

Chapter 3

Analysis of the Tasks of School Principals in Secondary Education in Catalonia: Case Study

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ABSTRACT

School principals have important jobs. To achieve a better understanding of their working lives, this chapter uses the professional diary and timetabling data of all the secondary School Principals, from schools in the Sant Cugat area of Catalonia, Spain. It begins by describing the context of the Catalan educational system, its leadership and managerial model from a double perspective: on the one hand, the normative requirements; and on the other, the “day-to-day” tasks. The authors adopt a qualitative methodology. The analysis of the school principals’ diaries and timetables was conducted over the course of one month (November 2013). The results permit us to relate the day-to-day tasks of the school principal to those tasks identified in the local and national school regulations and in the Education Law. This examination will lead to a better understanding of how the distribution of their activities and their time management is related to these requirements.

INTRODUCTION

In the current school environment, School Principals have a very complex job dealing with various internal and external challenges, which make their role one of the most important for the functioning of a school, in supporting change and providing

quality educational (Brauckmann and Pashiardis, 2011). In this study we start by presenting different approaches to the principals’ tasks in secondary schools. We situate our study in the context of the Catalan education system, and finally we analyze the tasks performed by school principals using as a point of reference two classificatory approaches:

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a theoretical approach, and an approach based on Catalan educational law, which specifies and regulates the functions of principals. Finally we discuss our findings in the light of the current prevailing model of management found in Catalonia.

The school principal's role has been analysed in terms of the different aspects of the main activities: managerial tasks and responsibilities, motivating staff and students, monitoring and assessing the educational aspects of the school, among others. Authors such as Goldring et al (2009) emphasise knowledge and skills, personal characteristics, and values and beliefs as the underpinning of the sort of leadership exhibited by individuals and teams when fulfilling their leadership role. The authors identify the core components and key processes associated with effective principalship. The key processes are, according to the authors: planning; implementing; supporting; advocating; communicating; monitoring and setting high standards for student learning; rigorous curriculum (content); quality pedagogy; culture of learning and professional behaviour; connections to external communities; and systemic performance accountability. In a similar vein Pashiardis (1998) identifies the main characteristics that are needed in order to perform effectively as a principal. These are: having great love and ambition for their profession which they regard as a sacred and holy duty; being deep thinkers and constant learners; having the deep conviction that they can have greater influence from a position of leadership such as the principalship than from any other position in the school system; being risk-takers and not being afraid to "express their inner thoughts freely": they should be self-confident and know that they are doing a good job and, therefore, are not afraid to be compared with others; being honest and lovers of the truth; finding innovative ways to reward both their teachers and their students; being ambitious and having the drive for constant improvement and advancement to positions of authority and influence for both personal and professional reasons; being focussed on creating and maintaining

good school-parent relations; believing in trait-leadership theory whilst acknowledging that they should familiarise themselves with theoretical approaches to leadership in order to improve their management style.

Both the effectiveness of the school principal and the impact of their work have been analysed in the literature. The differences between leaders must in any case be measured according to their outcomes: performance, achievement of objectives, growth and individual development. Pont, Nusche and Moorman (2008) summarise this by outlining three reasons for the importance of school leadership:

- It plays its part in helping students to learn better. The conditions in which one learns and teaches have an effect upon learning, and ultimately leadership helps to determine these conditions. The research into the relationship between leadership and learning establishes that there is an indirect correlation given that the leader generally works outside the classroom and their impact on the student is mediated by the teachers, the classroom environment, practices in the classroom, etc. The consequences of the actions of leaders must be sought in the motivation, capacity and working conditions of the teachers, who work directly with the students. The four tasks of leadership that have a direct relationship with learning are: supporting and developing teaching quality, defining aims and measuring progress, allocating strategic resources and collaborating with other schools.
- It builds a bridge between educational policy and practice. School principals have an important role in the application of educational reform within schools, in that they exercise the vital role of mediator between those who must implement reforms or innovation in the classroom and those who

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