

REVIEW ARTICLE

The Concept of Leadership in Educational Spaces: Scopes and Limits of an Elastic Term

El concepto de liderazgo en los espacios educativos: alcances y límites de un término elástico

O conceito de liderança em espaços educacionais: alcance e limites de uma palavra elástica

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ABSTRACT

The results of a documentary review on the definitions of educational leadership present in the works published on the subject in Latin America are presented. A query was made in digital databases. After analyzing 87 documents, it was established that conceptual ambiguity between educational, pedagogical and school leadership. In addition, that the leadership is framed administratively but that is not restricted to these spaces. It is concluded that it is necessary to formulate theories that constitute educational leadership as an object of study with ontologically defined features, to avoid epistemological distortions and accumulate knowledge on this subject.

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RESUMO

São apresentados os resultados de uma revisão documental sobre as definições de liderança educacional presentes nos trabalhos publicados sobre o tema na América Latina. Foi feita uma consulta em bancos de dados digitais. Após análise de 87 documentos, constatou-se essa ambigüidade conceitual entre liderança educacional, pedagógica e escolar. Além disso, essa liderança é enquadrada administrativamente, mas não se restringe a esses espaços. Conclui-se que é necessário formular teorias que constituam a liderança educacional como objeto de estudo com características ontologicamente definidas, para evitar distorções epistemológicas e acumular conhecimentos sobre o tema.

Introduction

Leadership has become a central quality for the management of organizations. Educational institutions, focused on meeting quality indicators, have found leadership to be a determining factor in achieving their goals and carrying out their mission efficiently. Educational leadership is not only seen as an exercise in institutional management, but also has consequences for learning (Bolívar, 2010; Villa, 2015). Likewise, it has become a key factor in the improvement of educational quality (Leithwood & Louis, 2011).

Indeed, the progress of educational institutions depends largely on the management teams and the exercise of their leadership in the organization, dynamization, support, motivation and transformation of institutional processes and strategies. Thus, it is evidenced by the McKinsey report (Barber and Mourshed, 2008) and the OECD reports (2008, 2016) that include educational leadership as the second relevant factor in learning achievement from teacher action. This is because managers who exercise leadership have the ability to influence the development and well-being of their team of teachers, and therefore, the performance of students.

School directors are considered in their roles as managers, administrators, counselors, that is, they are characterized by exercising different responsibilities and leadership associated with the pressures in the performance of their functions. On the other hand, there is an explicit link between the quality and success of a school relative to the leader, according to Leitwood et al. (2010):

Leadership refers entirely to the improvement of the organization; more specifically, it is about establishing valuable agreements and directions for the organization in question and doing whatever it takes to push and support people to move in those directions (p. 9).

Hence the need to think about the teaching directors and the educational leadership they require, but this cannot be done in isolation from the literature review and discussions on the subject. Especially, pedagogical leadership is currently highlighted as essential to generate good practices and contribute to the improvement of learning outcomes (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Day et al., 2011; Robinson, 2007).

There are two ways to influence students' academic outcomes and thus exercise pedagogical leadership (Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 2009). The first relates to actions with a direct impact on teaching and learning (training that contributes to the development of conceptual, procedural and attitudinal skills of managers). The second way has to do with activities that indirectly influence teaching practices (organizational conditions of the school). In this sense, empirical studies that theorize on how leadership practices are shaped and strengthened by this type of practices contribute to the pedagogical knowledge of the management team with a focus on professional development. Thus, leadership begins to be seen as a community practice, distributed, more democratic, structuring in the school and not exclusive to a few.

In fact, it is not only leadership but leadership style that influences the quality and success of programs (Pedraja-Rejas, Rodríguez-Ponce and Villarroel, 2012; Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe, 2014). This has led to think about different perspectives of leadership in educational organizations, among others we can mention: Dialogic leadership (Redondo-Sama, 2015), socio-formative leadership (Hernández, Tobón & Vázquez, 2015), transformational leadership (Salazar, 2006), distributive leadership (Carreño, 2008), formative leadership (Rodríguez & Mármol, 2009), educational or pedagogical leadership (Bolívar, 2010; Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, 2009) school leadership (Weinstein, 2009) and managerial leadership (Anderson, 2010; Weinstein, 2009).

