

SUPPORT FOR THE LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING IN SECONDARY EDUCATION. THE CASE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN SPAIN

Jesus Domingo, PhD

Katia Caballero, PhD

Beatriz Barrero, MA

Faculty of Education Sciences, University of Granada, Spain

Abstract

This paper shows the results of a project I+D, funded by the Ministry of Education, which is focused on how to support leadership for learning in secondary schools (Ref. EDU2010-16131). The main target is to redefine and promote the relationship between principal and school counselor to develop a distributed leadership for learning towards the educational community. This relationship must be based on sharing effort and commitment through a common educational project headed to get quality and equity for all. It has been used a method focused on deep biographical interviews to key informants at schools. The results obtained prove there are controversial but also a good potential in this professional relationship. They must collaborate and not compete for leadership, balancing lines of action to achieve the improvement at school. In this sense, it is necessary to promote the principal's training for the effective leadership and to redefine the counselor's functions.

Keywords: Leadership for learning, Distributed leadership, School counselor, School improvement, Counselor and principal relationship

Research Problem

There are empirical proofs about the effectiveness of leadership for learning and its impact on outcomes (Leithwood, 2009). Principals can influence on results and give to the school a strong pedagogical leadership in order to improve the school and the relationships between teachers, students and curriculum (Elmore, 2010).

The report "Improving School Leadership" (OECD, 2009b) points out this issue is now a priority for the system (Pont, Nusch, & Moorman, 2008) that must be tackled. But it is

not returning to the romantic lead, but to explore new options. The realization of distributed educational leadership within the community (Harris, 2004), supported by supervisory and advisory functions, can be an important element for cultural change at the school. In this sense, interested in exploring what is possible and efficient support educational leadership, to be distributed within team's stewards of a community education project.

However, if we observe the TALIS results (OECD, 2009a), developing this kind of leadership in Spain is quite controversial. The principal in Spain is not a professionalized figure, so is chosen among teachers with a certain profile by colleagues. Besides, they do not have enough power to head an educational leadership, because their functions are more focused on management and bureaucratic activities.

Perhaps we are in a time when there are enough global diagnoses and specific stories to know what's going on (Coronel & Fernández, 2002; Gago, 2006; Viñao, 2005). So, the school principal's leadership is clearly diminished function that needs to be reset, and it is time to act. The improvement of secondary education institutions is a priority, even if it is complex and needs the concurrence of internal and situational factors. Beginning with the involvement of educational administration and following the emergence of leadership for learning, we have to promote, develop and support. This requires entering the debate of what leadership we need and how you can make viable and sustainable over time.

Promote a professional performance, in line with what the current pedagogical knowledge as the most relevant points to promote the improvement of schools and learning outcomes is a task is highly complex. And it must be done in a realistic and possibility. The romantic speeches blaming or victim and little can bring.

In this context we are taking some significant changes to the rule are to support the transition from a bureaucratic model to a course of study designed to improve learning and performance in schools (MEC, 2007; DOGC, 2010). But also coexist overregulated and limitations cannot be ignored (Bolívar, 2012). Next to it is being given a start value of current "best practices" in this sense.

The school principal's leadership needs to be reconsidered, and it is time to act. Firstly, it is necessary the educational administration involvement and, secondary, a leadership for learning support, promotion and development. This requires starting a debate about the kind of leadership we need and how to make it possible and sustainable over time.

Selecting and giving value to current "best practices" would be a good manner to start this process. In this sense, it is being investigated what good practices transform the present principal in a leader for learning (Bolívar, Domingo, & Caballero, 2011).

Another aspect to take into consideration is that there is not just a principal, but a management team, and the responsibility for teaching-learning processes is distributed among teaching teams. In the Spanish context there are participation and coordination structures that also can offer a new horizon for improvement. Many of them have an interesting history of "good practices" to support the improvement and illuminate the way we must take.

