Conceptualizations of Teacher-leadership in Colombia: Evidence from Policies

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Abstract	Article Info
This study sought to examine the conceptualization of teacher leadership in official education policies in Colombia with the aim of expanding the notion of this concept and providing information on the qualification of teachers in similar contexts. Content analysis was used to analyze documents focused on the recruitment, selection, and evaluation of teachers. The findings show that the concept of teacher leadership is nonexistent in Colombia and that the documents conceptualize leadership in terms of hierarchical figures, leaving aside the role of teachers in school improvement. However, traces of teacher leadership are found in connection to pedagogical leadership, promotion of a culture of evaluation, peacebuilding, and awareness of diversity. The study highlights the need to promote the image of the teacher as a leader and to improve the quality of initial and in-service preparation programs	

Introduction

Teachers' effectiveness, solid pedagogical practices, and teacher leadership strongly influence student achievement (Adnot et al., 2016; Evans & Popova, 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Ingersoll et al., 2017). This understanding is especially relevant in the Latin American context, where, despite advancements in expanded coverage and investment, substantial gaps in the quality of educational experiences offered to students remain (UNESCO, 2016). Recent data show that students in the region scored below average in mathematics, reading, and science in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), lagging two to three schooling years in comparison with their peers in other countries (OECD, 2019). Colombian students' performance on this test shows a continuous tendency to lag two years behind (Bonilla-Mejía et al., 2018; OECD, 2018, 2019), which, apart from structural problems in the Colombian educational system, may be attributed to weak teaching methodologies and shortcomings in the preparation of teachers (OECD, 2018).

School leadership in Latin America has gained attention in recent decades and is becoming a central topic in the research and policy agendas of various countries (Aravena & Hallinger, 2017; Flessa et al., 2018). However, little is known about the role of teachers as leaders in the region. The present study intends to fill this gap by exploring how teacher leadership is conceptualized in official education policies in Colombia. The study is part of a multi-layered initiative that seeks to better understand teacher leadership in various international contexts and to provide information on the qualification of teachers. It presents an analysis of official documents regarding the recruitment, selection, and evaluation of teachers and, moreover,

discusses the findings and implications in the light of key contextual factors for teachers' professional development.

Context of the Study

This section briefly describes the Colombian educational system, the general characteristics of its public education teachers, and its policies for teacher recruitment, preparation, and evaluation. The Colombian Political Constitution (Asamblea Constituyente, 1991) guarantees the right to education and emphasizes that the state is responsible for the regulation and supervision of educational services to ensure their quality. General Education Law 115 (Congreso de la República, 1994) regulates public education services in connection to the needs of the country and establishes the parameters for services for both formal and informal education. The Colombian formal education system is composed of pre-school education, basic education (which includes five years of primary school and four years of lower secondary education), upper secondary school (for two years), and higher education.

There are 299,017 teachers in the public sector in Colombia, mostly female, with an average age of 47.4 years (Bonilla-Mejía et al., 2018). Data show that the teaching force in Colombia is becoming more qualified, with teachers in secondary schools holding graduate degrees in a higher proportion than those in primary or early childhood education (Bonilla-Mejía et al., 2018; Figueroa et al., 2018). There is a high concentration of teachers in urban areas and, despite efforts to decentralize education, the distribution and permanence of teachers in rural and remote areas remain challenging (Bonilla et al., 2018; OECD, 2018). Two main reasons account for the inefficient and unequal proportion of teachers working in disadvantaged contexts.

One has to do with the uneven distribution of financial resources regulated by the General System of Transfers (OECD, 2018) and the second with the use of provisional teacher contracts to fill positions in those areas. The first reason has repercussions on the selection and professional development of teachers, which, consequently, affects student achievement (Brutti, 2016; García et al., 2014). The second reason widens the gap between rural and urban achievement and raises questions about incentives to attract qualified teachers in rural and remote regions (Figueroa et al., 2018; García et al., 2014).