However, even though educational leadership has been addressed in doctoral and master's theses and has even been addressed by documents of organizations that have an impact on global education such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008), it is a problematic concept, since it is not easy to conceptualize (Vázquez, Bernal and Liesa, 2014).

Indeed, the definition of educational leadership is fuzzy since there is no homogeneous conceptualization. Moreover, some researchers speak of school leadership and others of pedagogical leadership as synonymous with educational leadership, but others point out differences between them. Consequently, this increases the ambiguity and broadens the imprecision of the concept.

Precisely, the article presents the results of a documentary review to establish which definitions of educational leadership are expressed in the works that have addressed the subject. In addition, the research sought to locate in these documents recurring elements that are stipulated that an educational leader must have in order to contribute to a framework for good direction.

Methodology

A descriptive documentary review was carried out, determined by a temporal and geographic cut-off. The temporal criterion was determined by works published in the last 20 years. The geographical criterion was limited to Ibero-American works. The search was carried out in three databases (DIALNET, REDALYC, PROQUEST). In the search, restrictive criteria were applied in the language (Spanish only) and in the type of document (articles). However, in the end some doctoral theses and books that the databases also selected in the search were included. Likewise, texts in English that are a reference for this topic at the international level were consulted. Eighty-seven papers were selected for analysis and their information was organized in a matrix that classified the papers according to their subject matter.

Results

The literature review shows that the approach to educational leadership is a priority in international educational agendas. This leadership is especially linked to the role of the principal and the management team and their influence on the development and improvement of the school. In that order, the documents point out that they must be real agents of change. Another type of leadership significantly mentioned is the role of the teacher, especially in his or her management role in the achievement of student learning.

In the documents, leadership tends to be understood holistically and linked to organizational educational contexts, i.e., it is the result of the concatenation of various attitudes, behaviors, decisions, but also interpersonal synergies. Along these lines, the results of the review show that it is necessary to break down the usual image of leadership, i.e., that it should not be understood as exclusive and attributable to the mystique of a person or the nature of a position.

Indeed, beyond the fact that leadership is an attribute visible in individual attitudes or behaviors, the documents reviewed describe and analyze it as a dynamic inherent to the context, in this case, the school, which implies not separating leadership and its qualities from the problems, transformations and needs that challenge the function and role of the manager and his or her team.

Several documents follow the international provisions for educational leadership, hence the talk of leadership being linked to school improvement. However, such improvement is basically the optimization of learning processes (*learning-centered leadership*). Therefore, great importance is attributed to the evaluation of learning outcomes, student performance and its relationship with the effectiveness of educational leadership (Robinson, 2011). Consequently, a critique of this notion of learning would involve doubting the centrality of learning, since in the educational act there is a formation of the subject that cannot be reduced to a list of expected learning.

On the other hand, the review of the documents allowed to establish that there is a dispersion in the concept of leadership itself, that is, there is no shared definition that allows to establish essence on it. Hence, several times educational, pedagogical and school leadership are spoken of indistinctly, but other times they are planned as different matters.

In general, leadership is assumed as an attribute of the role of the school director, so several documents indicate the traits that the educational direction must have and the different types of leadership linked to these positions in the organizational pyramid of educational institutions.

The following section categorizes these findings in this order: first, the concept of leadership is analyzed and the possible differences and consequences of its adjectivation are discussed, i.e., what does it imply to speak of school, educational or pedagogical leadership. Secondly, it shows how the documents address leadership as an issue for managers. Finally, these data provide some keys to a framework for good management.

