiempo que son retados por sus colegas y administradores" (Hargreaves y Fullan, 2012: 143).

Además, en lugar de enfoques empresariales o mercantiles para la enseñanza ("business capital") se reivindica la dimensión "profesional", que requiere un saber hacer, en una profesión que es técnicamente difícil, lo que requiere conocimiento técnico, altos niveles de educación, saber hacer y continua mejora a lo largo del tiempo. En la investigación llevada a cabo por Leana (2011), en la que se apoyan Hargreaves y Fullan para el capital social, los mejores docentes no lo son solo por el capital humano que poseen, sino por la capacidad para compartir conocimientos y aprender de otros, es decir, por su capital social. Igualmente, los mejores directores y líderes lo son por fortalecer el capital social de sus respectivas escuelas (gestionar contactos, mejores relaciones escuela-familia, comunidad, etc.), por desarrollar confianza y por construir una más eficaz colaboración profesional, que elevan el capital social de la escuela. De ahí que el capital social de una escuela sea más importante que el capital humano individual, dado que genera más rápidamente capital humano, entre el profesorado y para cada alumno. En una cultura profesional, comentan Fullan y Hargreaves (2012), los maestros comparten la responsabilidad colectiva de todos sus estudiantes.

Construir capacidades no consiste en trasmitir conocimientos, más bien – como remarca Lewin (2012: 16) – requiere oportunidades para "aprender en contexto", en hacer de la escuela un sistema donde el aprendizaje en contexto es endémico. La literatura sobre mejora escolar sugiere (Thoonen et al., 2011) que la capacidad de la escuela para la mejora puede ser apoyada por estructuras coherentes, prácticas de liderazgo y percepciones positivas por parte del profesorado sobre su eficacia en los aprendizajes de los

alumnos. Suficiente tiempo para planificar y recursos, un currículum y programa de enseñanza coordinados, compromiso del profesorado, particularmente con los alumnos más desventajados, y sentido de eficacia colectiva profesional son características, entre otras, que la literatura argumenta están más relacionadas con una mejora escolar efectiva (King y Bouchard, 2011).

La construcción de una cultura escolar de aprendizaje (Louis, 2006) se vincula –de una parte– con "Comunidad Profesional de Aprendizaje"; de otra, con liderazgo distribuido y liderazgo docente, en una perspectiva de construcción social del conocimiento y del capital social. Liderazgo distribuido, aprendizaje de los alumnos y aprendizaje de los docentes en el contexto de trabajo, forma así un trípode donde se asientan actualmente las líneas más prometedoras de mejora (Leclerc, 2012). A su vez, vinculado con la sostenibilidad del cambio, todo ello se enmarca en la construcción de capacidades de toda la escuela para promover el aprendizaje profesional (Thoonen et al., 2012). La investigación ha determinado las dimensiones clave que la constituyen, así como los dispositivos que favorecen su desarrollo. La cooperación entre docentes y una visión compartida de la escuela están estadísticamente correlacionados con el grado de eficacia de la escuela. Para que el proceso de cambio sea exitoso Fullan (2010) aconseja que la construcción de capacidades debe conjuntarse con un enfoque en los resultados (*capacity building with a focus on results*). En ellos, el liderazgo compartido y la comunidad profesional de aprendizaje, como hemos señalado, desempeñan un papel de primer orden.

La construcción de capacidades implica que la gente tenga oportunidades y dispositivos para hacer las cosas de otra manera, aprender nuevas habilidades y generar prácticas más eficaces (Dimmock, 2012). De modo paralelo requiere una responsabilidad colectiva, donde los profesionales trabajan juntos por mejorar su práctica, mediante el apoyo mutuo, responsabilidad y retos compartidos (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). La práctica colaborativa es aquella donde los profesores trabajan juntos para desarrollar prácticas efectivas de enseñanza y donde hay un compromiso profundo por la mejora de la práctica propia y la de los demás. Lo que define a una comunidad profesional es que está centrada en el aprendizaje. Una mejora real a través de comunidades profesionales de aprendizaje se centra, en primer lugar, en las necesidades del estudiante para,

trabajando sin descanso, incidir en las metodologías didácticas que puedan satisfacerlas adecuadamente (Harris y Jones, 2010).

El Liderazgo Compartido Como Construcción de Capacidad

Construir capacidades en las escuelas implica una nueva comprensión del liderazgo. La dirección escolar –como señalan Stein y Spillane (2005)–, entendida como liderazgo educativo, está en un proceso de revisar sus fundamentos y orientaciones futuras, particularmente –como un amplio consenso ha establecido (Day et al., 2011)– en que "la responsabilidad principal de los líderes es la mejora del aprendizaje de los alumnos". La cuestión relevante es *cómo los líderes educativos pueden ayudar tanto a estudiantes como a los docentes para aprender*. Si durante décadas el liderazgo ha ido asociado a una posición formal y personal en la organización, con unas funciones y responsabilidades limitadas a la gestión, particularmente en España; actualmente tiene más que ver con actividades y prácticas ligadas a un conjunto de interacciones en un proceso de construcción social (Spillane, 2006). Frente al mito de que un líder carismático pueda ser la causa de la mejora escolar, hoy sabemos (Hopkins, 2013: 297) que "cuando el liderazgo está focalizado en lo pedagógico y ampliamente distribuido, entonces tanto el profesorado como el alumnado pueden ser capaces de aprovechar plenamente su capacidad de aprender y lograr".

El liderazgo puede tener efectos muy significativos en la organización de la escuela y en el aprendizaje de los alumnos. En particular, en la forma de liderazgo distribuido es más probable que contribuya a la mejora de la escuela y construir la capacidad interna para el desarrollo. Una posición de autoridad o poder, que prescribe lo que hay que hacer, impide el crecimiento de la organización. Sin embargo, la capacidad de mejora se ve potenciada cuando el liderazgo está distribuido o compartido en una textura de liderazgos informales, en modos que generan valores compartidos, cohesión social, propósitos morales e impulsos para desarrollar nuevas competencias. Por eso, como hemos tratado en otro lugar (Bolívar, 2012), si queremos que toda la organización aprenda, el liderazgo debe ser compartido o "distribuido" entre los diferentes miembros de la organización. De ahí también que se vincule con el liderazgo docente (Lieberman y Miller, 2004), en un liderazgo centrado en el aprendizaje, como forma de aprendizaje

colectivo. Tener escuelas capacitadas o "empoderadas" requiere un liderazgo múltiple y compartido del profesorado, configurando el centro escolar en una Comunidad Profesional de Aprendizaje.

En las últimas décadas, de modo creciente, se ha destacado una cuestión obvia pero extraña en el contexto español: la dirección escolar está para la mejora de la escuela y la responsabilidad principal de los líderes es la mejora del aprendizaje de los alumnos. En una buena revisión metodológica de la investigación sobre liderazgo, Hallinger (2013) señala que uno de los tópicos que guían la investigación actual sobre liderazgo se centra en qué *prácticas de liderazgo* contribuyen a construir capacidades para la mejora de la escuela. En este sentido, Leithwood y Riehl (2005) afirman que el "liderazgo es la labor de movilizar e influenciar a otros para desarrollar comprensiones y propósitos compartidos sobre las metas a conseguir en la escuela" (p. 14).

Por lo demás, suele haber una relación positiva entre liderazgo distribuido y desarrollo organizacional, dado que supone la implicación del profesorado en los procesos de toma de decisiones, así como relaciones colegiadas. No obstante, como se ha evidenciado en la investigación, la distribución del liderazgo no resulta automáticamente en una mejora organizativa, depende de los modos en que está distribuido y para qué propósitos. Hay patrones de distribución más productivos que otros:

> Nuestro marco de referencias proponía cuatro modalidades distintas de alineamiento, cada una asociada con un conjunto de valores y creencias únicos. […] Nuestros resultados revelaron muchas instancias de alineamiento planificado. Esta modalidad de alineamiento surgía con mayor probabilidad en relación a la iniciativa escolar con la más alta prioridad. […] Nuestra evidencia sugiere que, si ha de ser efectiva, la distribución del liderazgo en equipos de profesores, en una estructura planificada y alineada, dependerá de que el director monitoree regularmente el progreso, y, en ocasiones, realice una intervención activa, para impulsar la agenda si ésta se empantana. (Leithwood 2009: 117-118).

Importa el papel que desempeña el *liderazgo pedagógico* en organizar buenas prácticas educativas en los centros y en contribuir a la mejora de los resultados del aprendizaje. La introducción de un *paradigma orientado al aprendizaje* ha significado –así– un importante giro en la investigación.

Leithwood y Louis (2011) mantienen que hay una "conexión crítica" entre el liderazgo del equipo directivo (y otros líderes, en un liderazgo colectivo o distribuido) y los aprendizajes de los estudiantes, no directa sino mediada por otros factores (profesorado, en primer lugar; pero también familias y otros factores que influyen en el aula). Scheerens (2012) ha revisado las evidencias empíricas de los meta-análisis llevados a cabo durante las dos últimas décadas, cuestionando los efectos directos, para destacar su carácter indirecto, mediados por otras variables escolares, comparable al concepto de meta-control.

El liderazgo pedagógico puede desempeñar un relevante papel en el aprendizaje profesional de su profesorado (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009) y, en un paradigma mediacional, del alumnado. Además, los líderes eficaces utilizan estratégicamente los recursos para priorizar los objetivos de la enseñanza; establecer metas y expectativas claras, y asegurar un ambiente ordenado y de apoyo para la enseñanza. Al tiempo, el liderazgo se configura como un fenómeno anidado, en el que las prácticas de múltiples agentes o líderes contribuyen a los aprendizajes y mejora de resultados.

Comunidad Profesional de Aprendizaje

Entender el centro escolar como una *Comunidad de Aprendizaje Profesional* (PLC) ha llegado a constituirse, como ha mostrado un corpus creciente de investigación y experiencias internacionales, como la línea más prometedora para el desarrollo y mejora de la escuela. Más allá de una comunidad de práctica, implica una colaboración centrada en la mejora de los resultados de aprendizaje. El liderazgo pedagógico de la dirección escolar, según las experiencias, desempeña un papel fundamental en la puesta en práctica de una PLC en una escuela: establecer un clima de confianza, promover la colaboración y el compromiso, facilitar el proceso de cambio de cultura, liderazgo docente, una práctica reflexiva sobre los datos provenientes de los aprendizajes, compartir datos e información sobre la práctica, responsabilidad compartida por los resultados, son –entre otras– sus características (Hord y Sommers, 2008, DuFour et al., 2008; Stoll y Louis, 2007).

Cuando el profesorado funciona como una comunidad profesional, trabajando en un contexto colaborativo para analizar los aprendizajes de los estudiantes y aprender juntos como colectivo, la mejora de la escuela se

asienta en una base firme y sostenible. Como hace tiempo sentenció Sarason (2003), no es posible crear y mantener a lo largo del tiempo condiciones para un aprendizaje productivo para los estudiantes cuando no existen para sus profesores. El desarrollo profesional efectivo acontece en comunidades de práctica en los contextos de trabajo, en un aprendizaje colectivo. A su vez, se incardina en un enfoque de liderazgo distribuido, en que las tareas de mover al personal son compartidas por otros miembros de la comunidad. En todo el proceso, el foco común es el aprendizaje de los estudiantes, revisando colectivamente las mejores prácticas docentes que puedan potenciarlo.

Desde la mirada del papel del liderazgo nos importan los procesos y condiciones para configurar las escuelas como espacios de aprendizaje y desarrollo profesional de los docentes, con el propósito de mejorar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes. Si la cultura individualista es difícil de cambiar, configurar la escuela con una identidad colectiva de PLC, provoca una "cultura fuerte" capaz de vencer las resistencias de la organización (Kruse & Louis, 2009). Particularmente nos importa el "capital social", como patrones de relaciones entre los docentes, para incrementar el "capital profesional" de la escuela (Hargreaves y Fullan, 2012). En este contexto, interesa mostrar cómo la capacidad de un centro escolar para mejorar depende, en modos significativos de líderes que contribuyan activamente a dinamizar, apoyar y animar a que su escuela aprenda a desarrollarse, haciendo las cosas progresivamente mejor.

Firestone y Riehl (2005), en volumen relevante (auspiciado por la división A de la AERA), entre las líneas prometedoras de investigación, señalaban "cómo la idea de liderazgo distribuido se solapa con otros dos ideas: comunidad profesional de aprendizaje, derivada de las comunidades de práctica". La literatura sobre comunidades profesionales sugiere dos cuestiones relevantes para futuros estudios (Huffman y Hipp, 2003). En primer lugar, *¿Cómo la organización de comunidades profesionales (y la interacción entre profesores) afecta el aprendizaje docente?* Hay pruebas de que cuando los docentes están menos aislados aprenden más. En segundo lugar, *¿cómo los líderes contribuyen a la organización de las comunidades profesionales, y qué líderes se requieren para estos propósitos?* Se precisa un considerable trabajo para clarificar cómo los directivos contribuyen a la organización social de los profesores, junto a qué otros factores, y cómo estos factores se condicionan mutuamente (Bolam et al., 2005). Una larga y

sucesiva cadena de investigaciones han puesto de manifiesto la importancia de un liderazgo pedagógico para la mejora de los aprendizajes, como hemos constatado (Bolívar, 2012); además, el liderazgo escolar tiene mayor influencia sobre las escuelas y los alumnos cuando es ampliamente distribuido. Las Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje supone ligar ambas dimensiones, por medio de una toma de decisiones colegiadas y unas prácticas reflexivas sobre la acción profesional, analizando qué formas de distribución del liderazgo son más efectivas que otras (Harris, 2014).

