

Presentation

Dossier “Educational Leadership”

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Recent years have been marked by a growing demand on school communities to improve the quality and equity of their students’ learning. In this context, school managers are no longer seen as mere administrators of policies, norms and programs that should be implemented in their establishments, and they begin to be considered as proactive and propositive actors, who must lead educational projects and put in place complex processes of pedagogical and institutional change.

The increasingly abundant and accurate research conducted in different parts of the world has been instrumental in properly establishing and valuing the influence processes generated by leaders within educational institutions, many of which were probably already known intuitively by everyday experience of directors, teachers and students. Now, it is possible to affirm from the numbers, theory and hundreds of empirical studies: the leadership is fundamental for the improvement and the construction of a good school. In fact, research has shown that leadership is the second most important intra-school factor, after teacher quality, which impacts students’ learning outcomes.

The objective of this dossier is to bring Brazil closer to the discoveries of this abundant international research, since the educational leadership as a field of research is still incipient in the country. In fact, a comparative analysis between different Latin American countries, among them Brazil, showed that the theme appears only as a secondary theme in studies about educational reforms that have occurred since the 1990s. In these studies, educational decentralization and democratization of school management are the most relevant topics. It is also possible to find a more current set of research focused mainly on training, recruitment and practices of school principals at the national level, but that do not consider the elements of the theoretical and practical field of school leadership or even educational improvement².

With this compilation of articles, we seek to reflect on the international academic debate about educational leadership, bringing different, sometimes divergent and controversial views on the subject. We also bring reflections and points of view about the strong intersection between improvement and leadership that can contribute to shed some light on such an important debate for the quality and equity of education in Brazil.

It is not, however, a question of denying the importance of so many other factors that, inside and outside of school, affect the quality of teaching; or naively postulate a kind of new panacea. But without leadership, it is difficult, if not impossible, for the main unit of the schooling systems, the schools, to transform their present state and provide better training opportunities for students. In this sense, the concept of leadership is strongly connected with the idea of improvement. If improvement requires leadership to be driven at different levels of the school system, educational leadership

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² FLESSA, J., BRAMWELL, D., FERNANDEZ, M., & WEINSTEIN, J. (2018). School leadership in Latin America 2000–2016. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(2), 182-206.

in turn needs the prospect of improvement, to have a north to follow, as well as values and priorities to guide it. Therefore, improvement without leadership cannot be materialized, and a leadership that is not oriented towards improvement would be like blind sailing. This explains why different models of improvement have included a dimension of leadership, particularly of principals. Moreover, different conceptions of educational leadership, especially those related to pedagogical management and leadership for learning, have appeared connected with the more general movement of the school in favor of its greater quality and equality. Since the bibliographical reference that exists in Brazil on this field of knowledge is small and often very little updated, we believe that the articles included in this compilation may provide novelty and evidence for academic reflection and educational practice in the country.

These articles, with the exception of the Brazilian one, were selected from two works originally published by the Center for the Development of Educational Leadership (CEDLE), linked to the Faculty of Education of the Diego Portales University in Santiago, Chile: CEDLE's collaboration with the Electronic Journal of Education of the Post-Graduation Program in Education of the Federal University of São Carlos allowed these articles to be published in Brazil.

The first article of this selection is by the Brazilian researchers Sofia Lerche Vieira and Eloísa Maia Vidal who contextualize the debate about educational leadership in Brazil. The authors show that there is a specificity of the Brazilian context in relation to this theme, which is its focus on the principle of democratic management. They detail the historical trajectory of the debate on this principle from the mid-1980s to the more recent context. Next, they present two national training programs: the Distance Training Program for School Managers (Progestión) and the National School Program for Managers of Basic Public Education (PNEGEB), also known as School of Managers. The study shows that the principle of democratic management, associated with a political leadership, prevails in the literature and initiatives of formation of school directors in Brazil. In this sense, they conclude that the issue of leadership, as it is configured in the international context, is not present in the Brazilian academic debate or even in its educational policy.

The second article is by David Hopkins, an English researcher who has been a leading player in the school improvement movement inside and outside his country. He reviews the more than fifty-year history of this subject. He distinguishes five phases: the first marked by the attempt to understand the organizational culture proper to the school; the second focusing on action research, self-assessment and improvement in school; the third focusing on change management and school self-management, both of which are considered as a way to impact large-scale reforms; the fourth pointing to learning communities and recognition of the significant role of leadership within schools as well as at the local level (school districts); and the last phase, on which we would be inserted today, guided by the attempt to achieve a systemic improvement and that the global dimension, with its internationally recognized success stories, would be decisive. Hopkins concludes his paper with eight proposals for school reform, ranging from the importance of having a narrative of change to the need for the system and its various actors to mobilize for their moral purpose: the learning of all students.