Discussion

Concept of Educational Leadership

Several of the papers reviewed address the concept of leadership to locate their research theoretically. Hence, it is pertinent to recover such definitions to delimit key elements of leadership and, from this, observe what educational leadership would be.

Bernasconi and Rodriguez-Ponce (2018) argue that the leader is the one who has influence on the members of a team or organization to perform the tasks necessary to achieve the objectives. Consequently, leadership would be "the ability to influence, influence or induce groups or individuals within a team or an organization to achieve a certain action or behavior in favor of achieving institutional objectives or goals" (p.31). Castro, Miquilena and Peley (2006) agree that leadership implies influencing others, but point out that it is a phenomenon resulting from social interaction and is present in all human groups.

Along these lines, Reviriego (2013) argues that leadership is "the ability of a person to influence the members of an organization by inducing them to behave in a certain way", and in the context of an organization "leadership must be oriented towards achieving the goals that the institution proposes" (p.439).

According to Navarro-Corona (2016) three approaches can be identified in the understanding of leadership: (1) One that focuses on personal traits, which assume that leaders possess innate characteristics, so they seek to analyze attributes of the subject; (2) one that approaches leadership as the "set of actions and strategies undertaken by the leader to obtain success" (p.57), which leads to thinking about effective practices of leaders; (3) one that focuses on the links and relationships between leaders and followers, which implies incorporating the contextual characteristics of the institution in which leadership is generated.

The latter ratifies that leadership should be understood as a process of social order, that is, "of relationships between subjects that are structured not only on the basis of the extraordinary qualities of their leader but also of their work, and that these two elements agree with the characteristics and needs of the followers and followers, and with the characteristics of the context" (Navarro-Corona, 2016, p.62). That is, leadership is seen as a process through which individuals exert influence on others, inspire, motivate and guide them to meet objectives as a team (Davis and Newstrom, 2003; Leithwood et al. 2004).

However, in the educational framework, leadership is associated with the management of educational institutions to achieve efficiency, especially in terms of students achieving learning (Badillo and Arroyo, 2015) and, in this way, to achieve quality dynamics (Cantón and Arias, 2008; Alonso, 2012). This requires not only an ability to influence the work team, but also to lead and possess "a vision of what the educational organization is and should be" (Vázquez, Bernal, & Liesa, 2014, p. 94).

In any case, if leadership is the influence that achieves that a group of people collaborate voluntarily and with enthusiasm in the achievement of some objective, in educational leadership it can be understood that such influence is oriented towards the achievement of the teaching-learning process (Vázquez and Rodríguez, 2016).

Differences between Educational, Pedagogical and School Leadership

In some articles, the concepts of school leadership and pedagogical leadership are often used as synonyms for educational leadership. However, there are others who point out differences, although these are not always explicit in the enunciation. For example, Hernandez, Catrino, and Bravo (2017) state that "the school leader should understand the pedagogical principles underlying the classroom process" (p.542). In other words, the idea remains latent that not always the school leader knows pedagogy, so he or she is not automatically a pedagogical leader.

Another example is the OECD's *Improving School Leadership* program, which shows that the development of school leadership has four main axes: "(re)defining responsibilities; distributing school leadership; acquiring the necessary competencies to exercise effective leadership; and making leadership an attractive profession" (Bolivar, 2010, p. 15), all bearing in mind that "leadership for learning is the fundamental character of school leadership" (Pont et al., 2008, p. 10). As can be seen, none of the above makes pedagogy explicit as a constitutive dimension of school leadership (to speak of learning is not necessarily

to speak of pedagogy, since it refers to a noun that can be achieved without the intervention of the teacher and, in fact, without the need for the school), so that the school leader is not by constitution a pedagogical leader.