Entry into the teaching profession was regulated from 1979 by Decree 2277, which established that a person holding a high-school diploma and a degree in teaching (*licenciatura)* could enter the teaching profession (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1979). There was no evaluation period, and the guidelines for promotion through the 14 levels of the professional ladder were not clear (Figueroa et al., 2018). However, since 2002, Decree 1278 has governed all teachers' entry into the public education system (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2002). The National Civil Service Commission (*Comisión Nacional del Servicio Civil*, *CNSC*) uses a meritocratic model for the entry, permanence, evaluation, and promotion of teachers covered by Decree 1278. The model includes an evaluation of their aptitudes, experience, competencies and interpersonal abilities.

The Ministry of Education provides the policies and guidelines for the preparation of teachers at different levels (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013). Table 1 summarizes the main routes to becoming a teacher in Colombia. A person holding a teaching education degree (*licenciatura)* can be a teacher, but so can a person holding a degree from any other field if they complete pedagogical programs of study from accredited institutions.

Table 1.

Routes to Becoming a Teacher in Colombia

Academic requirement	Description
Normalist *Normalista*	Requires two years of post-secondary or complementary education (different from tertiary education) in addition to the requirements for a high-school diploma. Allows teaching at the early childhood and primary level. Offered by higher teaching schools (*escuelas normales*).
Professional degree in education (*licenciatura*)	A four- to five-year degree. Title earned in a higher educational institution. Allows teaching at pre-school, primary, and secondary educational levels.
Professionals from other fields with a specialization in pedagogy	Professionals from different disciplines (e.g. lawyers, engineers) who complete postgraduate studies or a program in pedagogy. Offered by higher educational institutions. Teach at the secondary level.

School principals evaluate teachers annually using the parameters established by the MEN (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2008). This evaluation comprises evidence from eight functional competencies in three domains—academic, administrative, and community—which account for 70% of the evaluation; the remaining 30% includes seven behavioral competencies. Together, the school principal and the teacher design an improvement plan based on the evaluation. A dismissal may occur if a teacher has poor performance for two consecutive years.

Rationale

Research on school leadership is scarce in Colombia and has
tended to focus exclusively on the role played by principals (Pineda-
Báez et al., 2020; Pineda-Báez et al., 2019), overshadowing the role
that teachers play in school leadership. The information provided by
the present study contributes to widening the understanding of
school leadership in Colombia by examining it from the lenses of
policies and in connection to teacher leadership. Recent studies show
the need to articulate principals and teachers' actions to improve
education practices in this country (OECD, 2018). There is reason to
believe that there are Colombian teachers who display leadership
qualities, but their work has not been recognized (Barbosa et al.,
2018). The argument of this article is that teacher leadership is
important for school improvement in Colombia and that it should be
promoted. In an international context, Conway, for example, (2015)
argued that both principals and teachers are key actors in school
improvement. Crowther et al. (2009) added that shared school vision,
values, and trust between principals and teachers are necessary
conditions to improve school capacity.

Additionally, as Hallinger (2018) proposed, there is a need for a
more profound understanding of the context of leadership practices.
Jointly, the individual context in which leaders act and their wider
sociopolitical, cultural, and economic contexts should be examined so
that improvement proposals can become more effective. Harris and
Jones (2018) added that context and culture shape policies and their
implementation and caution that, without understanding them, "our
accounts of education reform will continue to be partial and
potentially misleading, thus making our attempts at education
change fragile" (p. 204).

An in-depth understanding of leadership in context is required for assertive pedagogical practices and for school improvement (Conway & Abawi, 2013). Wenner and Campbell (2017) characterized the term *teacher leadership* as still "muddy", particularly for stakeholders. They called for more grounded research to support teacher-leaders. This is very important for the Latin American context, especially considering the limited skill capacities of the teaching force (Bruns & Luque, 2015) and the need for better qualification (Rivas, 2015).