Investigar el Liderazgo Distribuido en una Escuela como Comunidad Profesional

Estamos embarcados con mi grupo de investigación en un Proyecto de Investigación, con financiación pública, que continúa una línea anterior sobre prácticas exitosas de liderazgo pedagógico. La finalidad principal es documentar y describir qué prácticas de liderazgo contribuyen a potenciar el funcionamiento del centro como una PLC, creando un contexto para un mejor aprendizaje del profesorado e impactando positivamente en la mejora de los aprendizajes del alumnado. Siguiendo la revisión de Firestone y Robinson (2010), el proyecto se inscribe y recoge las cuatro tendencias en curso que merecen un mayor desarrollo: cómo el liderazgo educativo influye en el aprendizaje (del profesorado y del alumnado); incardinarlo en las organizaciones educativas; identificar las prácticas de liderazgo que mejoran la enseñanza y el aprendizaje y, por último, el liderazgo distribuido o compartido en una comunidad profesional.

La investigación que estamos iniciando conjuga la descripción de la situación en centros educativos de Primaria y Secundaria de Andalucía, con el estudio en profundidad de casos, debidamente seleccionados, que pueden evidenciar progresos en sus niveles de éxito educativo, según los grados de desarrollo de un liderazgo compartido que promueve el desarrollo de la escuela como Comunidad Profesional de Aprendizaje. Por eso nos importa más que buenas prácticas, prácticas que documentan un éxito en los logros educativos. Identificar y describir las condiciones y procesos, en que el liderazgo de los equipos directivos posibilita el desarrollo de los centros educativos como PLC, es uno de los objetivos principales del proyecto que describimos.

Una perspectiva de liderazgo distribuido tiene implicaciones para la recogida y el análisis de datos. Además de instrumentos tipo *survey*, para describir la situación, se requieren estudios de caso. Por un lado se han elegido cuestionarios, dentro de los mejores existentes a nivel internacional, que puedan servir para valorar el grado de liderazgo pedagógico en los centros seleccionados, así como su desarrollo como comunidad. A su vez, como estudio de caso, se propone una adecuada selección de centros, para focalizarse en la descripción de las condiciones y procesos que facilitan tanto el liderazgo pedagógico como su desarrollo como comunidad profesional. Pretendemos contrastar y documentar la hipótesis de que suele existir una relación positiva entre el aumento de la distribución de roles y responsabilidades de liderazgo y la mejora continua de los resultados de los alumnos.

La investigación se propone analizar cómo los centros educativos cuando funcionan, mediante un liderazgo distribuido, como Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje (PLC), se convierten en una vía privilegiada para asegurar el éxito de *cada* alumno y alumna en *cada* entorno. Por eso, *partimos de la hipótesis* de que es posible constatar y verificar que centros de Primaria y Secundaria que se acercan en su funcionamiento al de *comunidad profesional* alcanzan mayores niveles de éxito educativo. Paralelamente, que el ejercicio de la dirección como liderazgo, en grado compartido y horizontal promueve *la construcción de capacidades* del centro escolar. Los objetivos de esta investigación, de acuerdo con la doble dimensión anterior (Liderazgo-Comunidad), se dirigen a constatar en qué grado y modos el liderazgo educativo de los equipos directivos contribuye al desarrollo del centro como Comunidad Profesional, y qué *actuaciones de éxito* contribuyen decididamente a la mejora de la educación. Se pretende generar conocimiento educativo sobre los modos de funcionar los centros escolares que tengan su impacto en los aprendizajes de los estudiantes.

Por eso, queremos contrastar en el contexto español, con sus modos diferenciales en Primaria y en Secundaria, la idea de que fuertes Comunidades Profesionales promueven el *aprendizaje del profesorado y mejoran las prácticas docentes* (Verscio, Ross & Adams, 2008). Sobre esta tesis, avalada por un amplio corpus de trabajos a nivel internacional (Louis, 2012), se persigue:

— Analizar cómo las comunidades profesionales inciden en el aprendizaje docente y en la mejora educativa, según sus grados de desarrollo en el centro escolar respectivo.

— Describir cómo el trabajo en colaboración se centra o no en los aprendizajes de los alumnos y el impacto de las prácticas docentes desarrolladas.

— Indagar, en los centros escolares analizados, cómo los dispositivos comunitarios de colaboración entre el profesorado, posibilitan el aprendizaje de la organización, al incrementar el saber profesional individual mediante su intercambio con el de los colegas.

—Analizar los modos en que se promueve la participación activa de toda la comunidad escolar para incrementar los aprendizajes del alumnado.

En segundo lugar, queremos describir las *condiciones y procesos* (dentro y fuera de la escuela) que posibilitan el *desarrollo de la organización como comunidad*: modos, formas, tiempos, contenidos en que los docentes comparten sus conocimientos y aprenden unos de otros para modificar sus prácticas.

— Contrastar los indicadores de acuerdo con la literatura (DuFour, DuFour y Eaker, 2005; Huffman y Hipp, 2003; Hord & Sommers, 2008): el trabajo como un equipo de investigación sobre las prácticas y los aprendizajes, formación en el contexto de trabajo, observaciones regulares del progreso de los alumnos y un seguimiento riguroso, grados de responsabilidad colectiva en el aprendizaje de los alumnos, gestión de recursos estructurales. Igualmente, desde el lado opuesto, nos importa la resistencia a cambiar la cultura escolar, desprivatizar la práctica (Kruse & Louis, 2009).

—Analizar cómo el grado de *confianza relacional* en la organización condiciona tanto la distribución de liderazgo como el desarrollo del centro como comunidad (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

— Descubrir los efectos posibles de la distribución del liderazgo en el grado de desarrollo de la escuela como PLC (Leclerc, 2012).

En tercer lugar, de modo complementario, entraremos en describir los *modos de compartir el liderazgo*, indagando y contrastando la referida tesis sobre la mayor incidencia de un liderazgo ampliamente distribuido entre equipos directivos, profesorado, familias y estudiantes. Esto se especifica en:

— Analizar, de acuerdo con la distinción de Spillane (2006), además del *líder-plus (qué)*, la *dimensión práctica (cómo)* de interacciones entre

personas (otros líderes, profesorado, personal administración), tareas y situaciones.

— Contrastar si las oportunidades para que los docentes puedan ejercer el liderazgo de forma efectiva dependen de cómo los directivos están dispuestos a compartirlo en formas más horizontales (equipos, comisiones, grupos de trabajo, etc.) y proporcionan recursos estructurales e incentivos.

 — Determinar en cada caso las *configuraciones* particulares o híbridas (Gronn, 2010), que adopta el liderazgo distribuido en un centro en proceso de construcción de una comunidad profesional, particularmente su emergencia como una propiedad colectiva entre grupos e individuos que interactúan en una organización.

— Analizar y describir en los estudios de caso cómo la distribución del liderazgo es variable según los contextos de Primaria y sus diferencias con Secundaria, mediante la estructura y patrón de distribución que presenta el liderazgo en cada centro, así como un análisis comparativo de las formas de distribución del liderazgo halladas en los distintos centros, determinando cuáles son más eficaces.

Una Propuesta Metodológica

El diseño de la investigación iniciada comprende (Riehl y Firestone, 2005), como antes se ha señalado, métodos mixtos o híbridos (*mixed methods research*) que, de modo creciente, se están empleando en las investigaciones sobre el tema, como muestran revisiones recientes (Stentz et al., 2012; Spillane, Pareja et al., 2010). Igualmente en la investigación llevada a cabo por un importante equipo (Day, Sammons, Hopkins et al., 2009) emplean una metodología mixta, combinando estudios de caso con cuestionarios (Sammons, Gu, & Robertson, 2007).

Tanto el liderazgo como la PLC, para no quedar como conceptos de libre flotación (*free-floating*), requieren ser operativizados con los correspondientes instrumentos que, debidamente validados, contribuyan a poder identificarlos en sus prácticas y valorar sus grados de desarrollo. Como se especifica a continuación, empleamos un conjunto de instrumentos estandarizados empleados en otras investigaciones que podemos utilizar, unos por ser de acceso libre o elaboración propia, otros por contar con permiso concedido. Como una primera entrada panorámica al campo, nos

importa describir lo que sucede en los centros, como dibujo de un cierto mapa. Se determinará una muestra de Colegios de Infantil y Primaria, así como de Institutos de Educación Secundaria de Andalucía, para recoger información con el cuestionario siguiente:

— Cuestionario sobre *"Prácticas eficaces del liderazgo pedagógico de la dirección escolar"*, dirigido al equipo directivo y a los docentes. Este cuestionario ya elaborado (García Garnica, 2013) recoge las principales dimensiones de prácticas pedagógicas de la dirección escolar (apoyo a la calidad docente, gestión estratégica de recursos, colaboración más allá de la escuela, fijación y evaluación de metas, capacidad para compartir el liderazgo, formación y competencias pedagógicas, apoyo a las labores pedagógicas de la dirección) en una doble dimensión: situación actual y lo que sería deseable.

Tras una descripción del campo y de sus modos diferenciales en Primaria y Secundaria, nos importa entrar en el funcionamiento de los centros como comunidades profesionales y los modos en que el liderazgo educativo puede incidir en empoderar al profesorado e incidir en la capacidad de mejora. Estamos empleando en unos casos y planificado en otros los siguientes instrumentos tipo *survey*:

— *Grado de desarrollo de un centro como Comunidad Profesional de Aprendizaje.* Contamos con un conjunto de instrumentos creados para evaluar la madurez del personal y del centro como una comunidad de aprendizaje a partir de las cinco dimensiones establecidas por Hord (liderazgo compartido, valores y visiones compartidas, aprendizaje colectivo, práctica personal compartida, condiciones de apoyo), en un enfoque centrado en los aprendizajes de los estudiantes como resultado último. Sucesivamente perfeccionado, la versión refinada o revisada (*Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised*, PLCA-R), constituye el instrumento más útil para diagnosticar las prácticas a nivel de centro escolar que incrementa intencionalmente el aprendizaje profesional (Olivier y Hipp, 2011). Este lo hemos adaptado y validado en nuestro equipo de investigación (Bolívar Ruano, 2013).

 — *Actuaciones más importantes de la dirección que influyen en el desempeño docente y el aprendizaje del alumnado*. El "*Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED)*" es uno de los dispositivos más completos y potentes para la evaluación. El VAL-ED se inspira, como modelo de evaluación, en una comprensión del liderazgo

como "el proceso de influenciar a otros para lograr, por mutuo acuerdo, las metas de la organización" (Goldring et al., 2009: 4). Se focaliza en conductas asociadas a un liderazgo centrado en el aprendizaje (*learning-centered leadership*). Por su estructura, evalúa la intersección de *lo que* los directores o equipos de liderazgo deben hacer para mejorar el aprendizaje académico y social de los alumnos (componente básico), y *cómo* crea estos componentes básicos (los procesos clave).

Nuestro equipo de investigación lo ha validado y adaptado al contexto español, así como su posterior aplicación. Contamos, además, con el correspondiente permiso de la Universidad de Vanderbilt (Porter et al., 2008). Basado en la investigación sobre el liderazgo y sus efectos en los resultados de aprendizaje, se establecieron seis componentes básicos y seis procesos claves a evaluar. Los primeros son: Objetivos de aprendizaje elevados; Currículum riguroso; Calidad de la enseñanza; Cultura de aprendizaje y trabajo en equipo; Relación con la comunidad; y Responsabilidad por los resultados. Cada uno de estos "Componentes Básicos" debe evaluarse en las siguientes "Dimensiones": *planificación, desarrollo, apoyo, inclusión, comunicación y seguimiento*, con un total de 72 ítems. En cada uno se marcan las principales "fuentes de evidencia" que usa para basar su evaluación, así como la "valoración del grado de eficacia" en cinco grados.

—*Capacidad para la mejora.* El "Dutch School Improvement Questionnaire", empleado em la tesis doctoral de E.E.J. Thoonen (2012) de la Universidad de Amsterdam dirigida por P. Sleegers. Un excelente cuestionario, dirigido al profesorado (*Teacher Questionnaire Items*) sobre cómo determinados factores (prácticas de liderazgo, condiciones organizativas, motivación docente, aprendizaje docente) impactan en las prácticas docentes. Se emplea para medir la construcción de capacidad de mejora de la escuela (Thoonen et al., 2011). El cuestionario constata cómo las prácticas transformativas de liderazgo estimulan el aprendizaje profesional docente y la motivación y mejora de las condiciones organizativas. En función de los datos resultantes de los cuestionarios anteriores se elegirán, con los criterios que se señalan a continuación, los centros objeto de estudio de caso, que nos permitan recoger datos cualitativos enriquecedores sobre procesos de liderazgo y mejora que se desarrollan en ellos (o, por contraste, los déficits en aquellos que no

tienen el éxito deseable). El proyecto usa un diseño por estudio de caso, empleando diversos dispositivos de recogida de datos: entrevistas, registros de experiencias, observación participante, y revisión de documentos de los centros.

Muestra

Un problema inicial es el escaso grado de desarrollo de nuestros centros escolares como PLC, particularmente en Secundaria. Esto dificultaría notablemente las posibilidades de alcanzar algunos de los objetivos mencionados. No obstante, contamos con dos grupos potenciales de muestra prioritarios en Andalucía, por estar desarrollando procesos que los acercan a PLC.

