

# **Pedagogical Leadership, Teaching Leadership and their Role in School Improvement: A Theoretical Approach**

## **Liderazgo pedagógico, liderazgo docente y su papel en la mejora de la escuela: una aproximación teórica**

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## Summary

Educational demands of the 21st century make it indispensable to re-evaluate the traditional models of management and leadership in schools and focus on pedagogical aspects, distributed leadership, participative school development and teachers' professional growth. Pedagogical leadership includes these aspects and it is emerging, within the educational research field, as the most effective model to achieve sustained improvements in the schools. Teaching leadership is an essential element of this model and it has also been accredited, in recent years, as a fundamental characteristic of a successful school. A theoretical-conceptual approach of pedagogical and teaching leadership is made, presenting the conditions in which they can be developed, and their role in school improvement. Conclusions are the following: Teachers, their leadership potential and pedagogical leadership, define a new comprehensive notion of school which is aimed to serve the students and their learning process, and to promote human and professional development. In order to achieve an educational change and school development, it is essential that teachers and principals are appropriately trained and empowered, and become aware of their key role within such processes.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical leadership, teaching leadership, school improvement, school development, educational change.

## Resumen

Las demandas educativas del siglo XXI hacen indispensable replantearse los modelos tradicionales de gestión y liderazgo en las escuelas y apostar por un enfoque centrado en lo pedagógico, el liderazgo distribuido, el desarrollo participativo de la escuela y el crecimiento profesional docente. El liderazgo pedagógico engloba estos aspectos y se perfila en la investigación educativa como el modelo más efectivo para lograr mejoras sostenidas en la escuela. El liderazgo docente es un elemento esencial de este modelo y se ha acreditado

también en los últimos tiempos como rasgo fundamental de la escuela exitosa. Se hace un abordaje teórico-conceptual del liderazgo pedagógico y del liderazgo docente, refiriendo los marcos en los que pueden desarrollarse y su papel en la mejora de la escuela. Se concluye que el profesorado, su potencial de liderazgo y el liderazgo pedagógico conforman una nueva noción integral de escuela que tiene como máxima servir al alumno y su aprendizaje, al desarrollo humano y al desarrollo profesional. Para la transformación de la educación y el desarrollo de la escuela es esencial que profesores y directores sean debidamente capacitados y empoderados, y que tomen conciencia de su rol protagónico en dichos procesos.

**Palabras clave:** Liderazgo pedagógico, liderazgo docente, mejora escolar, desarrollo escolar, cambio educativo.

## Introduction

Education and transformation are ubiquitous terms in the speeches of emerging societies. Innovation and reflection are keywords in the dynamics of modern societies. These are exposed to constant change; they bring the challenge of permanently optimizing states, processes and services. Intellectual, social and emotional competences of individuals are essential to achieve this and to adapt to the rapid pace of requirements given today. They are, in essence, the cornerstone of the success or failure of a society. Satisfying the educational demand and, therefore the continuous development of the education sector, are the nuclear issues in all discourses and practices of development. It is known that the educational success of a society translates into equal opportunities, well-being, integration and sustainable development. But what paths shall we follow to reach such a success and a continuous development of education?

The society of knowledge has relegated these traditional, rote, and deterministic learning paradigms. Nowadays more reflective, analytical and interpretive competences are demanded. These are based on critical-constructive reasoning and create opportunities for innovation and optimization, as well as cooperative and participatory working ways. Sustainable development starts from and requires modernization and transformation of the structures and working methods in education, according to the contemporary demands of the society that hosts it, maintains it and generates it. This is the greatest challenge for education and the policy of emerging societies. The world today is, as stated in the McKinsey report, “indifferent to tradition and past reputation [...] It does not forgive weaknesses and it ignores customs or practices. Success will be for the people and countries that are quick to adapt, reduce their complaints and are open to change. The government’s duty will be to ensure that countries face this challenge”. (Barber and Mourshed, 2008, p. 6)

Educational effectiveness research shows that teacher quality is the factor with the greatest impact on learning. Therefore, training and professional

development of working teachers have become the key components in the design, development and improvement of school quality. On the other hand, the experience of successful education systems places the school leadership as the second influence factor on learning. Such systems have a culture of organizational leadership and a school administration focused on and committed to learning and on to the student, with pedagogical objectives as their ultimate goal. Empirical evidence has shown that school leadership with these characteristics has positive effects on learning, teaching quality and organizational climate in the educational community (Barber & Mourshed, 2008; Bolívar, 2010; Horn & Marfán, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Marzano, McNulty & Waters, 2005; Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008).