Related Literature

Teacher leadership has multiple connotations. Angelle and DeHart (2016) stated that the word is commonly associated with school culture, teachers' actions to improve students' learning, skills, competencies, and with instructional, distributive and parallel leadership theories that stress the role of collective work. York-Barr and Duke's definition (2004) is widely accepted, as it encompasses the main characteristics of teacher leaders: their capacity to mobilize others and their role in student learning. The authors state that "teacher leadership is the process by which teachers individually or collectively influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student achievement" (2004, p. 287-288). Teacher leaders are good communicators, demonstrate skills to motivate, inspire, and energize peers and other members of the community to transform the school (Danielson, 2006; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).). From the lens of teacher preparation, programs usually aim at developing these competencies, but do not necessarily focus on teachers' mindsets to make their leadership flourish (Matsumoto

et al., 2018). The essential feature of teacher leaders is their capacity to influence and orient all members of the school community to reach intentional development goals. When teachers engage professionally with their colleagues, promote commitment, advocate for students and seek collective solutions, they are promoting engagement in professional communities. Research has demonstrated that teacher leaders' commitment impacts students' progress and success (Calderone et al., 2018; Crowther et al., 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009).

Recent research on the meanings attributed to teacher leadership show the concept still requires a solid theoretical foundation and that studies have not addressed issues of equity and social justice (Wenner & Campell, 2017). To fill this gap, Bradley-Levine (2018) conducted a case study in three marginalized schools where teachers were deeply committed to promote advocacy through critical pedagogical activities and collaboration. The study showed that social justice, or ethical leadership, emerges when the needs of marginalized students are met through critical practices and collective work. A similar view is presented in King's study (2017) in Ireland that demonstrated that strong commitment to inclusion and teacher leadership preparation at the preservice level are indispensable for inclusive school practices. Nevertheless, this theme remains under researched.

A different perspective was undertaken by Harrison et al. (2019) whose research pointed at four distinct characteristics of teacher leadership. One is *legitimacy* or the path that enables teachers to influence others. The second refers to *support for leadership activities* that implies the role of teachers as entrepreneurs and the external support they receive to accomplish their objectives. The third is

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objective, which responds to the question: "how directly must teachers influence teaching and learning to be considered teacher leaders?" (p. 9). The last one is *method*, or the routes teacher leaders use to influence others and that involve dialogue and modeling of good practices, among other aspects.

Szeto and Cheng (2017) stated that teacher leadership is part of the distributed models of leadership and that teachers may be appointed by principals to assume that role. Nevertheless, they cautioned the community about the need to examine the role of culture and hierarchical structures on teacher leaders' designation and performance. Smylie and Eckert (2018) added that teacher leaders can be appointed through different pathways such as self-initiation, exhortation and advocacy, but that teacher leadership requires development or "intentional, systematic, systemic development of teachers' capacity for leadership and teachers' leadership practice" (p. 557).

Smylie and Eckert (2018) highlighted that teacher leadership has received attention in the United States and in Europe as demonstrated by the increasing number of programs to promote it. Other countries such as Australia (Conway & Andrews, 2015) and Hong Kong (Szeto & Cheng, 2018; Szeto & Cheng, 2017) have also advanced in the study of this theme in connection to its development and sustainability. Conversely, the dearth of research in Latin America is a signal that more research is required to examine its meanings and application, this information is crucial to advance in the understanding of the role teachers can play in policy construction (Harris & Jones, 2019).

Methodology

Design and Methods

Content analysis was the framework used in this study. It is a form of research that allows inferences to be made from texts, "provides new insights, increases a researcher's understanding of particular phenomena, or informs practical actions" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). An inductive approach that involved moving from general descriptions of leadership in key documents to instances describing teachers' roles was used to gain an understanding of the conceptualization of teacher leadership in the Colombian context.

Data

This study used historical documents, or an "organization's records, minutes, and policy documents" produced in a given period that reflect the interest of the researcher (O'Leary, 2014, p. 178). As criteria for inclusion, we considered only official documents produced by the Colombian Ministry of Education, in charge of regulating all education policies in Colombia. Only documents that contained policies concerning the teaching profession in this context were included. All documents are available from the Ministry's official web page (https://www.mineducacion.gov.co).

Data was drawn from 11 documents. A criterion for selecting four of them is that they represent milestones in the Colombian educational system. One was the Political Constitution (Asamblea Constituyente, 1991), which has governed the country since 1991 and grants citizens the right to education. The second document was the General Law of Education, Law 115 (Congreso de la República, 1994), which provides fundamental guidelines for the country's educational system. The third was Act 2277 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional,

1979), which is the old statute for teachers, and the fourth was Act 1278, or the new teacher statute that has regulated the selection, recruitment, professionalization, and evaluation of teachers in the country since 2002 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2002).