1. *Programa de Calidad y Mejora de los Rendimientos Escolares en los Centros Docentes Públicos*. Desde la primera convocatoria hasta la última un total de 1.996 centros (67 % de Infantil y Primaria y 26% de Secundaria) lo han desarrollado. Este programa está paralizado, pero los centros acogidos en última convocatoria estarán hasta el curso 2015-16. El programa ha sido muy criticado (por ejemplo, Merchán, 2012), pero –sin entrar ahora en ese tema– ha posibilitado institucionalmente, para lo que nos importa, crear una cultura de trabajo conjunto.

2. *Red Andaluza de Comunidades de Aprendizaje*. La Junta de Andalucía ha reconocido hasta la actualidad 68 centros de Primaria y Secundaria como "Comunidades de Aprendizaje", número que se podrá ver incrementado en sucesivas convocatorias. Aun cuando las Comunidades de Aprendizaje no son iguales que las PLC, comparten una "filosofía" de fondo sobre el trabajo en colaboración y equipo del profesorado y de la comunidad educativa, así como en el éxito educativo.

Sobre este grupo de muestra cualificado, de modo aleatorio, se han determinado los centros para pasar los cuestionarios a todo el profesorado y equipos directivos. De otro lado, nos importa mucho contrastarlo con centros escolares que no están acogidos a los referidos programas cuyo grado de liderazgo e implicación en un proyecto conjunto inicialmente pueda ser menor. A la vez, se determinará –por sus condiciones y grado de accesibilidad– la investigación en estudios de caso.

El *International Successful School Principalship Project* (ISSPP), a cuyo equipo español e iberoamericano pertenecemos, ha propuesto (Reunión

ECER Cádiz, 2012) como guía de trabajo, elegir los siguientes casos, que –por su congruencia con el nuestro– vamos a seguir. Se combinan dos criterios: resultados (mejores o por debajo de lo que cabría razonablemente esperar de ellas) y contexto sociocultural (buenos o malos requisitos de entrada). De este modo tendríamos las siguientes cuatro situaciones:

Tabla 1
Escuelas según prerrequisitos y resultados

Resultados	Malos Prerrequisitos	Buenos Prerrequisitos
Resultados mejor de los esperados	**A**: Escuelas de alto rendimiento 2 escuelas	B: Escuelas con alto rendimiento visible 2 escuelas
Resultados peor de los esperados	C: Escuelas con bajo rendimiento visible 2 escuelas	**D**: Escuelas de bajo rendimiento 2 escuelas

Las escuelas en las casillas B y C son fáciles de encontrar. Nuestro interés principal está en A y D. A representan escuelas que en circunstancias difíciles han logrado conseguir buenos resultados. D son escuelas que estando en contextos favorables, sin embargo, tienen bajos rendimientos. Nos importa, particularmente, comprender qué factores y relaciones internos a la escuela pueden contribuir a este alto o bajo rendimiento. Las *actuaciones de éxito* que nos importan, preferentemente, son las escuelas situadas en A, como *casos ejemplares* por los procesos de liderazgo y trabajo conjunto que tienen lugar para la mejora. No obstante, como en el proyecto ISSPP, por contraste elegiremos también centros en las otras situaciones.

Metodología de recogida de datos cualitativos

La metodología de actuaciones de liderazgo tiene dos vertientes:
    [1] *Informes verbales* (entrevistas, Log, SMS, Focus Group)
    [2] *Observaciones en sus distintas variantes*: observaciones de espía o en la sombra "shadow observation", observación continua durante tres días, describiendo la actividad realizada y el contexto (qué, cómo, quién, dónde, cuándo, etc.)

Como informes verbales, en primer lugar, en los centros seleccionados se están empleando *entrevistas* a Equipo directivos (director o directora y jefe de estudios) y profesorado (particularmente miembros de la Comisión de Coordinación Pedagógica). El protocolo de las entrevistas se inspira en la literatura sobre el tema y, particularmente, en la propuesta del Proyecto ISSPP.

Similar al estudio que planteamos, Leo & Wickenberg (2013) realizaron, en primer lugar, un cuestionario a todos los profesores y directores. En una segunda fase, cada uno de los directores fue entrevistado individualmente. La tercera fase emplea grupos de discusión (*focus group*) formados por los directores que componen los grupos de liderazgo. Los grupos de discusión se centraban en los resultados preliminares del cuestionario y de las entrevistas individuales

Por lo que respecta a la observación, una de las posibilidades es la desarrollada por Spillane (Spillane & Zuberi, 2009; Camburn, Spillane & Sebastian, 2010), que ha desarrollado los registros de experiencias cotidianas ("*ESM* log"); combinado con cuestionarios a directivos y al profesorado, como un "método cuasi-naturalista de la investigación". En un muestreo de la experiencia se elige al azar un día o semana para ver la calidad y naturaleza de su trabajo cotidiano. Se pretende captar las acciones tal como ocurren en su contexto habitual (Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2007). Los participantes reciben un breve cuestionario en diferentes momentos del día, establecidos aleatoriamente –a través de dispositivos móviles como un teléfono móvil o una PDA– acerca de la actividad, relacionada con la práctica del liderazgo, que estén realizando en ese momento. No obstante, tiene el grave inconveniente de ser un dispositivo en exceso invasivo sobre lo que está haciendo en cada momento. Si no se cuenta con un alto compromiso entre investigado e investigador, no suele funcionar. El grupo considerará, según los casos, su utilización, o –mejor– como ha hecho el equipo de Sevilla (López Yáñez, 2011), metodologías de registro de la práctica como el "Leadership Daily Practice" (LDP) (Spillane &, 2010).

Documentación del éxito

En los estudios de caso analizados nos importa tener conocimiento documentado del éxito educativo alcanzado. Aparte de los datos aportados por los propios centros, debemos contar con los disponibles vía evaluaciones

externas, con un mayor grado de objetividad y comparabilidad. Se solicitará a la Agencia Andaluza de Evaluación Educativa (AGAEVE) datos de los centros que han tenido una mejora significativa y progresiva en las evaluaciones anuales y censales de Diagnóstico de Competencias Básicas, particularmente su evolución longitudinal desde 2006. En particular, aquellos centros con un bajo índice sociocultural y, sin embargo, cuentan con un alto "valor añadido", constatando si en ellos se ha dado un liderazgo distribuido junto a un incremento del sentido de comunidad, para ser elegidos como casos objeto estudio.

El caso según su desarrollo como comunidad

Vinculado a los anteriores, dentro de los estudios de caso elegidos, nos concentraremos, como una dimensión particular de interés, en el grado de desarrollo de la escuela como PLC. Los resultados del cuestionario PLCA-R son la base de partida para situar el grado de desarrollo. Los datos recogidos se analizarán según los estudios de desarrollo o evolución del centro como PLC, en cada uno de los cuales la dirección escolar juega un papel diferente (Huffman y Hipp, 2003; Leclerc, 2012): *iniciación, implementación, e integración*. Christopher Day et al. (2010) señalan cuatro grandes fases de mejora de la escuela: fundacional, de desarrollo, de enriquecimiento, de renovación. Estas fases se corresponden con las de un liderazgo exitoso y de la escuela como comunidad.

Contribución y Resultados de esta Línea de Investigación

Cuando hayamos completado su implementación y desarrollo, en conjunto, queremos aportar orientaciones y actuaciones de éxito de liderazgo y desarrollo de los centros escolares, contrastándolas con las procedentes de otros contextos internacionales. Más allá de las orientaciones cambiantes de la Administración educativa, pretendemos aportar ejemplificaciones que puedan llevarse a cabo en otros centros sobre la mejora del trabajo de la dirección y del trabajo conjunto y, a través de ella, contribuir a definir qué responsabilidades deban tener los equipos directivos para la mejora de sus respectivos centros escolares

Se quiere documentar, diseminar y sacar lecciones provechosas del conocimiento extraído de la investigación, haciendo aportaciones sobre

cómo la mejora del aprendizaje y de los resultados del centro puede verse impactada por determinadas prácticas de dirección pedagógica. Si los profesores son clave de la mejora, los equipos directivos y otros agentes pueden construir contextos y climas adecuados para que los docentes sean mejores. No obstante, preciso es reconocerlo, en España tenemos un conjunto de retos pendientes para poder pasar del actual modo de ejercer la dirección al liderazgo para el aprendizaje (Bolívar, 2013). También, en este extremo, queremos hacer aportaciones.

Somos conscientes de los problemas para alterar la llamada "gramática básica" de la organización escolar que, en las actuales condiciones, impide el trabajo conjunto (Kruse & Louis, 2009). El profesorado en Secundaria es especialista en una materia, está encargado de determinados grupos o cursos, en departamentos disciplinares (en Secundaria), trabaja en solitario. La propia organización arquitectónica (aulas aisladas), disciplinar (especialistas en disciplinas), como social, hacen difícil trabajar de otra manera. Por eso, proponer hacer de los centros (particularmente de los I.E.S.) "Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje", de entrada, va contra la lógica y arquitectura imperante. Y, sin embargo, según hemos argumentado anteriormente, es una vía prometedora que marca por dónde hay que ir para la mejora de la educación. Se trata, pues, de cómo partiendo de "aquí" se pueden ir dando pasos seguros para llegar "allí".

En particular, nos importa extraer líneas de acción para mejorar la capacidad organizativa de cada escuela mediante un s*entido de comunidad* entre los profesionales, como componente crítico actual de la eficacia escolar: procesos y dispositivos para el desarrollo de las escuelas como organizaciones, sobre su reconstrucción como lugares de formación e innovación no sólo para los alumnos, sino también para los propios profesores.

Se pretende recoger buenas experiencias y evidencias internacionales sobre modos de organizar el trabajo escolar que consiguen lograr una cultura escolar favorable al aprendizaje. Al tiempo, los estudios de caso ilustrarán, con actuaciones de éxito de los equipos directivos y de los centros en su conjunto, sobre los modos para *rediseñar* los lugares de trabajo en formas de redistribución de roles y estructuras que permitan hacer del centro escolar no sólo un lugar de aprendizaje sino un contexto donde los docentes aprendan a hacerlo mejor.

En definitiva, los resultados de la investigación en que estamos inmersos pueden contribuir decididamente a documentar cómo provocar, en nuestro contexto, cambios significativos en los modos cómo los docentes ejercen su oficio y en la mejora de los resultados escolares de nuestros alumnos. Paralelamente, a partir de esta investigación, se pueden señalar líneas productivas para poner en acción Comunidades de Aprendizaje, al modo como proponen Harris y Jones (2011). En esta línea estamos en un proceso de renovar el "Proyecto Atlántida" [http://www.proyectoatlantida.net/] con el enfoque de PLC, incidiendo en la dimensión comunitaria, desarrollada en las experiencias anteriores de Atlántida.

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Principal and Teacher Collaboration: An Exploration of Distributed Leadership in Professional Learning Communities

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Abstract

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can be powerful tools for school improvement but require principals and teachers to collaborate and work together. This article reports on a qualitative multi-case study focused on six elementary schools in West Texas that had been identified for having effective PLCs. Principals and teachers were observed and interviewed over the course of one academic school year to understand how leadership was distributed across the school to facilitate effective PLCs. Findings highlight the ways principals distribute leadership across their school, relevant teacher and principal interactions, and how key aspects of PLCs are influenced by principals, teacher leaders, and teachers. Findings have implications for in-service professional development experts within school districts and faculty working in principal preparation programs.

Keywords: educational leadership, distributed leadership, professional learning communities

La Colaboración entre Director y Profesor: Investigación sobre Liderazgo Distributivo en las Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje

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Resumen

Las Comunidades Profesionales de Aprendizaje (PLCs) pueden ser herramientas poderosas para las mejoras escolares, pero requieren que directores y profesores colaboren y trabajen conjuntamente. El artículo se basa en el estudio cualitativo de múltiples casos centrado en seis escuelas de primaria del oeste de Texas identificadas por tener eficaces PLCs. Los directores y profesores fueron observados y entrevistados durante un año académico para comprender cómo se distribuye el liderazgo a través de la escuela para facilitar PLCs eficaces. Los resultados ponen de manifiesto las formas mediante las cuales los directores distribuyen el liderazgo en la escuela, las interacciones relevantes entre profesor y director, y cómo los aspectos clave de las PLC están influenciados por los directores, los profesores líderes y los profesores. Los resultados tienen implicaciones para expertos en desarrollo profesional en servicio dentro de los distritos escolares y los profesores que trabajan en los programas de preparación para directivos.

Professional learning communities demand a school organization that features shared values, collective responsibility, an inquiry-minded orientation, and a school culture that promotes reflection, collaboration, and dialogue. Rooted in these organizational elements is an assumption that teachers and other stakeholders have particular knowledge, expertise, and experience that meaningfully contribute to the progression of teacher learning, innovative teaching pedagogies, and improved student achievement. Yet, traditional models of leadership can limit the diffusion of expertise across a school while current accountability and standards-based reforms support a school context that leads to micro-managing teacher time and pre-packaged school improvement programs rather than ongoing and reflective teacher inquiry. As a result, teachers often feel hurried, are focused on the short-term fixes, and subjected to top-down leadership and frequent redirection of their efforts due to program shifts from school district administrators (Bryk, Camburn, & Seashore-Louis, 1999; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). Research on innovative schools with effective professional learning communities (PLCs) suggest that among other things, a lack of time, effective leadership, resources, and long-term planning create significant barriers to maintaining PLCs in the long-term (Voulalas & Sharpe, 2005).