To this extent, pedagogical leadership also implies an improvement in the quality and effectiveness of school functioning (Bolívar, 2010; Martínez-García & Gil-Flores, 2018). This type of leadership requires that institutions focus their activities on what allows them to establish their purposes in the team of professors and managers, so that operational and organizational conditions are generated to exercise a culture of collaboration. Likewise, teacher professional development is promoted (Hallinger, 2005), therefore, pedagogical leadership is leadership for learning (Ord et al., 2013).

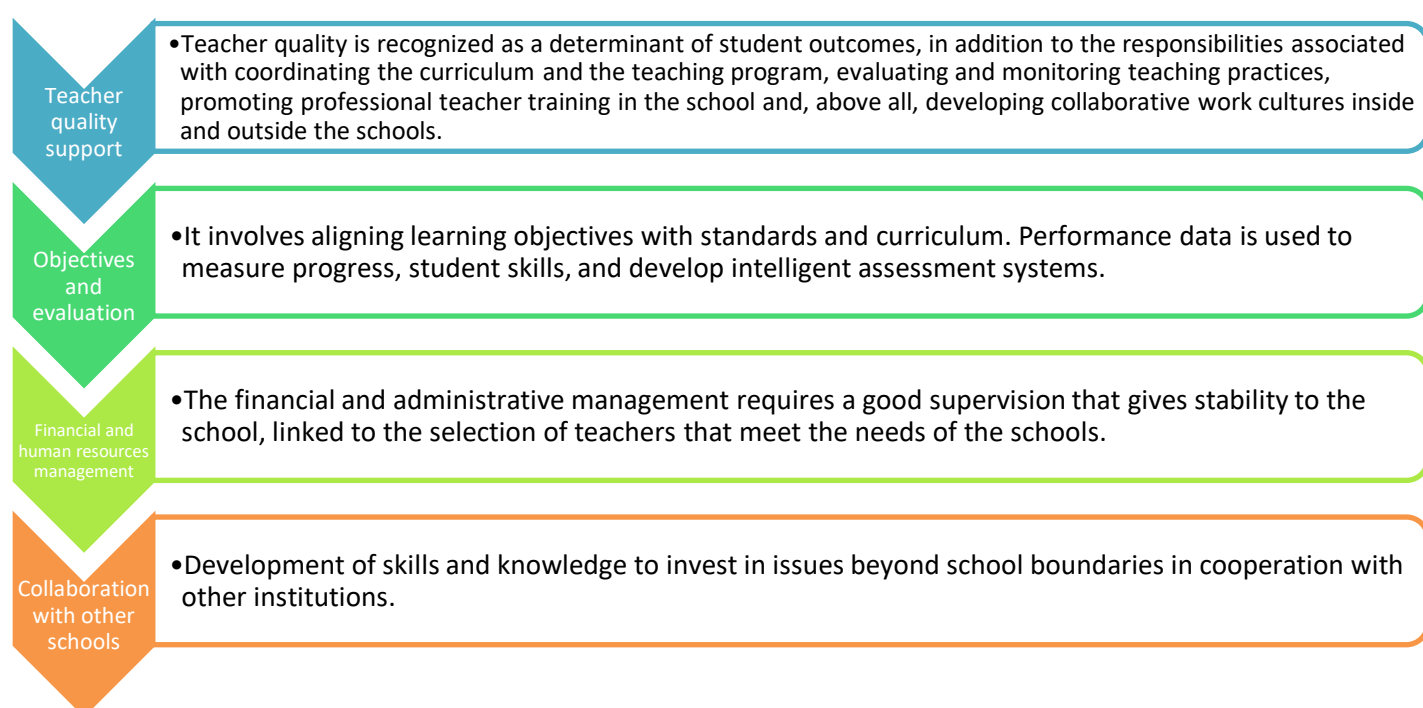
Educational leadership is assumed as a shared project in which leaders, collaborators, the context, the project and common commitments are involved. As Lorenzo (2005) puts it, "the function of energizing a group or an organization to generate its own growth based on a shared mission or project" (p. 371). Leithwood (2009) states that this leadership is assumed as "(...) the work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieve the shared intentions and goals of the school" (p. 20). This leadership, then, is not attributable to a leader but to the actions and forms of collaborative work that he or she generates in a contextualized way and inscribed beyond the school, that is, in any social institution. In contrast, school leadership would be installed in it.