Barber and Mourshed (2008) indicate that pedagogical leadership is, even in a greater extent, crucial when it comes to implementing change and transforming systems. In this sense, training and teacher performance, as well as school leadership, are key points in the educational agenda of developing countries, which have the great challenge ahead of increasing their educational levels in an accelerated and efficient way. Today's evidence makes it clear that without properly trained and high-performing teachers, or without pedagogical leaders in the management of schools with the necessary autonomy to decide and implement actions, a good school and school development are unlikely to be accomplished.

According to the current development paradigms and organizational management, which promote ways of cooperative and participatory work and promote innovation and optimization of resources, states and processes, the school has evolved to a point where its development cannot occur anymore in a centralized way, designed by senior institutions in the national apparatus. Development should start from the school, competences, human capital and the potential for internal change that it can generate.

The main idea in this new school conception is to encourage its development as an autonomous and empowered organization that learns and innovates with its own resources and directed in a democratic and

participatory manner. In this sense, Fend (1986, as cited in Rolff, 2012a) speaks about a paradigm shift in relation to what is now understood as school development, resulting from the transition from a perspective of centralized school planning to the discovery of the school as a design and a creation unit. In this new paradigm, each educational institution becomes the main engine of development and the stage where the success or failure of the education system is determined. Pedagogical leadership, accredited by empirical research as the most effective in terms of school performance and educational systems, is an expression of the new paradigms of education and school. We find in it a richer profile for leadership, genuine leadership for learning which, through teaching leadership and professional learning communities, extends and distributes beyond the school management (Bolívar, 2010). In this article, we will work on a theoretical approach to the concepts of pedagogical leadership and teaching leadership, referring to the frameworks where they can be developed and their role in school improvement and educational system.

### **Pedagogical leadership: a theoretical and conceptual approach.**

The interest on the subjects of leadership, skills and managerial effectiveness in schools is born within the framework of research on leadership in general and on school effectiveness, but it crystallizes and delves into a more autonomous work only towards the end of the last century. On researches about leadership in general and specifically in regard to educational leadership, the effectiveness of participatory styles, based on systemic principles and dynamic interaction, has been proven. These clearly differ from traditional forms of institutional management, where outside and inside the school, there are rigid hierarchical structures, dissociated at different levels and focused on regulatory and administrative matters. The traditional organizational management involved in schools leads to:

- Routine teaching practices. The normative approach relegates to the background the pedagogical issues, innovation and development of

teaching practices. We find, induced by the system, teachers more concerned about complying with the curricula and doing what was planned for the class instead of being concerned with the actual learning of students. This is reflected, for example, in large portions of the class dictated only by the teacher, but little active participation of students. By this, teachers are not promoting the students' analytical and reflective skills.

- Low permeability and exchange between the different functional areas of the school, which keep, for instance, teachers away from leadership roles and managers away from pedagogical practice in the classroom, engaged in bureaucratic and administrative matters only. At this stage, it is common to find principals who do not provide support for the educational work of teachers and do not get involved in the classroom learning. They do not get involved either in the daily lives of students and teachers, which creates a climate of cold work, and little rapport and understanding between them. Such principals may spend days or weeks in their office in front of a computer, reviewing papers and interacting with administrative staff, without walking around the school hallways during recess, meeting with teachers to inquire how they are doing in classes or paying them a spontaneous visit.
- An environment of subordination and authoritarian management that do not include teachers, students and other members of the educational community in the decision making processes and participation in school management. This is reflected, for example, in a modification of the curricula without prior consultation and/or active participation of teachers in the process. Also, in the predominance of normative management tools (e.g. work regulations, remuneration tables, etc.) over those pedagogically functional (e.g. good school standards, good teaching practices or good management practices, diagnostic tools, surveys for teachers or parents, reports and formats

to provide constructive feedback on performance, standards of good communication practices at school, etc.). The environment of subordination negatively affects the motivation, personal satisfaction and the level of commitment of the educational community members towards the school and its goals. The lack of active participation of this community in the school management causes a loss of power for the generation of ideas and ways of improvement and innovation.