Principal leadership is imperative to overcoming the barriers associated with establishing effective PLCs because of their ability to manage resources and influence organizational culture and expectations. Research has mostly focused on the organizational context necessary for establishing PLCs and the key elements that allow PLCs to translate into teacher learning and improved practices (Bryk, Camburn, & Seashore-Louis, 1999; Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Harris, 2010; Harris & Jones, 2010; Huffman, 2003; Huffman & Jacobson, 2003) while only broadly exploring the role principals play in distributing leadership to support teacher leadership in PLCs. Viewing leadership through a distributed lens is significant because creating and sustaining PLCs requires enhanced teacher capacity and leadership. Theories of distributed leadership provide a rich conceptual framework for posing questions about and examining the efforts of a varied group of stakeholders engaged in these types of capacity building efforts (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 2010; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

The study presented here examines the actions associated with effective PLCs taken by principals and teacher leaders in six elementary schools

located in West Texas. How principals distributed leadership to support effective PLCs is the main focus of this study. Findings from this study are presented as broad themes: (a) Principals beliefs about teacher leadership; (b) how teacher leaders are identified; (c) PLC types within schools; (d) shared-values within PLCs; and (e) traditional/hierarchical roles principals perform, maintain, or shift under certain conditions. This research is timely because the obstacles to establishing and sustaining PLCs continue to propagate as policies of accountability, limited teacher time and flexibility, and pre-packaged reforms and interventions models are incorporated into the work life of teachers and administrators. Moreover, the increasing complexity of school leadership and instructional practices across all content areas demonstrates a need for principals to look beyond traditional practices to build teacher capacity.

Conceptualizing PLCs and Distributed Leadership

Key features and assumptions of effective PLCs, research findings about the sustainability of PLCs, and the organizational context of schools complicate researchers' understandings of how leadership contributes to the development of PLCs. This section provides a review of research on the topic, but also presents research on effective leadership, highlights leadership obstacles to organizational learning, and explores distributed leadership and how it relates to PLCs.

Professional Learning Communities

There is a great deal of evidence that schools with effective PLCs generate greater teacher commitment and reflective practice (Bryk, Camburn, & Seashore Louis, 1999; Larrivvee, 2000; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008), but effective PLCs tend to be rare, most likely existing in new or alternative schools, and difficult to maintain over time (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). Many school districts and schools now utilize the concept of PLCs to focus reform around data analysis and test preparation with limited success. Perhaps, it is the nature of K-12 public schools that does not foster an environment for teacher learning or reflective practice because of the time it takes to develop communities, the wave of policies and programs thrown

into schools, and the high rates of teacher and administrator turnover. Regardless of pitfalls, PLCs can be a powerful tool for empowering teachers and creating schools where teachers are compelled to learn, grow, and take action.

Defining PLCs. Capacity, expertise, experience, and knowledge are diffused across organizations. Schools are complex organizations, but with appropriate direction, leadership, and shared values, teachers are capable of creating structures that promote their own improvement and collective success. PLCs refer to inquiry-based social interactions where teachers meet regularly to focus on their teaching practice. Such communities can take advantage of the varied capacity, expertise, and experiences of teachers by pulling these people together in ways that facilitate learning, reflection, and group problem-solving. PLCs are sites where people jointly construct, transform, hypothesize, and adapt the meanings of their practices with implications for individual teachers and the collective faculty (Wenger, 1998). Central to PLCs is a process where a group of people share and critically interrogate practices in an ongoing, reflective, and learning-oriented process (Toole & Louis, 2002).

Effective PLCs tend to share five characteristics or features that often intertwine or operate simultaneously: (a) shared values and vision that emphasizes a focus on student learning; (b) collective responsibility for student learning that helps to sustain commitment and put collegial pressure on colleagues to engage, learn, and improve; (c) reflective professional inquiry that manifests through conversations about important issues, the application of new knowledge, and the identification of solutions to support students and their needs; (d) collaboration that moves beyond superficial interactions of help, support, or assistance; and (e) an emphasis on group and individual learning where teachers develop as colleagues and professionals, but also maintain an orientation toward inquiry and its benefits for improving their own practice and the practices in their school (Stoll et al., 2006).

PLCs vary in their organization and configuration. For example, PLCs might focus on instruction, students with academic or behavioral difficulties, or school structures that support teaching and learning (Levine & Marcus, 2009). The structure of PLCs also vary, as some meetings are highly structured with specific protocols, agenda, and attention to time and outcomes while other PLCs are more loosely structured, more

conversational, and free flowing. In part, the way PLCs are organized is related to the topics or foci of the PLC, but organization can also be related to other factors and elements associated with a particular school, its culture, or community members. Levine and Marcus (2009) found that PLC organization and structure can facilitate or constrain what teachers learn because particular structures influence: "whether teachers make their own practices in the classroom public; which aspects of teaching are discussed; the degree of specificity with which teachers share aspects of their work; and the kinds of information about students teachers make available to each other" (p. 397). These findings highlight a need for leadership and organization, but also a need to have teachers critically engaged in decision-making conversations about how PLCs are structured and the norms established in their operation.

Barriers to effective PLCs. Systemic change is a challenging task in schools because schools are complex and because teachers' beliefs and practices are often rooted in their biographies, experiences, and priorities (Hargreaves, 2003). Hall and Hord (2001) captured the relation between change at the individual and school level:

> Although everyone wants to talk about such broad concepts as policy, systems, and organizational factors, successful change starts and ends at the individual level. An entire organization does not change until each member has changed (p. 7).

A number of factors inhibit or aide in facilitating change that has important implications on how PLCs are developed and utilized to improve teacher practices.

In a literature review on PLC implementation, Stoll et al. (2006) identified a number of variables that hinder the creation of effective PLCs, including: individual orientations to change, group dynamics, and school context. More specifically, influential variables included school size, phase of school reform, school age and history, group dynamics, and existing professional learning infrastructure. Schools that are larger tend to present numerous barriers to change, including a greater diversity of teachers and students, lack of organizational inertia for change, more likely under threat of closure or accountability sanctioning, high teacher/administrator turnover,

and less likely to be open to change or a culture that is reflective, inquiry-minded, and collaborative.

The status of the teaching profession also serves as a barrier to effective PLCs. Increasingly, the nature of teachers' work is hurried, focused on the short term, consumed with paperwork, overwhelmed with meaningless data, and subject to frequent redirection through new school district policies, programs, and interventions (Martin, Sass, & Schmitt, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Under such conditions, teachers are likely to struggle to engage as reflective practitioners or have the time, energy, or will to invest in building shared values and the other elements necessary to engage in PLCs. The organizational and teacher specific barriers to PLCs generate challenges for school leaders that are significant.

Impact of leadership. The characteristics of effective PLCs and the barriers to establishing and maintaining PLCs makes it difficult to see how a PLC could develop without the active support of principals. McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) captured the importance of the principal to teacher community:

> For better or worse, principals set conditions for teacher community by the ways in which they manage school resources, relate to teachers and students, support or inhibit social interaction and leadership in the faculty, respond to the broader policy context, and bring resources into the school (p. 98).

Principals and other school leaders help to create a school learning culture that emphasizes teacher learning, dialogue, and critical reflection because they are able to influence physical and social climate (Griffith, 1999; Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, & Strauss, 2010). Principals facilitate the core elements needed to sustain PLCs through their words and actions, how they generate teacher schedules and workloads, and whether or not they are inquisitive, thoughtful, and reflective in their own practices and what they see happening in their schools. A principal's social interactions can facilitate the development of trusting relationships, collaboration, and a diffusion of expertise and knowledge. They can also buffer teachers from district policies and fast-paced changes that disrupt school improvement continuity.

Although it is clear PLCs require leadership and principal support, it is increasingly evident that leadership cannot remain only in the hands of the

principal or other traditional leaders because of the demands, responsibilities, and expertise required to support teachers in a modern school are too significant (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). The characteristics of effective PLCs have previously been described as a form of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2012) and highlight how principals and teachers work together to inquire, engage in leadership, and share their knowledge and expertise to enhance their community's ability to meet the needs of all students. Harris (2003) concluded that multiple forms of leadership are required to build PLCs and that greater opportunities for teacher leadership will lead to meaningful innovations that support professional and organizational learning.

Distributed Leadership and Professional Learning Communities

Distributed leadership provides a rich conceptual framework to study PLCs (Spillane, 2012; Stoll et al., 2006) because a distributed framework can help clarify the varied roles assumed by principals, teachers, and other staff and how their actions, orientations, and leadership contribute to organizational learning. Theories of distributed leadership highlight how leadership is spread across an organization, involves concerted action from teachers and school administrators, and extends beyond task delegation to more profound levels of collective action (Gronn, 2009; Heikka, Waniganayake, & Hujala, 2013). Who leads and who follows is not just associated with traditional roles but to what the problem, task, or situation dictates, or who has the prerequisite knowledge and skills under particular circumstances (Copland, 2003).

   The role of the principal and other administrators is still important, but often in different ways (Leithwood et al., 2006). For example, it is important for principals to recognize who is capable of leading and who is not because the last thing that would contribute to an effective PLC would be ineffective leadership, disorganization, or a chosen teacher leader's personal values that are not aligned to collaborative inquiry and dialogue. When principals are able to identify effective teacher leaders for appropriate situations they must also have a support process in place so that teacher leaders are knowledgeable about organizational and task objectives. A strategic and well-supported distribution of leadership can enhance an

organization's capacity to learn, problem-solve, and take ownership over their performance.

Principals tend to engage in many of the same practices described in other leadership approaches (e.g., instructional leadership, social justice leadership), but with recognition that teacher leadership is important, knowledge and expertise is scattered across a school community, and collective engagement brings about greater change than the sum of individual efforts in isolation. These principals are catalysts for a distribution of leadership because they focus their efforts on cultivating teacher leaders, building relationships, and developing networks (Fullan, 2001) that nurture opportunities for teachers to develop, learn, and innovate. A principal's awareness of the diffused skills and capacities of their teachers is essential and enables them to arrange "the conditions, opportunities and experiences for collaboration and mutual learning (Harris, 2002, p. 3).

A distributed approach to leadership is important in establishing PLCs and starts with the principal ensuring the organization is safe and nurturing to adult learning (Jacobson, 2010). Principals have the ability to support teachers with classroom management issues, prioritize planning time, and limit disruptions to instruction. They attend to the human side of leadership because bringing about educational change in the form of PLCs can involve teachers overcoming fears, emotions, and trust issues (Stoll et al., 2006). Leadership in this context requires a degree of emotional intelligence (Harms & Credé, 2010), an ability to recognize how the pace of change can impact the work lives of staff, and an emphasis on support when change becomes uncomfortable.

As principals recognize teacher leadership capacity, it is not their job to push them into leadership positions with little thought or utilize their capacity to handle administrative paperwork or random assignments. Effective principals provide leadership opportunities that are aligned to the schools vision and mission, identify leadership opportunities that teachers can effectively manage, and provide a safety net and support as teachers engage in leadership practice so that they can grow and expand their capabilities (DeMatthews, 2015; Knapp et al., 2010). Developing teacher leadership is vital to the work of PLCs because PLCs thrive when teachers design the core elements and structures that make these communities function. Effective PLCs are not just well organized or efficiently conducted meetings where all stakeholders come prepared, followed pre-

developed agenda topics, and leave with clear next steps. PLCs are places where all community members share values and beliefs about teaching and learning, engage in reflective dialogue, avoid simplistic answers and quick fixes, and are comfortable with complexity. Conversations are not fixed on an immediate answers, rather, they are about digging deeper into data and teacher experiences to understand complexities, explore nuances, and wrestle with dilemmas (Neumerski, 2013).

Teacher leaders and principals play an important role in facilitating PLCs and the core elements of PLCs, but research has only generally described principal actions in supporting effective PLCs. It is commonly understood that effective principals support the development of a school's mission and vision and that teacher leaders and other teachers play an important role in generating and acting out that mission (Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). Yet, how principals distribute teacher leadership throughout a school and the daily practices of principals and teacher leaders working together to develop effective PLCs is less understood. Research on PLCs highlight the need for critical conversations between teachers, teacher leaders, and principals, but existing research on these topic tends to focus explicitly on the principal or on teachers in isolation of each other, lacks details or specifics, and does not fully capture a process of how leadership is distributed in a school.

Methodology

This article examines the way principals distributed leadership across six elementary schools to create and sustain effective PLCs. This study was conducted as a qualitative multi-case study (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009), with data collection occurring over the course of the 2013-2014 academic school year. Six elementary schools were selected based on recommendations of district administrators, informal surveys with principals in each district, local university faculty knowledgeable in the area of school leadership, and teacher climate surveys that reflected the presence of an effective learning community. Initially, fourteen schools were identified from this pre-selection process. However, after conducting early interviews with principals, four of the school's principals did not believe their schools had effective PLCs. Four other schools opted not to participate in the study

due to time constraints or other research studies being conducted at their school.

The data collection process consisted of in-depth interviews with principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teachers. Interview protocols were developed for each staff position (principals, teachers, and instructional coaches) based on their professional role and a review of literature on PLCs. Interview protocols were reviewed by a small group of principals, teachers, and university faculty and piloted prior to the study. Interviews were semi-structured and took place over the course of the school year. Each interview was approximately 35-60 minutes and primarily focused on: (a) the structure of PLCs; (b) the role different administrators and teachers played; (c) school culture around teacher learning; and (d) perceptions of how PLCs help or hinder teachers in their daily work. The term teacher is used broadly and includes guidance counselors, social workers, and other service providers that work full time at the school. In addition, 10 PLC meetings were observed in each of the six schools for a total of 60 PLC observations. Documents were collected from PLCs and analyzed in this study. Documents included meeting agenda, class and school data reports, professional development activities, and reflection protocols.