School leadership is associated with the dynamics of the school and the ways of influencing the solution of problems (Bolívar et al., 2013). It is a polysemantic concept linked to the different functions of the manager. That is, associated with the work carried out by the management team in collaboration with teachers, which is linked to human resources management, the management of the organizational climate and coexistence, administration and leadership for learning (Bolívar, 2013; Pont et al. 2008).

Different research (Hallinger, 2014; Hattie, 2015; Leithwood et al. 2009) evidences that school leadership exerts considerable results on school functioning, outcomes and development. It is also about impacting outcomes through interventions focused on teachers and their capabilities (Louis et al., 2011; Pont et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2009). It is evident, then, that leadership is not a field of action and competence exclusive to managers, but should really be exercised by all members of the educational community.

The OECD study on school leadership (Pont et al., 2008) presented evidence on practices of 22 educational systems and found specific responsibilities of principals that contribute to improving student and school results, these are:

Figure 1. Responsibilities of teacher managers from the perspective of school leadership



Source: OECD (Pont et al. 2008)

From the review it can be affirmed that educational leadership is a concept that refers to the influence that is exerted for the group to successfully achieve the educational process, but since education is not limited to a single social institution (universities, media, family, etc.), school leadership would indicate that such influence is made specifically in schools and colleges. Pedagogical leadership would refer to the specificity of influencing the curriculum and teaching practice using the knowledge of pedagogy as a field of knowledge.

School leadership encompasses school management, which implies administration and management of resources outside the classroom (although they contingently influence the practice that takes place there, because if there is no budget for the board, this influences the development of teaching). Although the TALIS report (OECD, 2009) shows that there is no tension between an administrative and pedagogical exercise, not necessarily every administrative leader is a pedagogical leader and vice versa.

The latter implies thinking that school leadership could refer to pedagogical leadership, but it is not consubstantial to it, since a school leader could be a good manager, but not necessarily a pedagogue and, likewise, there would be good pedagogical leaders who do not interfere in the administrative decisions of the schools where they work. That is to say, it is possible to think of a school with pedagogical leaders and school leaders that complement each other, so as not to fall into messianisms that place a large number of qualities in a single school actor.

In short, educational leadership refers to the leadership carried out in these institutions, so it can be exercised in different ways, one of which would be pedagogical leadership (Fernández, Palacios and Gutiérrez, 2016), which would be focused on curricular issues and learning outcomes, which refers to planning, organization and evaluation (Rodríguez-Molina, 2011). To this extent, in education there could be administrative leadership (organizational management), leadership more focused on the nature of the act of educating (pedagogical) or school leadership that denotes an evolution of leadership more centered on the needs, problems and results of the schools, seen not only from the function of the director, but also from the articulation of this with his or her team of teachers.

Leadership as a Principal's Role

Several documents will place leadership as an exercise that falls to the educational or school principal. That is, as if it were an activity to be performed by the nature of the position. In fact, some educational policies have as a strategy to strengthen the leadership of school principals (Monarca, 2013). So much so that there are works that propose managerial leadership as one of the most effective routes for the school context, since the principal has, at the end of the day, a decision-making power (*Fundación Empresarios por la Educación*, 2018).

In addition, there is research that shows that the role of managerial leadership is fundamental to achieve quality standards, effective results (Thieme and Treviño, 2012) and changes that improve the quality of learning (Ahumada, 2012). Hence, Risco (2015, p.97) states that: "One of the most important characteristics of effective schools, also considered quality schools, is the clear and open leadership of the principal."

Along these lines, Gento (2013) argues that the principal's leadership must be eminently pedagogical, so his fundamental concern "must be the promotion or empowerment of all members and those involved in the educational entity or initiative, in order to achieve effectiveness and improve the quality of education" (p.42).