From these structures we want to highlight the school counselor figure, especially the Secondary Education counselors. The reasons are clear. On the one hand, they have a real presence in all secondary schools, workhorse stage of all reforms. And, secondly, their training in psycho-pedagogy and the role they have assigned, gives them a systemic and educational view and an important strategic position.

Why, in certain circumstances, may be especially welcome some support, advice and strategic and programmatic tools. Like others, this support may be perceived as irrelevant interference. Life histories are intertwined, professional and institutional culture and another set of circumstances that weave complex scenarios for or against the meeting professional. Why it is appropriate to enter into the life experiences and guiding professional counselors and managers, from their own voices.

School counselors in Spain: from the expert intervention to the counseling for improvement as agent of change

Educational counseling in secondary schools used to be considered something new, but now it is known and valued. Many teachers recognize the importance of the counselor's advisory function. Counselors integrate gradually in higher schools and carry out a role that everybody consider necessary, especially in the Action Tutorial Plan; scholar, personal and professional counseling; and within the especial needs field. However, they are still working on the edge of the school, in the periphery of educational action. But still at the margins. Hence the complaint voiced by De la Oliva, Martín & Vélaz de Medrano,

"The psycho pedagogic intervention is contributing to the improvement of education, but still marginal performances from schools, the jump to the core of the task in the classroom and in the center is to give" (2005, p. 67).

Counselor professional practices are not yet sufficiently integrated in the school. They tackle specific tasks isolated from the daily life at classrooms. So, they create their own role in each context according to what "everybody" conceives as their functions and the necessities that appear in the school. Nevertheless, educational administration defines their duties in a wider sense and considers them as a driving force behind change.

To this end, it is necessary to look for new professional space where counselors undertake directly with educational and scholar improvement, without being considered intruders by the rest of professionals (Domingo & Hernández, 2008).

Boza, Toscana & Salas (2007), analyzing the counselors diary work, indicate that “the advisory function to the educational community is one of the most defined and repeated”. Therefore, it is not necessary to create new structures and services or overload the existing ones, but making better use of existing ones, for example, let counselors take decisions and participate in the school and learning improvement (McMahon, Mason & Paisey, 2009; Martínez, Krichesky & García, 2010).

In this way, the school counselor, in particular innovative schools, begins to be an educational agent involved in the improvement of the school, which collaborate both teachers to encourage the learning development and management team to promote the diary practice improvement.

Currently there is a change of perspective and counselors start to be considered as educational leaders, students’ advocates and agents of social change. This conception empowers the professional counselor figure by defining it as a leader engaged with the continual school improvement (DeVoss & Andrews, 2006).

So, this professional is now located in a strategic position which, while working very close to the classroom, has a broad overview and systematic whole vision (House & Hayes, 2002) that make possible collaborative work with teachers and management team (Stone & Dahir, 2006; Janson, Stone & Clark, 2009; Domingo, 2006, 2011; Santana, 2008).

The school counselor as an agent of change. Working closely with the Management Team for the improvement of learning

The ultimate purpose of the "new" internal support services to mediate, and support the mobilization of internal capacity for change (Hopkins, 2007). Especially those aimed at developing the core teaching (Elmore, 2010) of "good" teaching-learning processes that give rise to commitments and reflective processes in which they learn together-without-a complex change. It would be a professional support to strengthen and operationalize the learning needs of the community from statements of support and mutual collaboration (Bolam et al., 2005) and distribution of leadership (Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006, Leithwood, 2009).

We agree with Martínez, Krichesky, & García (2010) conception of the figure of the school counselor as “*an educational agent in commitment to school improvement, working with teachers to improve students' development in a holistic manner, working closely link with the team and promoting the improvement in daily practice*” (p.110).

So, the practices of these professional advisers should be dynamic, between racks and internal structures capable of leading them and keeping them-processes that will be possible to the critical analysis of basic grammar at all three levels of action: 1) institutional dimension to set directions, 2) strategic dimension to bring together faculty action around areas of improvement, from redesigning the organization, and 3) management of instruction and interaction in the classroom or educational in formal and informal contexts. Bolívar & Romero (2009) indicate that the goodness of support services is how to be able to:

- Articulate the action both individual and collective teaching of the community in a joint project in line with the basics that promotes the education system.
- Helping to set the school as a project.
- Influence the core of the improvement: The teaching and learning processes.