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously over the course of the study. Data that were collected and analyzed early in the school year directed further data collection later in the study. Data were analyzed using Nvivo 9 software and coded based on findings from an initial literature review and emergent themes in the data. Both inductive and deductive coding processes were employed (Strauss & Corbin, 1999).

Findings

This study was conducted in six public elementary schools across two school districts located in West Texas adjacent to the US-Mexico border. The districts were within 25 miles of each other and enrolled students with similar socio-economic backgrounds. Bravo Independent School District enrolled approximately 45,000 students and had been recognized by state and national organizations for excellence in school and district leadership. Mesa Independent School District enrolled approximately 7,000 students and was considered by many to be the poorer and less organized school

district. Table 1 describes the general demographics and features of each district.

Table 1.
School District Information

	Bravo ISD	Mesa ISD
Number of Schools	More than 40	Less than 10
Total Enrollment	Approx. 45,000	Approx. 7,000
Hispanic Population	Over 90%	Over 90%
English Language Learners	Over 20%	Over 25%
Eligible for Free/Reduced Meals	Over 70%	Over 75%

Although Bravo ISD had more structures and supports in place than Mesa ISD, both schools struggled with similar challenges and concerns. Both districts were situated across a handful of some of the poorest zip codes in Texas and the United States. In recent years, the per capita income for one zip code served by Bravo ISD was under $12,000 dollars a year. Both districts had high populations of Hispanic students, English Language Learners, and recent immigrants from Mexico.

Both school districts had similarities and differences, but in general, findings related to PLCs and school leadership was similar across both districts. In part, this is because both school districts are located within one region of West Texas that is geographically isolated from the rest of the state. As a result, most superintendents, central office principals, teachers, and school staff received their degree and training from the same institutions. Table 2 provides a brief description of each school.

Table 2.
School and Principal Characteristics

Bravo ISD	**Characteristics**
Gonzalez ES	
Principal Tompkins Tenure:	4 years
Student Enrollment:	Approximately 650 students
Faculty Size:	About 60 teachers

Bravo ISD	Characteristics
Juarez ES	
Principal Edwards Tenure:	11 years
Student Enrollment:	Approximately 550 students
Faculty Size:	Less than 50 teachers
Austin ES	
Principal Ronaldo Tenure:	7 years
Student Enrollment:	Approximately 800 students
Faculty Size:	About 70 teachers
Gomez ES	
Principal Johnson Tenure:	2 years
Student Enrollment:	Approximately 475 students
Faculty Size:	Less than 50 teachers

Mesa ISD	Characteristics
Houston ES	
Principal Sanchez Tenure:	19 years
Student Enrollment:	Approximately 250 students
Faculty Size:	About 20 teachers
Smith ES	
Principal Torres Tenure:	15 years
Student Enrollment:	Approximately 300 students
Faculty Size:	Less than 25 teachers

Each school had PLCs that fit the criteria of an effective PLC, as described in the literature review. Teacher surveys provided general findings that teachers were engaged in professional learning. The overwhelming majority of staff believed: (a) professional development at the campus level enhanced their craft in teaching and learning; (b) other teachers were supportive; (c) teacher ideas were listened to and considered; and (d) school culture promoted trust and collegiality. Interviews and observations with teachers yielded additional confirmation that effective PLCs existed in

the six schools. Teachers described their PLCs using a variety of terms, including, "a safe place to share and grow" and a place "where everyone comes together to solve problems, address concerns, and learn." Observations of PLCs captured school communities that were not interested in easy answers or quick fixes, but rather, thinking about how to improve practices over time. A great deal of PLC time was spent on planning outside activities, such as learning walks, classroom observations, co-planning opportunities, or data-analysis sessions. After confirming that PLCs were engaged in effective organizational inquiry and learning, interviews and observations shifted to understand the role of distributed leadership, principal action, and key interactions between principals, assistant principals, instructional leadership, and teachers.

Principal Beliefs about Teacher Leadership

Each of the six principals acknowledged a necessity for teacher leadership to improve teaching practices and a culture that was supportive and collegial. Observations and interviews captured the ways principals supported teacher leadership and how their leadership varied across schools. Generally, each principal ensured there was opportunities for teacher leadership, provided feedback and support after observing teacher leaders in action, and encouraged all teachers to share ideas, opinions, and experiences related to school improvement issues. Each school had PLCs where teachers were engaged in leadership work.

At Gonzalez Elementary School, Mrs. Perkins was a 13-year veteran teacher at the school and grade level team leader. Principal Tompkins believed that Mrs. Perkins was hard working, motivated, intelligent, and commanded the respect of colleagues. Principal Tompkins said: "She demands respect and she has it, from everyone, even more than we [administrators] do. She is caring, supportive, but has very high expectations. She's passionate about our school and when she talks, everyone listens." Principal Tompkins clearly recognized strength in Mrs. Perkins, but also saw in her an advocate for school improvement from someone who was not an administrator. Other principals believed that teacher leaders brought strength and expertise to their schools that supported or even surpassed that of the administrators. Principal Torres of Smith

Elementary School spoke of Mr. Reyes in such glowing terms. Mr. Reyes was a third year 5th grade teacher that was the leader of his grade level. He was charming, hard working, and had almost immediately won the support of his more senior colleagues. After sitting in on a PLC run by Mr. Reyes, Principal Torres said that Mr. Reyes was:

> just an amazing young man. He's tireless, smart, and passionate. And, to be so supported by older colleagues, it really says something. In PLCs and in other meetings, he is like glue. He is always bringing people together, he is always looking for common ground, and most importantly, he always looks for outcomes. When you see a young man like this, you support him and you let him lead.

Observations and interviews indicated that each principal recognized the importance of teacher leaders in their schools, but also highlighted that teacher leaders needed support. During interviews, most principals noted that teacher leadership wasn't about delegation of authority or leadership, but instead about supporting teachers as leaders. Austin Elementary School's Principal Ronaldo commented about teacher leadership that reflected the opinions of other principals in this study. Principal Ronaldo said:

> Teacher leadership does not mean these teacher leaders don't need support. It doesn't mean meetings or problems or tasks are simply delegated. Some of my colleagues [in other schools] believe this. Teacher leadership is only effective when we support them, provide them with training, feedback, and motivation. Leadership is difficult work and it's not something we should distribute without thought or support.

Each principal believed that teacher leadership was important to the development of effective PLCs and teacher professional growth. These principals also believed that having teacher leaders supported professional learning and growth in less direct ways. Principal Johnson of Gomez Elementary School believed that having a handful of teacher leaders in different areas and aspects of the school created teacher role models for younger or less experienced teachers. Other principals highlighted that having teacher leaders made all teachers more likely to share ideas, advocate

for new policies, try new instructional practices, and communicate frustrations or problems. All principals agreed that having a faculty that was more open to discussion created opportunities for traditional leaders to solve problems, provide the appropriate supports, and build more trusting relationships.

Selection of Teacher Leaders

How teacher leaders were identified and selected varied across schools and situations. In most schools, principals had at least some degree of say-so about which teachers would lead PLCs, provide professional development, or mentor new and struggling teachers. However, principals did not always have or want absolute control and some teachers were able to obtain leadership positions in more informal ways. Generally, principals and teachers agreed on who should be viewed as teacher leaders. In most instances, teachers were supportive of teacher leaders who had formal authority in PLCs and other meetings.

At Houston Elementary School, Ms. Baker was a fourth-year special education teacher who became a fifth-grade team leader and chair of a PLC organized to support students with disabilities, behavioral problems, or reading difficulties. Her principal strongly supported her and recommended that she be the grade level team leader in an open meeting. Observations indicated that other teachers were supportive of her and believed she was the right person for the job. Ms. Baker's selection was not democratic and could be viewed as the principal's choice, but staff appeared happy with the choice. Below are reflections from Ms. Baker, Mrs. Sanchez the principal, and another teacher in the grade:

- "I was a little unsure about this role, I'm not the most vocal person, but Mrs. Sanchez really believes in me and I know she wants me to do it. I see it as an opportunity to grow and, I guess, more importantly, to help all teachers see how important it is to support all students… I'm excited" (Ms. Baker)
- "She can be a bit quiet, but she is super organized, hard-working, passionate, and loyal to her students and families. She has some room to grow, she needs to get a little more tough when it comes to

interacting with staff, but she will grow into the role and it will help her and our school in the long run" (Principal Sanchez).

- "To be honest, I'm kind of surprised, she's a good, hardworking teacher, but she is a bit shy. She knows her stuff, but will everyone listen to her? I hope so, we will see" (Grade level teacher).

In other schools, teacher leadership duties and responsibilities were distributed on a continuum ranging from democratic where all teachers voted to principal selection without any questions or recourse from teachers and staff. Interestingly, not only did these decisions range across schools, but also within schools. These decisions raise important questions related to teacher leadership. For example, at Juarez Elementary School, Principal Edwards allowed most grade levels to vote on who would be their grade level team leader and had a panel of teachers select and hire an instructional coach candidate who would ultimately run most of the school's PLCs around literacy and mathematics. However, Principal Edwards unilaterally selected the sixth grade team leader because he felt that the team was underperforming and that there were a few teachers who were ineffective and at times toxic. As a result, Principal Edwards moved another teacher onto that grade level and made her team leader. Principal Edwards explained his decisions:

> Not just anyone can lead and not just anyone can lead when there are some negative behaviors that must change. This isn't a democracy, it's my responsibility to ensure all students are learning and at the end of the day, if teachers are not being effective and if we really believe in teacher leadership and effective PLCs, well then I'm going to say who leads and who follows. Having a bad leader only makes things worse, and I'm not okay with that. If I'm not democratic, or I'm not fair, so be it.

Principal Edwards' feelings were shared across all principals. Interviews and observations captured how each principal stressed the importance of teacher leadership, but that their leadership must be effective, organized, and aligned to the school's vision. It was clear that despite the fact that each principal was okay with taking a more distributed approach to leadership, they did not abdicate their formal authority.

PLC Types, Values, and Beliefs

The types of PLCs varied across and within schools. All schools had single- or multi-grade teams with a clear teacher leader identified through the processes described above. In addition, other PLCs existed and were focused on a variety of school related areas. There were school wide PLCs focused on supporting English Language Learners, students with disabilities, students who had recently migrated from Mexico, and students and families struggling socially, emotionally, and/or financially. Some schools had school wide literacy and mathematics initiatives, some of which were geared to improved test scores. Regardless of PLC type, shared values and beliefs were present or in the process of being shaped.

Effective PLCs were common across all schools and it was clear that teachers shared similar personal and professional values associated with the purposes of education. One prominent value shared by teachers was collective responsibility for student learning. During PLC sessions, teachers rarely had excuses for failure and believed that their PLCs and the dialogue, reflection, and problem solving that occurred were the tools for improving their practices and their schools. Typically, teachers' shared beliefs in PLCs were in some way connected to the school's vision and mission and related to key areas the principal cares about. For example, Principal Johnson was a strong advocate for inclusion of students with disabilities and thus identified teachers and supported the development of a PLC around inclusion, co-teaching, and co-planning.

At a general level, shared values in PLCs were aligned to the moral purposes of the school's mission and aligned to teacher beliefs about the purposes of education. In this study, principals and teachers shared a grit and persistent to serve their students despite challenges. For example, a fourth grade teacher at Juarez Elementary School commented: "We have a lot of challenges, but challenges aren't excuses. We come together to address those challenges. That's what this is all about." A literacy focused PLC at Gonzalez Elementary School had a strong sense of shared values. The PLC consisted of fourteen school staff members including grade level teachers, special education teachers, an assistant principal, and a parent who worked as an afterschool literacy tutor. The team identified numerous challenges to success, including, a lack of resources such as leveled

readers/books, technology (electronic tablets and computers, assessment materials (Curriculum Based Measures), and time.   However, the team didn't view these challenges as unfixable.   Instead, they focused on what they could control and believed they needed to focus even more on their own teaching practices and on supporting each other because of the lack of resources. Mrs. Evans, one of the two leaders said: "We know we can't get everything on our wish list and so we are motivated to become brilliant teachers. We have to overcome our obstacles and we do that by working together, by pooling our expertise, our knowledge, and helping each other out."   In one meeting, the team was focused on improving reading fluency. The teachers discussed strategies, shared challenges, set new goals, and then determined that they would conduct learning walks and have a buddy system where two teachers would take turns observing each other and proving feedback based on reading fluency instruction.   Months after this PLC meeting, a teacher shared:

> We worked together to improve our practice. You know, by working with your colleagues you learn a lot about what you know and what you don't know. You also learn what others knows. That helps you grow. For us, once we know what we all know and don't know, we work together to learn newer ways and strategies… We are about constant improvement and it's fun.

Other PLCs were focused more on classroom management, mental health concerns, and students struggling with difficulties inside and outside of the classroom/school. At Juarez Elementary School, an interdisciplinary team of teachers, mental health staff, and administrators came together to find ways to support a subgroup of students who were struggling. Teachers in the school had been complaining about some students not coming to school prepared to learn or exhibiting behaviors that made teaching difficult. The assistant principal, Mr. Tony, decided to call together a group of stakeholders. He structured an agenda to facilitate discussion and conclude with some action steps.   As a group, the team decided to formalize a community and determined that Ms. Pullen, a social worker, should take the lead on the team, but with the support of Ms. Harris the school psychologist. Mr. Tony was happy about the results and the opportunity to have more knowledgeable and prepared staff leaders. He stated: "I know a little bit

about mental health and outside supports, but I'm far from an expert. Their help and knowledge is great. I'm so much more excited to work on these issues now. I don't feel alone or lost." Ms. Pullen and Ms. Harris felt similarly and noted that they were happy Mr. Tony started the group and knew that he would support them.