In any case, it is indisputable that, in a pyramidal structure, the principal plays a substantive role and leadership qualities are desirable to "manage conflicts, welcome the diversity of voices and allow these to be heard from the higher hierarchy" (Rodríguez, 2016, p. 232). In fact, many times the vertical culture rooted in educational institutions makes subjects desire a decisive managerial leadership, contrary to theories that speak of participation and horizontality (Franco, Ortega and Ortiz, 2016), of shared leadership, where any worker can be a leader and contribute to the dynamics of the school (Salazar, 2006) or of distributed leadership, based on interaction rather than on a unipersonal power (Maureira, Garay and López, 2016).

Now, whether leadership is a matter associated with a position (the school principal) or not, the truth is that it is a necessary exercise in contemporary education, since this is a dynamic carried out among groups of people, so that "someone is required who knows how to respond to all the issues that justify the meaning of this group, in our case, the learning and personal and social development of each individual and, therefore, of that same community" (Corbella, 2014, p.96).

On the other hand, in the literature there are studies that indicate that leadership is necessary for institutions to adapt to social needs (Alatorre, 2013), which implies having an ethical reference in sustainability (Sierra, 2016), mastering skills and attitudes that respond to new changes (Castro, Miquilena and Peley, 2006) and committing to inclusion (Fernández and Hernández, 2013). Along these lines, leadership is a quality of organization that is systemic and distributed (Bolívar, 2000; Leithwood et al.2009). That is to say, a multiple leadership, in a shared team, in which teachers assume their role as professionals in their areas and exercise the direction of their fields of knowledge, for which the faculty will have to commit to:

- The development of a shared vision focused on students and their needs.
- A commitment and involvement in teaching and learning.
- An involvement of the teaching staff for the professional learning of all the staff.
- The development of a culture of collaboration.
- An emphasis on learning in action.
- Facilitating systems thinking. (Sheppard et. al. 2009, p. 16).

The principal thus becomes an agent of change who inspires and capitalizes on the competencies of the members of his or her community to achieve common goals, solve school problems, set goals and develop a climate of collaboration.

Educational Management and Types of Leadership

Regarding the role of managers and the leadership they must exercise, reflections have been developed and theories from other fields have been brought in to determine the qualities that must be considered in the position. For example, García and Flores (2018) point out the importance of distributive leadership and show that: "it is characterized by the leader creating routines that help transform the culture of the center, contributing to the improvement of teachers' job satisfaction and academic performance in the student body, with a loss of protagonism for the leader's functions and actions" (p.80). Therefore, it is associated with democratic forms and corresponsibility (Ojeda, 2007). For example, Pérez, Romero, Calderón and Verdú (2012) show the importance of situational teacher leadership for student learning.

Another type of leadership that is addressed in the documents is transformational leadership. "Such leadership focuses on motivating people to print their greatest effort in achieving their expectations. There are changes in groups, organizations and society, which in turn represent a benefit for the community" (Bracho and García, 2013, p.167), for which the leader "generates purposes and goals that are uncompromising, those that are sought to be achieved as an institution or as a team" (Bernasconi and Rodríguez-Ponce, 2018, p.31). In that order, it is about seeing leadership not as a matter of a person but of an organization, what Monarca (2013) calls organizational leadership.

Navarro-Granados (2017) proposes leadership for social justice that "deals with that leadership that focuses its actions, in the first place, on the recognition of the inequality of those groups at risk of social exclusion" (p.165), and that seeks to influence the teaching and learning processes effectively. This leadership implies a recognition of inequalities and keeping in mind the nature of schools in disadvantaged contexts (Llorent-Bedmar, Cobano-Delgado, & Navarro-Granados, 2017). It is a leadership oriented to the practices of management teams to achieve an inclusive culture that eliminates the marginalization of race, class, gender, special learning conditions, that works for the common good and distributive justice (Murillo & Hernández, 2014; Theoharis, 2007; Tintoré, 2018).