Ultimately, it comes to promoting a climate of collaboration and learning community, supporting dynamic and stimulating work, potentially formative dimensional, dynamic and relevant content for the development of an intercultural project group. These actions become motor and unique opportunity for self-revision, reconstruction and integration of the center. It is a unique opportunity to get and give advice on overall planning, development, evaluation and innovation of the curriculum and at the same time, mediating the understanding and use of proposals from teachers.

Along with this global perspective, vision and community center, the reality is that, without losing sight of this goal, adds functionality to find this integration of voices, concerns, efforts and perspectives on things more tangible. Thus, it is about specific programs, projects or tasks particular work very attached globalizing the classroom, where this process of (re) construction becomes a more real to work on a shared vision.

All in all, this professional is now located in a strategic position which, while working very close to the classroom, pose a broad overview and systematic vision (House & Hayes, 2002), enabling you especially for collaborative work with faculty and management team (Stone & Dahir, 2006; Janson, Stone & Clark, 2009).

If Principal and School Counselor working together, within a team of leadership for learning of the school, they can articulate individual and collective actions of the community in a shared educational project aimed at the good learning for all; and influence the core of the improvement, which is the teaching and learning process.

Thus, Martínez, Krichesky, & García (2010), indicate that counselors work with management teams must walk in line with supporting the role of educational leadership and also finding support for it to develop their programs that permeate the life of the school. For

what cannot enter into dispute and must form a solid team and interrelated, with an open, sincere and permanent, and combine their strengths and skills towards the improvement of learning for all.

In short, we can say these services, without being the key of change, are an important support for the exercise of leadership for learning, and vice versa (Lambie, & Williamson, 2004; Wolker, 2006; Ford, & Nelson, 2007). To define new professional competences for counselors, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2008) argues these professionals can really help in this regard. However, we are still far from achieving this reality (Amatea & Clark, 2005). And for better or worse, getting it depends on the set of perceptions that come up between counselors and headship (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Stone & Clark, 2001; Clark & Amatea, 2004). Counselors may have a positive impact on defining the role of the school counselor (Dahir, 2004).

Methodological framework: design and research development

If involved the different perceptions and verbalizations of professional experience between practitioners and managers, should enter them. We are not as interested in the landscape, such as understanding the most important dimensions and circumstances which may render both support elements such as distorting professional relationship.

The world of counselor and advice are made in complex ways. Show a dynamic, flexible and panoramic issue which must be addressed-in the face of procedural understanding and significantly from the biographical and narrative approaches, especially suited to the current time of great disappointment postmodern narratives and vindication of the relevance of the personal subject (Bolívar, 2002).

The aim is to understand cultural and professional identity keys that facilitate or difficult the development of a coordinated action principal-counselor to practice and distribute the leadership of learning to the community.

We are not interested in the landscape as much as in the understanding of how that relationship can help or hinder the improvement. For this reason we use a qualitative method based on a biographical-narrative approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Domingo, 2005). Biographical narratives about professional and institutional experiences have been useful to understand the variables that influence or make difficult the possibilities of change.

The biographical narrative provides a conceptual and methodological framework for analyzing key aspects of the development of education. The personal stories of the experience provided the biographical framework that makes intelligible the professional development of teachers, becoming a new form of knowledge.

The complexity of the advisory profession is saturated causes of roles, responsibilities and challenges (Domingo, 2009). In many cases they are not specific to the profession and can become evil (which operate in the opposite direction in the face of the alleged improvement), despite its appearance of safety or be promoted by the educational administration itself. It is a practice likely to be especially vulnerable to side effects, uncontrolled, unwanted or adaptation resigned pessimism of reality and look at the profession. Listening and understanding lives and experiences it is possible to make significant connections between professionals' thoughts and between what they have and what they need.