The team would discuss student challenges, recommend new strategies, and monitor student progress. In addition, the group members would observe the students in different settings and support teachers who were struggling in the classrooms. Ms. Pullen described the PLC:

> This isn't a traditional PLC, we learn together, we support each other, but sometimes the learning is policy stuff, like how to work with Child Protective Services. Other times, it's about teaching teachers how to recognize triggers to student behavior… Ultimately we learn through each case because each case and each student is so different…We share a belief that we can help each child. If we didn't, we wouldn't be doing this work and would definitely would have given up a long time ago because trying to help solve these types of problems makes you want to give up, it's exhausting…But, when one of us is tired, I know I can count on my colleagues.

The PLC built structures and supports around how they scheduled and conducted meetings, how they developed cases and sought out answers to problems and questions, and how they communicated their learning across the team and across the school. As the PLC became more successful, PLC members would present information and conduct professional development sessions on aspects related to their own professional growth.

Other PLCs with different foci brought together diverse groups of stakeholders, but tended to share the same beliefs: (a) all students can learn if supported; (b) teachers and staff needed each other's support; (c) obstacles and challenges weren't excuses; and (d) learning happened over time through reflection, dialogue, and practice. Teacher learning extended from PLCs to organizational and community levels. Principals, assistant principals, instructional coaches, teachers, and parents benefitted from the learning that occurred in PLCs.

Formal Leadership

Formal or traditional leadership still played an important role in teacher leadership and PLCs. Although each principal had various leadership styles, each principal was observed maintaining expectations for PLCs, setting a level of professional acumen for teacher leaders, and developing a range of objectives for PLCs. Similarly, teacher leaders and PLC members were observed seeking formal authority for support, new ideas, resources, assistance, expectations, and guidance. Sometimes teachers struggled with working in PLCs or with challenging topics and looked for guidance and support.

Teacher leaders and PLCs confronted the following problems: (a) disgruntled teachers or staff that challenged the authority of teacher leaders and/or contributed to a toxic school environment; (b) PLC groups lacked specific knowledge or expertise necessary to get started with their work and required outside training; (c) teacher leaders struggled to organize and manage meetings, expectations, and distribute workload; (d) a lack of knowledge associated with available resources and tools within the school and district; and (e) limited knowledge of federal, state, and district policies. Under these conditions, PLCs and their teacher leaders sought support from principals and other traditional administrators. For example, a PLC at Gomez Elementary School was organized over the summer to learn about co-teaching and co-planning in the area of special education and sought principal support. The group had an objective given by the principal, to identify a co-teaching/co-planning model that best fits the school, identify options to present to the entire faculty, develop trainings that can be given over the course of the year, monitor areas of emphasis, and problem-solve potential challenges.

The first two PLC meetings were not a success because the teachers didn't feel knowledgeable enough about co-teaching and co-planning models. One teacher in the PLC said, "We were just wasting time because we didn't have enough information or knowledge to get started." The team already had strong teacher management, shared values about inclusion, and strong work ethic, but they asked the principal for support, ideas, and recommendations due to a lack of technical expertise about inclusion. Instead of giving recommendations, the principal shared with the group that a statewide training provided by co-teaching experts would be conducted

and implored group members to attend. The additional training provided the PLC with the prerequisite knowledge to be successful moving forward.

Newer PLCs or PLCs with less assertive teacher leaders were more likely to struggle with disgruntled or toxic colleagues. For example, at Gonzalez Elementary School the leader of a PLC struggled with a teacher who constantly interrupted meetings, was not willing to follow the meeting agenda, and was frequently disengaged from the group. Other PLC members were angered by the teacher, but did not outright confront her. This disgruntled teacher was observed talking over other teachers during the meeting session, speaking loudly, and being aggressive in her comments. Mrs. Evans was the teacher leader and was frustrated. She explained her feelings early in the school year:

> I tried talking to her in private and tried to see how I could help her. I asked her how I could help her. I asked her if she had any ideas to make the meetings run smoother. She really didn't want to talk. To be honest, I think she is just one of those people who refuse to fit in with the group. We are all a family here and she is the outsider. I was so frustrated with her and I needed help from our principal.

Mrs. Evans asked Principal Johnson for assistance.   The principal provided her with a number of strategies, gave her an article to read about conflict resolution, and scheduled a follow-up meeting in two weeks. Mrs. Evans made little progress and became more frustrated. She again followed up with the principal. Principal Johnson described how he supported Mrs. Evans:

> I observed a few PLCs and saw this toxic teacher in action. I wasn't surprised, because she had problems before.   I took notes on her behaviors and then afterwards I scheduled a meeting with her. We talked about her behaviors and her comments… I connected her behavior to our purpose here and pointed out how she wasn't meeting expectations and how her values were not aligned with our mission and vision. I also helped her make a connection to how her behaviors and attitudes are associated with aspects of her formal evaluation… Let's put it this way, it wasn't a nice conversation, but she got the message.

Mrs. Evans and Principal Johnson noticed an immediate change in the disgruntled teacher. By the end of the school year, the disgruntled teacher apologized to Mrs. Evans for being difficult and thanked her for her hard work. There were other instances where teacher leaders asked for support dealing with colleagues, although, some cases were not resolved as successfully.

Principals also encountered problems with PLCs and the distribution of leadership that included: (a) poorly conducted meetings where little work or progress was made on a specific agenda; (b) meetings not starting or ending in a timely fashion; and (c) incomplete assignments or low-quality products (e.g., professional development sessions, policy drafts, parts of school improvement plans). Observations and interviews with principals suggested that at times, teacher leadership was difficult to sustain and deal with. Principal Edwards said, "sometimes, and I know I shouldn't say this, but I wish I could just run everything on my own. At least it would run right." Principal Edwards' frustration was obvious during the interview, but future observations and interviews showed his dedication to supporting teacher leadership and maintaining PLCs that were run by teachers. Each principal recognized that PLCs and teacher leaders required some degree of management based on that particular teacher leader and the challenges associated with the group. Principal Sanchez's comments about the need for formal leadership captured the sentiments of each principal in this study. Principal Sanchez said: "Each [teacher] leader and each PLC has its own strengths and weaknesses. Part of my job is to know the dynamics and the needs of all staff and then to adapt my leadership accordingly." The formal authority of principals was present and used strategically.

Discussion

Each principal in this study engaged in aspects of distributed leadership and demonstrated a commitment to facilitating teacher leadership at a school-wide level. Although there was variance across principals' values, decision-making processes, and styles, each school provided rich opportunities for teachers to take ownership over their own learning. Previous research reported on distributed leadership and how principals supported teacher leadership, but rarely attempted to investigate how theories of distributed

leadership and principal actions associated with distributed leadership support PLCs. This article expands on existing research by focusing on how principals distribute leadership to create or maintain effective PLCs and attempts to capture some of the key elements, actions, and challenges in the leadership work.

Each of the six schools in the study fit the criteria for having effective PLCs previously described in empirical research. Teachers were engaged in reflective dialogue, shared values, and were learning through inquiry and collaboration. The schools believed that PLCs were a tool used to overcome obstacles and challenges. The school community gained from engagement in PLCs and helped to overcome organizational challenges. PLCs were viewed by teachers and principals as difficult, challenging, but ultimately worth their efforts. Administrators and teachers recognized the powerful impact of learning PLCs brought. How leadership was distributed, organized, and managed across and within schools varied. Some principals were more hands-on with managing and supporting teacher leadership and PLCs while others allowed teacher leaders to struggle before providing support. Teachers and teacher leaders had expanded authority and given flexibility to lead, but at times they still turned to principals for answers, support, or additional authority.

These findings provoke further questions about the ways context, group dynamics, personalities, and leadership styles influence principals' approaches to distributed leadership and important issues relevant to teacher leadership. Each school shared common demographic features situated in the same region of West Texas. Principals, teachers, and school district administrators were mostly educated and trained by the same people working in the same universities. Yet, each principal, each teacher leader, and each PLC presented different dynamics that influenced how PLCs were structured, conducted, and focused. The preferences, ideas, problems, and resources available influenced the shared-values of PLCs, the instances when teacher leaders would seek administrator support, and the products of learning produced through inquiry, reflection, and dialogue. These findings raise an important question: Can PLCs be pre-packaged reforms with specific foci, protocols, and objectives, as they exist today in countless schools? Many educational businesses, consultants, and even scholars have produced PLC and teacher education platforms that school districts have

purchased as increased accountability, marketization, and economic rationalization has changed the landscape of public schools (Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014; Zeichner, 2010). In this study, pre-packaged PLC models were not utilized and teachers were happy with PLCs and their learning outcomes.

Some scholars have highlighted that quality professional learning in general, or PLCs in particular, are mostly ineffective due to the fast-paced, ever-changing, accountability systems that govern life in schools. In this study, however, teachers and administrators viewed PLCs and a distributed approach to leadership as a mechanism to adapt to new or old challenges. When teachers lacked resources, such as certain types of assessment materials, they worked together to think about, observe, and perfect new teacher practices that can help them overcome what they lacked. This is not to say that PLCs are the magic bullet in educational reform, but rather, if teachers are given time and support, they can solve many of the issues they confront in their daily work lives and in doing so build community, trust, and shared values centered on student achievement.

Finally, this study captured the importance of formal/traditional authority related to the role of the principal. Principal authority varied across and within schools based on contextual features and principal characteristics. However, each principal maintained authority by holding expectations high, clearly communicating goals, and providing teachers and teacher leaders with feedback and guidance. At times, teacher leaders sought the principal's help or authority to remedy issues. In some instances, principals responded in traditional ways, such as having a critical conversation with a disgruntled teacher. Other times, principals did not respond to requests for support and instead helped teacher leaders find resources they could draw upon to remedy their own problems. These relationships were respectful, mindful of authority, and collegial. They were also mutually beneficial, as teacher leaders and principals had opportunities to learn from each other.

Implications

Researchers should continue to investigate how principals and teachers leaders can support organizational learning and how different leadership qualities, actions, experiences, and contextual features of schools, districts, and policies support or impede organizational learning. To date, most

research on PLCs has focused on either principals or teachers but not on their interactions, challenges, and relationships. Researchers might consider focusing intensely on a small number PLCs to examine and explore daily practices, unique features, and how professional learning occurs during PLC meetings, but also through exercises and practices outside of PLC meetings. In addition, research is needed to explore different types of PLCs with different foci. A school may have a PLC focused on literacy or to support a transition from a bilingual program to a dual language program. The challenges, ideas, values, and actions in one type of PLC may vary greatly from another with important implications for how PLCs are understood.

This research also contributes to discussions on how principals and assistant principals should be prepared. Future school administrators must be prepared to distribute leadership effectively and then be capable of providing support and feedback to struggling teacher leaders. They must also have managerial skills to ensure PLCs are effective, efficient, and produce meaningful outcomes that extend beyond general meetings with little or no organizational learning. Instructors in principal preparation program can structure courses to be similar to PLCs by modeling principal and teacher leadership actions that support the development of community and inquiry. For example, instructors might conduct activities that help candidates build a collective system of values around organizational learning, provide activities that enable candidates to be reflective in their practice, and encourage candidates to work together to generate new ways of teaching and leading. In addition, instructors might consider having principal candidates assess PLCs in their schools. Candidates could present these findings to the class and discuss their strengths and areas of growth. Finally, instructors might consider attempting to build a PLC of candidates that extends outside of one class to an entire cohort of candidates. Candidates and instructors can work together to identify PLC themes or foci and these PLCs can remain intact beyond students' participation in the preparation program.

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Towards a Conceptualization of Dialogic Leadership

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Towards a Conceptualization of Dialogic Leadership

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Abstract

In 1968, Freire included in his work the need of dialogue for those acting as leaders. Since then, leadership has been widely addressed by authors around the world and different conceptual frameworks have been developed. Different social and educational movements have granted dialogue a significant role for leading change. Educational research has advanced knowledge on using a dialogic approach for mobilising schools and communities. Building on the research conducted under the INCLUD-ED project, schools and communities together engaged in participation processes that enabled teachers, children, families and community members to lead the transformation of their schools. Based on a first attempt to theorise this phenomenon, this article explores the concept of dialogic leadership and accounts for the contributions from educational and teacher leadership oriented to promote change and improvement. First, a general overview of the relevance of dialogue in the *dialogic turn* of societies and social sciences will be provided. Second, the role of dialogue in different leadership models will be analysed especially considering the relevance granted to dialogue in the teacher leadership model. Third, a conceptualisation of the model of dialogic leadership will be proposed and final remarks highlighting the relevance of conducting empirical work to further elaborate on this conceptualisation will be put forward.

Keywords: teacher leadership, dialogic leadership, educational community

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Hacia una Conceptualización del Liderazgo Dialógico

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Resumen

En 1968, Freire incluyó en su trabajo la necesidad de diálogo para quienes actúan como líderes. Desde entonces, el liderazgo ha sido tratado ampliamente por autores y autoras de todo el mundo y diferentes marcos conceptuales han sido desarrollados. El rol del diálogo para liderar el cambio ha sido significativo en diferentes movimientos sociales y educativos. La investigación educativa ha avanzado en el conocimiento sobre la utilización del enfoque dialógico para movilizar a las escuelas y comunidades. A partir de la investigación desarrollada en el proyecto INCLUD-ED, las escuelas y comunidades juntas, iniciaron procesos participativos que permitieron a los maestros, niños y niñas, familias y miembros de la comunidad liderar la transformación de sus escuelas. Basándonos en un primer intento de teorizar este fenómeno, este artículo explora el concepto de liderazgo dialógico y parte de las contribuciones en liderazgo educativo y del profesorado, orientado a promover el cambio y la mejora. Primero, se presenta una visión general de la relevancia del diálogo en el *giro dialógico* de las sociedades y las ciencias sociales. Segundo, se analizará el rol del diálogo en diferentes modelos de liderazgo, teniendo especial consideración por el relevante rol que se le otorga al diálogo en el modelo de liderazgo del profesorado. Tercero, se propondrá una conceptualización del modelo de liderazgo dialógico para finalizar con unas conclusiones destacando la relevancia de llevar a cabo trabajo empírico para profundizar en esta conceptualización.