- Teaching staff with little incentive and few opportunities for professional and personal growth, due to the lack of training workshops (offered by the school). Lack of teaching leadership, for example, when conducting weekly meetings with teachers who form a learning community to exchange their teaching experiences and report regularly on educational performance issues provided by the principal or more experienced teachers. As we have seen, teachers and their pedagogical performance is the first factor of influence on student learning. Therefore, this point has a significant negative impact on educational practice and school results.
- Lack of a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement, reflected in the absence of periodic diagnostic tests in various aspects of school life and implementation of improvement projects based on them. For example: “School “A” does not evaluate how its teachers are feeling. It does not realize, or simply ignores the fact that most of them do not see their efforts recognized, and it does not establish a regular practice in which the school principal visits some classes and meets with them regularly to congratulate them for their achievements, and/or provide educational support in areas that still require improvement. The lack of a culture of evaluation and implementation of improvement projects that have a positive impact on student learning, as the one described, is an important brake on school development and on the optimization of learning outcomes.



In contrast to the practices and situations explained above, school leadership currently tends to focus on pedagogy and on continuous improvement. It also tends to be conceptualized as an organizational phenomenon that turns to horizontal structures and distribution principles among various actors and roles to face the dilemmas and challenges of increasing complexity (Ogawa and Bossert (1995) and Manz and Sims (1993 as quoted in Leithwood & Mascal, 2008)). Trends on the current discussion of school development derive mainly from models of leadership and distributed leadership, whose main characteristics are (Del Valle, 2010; Longo, 2008; Seitz & Capaul, 2007):

- Distributed leadership, based on ethical and moral principles and a common organizational vision.
- Empowerment of the members of the organization through the requirement and encouragement of individual's intellects and talents as well as the encouragement of social networks and working communities.
- A culture of learning and innovation.
- A high degree of commitment of all members towards self-improvement, the development and transformation processes and common organizational goals.

For Longo (2008), the ability of school management to transfer, share and develop leadership is essential for change and innovation. Seitz and Capaul (2007) define school leadership as a process of interaction between leaders and collaborators occurring at different levels of action and not restricted to a formal leadership position. The relationship between the leader and his/her team is based on mutual influence. It should emerge from the will of both parties with the goal of achieving significant changes. Each particular situation (which includes, for example, characteristics of the institution, task, situation and/or persons involved) requires different relationship dynamics

and, consequently, different management skills. Management competency can then be defined as the ability of the leader or manager to act effectively considering each particular situation in which their actions are framed. In this sense, effective leadership in the school context is revealed as a complex phenomenon that cannot be handled with a uniform or standardized criteria, but it is placed under certain coordinates and principles of action.

Therefore, it is difficult to find definitions and standard terms regarding the concept of pedagogical leadership in the contributions of school leadership research. Regarding effective school leadership, we sometimes simply talk about “school leadership” but, also, about “pedagogical leadership”, or as it is commonly referred to in the English-speaking world: “educational leadership”, “learning-centered-leadership” and “instructional leadership”. At the same time, “pedagogical leadership” is often referred to, in the academic discourse, as the fact of conducting leadership positions in the educational world. Without implying any particular model of school management or ways of management with proven effectiveness. This paper addresses the concept of pedagogical leadership as the model of school management and educational management whose effectiveness has been repeatedly proven with empirical support in research of effectiveness and school leadership. It is then, rather than a model of school management among many others, a model which, according to today’s evidence, should convey all efforts related to the design, management and development of school and educational systems.