We position ourselves in that only from hearing and understanding "the lives and experiences", then enter respectful debate from them, it is possible to establish meaningful bridges between "their knowledge" and that of others, including his truth of the particular and what is objectively desirable ... With it you can walk towards the construction and appropriation of the meaning of change (Fullan, 2007).

It's a multi-case study with a biographical-narrative approach from stories of experience in secondary schools. The experience reports, showing their grounded theories are drawn from extensive discussions with key informants. It follows a process of successive deepening. It collects analyses and crosses the voices of advisors and managers. Was used the software for qualitative data analysis MAXqda.

Therefore, we study-in process, which selected a group of 10 secondary schools that were characterized by self-listed from the educational administration and among faculty in the area, as "examples" of good practice. We approached them and asked what was happening there and how he had come to this, both teachers, like other directors and management team members, and counselors. It starts with a number of key informants, directors and advisers of such centers, but will be expanding the selection of key informants displayed as mismatches or need more contrast or analytical perspectives.

It follows a process of successive deepening with biographical interviews, inspired by the already used by Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe (1994). In this process they relate and analyze the experience of professional life illustrating processes of interaction and collaboration between directors and advisers with a view to school improvement.

Our research study followed the recommended protocols for research on human subjects (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Thus, participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study, and their participation was completely voluntary.

Presentation of the research results

From the biographical narratives of professional experience and institutional reconstruction has failed to make a dialectic of sense from the biographical accounts. It was repaired in the dynamics of change in the elements that energize and the effects they produce. This will have identified some key dimensions of qualitative improvement of secondary education in Spain.

Some important dimensions to support the improvement of the quality and equity in secondary schools have been identified:

1. Professional collaboration and commitment to the principal and school counselors is very important to help the schools to be able to change (in quality and equity). Both have to work together to ensure that attention to diversity is the central issue on which pivot the change of the school. Now well, without neglecting the school results.
2. Strengthening and supporting the pedagogical leadership of principals. Without going into competition. Working with the management team to share a inclusive school project and valuing the practices and actions that help everybody to learn. If the counselor does not work to strengthen this community vision of school, it generates suspicion in the leader, who ironically notes that "you could say counselor, rather than orienting, disorienting".
3. Work with a perspective of the community, strengthen the school's axis, the family and the community; what key's productive interaction between counselor and principal.
4. Supporting educational activities of the departments as a platform for innovation in education and professional development. Facilitate the creation of a common purpose by generating and sharing professional knowledge about good learning for all.
5. Working with programs and to strengthen - each in its line of action (leadership or support)- the unspecific measures of attention to diversity: development of an inclusive curriculum, work by holistic tasks, curriculum integration, the fight against the duality of the curriculum and the groupings, developing cooperative methodologies and interactive groups, the genuine participation of all and the difference between the essential curriculum for all (not that it is not possible citizenship) and the desirable (such as additional basic training and extension)...

Of which highlights the strong commitment to the advisory role of counselors. The action of these professionals, properly focused, can contribute to internal training to schools to learn to change. To do this, if only we have some preliminary results, it seems to stand out as an alternative that this work should be based on:

(1) Working with the management team in line to do a school project, and to value the practices and actions that help the good learning of all.

"In our case, the most important has been helping to take the role of facilitator in the group, and who knows how to delegate and get jobs, but not from the imposition, but from the responsibility and make people think: what's going on?, Is this true?; to listen to criticism that occur in the middle ... "(DIR09).

"I cannot get into the departments, or schedules, or almost nothing, I am no educational authority. I left because I respect them, but also and mainly because the principal supports me and we are on the same line of action "(CO03).

"It is vital that we work together and coordinated by a shared vision of the center. Affecting the system, each in their areas of work, basics dimensions of the educational project. So join. But if not, you could say that the counselor, rather than orienting, disorienting "(DIR01).

"As the leadership did not, could not enter apartments or cycles. The result is that I was not able to create conditions and processes leading to pressure for change "(SC08).