Palabras clave: liderazgo del profesorado, liderazgo dialógico, comunidad educativa

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> *I was in prison and the teacher of my son called me saying that they needed me in school because my son was depressed (...) I started participating and now the teachers count on us, we meet to discuss what we can do in the neighbourhood, we also share conversations among parents* (Carlos, Roma father)

Carlos spent 8 years in prison. As a Roma father in his community he was seen as an unreliable person who was deemed for trouble and could not be trusted for caring for his own children. In 2006 something happened that changed his life. The school attended by his children - which was repeatedly in the news for the week educational performance of its students and the serious conflicts between the school's staff and the students' families-, is located in one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Spain. The school initiated a process of transformation based on the community participation with the dream of providing all children with the best education. Families, other relatives and other members in the community started to take part of the school's learning activities entering the classrooms and being active agents of the school's transformation into a successful and safe environment for all in which children have demonstrated to improve their academic results (Diez, Gatt, Racionero, 2011). This process meant a life transformation for many parents and community members who were given the opportunity of participating in their children's learning and getting involved in the school and in the community. The process of transformation of this community was analysed by the INCLUD-ED project, the only research in socioeconomic sciences and humanities in the list of the 10 success stories of the Framework Programme selected by the European Commission (2011). Many stories and lives like Carlos' turned into a process of empowerment through which they became leaders in the community, trusted by the families and engaged in different activities such as after-school training and the week-end centre. The process of leadership among many diverse people in the community would not have been possible without the chance to participate in their children's education, hand in hand with the staff, the teachers and other members in the school community. The conversations among teachers and community members about children's education and the future of the school were essential to build a relationship of trust and empowerment that facilitated the emergence of this leadership. Through

dialogue, they shared values and hopes that turned into action, in the same way as in what Marshall Ganz (2009) conceptualised as the story of self, the story of us and the story of now, where a shared narrative motivates agents for action. In this case, when we approached this reality -the schools analysed by the INCLUD-ED project- with the aim of exploring the ways in which the community participation promoted inclusion, we observed these emerging leaderships and shared empowerment. The processes that enabled community members to become leaders of the transformation has been the object of our analysis, which we intend to conceptualise in this article. Our aim will be to explore the concept of dialogic leadership that is driving to change and improvement and that is based on practices of leadership among the whole community. We first analyse the theoretical background that frames the dialogic turn in the social sciences and the relevance of dialogue among some of the leadership models, particularly focusing on the teacher leadership approach that significantly inspires the conceptualisation of dialogic leadership. We conclude underling the importance of carrying out empirical field work that can contribute to widely develop this conceptualisation.

The Relevance of Dialogue in the 21st Century: the *dialogic turn* of societies and Social Sciences

In the 21st Century, dialogue is acquiring an increasingly important role both in the public and the private spheres. Meanwhile power relations remain and social and educational inequalities, particularly affecting certain social groups, persist (Aubert & Soler, 2008). Among these inequalities, we find the ones resulting from the structural changes of the late 20th Century, consequences of the transition from the industrial society to the information society, which has been widely analysed since the mid-80s (Gorz, 1985; 1983). The transformations that have accompanied this process have generated new models of interaction in which subjects make dialogue an important part of their lives, relationships and ways of thinking. Similarly, people and communities request that such dialogue enters the institutions and structures of the political, educational, economic and cultural systems, according to what has been defined as the *dialogic turn* of societies (Flecha, Gómez, & Puigvert, 2003).

Research has shown that citizens are reclaiming more spaces of dialogue and the need to incorporate in the public debate the voices of the social groups

who have been traditionally silenced. The dialogic dimension of our societies exists at the personal, institutional and political level as dialogue is having more influence in politics, the school, at work, in culture or the family. The fact that people have now more possibilities to decide their own life world increases the influence of dialogue in decision-making processes and contributes to review one's own thoughts through interaction, according to the "reflexive modernization" of our societies (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994). The process of "de-traditionalization" in which the role of the old structures and their functions is being questioned, leads to a public debate about the need to transform them (Heelas, Lash, & Morris, 1996).

The configuration of the personal and professional lives is accompanied by what some authors have defined as the "de-monopolization" of expert knowledge (Beck et al., 1994; Habermas, 1984, 1987). As a consequence thereof, people have the opportunity to confirm the treatments, medicine or therapies recommended for a particular disease; and students' families get increased access to the actions that have scientifically proven to improve their children's academic outcomes. Both the doctor and the teacher start moving away from the role of expert and entering into a dialogue in which the arguments presented by the speaker are more relevant than the position the person holds in a given hierarchy (Habermas, 1984, 1987). The role that the information and communication technologies are acquiring to facilitate this change is extraordinary. The growing Open Access initiatives working for citizens to have free access to scientific knowledge through technology reveal a trend with no return (European Commission, 2013). Although there are still barriers to this knowledge, recent statistics on the Internet use are demonstrating reduced rates of digital literacy (Internet World Stats, 2014), a fundamental skill to access this knowledge. Worldwide educational initiatives that include the information and communication technologies are contributing to this democratization. The use of technologies has also been incorporated by the leadership studies, with multiple e-leadership initiatives arising since the 90s (Avolio, Sosik, Kahai, & Baker, 2014).

Dialogue has changed social life and currently the array of choice increases while people are assuming more risks. These social, political, educational and economic risks are becoming less controllable by the institutions of the industrial society, characterized by the limits of the nation state (Beck, 1999). Similarly, the social sciences have also been greatly influenced by the *dialogic turn* of society, both in its theoretical dimension as well as in the empirical

work. Different authors have analysed this trend as a way to overcome the traditional dichotomy between agency and structures in the social sciences (Beck-Gernsheim, Butler, & Puigvert, 2003). The study of this *dialogic turn* incorporates both structures that favour or hinder the dialogue, as well as the agency, understanding that the social reality is based on this duality. Some of the most relevant authors worldwide, such as Habermas (1987, 1984), Touraine (1997) and Beck (1992) account for this dual perspective in their analysis. They concluded that knowledge is built in a more democratic way by giving more prominence to social actors and communities.

There is a growing concern in the European context within the social science research about the need to open up a dialogue with the public in order to respond to the specific problems of the citizens. In Europe, the research program in Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities (SSH) with the largest funding in the world is implemented taken this goal into account. During the process of approval of the Horizon 2020 program presently at work and lasting until 2020, the SSH research impact was questioned. This required the mobilisation of the academia claiming to maintain the programme. NET4SOCIETY, ALLEA, the European Consortium of Humanities Institutes and Centres, and the Standing Committees for the Humanities (SCH) and for the Social Sciences (SCSS) of the European Science Foundation (ESF) led these academics' movement which collected more than 25,000 signatures across Europe. However, the challenges for the maintenance and recognition of SSH research continues. The European Commission emphasizes the need to find ways through which civil society gets the opportunity to participate in science and, at the same time, finding channels through which science can be enriched from an on-going dialogue with society, including their voices. Numerous disciplines, from sociology to education or gender studies are incorporating the characteristics of this *dialogic turn* highlighting the dialogic nature of the social processes. In all these areas, the emphasis on intersubjectivity and dialogue is highlighted as key elements that explain the possibilities of living together (Touraine, 1997). Among the contributions that respond to this dialogic turn we can refer to Elster's analysis of the relationship of dialogue with democracy (1998), the dialogic feminism (Beck-Gernsheim, Butler, & Puigvert, 2003) or the conceptualization of the "dialogic self" (Mead, 1934).

Focusing particularly in education, it is relevant to highlight that the role of dialogue as a facilitator of change and transformation has been analysed for

more than four decades. Already in the 70s, Paulo Freire (1970) developed the theory of dialogic action, still playing a prominent role in many of the most important contributions in education at the international level. Through his prolific writing Freire analysed how dialogicity is inherent to the human nature and a fundamental aspect of democracy to empower community involvement, including teachers as cultural workers (Freire, 1998, 1997). In coherence with Freire's work and the *dialogic turn* of societies and the social sciences, relevant developments on education are including dialogue in their analysis. Furthermore, they also consider the ways in which the community can be empowered in order to be involved in schools through it. This approach resonates as a transformative and comprehensive perspective to education according to which learning and development are strongly related to the social interactions provided across school-community boundaries in order to respond to the changes brought about by the information society.

In the same line, this dialogic dimension has influenced several areas of educational research. Educational leadership has evolved towards a greater inclusion of this dimension, taking advantage of the developments that identify synergies between education and dialogue influencing learning and teaching. By doing this, research that considers the different educational agents involved in leadership is encouraged. Some of the contributions in this regard are being discussed in the following section.

The Role of Dialogue to Enhance Leadership in Education

The educational leadership includes a wide range of approaches, concepts, analysis and practices that are facing new challenges in the 21st century. It is important to highlight that recent developments in the field of educational leadership are dealing with the analysis on macro and micro levels, the processes involved in leadership and the varied roles it plays in different cultural contexts (Shina, 2013; Hallinger & Huber, 2012). Among the richness and diversity of topics addressed, we will focus on some of the contributions of teacher leadership for the conceptualisation of our model. This will include the transformative approach, for being particularly relevant as regards the role of dialogue and of communities into schools and their contexts.

Dialogue has a relevant role in the construction and consolidation of leadership, particularly in the models building on the distribution of leadership among different teachers as a way to contribute to efficient leadership

(Bennett, Wise, Woods, & Harvey, 2003; Pont et al., 2008; Hallinger, 2009). For instance, Ganz (2010) has indicated the need to mobilize the whole community in order to reach effective solutions through the centrality of dialogue with all community members. Ganz's research and his involvement in the practice has demonstrated the effectiveness and success of dialogue in social movements (i.e. environmental, health, housing) and political campaigns (i.e. Obama campaign).

The pre-eminence of dialogue in educational action and in the different models of leadership, especially in the one developed with a transformative aim, is long known. Freire, who in 1968 included the role of revolutionary leadership and dialogue, inspires some of the leadership contributions. Already in the 60s, Freire stated that "the revolutionary leadership establishes a permanent relationship of dialogue with the oppressed" (1968, p. 50). His work -and the role of dialogue in it- has inspired educational leadership among number of scholars around the world, and it has understood as a key point to social transformation. In line with the importance granted to dialogue in these and other theories, we also observed that dialogue was at the centre of all the activity and progress in Carlos' children school (as we have also identified in other schools following the same educational project) – as well as in the neighbourhood's movements and actions-. The presence of dialogue, debates, conversations in the hall and meetings among teachers, among families, and also between them, does also mean that the analysis of leadership perspectives is not an isolated case but rather that leadership enters this context with a large prevalence of dialogue.

Over the last decades different conceptual frameworks have improved our understanding of distributed leadership (Spillane et al, 2001; Gronn, 2002; Louis, Mayroweth, Murphy & Smylie, 2013; Robinson, 2008). Although dialogue has been included in some of these contributions, this approach is focused on developing measures, classroom conditions and outcomes for the school improvement (Spillane, 2010; Elmore, 2008; Mulford, 2013; Robison, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). This approach becomes particularly important to improve school outcomes and contexts, including formal and informal dimensions. Aiming at combining both school improvement in socially just contexts (EPNoSL, 2013), the transformative leadership accounts for the role of dialogue to achieve *schools more equitable, inclusive, excellent and socially just* (Shields, 2010, p.580). One of the most important elements in this process is the need to take into account the existence of inclusive spaces

and relationships in which dialogue occurs, expanding the horizon of learning through community partnerships. A clear relation exists between dialogue and the community placing the focus in this case, on the inclusive spaces to open new horizons for leadership.

We have already seen how dialogue is linked to different actions addressed to transformation. In this sense, it is relevant to mention that transformation is a key point in the first developments of what has been defined as transformational leadership, an approach developed in the late 70s (Burns, 1978), while the information society was replacing the industrial one. In his work, Burns studied the leader's influence in developing a common vision into organizations allowing for their transformation, although dialogue had no relevant significance yet in this work. Since then, several authors have tried to assess this conceptualization to measure its impact into the academic outcomes (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Day & Sammons, 2013: Day et al., 2010, 2011). In this approach, the promotion of change and transformation that takes dialogue into account includes the role and involvement of teachers. Furthermore, other similar analyses conclude that the transformation of the school organization is influenced also by the social context (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). At this point, it would be interesting to study how dialogue is influencing this conceptualization, which requires an inclusive environment to achieve excellence and equity in schools and communities (Shields, 2004, 2010).

Importantly, the scientific literature also highlights the role of teachers in schools as one of the key topics in leadership processes, including the managerial and administrative dimensions, and the very teacher's leadership practice. Frost (2012a) analyses the need of strengthening partnerships with schools' teachers who commit themselves to expand leadership in their schools. The non-positional teacher leadership is one of the basis of this innovative approach that has been pioneering in the United Kingdom and extended worldwide in the framework of the *International Teacher Leadership* project (Frost, 2011; Frost, 2014) with outstanding relevance. This initiative was launched in 2008 at the University of Cambridge and has supported the creation of a network that actually involves 14 countries (Frost, 2012a), having as key transversal aspects: the relevance of developing teacher leadership, knowledge building and culture building. In the network, teacher leadership encourages the development of projects in which there is an

important role of professional development, expert facilitation and support and practical knowledge creation. This international dimension of teacher leadership is strongly supported by the HertsCam Network made up of over 300 teachers and other professionals in the United Kingdom (Frost, 2013).

