

Chapter 4

Considering Latin American School Management from a Skills–Based Perspective

Joaquín Gairín

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

Miren Fernández-de-Álava

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

Aleix Barrera-Corominas

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain

ABSTRACT

Management has an ever-greater need to surpass its mere organisational function. This chapter reviews the current situation in the competency-based training of 10 Latin American countries with two objectives: a) to understand the legislative situations and perspectives of the school management and b) to analyse the activity of the management from the perspective of competencies. This study identifies competencies as personal characteristics linked to successful activity in the workplace. School principals must display personal and procedural competencies, as well as the achievement of actions, objectives, and results. The results allow us to identify the persistence of bureaucratic and administrative model of management, and the emerging roles and competencies that would lead us to a model more focused on people and the community. School principals, as agents of change, would fit into this last perspective, which links us with the most current focus of school management.

INTRODUCTION

School centres, school principals and teachers are currently facing situations that are new, distinct and complex as a result of a society undergoing constant change and of user awareness as regards

the quality of the services that they require. This new reality shows that the following issues are of relevance (Gómez-Dacal, 2013; Malpica, 2013; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008; Silva, 2010): (1) educational responses need to take into account complex phenomena such as the swift generation

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and transformation of cultural content; increased availability of schooling; student diversity; new demands created by a multicultural knowledge society; the contextualization of approaches to the curriculum or the assumption of teaching as a collective task; (2) teachers update themselves professionally and thereby improve in an on-going manner; and (3) the role taken by principals adopts personal as well as institutional change.

There are new approaches and with them the need for new training processes. Training is, in this regard, an imperative need and a basis for providing principals with the tools necessary for the required transformation (Hallinger, 2003; Gairín, 2012). It is not simply a matter of providing them with skills and abilities but making general transformation possible through the acquisition of new knowledge and competencies (Teixidó, 2010) and with a personal orientation that includes the transformation of attitudes, values, discourse and motivations (Begley, 2006; Gairín, 2011). Their role must go beyond their organisational function and promote energising positions that manage the necessary changes (Lorenzo, 2012). Initial or permanent training in competencies must help the intended transformation.

In short, the professional development of school principals is directly linked to the processes of organizational improvement, seeing this as (1) a requirement that makes it possible to achieve organizational objectives; (2) a tool pertaining to the organization itself that acts in accordance with that organization's needs; (3) part of the strategy that makes it possible to establish advantageous positions with respect to change; or (4) the essence that permits the organization to learn. In this sense, traditional and lineal action and training models have become obsolete, giving way to new training strategies based on competencies and 'management-action', combining aspects of technical, personal, professional and social development in the framework of the triangle of

relationships established between professional development, institutional development and social development.

This chapter is a critical synthesis of the contributions of 45 specialists from 14 Latin American countries on the situation and activity of the competency-based focus, carried out in the framework of the Support Network for Educational Management (RedAGE, <http://www.redage.org/>): a non-profit scientific association promoted by the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB, Spain) and the ORT University (Uruguay). It should be considered that the different contributions are linked to the educational stages of compulsory education and of the education system, although many of the references are also considered in some countries for other educational stages and for the private education system.

The text presented here falls within the framework of this association, which obtained university co-operation grants, financed by the Spanish Agency for International Development Co-operation (D/012227/07, 2008; D/018124/08, 2009; D/023860/09, 2010 and D/030241/10, 2011), and complements other publications made on the management of schools in Latin America (Gairín, 2011; Gairín and Castro, 2011), which can be used to understand the political-administrative contexts of the different situations.

The description of the situation and perspectives of the school management in 10 Latin American countries and the analysis of the activity of the management from the perspective of competencies allow us to understand a current system which is very bureaucratic and must evolve towards roles for schools principles which are more focussed on people and the community. We should, therefore, go into greater depth on the changes that the activity of principals must make, beyond other reflections that can be made on other processes related with the improvement of management and the promotion of change in schools.

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