"It is very important to foster and improve the visibility of the line counselor and director, and the participation of both in the entire educational project" (SC07).

(2) Support educational activities of the departments as a platform for innovation in education and professional development;

"If anything viable out to make improvements, it is certainly the value of staff collaboration, communication and teamwork. And in all participating teachers and educational departments are involved. Although the direction and guidance should be with them, supporting them "(DIR10)

"The most important thing you can do the counselor is to facilitate teamwork and define north and east to avoid losing the way" (DIR04).

"In this raging storm, we cannot doubt ourselves as teachers. We make a point of credibility and professional dignity and seating working together well with all that is basic and we have to do "(PRO08).

"The response to the challenge of innovation requires the linking of educational psychology knowledge, which largely have counselors with the knowledge of other teachers" (DIR5).

"Get in their teaching teams not to take our land. Do not want to take their space. It is better to think with them on what works and what students get when they do what they do, and from there take appropriate decisions together "(SO09).

(3) (Re) constructing their professional action, face to move from marginal to basics, the problems to the problems and specific actions to systemic.

"Now you ask me, looking at my life, change the priority of our functions and activities. We did a lot of tasks, which we marked as priority and necessary, when in fact they needed were very different ones "(SC12).

"If we cannot jump out of my particular problem area of improvement that needs to be worked together, it is very difficult to overcome and transfer to everyday life. We have to make this jump a philosophy to work on a new framework of what should be an educational project "(SC04).

"We never start from scratch, there is a history that matters. Whether or not I have to live with the memory of previous guidance. Peers perceive me as a continuation of their work. Anything you do outside of that continuity cost me horrors "(SC03).

(4) Share tasks, responsibilities, and verbalization and learning good stories, share perspectives and bring arguments,

"Hear us talk and see what is behind it ... help structure and analyze the problems we have and give a solution. That helps us a lot. I do not know if it is to get in a situation of self or self-reflection, but it serves and, ultimately gives us tools to face new caseloads alone" (PRO13).

"I remember a counselor who knew a lot, but I do not understand. It was as if an unknown object, which spoke of terms unrecognizable and so far removed from practice, in the end and we listened "(PRO7).

"If you do not know the rules everyday stories of everyday life, interests and patterns of living prevailing in the community, so tolerant, it is impossible to share common spaces with diverse people" (DIR06).

(5) And act from a dialectical approach, collaborative processes that help the community acquire the process of (self) for engagement review and improvement;

"From the perspective of teachers, the role model that they see fit is quite close to a procedural guidance and collaborative, although this trend to a lesser degree coexists with a demand for specialist advice for particular issues and problems" (SC02).

"After living experiences of joint development of the Action Plan Tutorial, starting as one of the reality of the concerns and the problems of my colleagues, I realized the value of the process and trust the team, giving it time but always so careful not to lose interest or perspective" (SC05).

"It seems we agree in thinking that the best way of work must become and remain attentive to the processes and reflection in action, promoting teamwork and coordination of actions" (DIR06).

"It's not the strategies to use, but the effects they produce the enhancement and development center and increased autonomy and professionalism of teachers" (SC01).

Conclusion

These snippets of voice only make a particularly approach. The case studies (principal and school counselors) were selected as examples of good practice for school improvement. Is Are not decisive evidence or extrapolated. But they are on the road alerts, notices to mariners and invitations to continue investigating and to enter the debate in Spain. The results obtained from these examples of good practices analyzed, basically coincides with the international studies and what the literature has been pointing in this regard. Suffice it to look at the arguments used to argue the research problem.

Thus, in Spain, there is no reason to think that, with appropriate retraining and re-signification of the functions of school counselors to other more appropriate for advice and dynamic change, and work together with managers and other staff, can support both leadership for learning, like the center itself evolve and develop as a professional learning community (Bolam et. al., 2005; Escudero, 2011; Bolívar, 2012). It will be a walking path that should be thoughtfully and with commitment.

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