In his study: “12 theses about a good school leadership” Hubert (2013) states that good principals are committed to educational values. They are good teachers who believe and trust their team. Moreover, as experts and promoters of teamwork, they are examples of cooperative work, not only regarding the treatment of students and teachers, but also regarding school management and everyday life at school since they are a pedagogical example. In these contexts, the school administration is considered as a mere instrument for achieving genuine educational objectives. In the school context, the objective

of any measure is to encourage learning and the students' development. For this to work, actions should focus on the development of the staff and training sessions as part of the professional development of teachers. The educational objectives are the determinants premises. This creates a school culture in which administrative and structural elements are always subordinate to the pedagogical principles and, therefore, can be redefined in terms of the latter.

Bolívar (2010) defines pedagogical leadership as the ability to influence others and through it, arrange the organization towards the common goal of improving the students' learning. The influence applied is not based on power or formal authority. It also explains that "leadership for learning takes as its core action the quality of education offered and the learning outcomes achieved by students" (Bolívar, 2010, p. 14). In these lines of action, it is essential that the management creates spaces and environments that facilitate and support organizational learning and that of the teacher (Bolívar, 2010), which will ultimately result in better learning opportunities for students.

A central aspect of pedagogical leadership is, then, to create conditions that promote learning and school improvement. Here, the principal plays a catalytic role (Bolívar, 2010) and not an absolute one. In the pedagogical leadership, success and leadership are shared and accepted jointly and genuinely. Leadership should be understood as "a function that can be exercised by any member, rather than as a set of responsibilities reserved for an individual" (Bolívar, 1997, p. 38). Ways to facilitate consensus must be found without preventing critical thinking and attention. Efforts should focus on the roles and networks that arise at school, so that the team becomes involved in the dynamics of work of a sustained culture of learning and development (Bolívar, 1997).

Horn and Marfan (2010) highlight a shared responsibility and a personal commitment of those involved towards joint goals and desired changes, and the role of management in promoting such attitudes, as central aspects of the pedagogical leadership. For these authors (Horn & Marfan, 2010, p. 83), "leadership consists of the ability to establish guidelines so that others

can have them as their own objectives, creating a shared sense that moves the organization towards these common goals”. Therefore, “educational leadership manages to bring the school community together for a common improvement project, which implies that all participants have one common goal: the students’ learning. It also manages to guide the alignment of financial and human teaching resources towards that shared goal “(Horn & Marfan, 2010, p. 84).

In 1994 Dubs already claimed that pedagogical leadership is not based on control or supervision, but it helps to the development of teachers and school. According to this author, pedagogical leadership must be seen as an integral process intrinsically linked to the school development, in which a common denominator for personal development is generated: teachers’ needs and school goals. For Brägger and Posse (2007), one of the main tasks of an effective school management is to encourage teachers to develop their own skills. Good principals additionally manage to create, through the recognition of good performance, a climate of pedagogical optimism, willingness for joint action and absolute confidence to achieve success. They are interested in each person working and learning in their school, whether they are students, teachers or other staff (Brägger & Posse, 2007).

Rolff(2012b) also emphasizes the close relationship between pedagogical leadership and school development, and the fact that this leadership is not based on the imposition or mandate but on the example and the power of persuasion. School development and school, as an organic social system, demand a pedagogical notion of leadership and not a technical-functional notion. For Rolf (2012b.), one of the main educational goals is to build a school that learns, that is to say, a school that progresses. Principals, being the authorities in charge of encouragement, design and facilitation of goals; play, without any doubt, an essential role in the education system and school development. Without competent educational leaders in charge of the school management, change processes have zero chances of successful implementation.

According to Murillo (2006), a leadership model was proposed for the educational leadership research since the beginning. A model that prioritizes the efficiency and where educational problems are diagnosed, teachers are guided, supervision and staff evaluation and development are promoted, and curriculum development is addressed. In the eighties, the term “instructional leadership” was adopted. It had a strong impact on school management and marked the change from the traditional bureaucratic management approach to a leadership focused on teaching and learning. This new leadership highlights the creation of a suitable climate for learning, support, encouragement and professional development of teachers, encouraging teamwork and participation of the school community as well as a culture of evaluation for improvement.