The remaining seven documents were selected because they are pivotal in the selection and evaluation of teachers and consequently, include descriptions of teachers' profiles and expected performance that provide information about how teachers are portrayed. One of these documents was the *Manual of Functions, Requirements and Competences for Principals and Teachers* (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016). Also included in the analysis was the general policy for the education of teachers (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013), along with three guidelines for their evaluation (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2014; 2012; 2008). The final two documents were the most recent (at the time of writing) national development plans (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2019) and the national education policy (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, n.d.). Documents that contained information about salary scales and decress about health and teachers' well-being were not included in the analysis.

Data Analysis

A combination of inductive and deductive processes was used to analyze the data (Klenke et al., 2016). Two phases were used. The first examined the occurrence of the word *leadership* in all documents and used open codes to identify meanings associated with it. The second phase used 11 teacher-leadership attributes and indicators (accountability, advocacy, cultural responsiveness, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, reflection, risk-taking, shared vision, stability, and teamwork) synthesized in a comprehensive

review of the literature by Webber (2018). In addition, open coding (Charmaz, 2006) was used to label the data and to expand the connotation of the attributes. A total of 63 codes emerged. Axial coding ensued, and the codes were grouped into larger categories that were constantly revised in the light of memos, an analytical tool for gathering reflections on the meaning of the data themselves (Charmaz, 2006). To give credibility to the analysis, the researcher applied semantic validity and textual evidence (Weber, 1990). An expert in school leadership in the Colombian context was invited to examine the accuracy of the words used in the codification of the data. In addition, textual evidence that was consistent with the interpretation was used.

Findings

Data yielded 324 matches that included the string *leader* and suffixes such as *–ship* or verb conjugations. Of these, 59 matches with the phrase *teaching support leaders* were excluded. This label was introduced in 2016 by the national government for teachers supporting the pedagogical work in schools, but due to pressures from the largest teacher union in Colombia, the label was eliminated. Another set of 86 matches were ruled out because they did not refer to education. The remaining 179 matches were analyzed to examine the meanings attributed to them. Figure 1 presents the main categories that emerged from the meanings attributed to the word leadership.

Figure 1.

Main Findings that Emerged from the Analysis
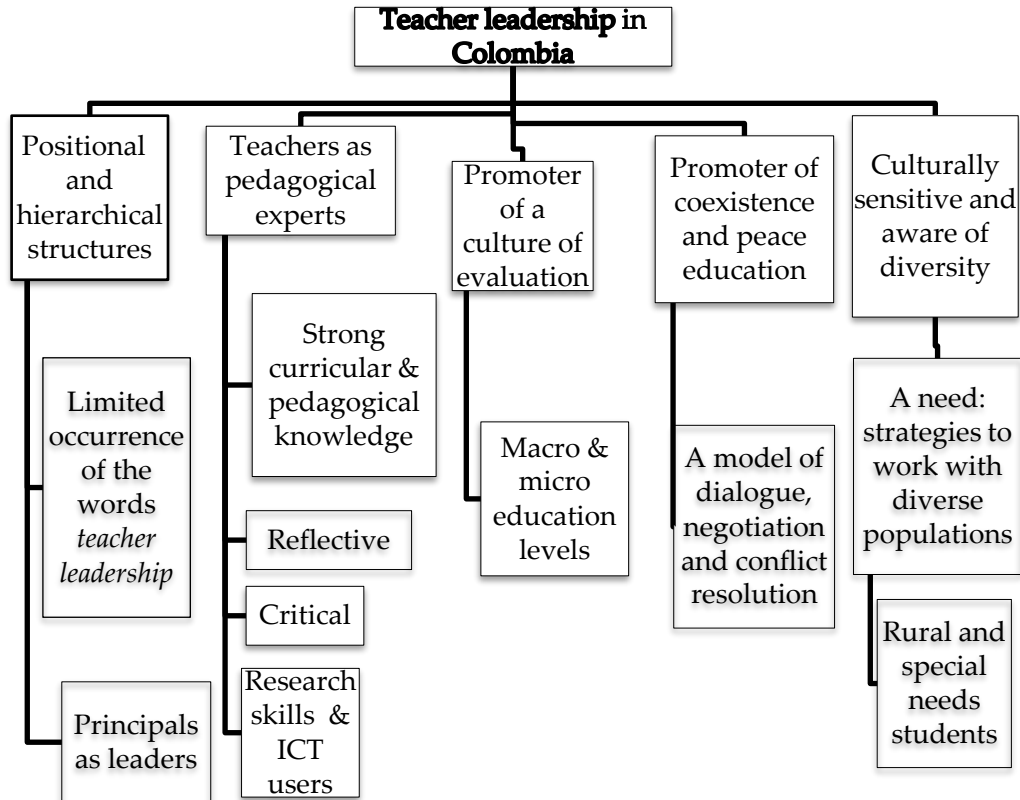
Positional Roles and Hierarchical Structures