Canadian Michael Fullan, probably the most influential researcher on thinking about educational change at the global level, focuses his essay on the essential tasks

that leaders and managers must develop. He considers that the overload of responsibilities, the scarce preparation, the rotation of the public policies and the high expectations placed on their shoulders make it difficult for school administrators to focus on their work. Their first focus should be to lead learning, playing an active and effective role in developing better teaching-learning practices for teachers at their school and also in promoting new leadership. This role should occur from the orchestration of different processes of pedagogical improvement for all teachers and should not be confused with a useless activism to check the work of each teacher (what the author euphemistically calls “micromanagement dementia”). A second emphasis should be on creating coherence in a context in which it is scarce, owing to the multiplicity of initiatives that coexist within schools and the breadth of results that are demanded. Therefore, managers should focus on the main goals: to create collaborative cultures, to deepen learning and to ensure adequate accountability both inside and outside school units.

Finally, managers should be facilitators of the teaching profession. In particular, they should foster effective collaboration among teachers, thereby seeking to increase social capital and collective pedagogical effectiveness within the school.

Researchers Amanda Datnow, North American, and Kim Schildkam, Dutch, present a text centered on the promotion, by school managers, of the use of data in school, especially among their teachers, to promote improvement. To do so, they compare the results of empirical studies that both have recently developed in their respective countries. Their results indicate that, in addition to the marked differences between both educational systems, there is a set of policy practices that favor a use of data that in turn will contribute to school improvement. One of them is that managers must show the meaning and projection of the use of data by teachers, socializing a broad understanding of what data are relevant, which are not restricted to the results of school tests by students, and to show the connection between this available evidence and the drive for improvement.

Secondly, managers can create the organizational conditions so that the use of data can be carried out in a systematic and profitable manner. Lastly, it insists that managers can actively promote the dissemination of key data in the school organization as a whole, constantly encouraging the creation of networks of exchange and shared knowledge.

This should occur, according to Datnow and Schildkam, with a sense of cohesion among the faculty, the motivation for the best individual and collective performance, and the primacy of a spirit of inquiry within the school.

Denise Vaillant, a Uruguayan researcher, focuses her contribution on the communities of professional learning (CAP), cornerstone of the professional development of teachers and, by addition, of the possibilities of improving a school. CAPs seek to generate effective experiences for professional development, targeting the daily activities of teachers, promoting their collaborative work, focusing on student learning as a priority. These vocational learning communities are not born or developed spontaneously. On the contrary, they must overcome multiple obstacles, among which stand out the availability of time, the lack of organizational conditions to safeguard their operation or the prevalence of a culture that is not profitable for the collective reflection on teaching practices. School managers can play a key role in overcoming these obstacles through their leadership. From the results of

the PISA test, Vaillant identifies some of the limitations that school managers in Latin America have in order to foster this collaborative work among teachers, while recognizing the peremptory need for more research in this area.

Renowned English researcher Tony Bush seeks to show the diversity of models of educational leadership that have been established in the vast academic production on this subject. This panoramic view serves to conceptually organize many of the visions of leadership within schools, showing their different focuses of interest, as well as the diverse actors that embody it. Before presenting a typology of the different forms of leadership on educational leadership, Bush dwells on the central elements of his definition, among which are the intentional process of social influence of a person (or group) on other people (or groups), which is guided by certain values that point to the construction of a certain vision of the school.

It is important to note that Professor Bush critically outlines the different approaches to leadership in their successes and challenges, while arguing that these conceptual models, which seem so differentiated in theory, tend to occur in a combined way in the reality of leadership that is built in schools.

University of Auckland (New Zealand) professor Viviane Robinson's article notes that adult leadership within the school should be student-centered: what ultimately matters is the consequences of the leaders' decisions and actions for the students, plus that satisfaction or comfort of adults. The areas of these "consequences" can be broad, ranging from academic learning to student participation, to creating the general psychosocial well-being of the student.

In order to develop this student-centered leadership, six dimensions are proposed that leaders must develop and define the key competencies that, according to Viviane Robinson, managers must count on to drive the dimensions mentioned: using relevant knowledge to make leadership decisions, solving complex problems and building trust bonds.

In continuation, the complexities that reform policies face are shown, when they try to change "by decree" the leadership practices carried out by managers and teachers, and the virtues of a particular innovative method are exposed, called *inquiry in theory*, that Professor Robinson has been developing in New Zealand and Australia.