A second important development on the school leadership research would occur by shifting the focus from what is considered or should be considered good school and good leadership practices to the conditions and lines of action under which the school can be transformed and improved (Murillo, 2006). In this sense, the dimensions of transformational leadership influence the concept and practice of pedagogical leadership, profiling and enriching it.

In recent times, distributed leadership has become “a new conceptual framework to analyze and address school leadership” (Murillo, 2006, p. 19). This model focuses on shared responsibility and leadership, as well as on the commitment and participation of all members in the actions taken to achieve the objectives. The model of distributed leadership implies, beyond a simple remodeling of tasks, “a change in culture which includes the commitment and involvement of all members of the school community in the running, operation and management of the school”. The principal creates a climate of work which is participatory, open, cooperative, trustworthy and of mutual respect. Therefore, leadership becomes a collective phenomenon, “under the responsibility of different people based on their skills and circumstances” (Murillo, 2006, p. 19), and the school increases its ability to solve problems

and to innovate. The essence of distributed leadership goes far beyond sharing or delegating tasks. It consists of taking advantage of the collective potential of the organization, getting the most out of the knowledge, skills, efforts and hopes of the school community (Murillo, 2006).

The role of the management team is redefined around these new frameworks, leaving purely administrative functions in the background. It gives importance to a visionary agent of change and encouragement who knows how to use and develop the potential of his/her people to achieve common goals. In this way, “everyone learns and improves personally and professionally [...] The top priority of the school’s management office is people and not roles or tasks”; and the school becomes “a true learning organization” (Murillo, 2006, p. 21).

Leithwood and Riehl (2009, p. 20) define pedagogical leadership as “the work to encourage and influence others to articulate and achieve shared goals of the school”. These authors also refer to the intellectual development and the individual support as essential dimensions of pedagogical leadership (ibid.). Educational leaders “support their teams showing respect and consideration for their feelings and personal needs” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2009, p. 27). Empirical evidence has shown that it positively influences the enthusiasm, optimism and commitment of the members of the educational community, resulting in a better performance (McColl-Kennedy & Anderson (2002, as cited in Leithwood & Riehl, 2009)). The development of people, as well as the core directive ability to positively influence their talents, potentials, skills, motivations, thought patterns and attitudes are essential dimensions of the pedagogical leadership and the modern conception of school and school development.

Based on the revised literature on educational leadership, we define pedagogical leadership as the management of educational institutions and/or pedagogical processes, whose main line of action is to achieve and ensure a quality learning and the well-being of all students. It is based on an ethical, participatory and innovative culture with continuous improvement, and it

commits to the development and wellbeing of all people. Its lines of action and essential features are:

- Leadership and shared responsibility.
- Leadership conceived as a dynamic and complex process with a positive influence on capabilities, motivations, thought patterns, talents, and attitudes, not based on authority or formal positions of power, but on the example and the power of persuasion.
- Successful learning and positive development of students as the ultimate goal.
- Joint willingness for action and commitment to the goals of the educational institution.
- The organizational culture of learning, development and improvement.
- Personalized support, assistance, development, demand and encouragement of teachers.
- Empowerment of the educational community members.
- The culture of cooperative and participatory work, based on ethical and pedagogical values.
- A work environment that is open, tolerant, optimistic, respectful, supportive, and trustworthy.
- Adequate treatment of emotional and motivational variables in the work dynamics.
- People and their development are always the centers of any action.
- The administrative and structural dimensions are subordinate to the educational objectives and educational principles.

The capability of pedagogical leadership consists of achieving, under these lines of action, the permanent improvement of the school learning

and school as an institution. Therefore, in this leadership model, the axis of each action is aimed to a successful learning and optimal development of students and people and to not tasks, rules or roles. The following words from a successful school principal in Boston are a good expression of its essence: “Being a teacher is to help children learn. Being a principal is to help adults learn. That is why it is so difficult ... I walk the hallways, I walk the hallways and walk the hallways ... I just check my email when everyone else has already left” (Barber & Mourshed, 2008, p. 34).