Of 86 occurrences of the word *leadership*, 43 were associated with the principal, which suggests that leadership in the Colombian context is positional, assigned by work status and legitimized by normativity. Consequently, leadership relates to principals' actions, particularly in connection to the managerial aspects of their schools. The image of principals as leaders reinforces figures of power and

leaves aside the work and contributions of other members of the community, particularly teachers. This also places principals at the center of accountability, as they are held responsible for the internal organization of the school and for external pressures represented in students' retention, promotion, and achievement, as shown in this excerpt from Act 1278:

[The evaluation includes] an account for at least their leadership; efficiency; work organization; school results, measured in accordance with students' retention and promotion rates and with results of students' basic skills in external evaluations (Act 1278, Art. 34, p. 8).

A school leadership framework is non-existent in Colombia, but leadership functions are an essential component of the evaluation of principals. Leadership, however, is one of the components of the behavioral competencies that both teachers and principals are expected to demonstrate (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016). It embraces actions to motivate and mobilize others in the light of a shared vision, aiming at the creation of a common identity. One of the analyzed documents defines leadership as follows:

*Leadership: Ability to motivate and involve members of the educational community with the construction of a common identity and the development of the institutional vision. (*Manual for the Evaluation of Principals and Teachers, Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2008, p.12).

It is interesting to note that there have been efforts to introduce a new teacher role called *teaching support leader*, but the largest union in Colombia (FECODE, 2017) met the proposal with strong opposition and, in 2017, the government eliminated the label. These teachers were to have acted as liaisons between classroom teachers and principals and to have been in charge of supporting and

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coordinating pedagogical proposals for holistic approaches to student development, but the union claimed that there was a blurry line between the functions of regular classroom teachers and those performed by support teachers.

Teachers as Pedagogical Experts

Teachers are an influential force in student progress and achievement. The analyzed documents emphasize excellence in pedagogy to improve students' learning opportunities. Teachers should possess strong theoretical foundations in curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching methodologies and should demonstrate strong epistemological foundations in the disciplines they teach. *Reflection*, *criticality*, and *research skills* are central attributes of the teacher as a pedagogical leader. As reflective practitioners, teachers adopt a critical view of the content they read and assume an inquiry-oriented position in which they examine and question their own practices. During the 1980s, a strong pedagogical movement highlighted the need to build up the image of the teacher as a professional and a critical intellectual (Calvo, 2004). This idea required teacher preparation programs to include the development of *research skills* that would encourage teachers to examine their practices and contexts in depth and to propose innovative solutions to problems they encountered. This excerpt on the profiles of inservice teachers demonstrates these attributes:

> *[Teachers] know the curriculum, promote the development of pedagogical projects that articulate different areas, grades and levels. Likewise, teachers encourage the development of research, according to needs of the environment; demonstrate updated knowledge, curricular and didactic mastery of their discipline and of the areas they are in*

charge of; efficiently and effectively manage the resources necessary for the development of their pedagogical activity (MEN, 2013, p. 92).