Researcher Jingping Sun of the University of Alabama (USA) conducts an exhaustive review of the knowledge accumulated around transformational leadership - which would be the focus of the largest number of empirical studies conducted and which has had a strong impact on the promotion of school leadership (for example by setting benchmarks for performance by many education authorities). Professor Sun's article focuses on analyzing the evidence found in (published and unpublished) investigations of transformational leadership, both as to its characteristics and its antecedents and impacts, with most of the studies being conducted in the United States. The new evidence, compiled especially in this meta-analysis, allows enriching the general dimensions and the specific practices of the school managers. In particular, the effect of different studies on key dimensions of school achievement is analyzed, with an impact on establishing shared goals and on providing collaborative structures. In addition, the meta-analysis confirms the high incidence of managers' transformational leadership in the emotional state of teachers, their job satisfaction and commitment to the school, as well as in the academic results of the students, which it would also influence, but more lightly and mediated by teachers.

The approach of leadership from a distributed perspective is developed by researchers James Spillane and Melissa Ortiz - being necessary to remember that Professor Spillane has been one of the founding fathers of this emerging trend. At the outset, it is noted that although the focus of analysis is on leadership, which seeks to introduce change in schools, it is indispensable to visualize it associated with management, which allows maintaining this change throughout time, and which operate together in the daily practice of schools. This approach stems from the critical realization that the study of individual behaviors of school leaders, particularly principals, has neglected the social character of social practices: when one person acts, others react, generating interactions. These interactions in the school do not occur in the void, but they happen in situations that have norms, organizational routines and tools that define them, influencing their possibilities of development. The focus of distributed leadership, according to Spillane and Ortiz, should be on teaching, which would be the central task of the school organization. But not only must we show teaching as the object of leadership, but also as a subject of leadership and management practices - constituting an explanatory variable. Finally, the authors describe some of the current challenges of this approach, ranging from the construction of methodologies that allow their description and more reliable study in schools, to the design of training and professional development models that are in charge of this shared view of the practices of school leadership.

For his part, the Canadian expert Dean Fink addresses another critical theme of leadership (and school improvement): its sustainability over time. Fink recalls seven basic principles of sustainable leadership: depth, duration, breadth, justice, diversity, creativity, and conservation. Fink expands on his article the meaning of the first three principles. The first is to try to fulfill the moral purpose of education and achieve profound learning. Second, it is crucial for educational leadership within the school to persist in time, and to go beyond the limits of an individual's period at the head of the organization - however successful it may have been. Studies show that managing the frequent risks of the transition of principals is of paramount importance for the sustainability of the improvement.

Hence the importance of planning a transition from the functions of one principal to the next, as well as the development of a set of new leaders well prepared and able to assume the different responsibilities. Finally, sustainable leadership requires expansion among the members of the school, and cannot be centered on one person or a small group. In this plan there would be a confluence of this approach with the distributed leadership, although Fink shows the ambiguities that this concept presents, as well as the diverse forms as it was conceived.

More than adding a new scope on school leadership, Izhar Oplatka, a researcher at the University of Tel Aviv, Izhar Oplatka, focuses his efforts on gauging the contribution of the conceptualizations elaborated in developed countries to the so-called “developing” countries, to Latin America in particular. His position advocates the creation of a field of study of educational management specifically oriented to Latin American educational contexts and the critic to the blind adoption of imported concepts and foreign theories. Drawing on the literature of sociology of knowledge, research in education and the epistemology of science, Oplatka succinctly analyzes the development of educational management as an Anglo-American field of study, showing the close connection between cultural and social contexts with theories

of school management. In fact, it questions the universal character of the concepts and theories in vogue in this subdiscipline. In seeking to characterize the specifics of the Latin American context, he insists that one cannot ignore the heavy burden of colonialism, the extent of poverty and inequality, the existence of indigenous peoples (and their majority presence in many countries), the fragility of the democratic political system, or the tension between tradition and modernity. Similarly, there would be certain resources that, despite the limited research available, may be relevant to educational leadership in the region. In his conclusion, the author suggests four challenges for Latin American academics and researchers focused on educational management and leadership, among them the generation of applied knowledge from and to the Latin American educational system and the exploration of new areas of study specific to the context of the region.

We believe that the value of this publication is in its richness, timeliness and breadth of perspectives, which allow us to understand the complexity and at the same time the importance of the phenomenon of educational leadership and its relation with school improvement processes.

Today, more than ever, we have, at an international level, knowledge and learning about how to fully develop school leadership and management in order to contribute to the quality and equity of education. Here some of this knowledge and learning is synthesized thanks to the contribution of recognized authors from different corners of the planet. We hope they are of great value for the Brazilian educational debate. We thank the authors who generously allowed their articles to be published again, this time in Brazil.

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