The internal improvement capability of the school depends largely on competent principals who can build it and promote it, creating the conditions that are suitable for its development (Bolívar, 2010). That being said, the school autonomy is essential for the exercise of pedagogical leadership, innovation and school development. Principals should have the autonomy to decide on actions and measures that will have a direct impact on their institution, and to evaluate and monitor the implemented measures.

An autonomous, participative and democratic school, that learns and progresses, is the center of the educational leadership, and it is the current concept used by successful schools today. As we have stated, in the modern educational context, the school is the power unit of development and of the education system quality. Moreover, it is the instance in which its success or failure takes place. In this sense, it is essential for innovation and improvement of the education quality to empower and give the schools the necessary tools so that its internal ability for leadership can be developed. Only then, the management autonomy that is offered can be taken advantage of, and the efforts of all participants in the sector and members of the school community may be channeled into a successful student learning. This leads us to conclude that without a distributed and participatory leadership by education policy or without a proper empowerment of each school community, neither the autonomous school or pedagogical leadership, nor the development of the school or education are possible. School improvement can only start from the improvement and development of the capabilities of the people who are part of it.



## **Teaching leadership in the framework of pedagogical leadership and school development.**

As stated in the McKinsey report (Barber & Mourshed, 2008, p. 15), “the quality of an education system is based on the quality of its teachers”. The modern educational paradigm requires both teachers and students and educational institutions to live and promote a culture of learning and improvement with the necessary reflective competence needed to achieve this. Moreover, they have to be open to innovation and have an intrinsic motivation, as well as positive attitudes towards individual and collective development. If school leadership must be applied in a participatory manner, if teachers are central players in the education system and we aim to improve it, then it is necessary for them to become active agents of change who, along with the principals, carry out and encourage the pedagogical leadership. The teachers’ leading role, according to Hutchinson (2005), is the key in the education reform. Teachers’ knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivations are important anchors and drivers of school development, being of utmost importance for the quality of education that they are not neglected or disregarded.

Professional development is the basis for improving the educational practice, it is essential for the growth, experience and development of the teachers’ skills (Helterbran, 2010). The implementation of a pedagogy-oriented school concept and environments focused on learning requires high levels of professionalism and commitment from teachers and principals (Istance & Dumont, 2010). For Henderson and Barron (1995), effective school change depends on the exercise of appropriate leadership roles. The demand for professional and managerial skills in teachers starts from the need of highly competent leaders that get involved when difficult situations arise and are able to solve them in a sustained and collective manner (Howey (1988, as cited in Henderson & Barron, 1995)).

In this scenario, besides the pedagogical leadership, teaching leadership has increasingly gained attention and prominence in both research and

discourses as well as in practices of school development and educational improvement. The importance of teaching leadership is a fundamental role that the teacher plays in the pedagogical leadership of the school, its performance in general and its core processes: teaching and learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). It is also, in essence, an expression of distributed leadership and cooperative ways of work. The exercise of leadership roles by teachers implies that leadership, accountability and school visions are shared (Nappi, 2014; Kurtz, 2009). In turn, the leading teacher shares with others his/her own resources, experience and expertise, so that individual resources enrich and strengthen collective ones (Nappi, 2014). In this way, the inner potential of the school performance is developed. It is the cornerstone of a sustainable educational development.

But the concept of teaching leadership goes beyond the fact that teachers takes on formal positions or leadership positions. It is about the teacher becoming a true and committed representative of the culture of learning and improvement in the school, and that he/she develops attitudes and practices of individual leadership, without these necessarily responding to a formal position in the organization of the school. As Nappi (2014) states, the “educational leader” is not an assigned position but a role that the individual accepts himself/herself. For Helterbran (2010), teaching leadership does not reside essentially in the most formal positions, but in the fact that the teacher sees the needs, identify problems and solve them on his/her own. This scenario has little chance of occurring as long as teachers are not aware of their own abilities and leadership roles, and as long as they do not develop the skills and confidence required for the exercise of effective pedagogical leadership (Helterbran, 2010). It is the task of the principals and other participants in formal leadership positions to promote teaching leadership and create the necessary conditions for this to grow, becoming its axis and support (Helterbran, 2010).