As pedagogical experts, teachers use ICT skills creatively in the classroom. The guidelines for teacher preparation programs (MEN, 2013) accentuate the need to become a researcher and an advanced ICT user. Similarly, this is a component of the evaluation of teachers. One document proposes that they should "incorporate pedagogical and didactic criteria in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to their educational processes" (MEN, 2016, p. 11). There has been considerable investment in the qualification of teachers by past government administrations, centered on honing research skills to improve pedagogical innovation and foster collaboration (Secretaría de Educación Distrital, 2015). Nevertheless, the outcomes of those experiences have yet to be examined and scrutinized (Jurado, 2016).

Teachers as Part of a Culture of Evaluation

This theme concerns government efforts to create a culture of evaluation in schools at both the macro- and micro-levels, where teachers play a determinant role. At the macro-level, they are expected to contribute key information on student development and performance to nurture the school and national quality systems. Colombia has begun to take part in international examinations (OECD, 2018) that have yielded important data for the analysis of student performance and to determine pathways toward school improvement. The national guidelines for teacher education (MEN, 2013) include evaluation as one of their three transversal axes. The other two are pedagogy and research. This document explicitly states that teacher education programs must prepare teachers to learn to evaluate and learn to be evaluated. With respect to learning to

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evaluate, programs ought to "prepare teachers as evaluators so that they provide feedback about contextualized and situated teaching and learning" (MEN, 2013, p. 67). This feedback is crucial for school improvement plans and the assessment of educational quality at the national level.

At the micro-level, teachers as evaluators are to become liaisons between the school and students' families. The aim is twofold, first, to keep families informed about students' progress and difficulties and, second, to increase parental participation in their children's educational processes. This aspect, as will be explained in the following category, is essential for the promotion of a healthy school climate. In general, teachers "keep students and their families informed of students' personal and academic situations (school records, discipline, absences and performance, among others)" (MEN, 2016, p. 41).

Concerning the second perspective—that is, being evaluated—the documents emphasize the value of critically examining teachers' actions and performance in the light of the competencies they should possess. The lens of evaluation proposed is not punitive and focuses on feedback from the principal. If the evaluation is not successful, teachers are recommended to take courses at accredited institutions (MEN, 2008). However, the documents do not specify feedback guidelines, nor do they mention peer evaluation or self-assessment formats. Teachers are evaluated annually, and their competency assessment is required for promotion. Both the macro- and micro-levels imply that teachers should be cognizant of evaluation procedures and of their applicability. It is important to highlight that teacher leaders would use their competencies in assessment and evaluation to scrutinize problems and drive the community to look

for collective solutions to improve students' experiences. However, as mentioned before, this would require that policies and preparation programs stimulate teachers' mindsets to become leaders and enact their leadership in their teams.

Promoters of Coexistence, Conflict Resolution and Peace

The analyzed documents emphasized that teachers play an important part in promoting a healthy school climate and peaceful educational environment. They enact school values such as collegiality and respect for others. In their classrooms, they create pedagogical activities designed to promote harmonic coexistence. One analyzed document (MEN, 2016) stated that teachers should "develop their academic activity through pedagogical projects and other support activities for students' holistic development, oriented to school coexistence" (p. 66). Being an assertive communicator is fundamental to facilitating dialogue among all members of the school community, especially families, and to involve them in solutions for school conflicts. Teachers must be knowledgeable about the *Coexistence Manual*, an institutional document that establishes school rules, behaviors, alternatives for solving conflicts, and agreements and the consequences of breaking those agreements (Chaux et al., 2013).

Colombian teachers are expected to promote dialogue, negotiation, understanding, and participation both inside and outside the school community and should be able to "identify conflicts and promote their peaceful resolution, in order to foster a climate of understanding and recognition of differences" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2016, p. 75). The Colombian government introduced a citizenship competencies plan, (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2011) aimed at fostering environments of respect for

human rights, democracy, and peace that teachers are expected to help implement in their classrooms. This is of enormous importance, considering that Colombia is going through a Peace Negotiation Agreement that seeks to end the violence perpetrated by different actors for more than 50 years within the country and that has permeated schools.