Leadership for social justice shares certain features with the 'formative' leadership proposed by Rodríguez and Márnol (2009), since it speaks of "love for knowledge, commitment, respect, care and responsibility" (p. 202). It is even related to emotional leadership (Goleman, 2014) in which the leader can influence the emotions of the team to foster self-awareness, self-regulation and social skills.

Keys to a Good Management Framework

However, for some jobs, being a leader or exercising leadership does not necessarily bring positive qualities, since some of them adjectivize the job. In other words, there are characteristics that guide leadership to achieve good management. For example, Alonso (2012) speaks of leading efficiently, for which it is necessary to be an agent of permanent change and to coordinate actions among the actors (Alonso, 2012). For his part, Vivolo (2015) proposes the idea of a creative leader, who is not subsumed to the prevailing situation and adapts to the environment.

In this order, it should be noted first of all that the leadership of the manager is not limited to administrative management, since his or her role can encourage or hinder the work of teachers and, therefore, that of student learning (Ramos, 2015). Hence, another aspect that principals must master in order to exercise adequate leadership is to maintain a good school climate, which involves having emotional intelligence and maintaining good interpersonal relationships based on communication (Jiménez, 2017). However, some of these qualities for managerial leadership pass through a charismatic dimension (Thieme and Treviño, 2012), or through the relationships that people maintain within the communities or institutions to which they belong (Sánchez and Hernández-Castilla, 2014).

There are even studies that indicate that the qualities for leadership would be crossed by the gender condition and that women would have characteristics to do it in a better way:

If we consider that women tend to have a more consensual, collaborative type of leadership, in which priority is given to creating a climate of understanding and participation, where communication, debate, dialogue and teamwork are encouraged, how is it possible that there are so few women in management positions elected by their peers (Díez, Valle, Terrón and Centeno, 2003, p.15).

In addition, some authors advocate changing the verticality of the school, modifying the hierarchical form and achieving ascending, descending and lateral relationships between leaders and teachers, emphasizing a collaborative culture (Cantón and Arias, 2008). Among other things, the fragmentation of the vertical dynamics goes through the very definition of leadership as influence, since it implies accepting that "it can be exercised both by actors with formal positions in the organization and by people who do not have them, but who manage to influence some course of action that involves others, in line with the common north" (Horn and Marfán, 2010, p. 84).

However, although there is the idea of shared leadership or that there may be several actors with leadership potential, the fact is that the form and disposition of the school institutions tends to place the director (rector, coordinator, etc.) in the position of leader. Hence, it is important that the principal be able to attract the "teaching, administrative, maintenance team; in addition to parents, representatives and community to carry out the proposed actions in consensus, in order to make the educational process viable in the pedagogical, management and community aspects, to achieve quality" (Rangel and Vitorá, 2016, p.209).

On the other hand, some documents warn that leadership is a responsibility of the individual and that his or her actions are determinant to engage collaborators in the achievement and development of projects (Sanchez, 2014), so the principal must, in addition to managing resources, promote "in the school collective, interest, participation and commitment to the construction of the meaning of that school, in order to improve the learning of their students" (Rodas and Sipión, 2014, p.13).

The latter shows the importance of leadership not only in the school as a singular structure, but also as a network, as is the idea of system leadership, where several leaders from different institutions are integrated and work as a community (Delgado, 2012). In any case, it is not only about influencing, but doing it so that people insist on achieving objectives voluntarily, which can be called the principle of voluntariness (Vallejo, Chancay and Mosquera, 2016).