Following a transformational dimension of this approach, one of the key aspects of these initiatives is the development of strategies for supporting teachers as agents of change, analysing the relevance of the agency to transformative educational aims and the moral purpose of teachers and their professionalism towards successful educational reform (Frost, 2012a). Focusing on teacher leadership, this contribution does also account for the creation of dialogue to lead change (Frost, MacBeath, & Jorunn, 2009; Frost, 2006), in line with the *dialogic turn* of societies and the social sciences. We argue that this dialogue promoted in the teacher leadership initiative is crucial and plays a critical role to inspire other social agents to be engaged in schools. The role of dialogue as a core element in leadership practices is a key contribution upon which we draw in the construction of our conceptualisation of dialogic leadership. In this sense, particularly important is the way by which teacher leadership is empowering profound transformations into school and children's lives, achieving school improvement through meaningful actions that teachers lead. This makes sense not only for the teachers themselves but also, going beyond the school, by creating meaningful networks for the daily work of those who devote themselves to education. These contributions become a milestone in the field also due to the fact that leadership is promoting the empowerment of other agents, the non-positional teachers in this case, shifting from one relevant figure (the principal), to a range of potential relevant figures (the teachers) (Frost, 2014). Therefore the teacher leadership model provides the opportunity to open up leadership to the empowerment of a larger number of agents, a factor that is essential for our conceptualisation. Particularly relevant in this regard is the approach for teacher leadership that analyses, develops and consolidates the vision of teachers as agents of change including the relevance of dialogue and the *dialogic turn* in education.

Teacher networks of leadership use dialogue to create meaning to actions, as actually community members in the schools analyzed by the INCLUD-ED project do as well, and by so doing, the identification of the relevance of the educational community for transformation has arisen. How does the educational community face the lead of teachers? What are the

communication ways in terms of dialogue between them? Which leaders in the communities are also empowering the teachers' work? The dialogic leadership approach we develop shares these concerns with the teacher leadership approach promoted by Frost, as the latter does also depart from the understanding of the critical role of agency for social transformation (Frost, 2012b).

Towards a Conceptualization of Dialogic Leadership

The dialogic leadership is thus the process through which leadership practices of all the members of the educational community are created, developed and consolidated including teachers, students, families, non-teaching staff, volunteers and any other members of the community. In their commitment as dialogic leaders, they seek to work together with families, teachers and students especially by supporting and promoting actions that contribute to transform the school and the community, which include the neighbourhood and the interactions at homes. In this regards, the literature has already informed on the impact that student empowerment has upon academic success (Mulford, 2013). In this sense, it is important to consider that these persons can be working or be involved in a wide range of areas, from economy to health, and can have diverse academic backgrounds, from an illiterate grandmother to a graduated sister or a father in secondary school. The dialogic leadership they carry out brings their expertise into concrete practices with a significant impact upon children's lives. Any **educational community member** may promote this kind of leadership by contributing his or her background to empower the voices and the dialogue among community members.

Our conceptualisation of dialogic leadership is in line with the dialogic turn of societies and the social sciences as, it accounts for some of the main features that we have identified: from the de-monopolisation of expert knowledge to the pre-eminence of dialogue within structures and relations. We put forward a model which is emerging in successful contexts of educational transformation in which the community plays a central role. The model of teacher leadership has followed an inclusive approach that sees leadership possibilities beyond those with administrative or managerial responsibilities, beyond the principal-centred leadership (Frost, 2003). Therefore it enlarges the community of leaders to multiple teachers. In the same way, our model

draws on this inclusive approach that opens up this possibility to other community members. This is the case of a child that is empowered through the capacity she is granted to participating in argumentation and decision making in the context of daily assemblies for instance; this process is taking her to lead change in her own community. Below, we present some of the observations we made in the context of the INCLUD-ED project.

Dialogic leaderships identified throughout the INCLUDE-ED project

The INCLUD-ED project conducted a 5 year longitudinal analysis of case studies in schools of 5 different European countries. As a result of this research, different types of successful family and community agents' participation were conceptualised, mainly educational and decisive participation (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2009). By going in depth in the analysis of these schools in order to unveil how this type of participation had an influence in the community, we observed that in schools where the successful types of participation were implemented, unforeseen leaderships emerged, some of them against all odds, such as Carlos'. From the moment this father was given the opportunity to enter his children's school while he was still in prison, he started to participate as an active agent of his children's educational success – as well as of the community's transformation. He progressively became a leader in the community actively involved in the creation of alternatives for the most vulnerable in the neighbourhood (Padrós, García, de Mello & Molina, 2011). Other stories of children and families as well as other members in the community follow a similar process of personal empowerment through which they are leading change in their community.

The teacher leadership initiative with the prominence given to dialogue has managed to widen leadership among multiple teachers that are given the chance to become agents of change. Drawing on these advances and on their connection to the centrality of dialogue, and the emergence of diverse leaderships in the communities observed in the INCLUD-ED project, we develop an initial conceptualization of dialogic leadership.

Through our observations, we have identified that the interactions in the context of these schools were based on the validity claims of what is argued and not on the power claims of the speakers (Habermas, 1984, 1987). For instance, in an assembly to discuss which actions were given priority in the community for instance, the voice of a Roma mother had the same value as

that of a person from the school staff or a social worker. Through this principle, dialogic leadership seeks to promote egalitarian dialogue through the maximum involvement of people in schools, regardless their educational background, or the position held in a particular hierarchy, giving value to the voices of all on equal terms. In this context, **teachers** who implement the dialogic leadership are acting independently of their position, creating and consolidating spaces and dynamics in which everybody is important. The principal of the school is also responsible that this dynamics would be fostered in all the school spaces and she becomes another member of the whole community. Moreover, teachers know that educational community members have different cultural knowledge and capabilities learned in very diverse contexts to solve everyday problems. By promoting the inclusion of their voices through dialogic leadership, they are taking advantage of the heterogeneous reality existing among the social contexts of the schools.

One of the characteristics of the schools in the 21st Century is that its students belong to different cultures, religions and ethnic backgrounds. When **children** from these different backgrounds are leading dialogically, they respect diversity of all, allowing their partners in the classroom to be treated equally, promoting the conditions that enable them to live their differences in egalitarian terms. We observed for instance, in interactive groups (Elboj, Niemela, 2010) children had very diverse strategies to support each other - when one of them would need help in solving a problem, their very different backgrounds and experiences lead them to contribute differently and the very functioning of the interactive group facilitated that all contributions were usefully incorporated, regardless of the diversity they implied. Children in these schools participate in ways that lead them to increase their sense of ownership and involvement with the community and which have an impact on the eventual change in the community. A concern of the school refers to collecting, from the very beginning, the dreams of everyone about what the school is meant to be, and granting equal importance to any of these, whether it comes from small children or from families or teaching staff. In the classroom practice too: the initiatives children take to support each other so that the whole group progresses is another element that characterises a sense of ownership not only of their own practice but also of the sense of belonging within the group. Under dialogic leadership -understood as a source of change and transformation for social and educational projects-, children are developing empowering practices that at the same time contribute to their

increased learning. In these schools, families are not only worried by the values their children are learning in school. Aware of the training requirements of the Information society, families' concerns also refer to the grades they are obtaining and the educational outcomes they achieved at the end of the academic course.

Therefore, the educational community and particularly family members contribute to develop practices to improve children's academic performance, reversing school failure in diverse socioeconomic contexts. **Family members** developing dialogic leadership are participating into decision making processes within school and are also having access to those practices that have demonstrated school improvement. The decision making processes in which family members participate in the observed schools were diverse in nature. For instance, Serrano and Mirceva (2010) have explored how Muslim mothers, in one of the schools analysed, participated in dialogic literary gatherings where they decided together which classic book want to read as well as debate about the its contents . They not only improve their level of Catalan or Spanish language but also they get in touch with some of the most relevant classic universal literature they had not accessed before. And they take active part in all the decisions: from the hours that best suit them to conduct the gatherings to the next classic book they want to read. They told us that by reading this classical books and discussing them in the gathering, they improve their level of Spanish (in this case) and learnt many other things and, most importantly, they felt empowered to help their children with their homework. When they lead dialogically, they are having in mind that the education they want for their children is the education they would like for all children. The impact concerning the improvement of educational outcomes allows the dialogic leadership to be a source of personal and social sense for the families. Furthermore, this meaning is shared by non-teaching members and volunteers also involved in the school, contributing to address actions that transform difficulties into possibilities, improving relations between community members and their context.

Conclusions

Along with the *dialogic turn* of societies, the role of dialogue is increasingly present in the scientific developments within the leadership models, and more specifically in teacher leadership models. Particularly, dialogue seems to be

one of the keys for educational success in inspiring work on teacher leadership. Scientific literature on educational leadership has addressed in detail the relevance that dialogue and the involvement of the community in schools have for improving the quality of education, with a special focus on teacher leadership. Some of the questions addressed in this sense are in relation to how teachers are empowering students to succeed in their academic results through dialogue, why they are creating meaning to other teachers around the world empowered through dialogue or what the challenges they face towards community involvement are. These are questions being discussed around the world across cultures and countries, among teachers coming from a wide range of school realities.

Different contexts could be identified as more facilitators of the emergence of this kind of inclusive leadership based on dialogue, on the involvement of the families and community members into schools with a transformative ethos. Through the inspiring work of teacher leadership and the practices of schools that are working on a dialogic basis through successful educational actions (INCLUD-ED Consortium, in press), we can identify the existence of a particular type of leadership involving the whole community, which we have attempted to conceptualise as dialogic leadership.

Now, many questions remain unexplored about how this dialogic leadership is created, promoted and consolidated in the long run, beyond teachers' and professionals' practice in educational centres. Empirical research is needed that allows us to find answers to these. In which ways do the concrete educational actions promote dialogic leadership? To what extent does the influence of dialogue particularly promote a successful dialogic leadership? How is the dialogic leadership consolidated among community members? Developments in this sense are needed, highlighting the relevance of research on these topics , including concrete actions undertaken towards this goal, as those promoted by the International Leadership Initiative (ITL, 2014). These new research avenues will allow advancing into the scientific knowledge on leadership research, in a joint effort to put in common the ways through which processes are influencing this field of knowledge as well as the transformative practices they enable and promote. The results would have relevance not only for the schools but also for the development of solidarity among community members, building a better future for our children.

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Distributed Leadership Matters: Perspectives, Practicalities, and Potential

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Review

Harris, Alma. (2014). *Distributed Leadership Matters: Perspectives, Practicalities, and Potential.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. ISBN: 978-1-41298118-7.

Alma Harris is internationally known for her research and writing on school improvement and leadership in recent years. She held senior academic posts at several universities and in 2009 she was pointed pro-director and professor of educational leadership at the Institute of Education, University of London for four years. Nowadays, she is working as a director in University of Malaya. She has published numerous articles and books related to this subject: distributed school leadership, professional learning communities in action and so on.

The book takes a pragmatic look at distributed leadership practice, not academic, aimed at a wider audience (practitioners, principals, policy makers, and Researchers). It focuses on why distributed leadership matters, by looking at the facts, the evidence and the practice. As Harris points out: "It looks at the different perspectives associated with the notion; it considers the practicalities of making it happen and the potential of distributed leadership affecting organizational improvement". In complex times we need more than ever explore how we can ensure better achievement of our students. International studies show how distributed leadership must be linked with professional collaboration and learning

between teachers. As this book highlights, distributed leadership can be a positive influence on organizational change and improvement.

In the first two chapters, Harris analyzes why many external reforms have produced little change and, instead, that leadership can become a critical component in school and system improvement; as she quotes: "Leadership is a key driver in securing and sustaining improved outcomes".

Chapter 3 looks at the leadership approaches and practices required in the future, the issue is how leadership can be fitted into present system and what type of leadership we need. The next chapter presents the empirical facts, which show that distributed leadership makes a difference to organizational change and improvement.

The "dark side" of distributed leadership is showed in chapter 5, making a commentary on the more negative aspects of this leadership approach and how it can be misused and misconstrued. The substantive part of the book (Chapters 6, 7, and 8) is devoted to distributed leadership and to how to put it into practice: relationship between distributed leadership and social capital; professional learning communities as a form of disciplined collaborative learning and facilitating the professional learning of others. The Appendix introduces a model and methodology of professional collaboration (Chapter 5) for those working within schools, which may serve to guide, support and assist schools in their collaborative work. The Formal leader, as a central part of his job, has the necessity to be capable of developing and providing opportunities to empower staff in the organization.

Distributed leadership matters, therefore, based on the form of professional collaboration, and it can positively influence learning and teaching. The book provides a practical framework to take into account and shows Professional Learning Communities as a chance to change professional practice in order to improve learner outcomes. A critical part of the work of Professional Learning Communities is sharing knowledge that might help enhance the practice of peers, although the communities of professionals does not guarantee meaningful change and improvement; for this reason, we need shared leadership, collegial norms among professional and opportunities to lead.

Professional Learning Communities should focus on the curriculum, the teaching and the professional practice of others to create a real

improvement. As shown by Harris and the empirical support, under the right conditions, distributed leadership has a potential to positively influence learning outcomes. Distributed leadership involves other ways of organizing the school and the role of teachers in a new governance of education.

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