Being Culturally Sensitive and Promoting Diversity: A Diffuse Area

The importance of being sensitive to students' individual needs, to their socio-cultural backgrounds, and to their contexts appears recurrently in the analyzed documents. The General Law of Education (Congreso de la República, 1994) establishes that "education is a process of permanent, personal, cultural and social development that is based on an integral conception of the human person, his dignity, his rights and his duties" (Article 1). Teachers' awareness of these factors leads to their adapting the curriculum and pedagogical activities to students' learning paces and styles, their cultural heritages, and the characteristics of their contexts. The guidelines for teacher preparation programs (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2013) state, for example, that programs must prepare teachers not only to recognize students' individual capacities but also their diverse social, ethnic, cultural, religious, and sexual orientations. Teachers promote an intercultural lens in which "teaching is contextualized, focused on dialogue and interlocution between students' own knowledge and foreign knowledge" (MEN, 2013, p. 56).

Although being culturally sensitive is emphasized in the analyzed documents, it is noticeable that terms such as *inclusion*, *Indigenous students*, *rural students*, and *special-needs students* are

seldom mentioned. None of the documents specifies alternatives for teachers to work with these kinds of groups. This is an important fact, considering the diversity of the Colombian population, which includes are Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and Rom groups that speak 68 different languages (Ministerio de Cultura, 2013), as well as a considerable number of special-needs and rural students who require specialized attention. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the following section.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The first finding from the present study is that the term *teacher leadership* does not appear in the analyzed policy documents and whenever the word *leadership* is used, it refers to principals, school coordinators, and hierarchical figures. The language used in the documents indicates that those in formal positions continue to lead the way in the education of Colombian students and that teachers are passive recipients of policies who operate in vertical organizational structures. In order to build the notion of teachers as "co-constructors of educational change and key contributors to policy making" (Harris & Jones, 2019, p. 123), the language used in policies and official documents in Colombia should accentuate the image of teachers as leaders. This would help make their work visible and receive recognition. Furthermore, it would help build collaboration among all members of the school community and confront the distorted vision of leadership that has permeated education in Latin America (Flessa et al., 2018).

Including the notion of the *teacher leader* would stimulate teachers to think of themselves as influential in school change and open spaces for principals to see them as their allies, which would, in

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turn, strengthen school capacity. The literature on school leadership has consistently stressed the importance of shared leadership (Printy & Marks, 2006), with principals delegating influence, interacting with teachers, and empowering them to improve learning experiences (Pineda-Báez et al., 2020; Sebastian et al., 2016; Szeto & Chen, 2018). Such empowerment leads to collective forms of leadership that influence decision-making (Ni et al., 2018). Moreover, studies show that team efforts, derived from teacher leadership, impact the improvement of students' reading and math achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010) and performance in advanced science and math (Calderone et al., 2018). This study reinforces the suggestion from the OECD (2018) to address conditions at the organizational and institutional levels to improve the quality of the educational experiences offered in schools. This recommendation implies stimulating synergies between principals and teachers instead of implementing programs targeted at each group separately.

Despite the fact that the notion of teacher leadership is nonexistent in the policies reviewed, it is possible to find traces of some teacher leadership attributes. The second finding from this study indicates that teachers are implicitly conceptualized as pedagogical leaders—the pillars for creating and consolidating favorable teaching and learning conditions. For the purpose of capitalizing on the knolwdge and experience that teachers as pedagogical developers produce, teacher leaders should enact pedagogical leadership among their colleagues. Sergiovanni (1998) argued that pedagogical leadership develops "social and academic capital for students, and intellectual and professional capital for teachers" (p. 38). The Colombian educational system urgently requires the consolidation of a teaching framework that emphasizes teacher-leadership skills to foster these types of capital. It is

indispensable to capitalize on the knowledge and expertise of teachers who excel in their practices despite adverse circumstances. The systematization of the information from teachers who receive the *Premio Compartir* (an award given by a private organization that selects best teachers annually), in addition to that provided by other teachers in programs such as *Let's All Learn (*Ministerio de Educación Nacional, n.d.), can be used to formulate a teacher-leadership framework. Such a framework would benefit from combining bottom-up and top-down approaches (Fullan, 1994) that could facilitate the creation of a profile for teachers in Colombia and foster the expectation of the teacher as a leader. A framework agreed upon and created by teachers and other stakeholders could be a democratic tool that favored contextualized, situated, and diversified teaching and learning. It would also gain more acceptance and support from the Colombian teachers' union.