In a changing and plural society like ours, the roles and functions of the teaching director are constantly transformed and updated to give scope to the different demands and problems. Therefore, the knowledge about the leadership that can be exercised by the directors and teaching teams is an important source for the establishment of a framework or agreements from the policy in order to understand the role of the linked director to the challenges of current social, cultural and educational processes. Below, some points involved in this role are summarized:

1. An educational leader must, above all, elicit the active involvement of all members of the institution, which means that his figure is twofold in that he remains the articulating axis of the dynamics of the organization and yet his position must be located within the horizontality of the base made up of the entire community of his institution.
2. The function of a pedagogical leader is to guide and promote an authentic quality education within a perspective of continuous improvement of the institution itself and in the processes they carry out in order to seek better results in terms of management, resource administration and human capital. For this case, the managerial leader should consider:
 - Communication
 - Motivation
 - Openness to change

The above, in terms of organizational success, allows the managerial leader to build teams, facilitate consensus, promote loyalty and guide staff to develop activities in the best way (Fur-guerle Rangel & Vitorá, 2016, p. 210).

3. A relationship, according to the two previous points, between a center (particular or collective) and a context, according to Gento (2013):
 - Establishes a link between educational policy and school practice and relates the school to its environment.
 - Influences the improvement of the internal climate or school environment.
 - Promotes the strategic use of available resources.
 - Improves teacher motivation and contributes to student success.
 - Drives successful educational innovations and promotes learning organizations. (p. 45).

Taking these areas of action as a framework, the educational leaders coordinate their efforts to achieve the goals of their institution, but they do so as a team. As managers, they must also ensure the school's main objective and thus link leadership, learning and educational quality. Management processes are also aimed at distributing and managing human, financial and material resources to achieve learning goals, which implies, among other things, strengthening the professional development of teachers, organizing teamwork and creating optimal conditions for cooperation. This is without taking into account the knowledge of the legal regulations that allows them to have a framework of understanding of the educational policy that governs it

and allows them to make viable the actions, processes and procedures in the school. In addition to this is the contribution to the organizational climate, coexistence and inter-institutional relations, fundamental to strengthen internal communication and establish support networks.

Conclusions

In the first place, following Vázquez and Rodríguez (2016), it can be concluded that "there are several approaching criteria of educational leadership; hence it is difficult to find unanimity in its conceptualization" (p. 99). This is because "it is crossed by social, economic, political and cultural processes that determine its identity" (*Fundación Empresarios por la Educación*, 2018, p.32).

However, being a polysemic term that admits multiple meanings (Vázquez, Bernal and Liesa, 2014), ontological and epistemological difficulties arise that raise doubts about the way in which research on educational leadership is constructed. Indeed, if there is no definitional closure that is accepted by the research community, it will be difficult to compile rigorous knowledge on the subject. In this order, it is pertinent to formulate theories that seek to constitute leadership as an object of study with ontologically defined features, otherwise it will continue to be an elastic concept that, even at the time this research was conducted, is not considered in the UNESCO Thesaurus.

On the other hand, the idea of educational leadership centered on corporate or business logic is questioned, as it leads to thinking about it from interpretation schemes that pigeonhole subjects and institutions (Monarca, 2013). In this regard, Pareja Fernandez de la Reguera (2009) argues that it is risky to bring administrative leadership understandings to the school because the school is a complex structure and because teacher autonomy is important. Along these lines, Fernández, Palacios and Gutiérrez (2016) argue that leadership in an "educational institution must be eminently pedagogical" (p.134) so its characteristics must be adequate to the nature of the educational act. In this context, it is worth asking: What should be included in the policy to achieve an educational leadership that contributes in a situational way to the school, and what is required in terms of training and education of principals and educational leaders?

Although leadership may be oriented to the management of educational organizations, which implies several tasks, the truth is that its natural goal or objective is to improve student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2014). Although some speak of achieving quality, excellence or educational success, all these purposes inevitably refer to the student. However, there are few studies that take into account students as informants in the analysis of leadership, so one possibility is to conduct surveys, interviews, focus groups, where they give an account of what makes a good leader.

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Note: All direct quotes in this article are translations from Spanish to English.