The third finding emerging from this study relates to the role of teachers in promoting a culture of evaluation. This is a key factor for changing and improving school processes and has two important implications. First, it is indispensable that teachers learn to interpret and use the data provided in national and international tests more efficiently. Consequently, literacy is required to nurture the use of such data for classroom and school improvement. Second, the evaluation of teachers requires periodicity and the assertive use of feedback. Teacher evaluation in Colombia is performed annually and, even though there are instruments to guide principals, the aim is not necessarily formative. The hypothesis of this study is that principals have limited information on feedback processes and on how to promote collegiality and exchange of ideas to enrich the schools' plans. Research demonstrates that feedback in teacher evaluation is more effective when it is performed periodically, with principals

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focusing on a disciplined dialogue with teachers about their individual practices and their roles in the overall functioning of the school (Tuytens & Devos, 2017).

However, providing useful feedback is a cumbersome task that is "complicated by local contexts, organizational constraints, and principals' knowledge of instruction, curriculum, and content-area pedagogy" (Wieczorek et al., 2019, p. 358). Research in Colombia has demonstrated that the immersion of Colombian principals in managerial tasks constrains their capacities for interacting with teachers (Sandoval-Estupiñan et al., 2020). Accordingly, Colombian education needs diagnostic studies on the interaction between principals and teachers during feedback sessions, the content of the feedback, and how the two parties perceive the usefulness of the instruments and the feedback sessions. Tuytens and Devos (2014) argued that when teachers perceive feedback as useful, they feel motivated to continue their professional development. Listening to teachers' voices about their experiences in the evaluation process is also essential to help both the school system and the teachers themselves understand their constructions and the enactment of their effectiveness (Warren & Ward, 2019).

The fourth finding highlights teachers' role in promoting peace, tolerance, and respect both inside and outside the classroom. This teacher-leadership attribute responds to the contextual needs of the country. Colombia has one of the longest internal conflicts in Latin America, which has generated poverty, displacement, and the exclusion of many children from the educational system. However, in 2016, the country signed a *Peace Agreement* that aims at improving conditions of equality and well-being for all citizens. The plan places education at its center and implies that teachers should lead the way

in guiding students to learn to act in a more democratic environment. Teachers have a key role in sustaining peace efforts in Colombia's post-conflict situation. They are fundamental in promoting scenarios of participation in which students value others and learn to dialogue, negotiate, and solve their conflicts. This is indispensable to mitigate the effects of the prolonged conditions of violence in the country that have permeated the schools.

The final finding has important implications for teacher preparation in Colombia and other countries in Latin America with similar characteristics. One of the implicit teacher-leadership attributes identified in the analyzed documents is teachers' awareness of diversity. This implies teachers should develop their expertise in the design of pedagogical proposals that help students develop their full capacities. However, it is unclear how well-prepared teachers are to achieve this aim. The documents reviewed do not provide guidelines or alternatives for working with the diverse classrooms in both rural and urban areas. This calls for substantial reforms in the policies guiding initial teacher preparation and in-service professional programs. Teachers must be sufficiently prepared to address the needs of the numerous Indigenous, Afro-descendent, and rural students in the country and be prepared to advocate for marginalized students as suggested by Bradley-Levine (2018). A recent study on rural education in Colombia (Fundación Compartir, 2019) indicated that, to impact education in rural areas (where many Indigenous and Afro-descendant groups live), teachers need better preparation to enable them to understand students' diversity and contextual characteristics. The present study endorses these recommendations and, furthermore, suggests that teacher preparation programs should make provisions for teachers to address the education of students with special needs and students with

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disabilities. Access to the educational system for these populations in Colombia is still limited, and retention and graduation rates are low (Correa & Castro, 2016).

To sum up, the present study emphasizes that the field of teacher leadership is still incipient in Colombia and that horizontal and collegial work is still required to improve school practices. Although there are traces of the concept of teacher leadership in the documents analyzed, the country would benefit from a framework that clearly establishes the vision of the teacher as a leader and from teacher preparation programs aimed at preparing teachers to work with the country's diverse population. Questions emerge regarding how teachers themselves understand their leadership role and how leadership practices are enacted in this context.

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