Studies addressing the concept of teaching leadership suggest that the leading teacher has the ability to encourage and motivate people; accepting

leadership roles inside and outside the classroom, for the benefit of students and other teachers. Moreover, they are teachers who make decisions, promote excellence, professionalism, development of teaching and learning processes and of the school in general, and contribute to school leadership in different ways. Teachers who identify themselves with communities of leading teachers and learners, contribute actively in these communities, promote teamwork, and give an example of a successful class and influence others by promoting improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Seitz & Capaul, 2007; Wasley, 1991; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 1998; Muijs & Harris, 2003). These teachers care about the learning process, they care about what it does, how it does it, and how it influences the students (Kurtz, 2009).

For York-Barr & Duke (2004), teachers lead by keeping the focus on teaching and learning processes, and establishing constructive and trusting relationships. They influence the development of individuals, work communities and organizational skills so that this is reflected in the improvement of learning. For Ash & Persall (2000, as cited in Muijs & Harris, 2003), leading teachers are skilled teachers who, although they spend most of their time in the classroom, conduct leadership roles at different times and in different ways, following the principles of pedagogical leadership. Kurtz (2009) highlights the key position of teachers to implement changes because they can “simply” go to class and make them. Neither the State nor the regional or local administrations have the information first hand that teachers have (Kurtz, 2009), as far as teaching and learning is concerned. Therefore, the contributions, opinions and abilities of teachers are valuable and decisive for the design, implementation and monitoring of school improvement processes.

Day & Harris (2003, as cited in Muijs & Harris, 2003) propose four dimensions of teaching leadership:

- Transferring the guidelines of school improvement to educational practice in the classrooms.

- Ensuring participatory leadership, in which all teachers feel part of the improvement and development, working with colleagues and guiding them towards collective goals.
- Playing a mediating role through which they transfer their knowledge, information and experience.
- Establishing close relationships between teachers, enabling a mutual learning.

The pedagogical leadership essentially involves, the teaching leadership. Their common goals are the optimization of teaching and learning, participatory school development and the growth of the school as a learning organization. Within the framework of pedagogical leadership, teaching leadership is a central strategy to turn the school into a professional learning organization (Mujis & Harris, 2003; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Therefore, teaching leadership brings essential contributions to school development and improvement of the educational quality (Seitz & Capaul, 2007).

The positive effects of teaching leadership are shown, at first instance, in the professional development of teachers themselves. Leadership practices and attitudes boost their development by expanding their notion about learning, teaching and school, and by making them aware of the fact of exercising leadership and learning are intrinsically linked (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Empirical evidence indicates that teaching leadership has a positive impact on the self-esteem and satisfaction of teachers, improving their motivation, performance (Mujis & Harris, 2003) and thus, resulting in better learning outcomes of students.

For teaching leadership to take place, the active support of the principals is required, creating learning spaces and making time and resources available (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As already stated, it is the responsibility of the principals and other participants in formal leadership positions that these conditions are created. They are in the best position to support and encourage teachers, give them credibility, recognition and appreciation,

generating chances for distributed leadership and development, and creating opportunities for exchange and cooperation (Hutchinson, 2005; Kurtz, 2009). But the key players of the development of teaching leadership at school are, indeed, teachers themselves. Helterbran (2010) notes that distributed leadership requires from principals and teachers, attitudes and relevant lines of action. Vision, desire and support are necessary to make the instructional leadership grow and improve (Helterbran, 2010). Teaching leadership does not consist, after all, of making available to principals a right hand to fulfill their obligations (Helterbran, 2010), but it creates, along with pedagogical leadership, a comprehensive concept of school which benefits learning, human and professional development. Cooperative and participatory working methods are the principles of this concept.

There are not miracles or magic potions to solve the problems of any educational system (Helterbran, 2010), but a distributed leadership and teachers who are valued, well trained and committed can channel efforts towards significant results. If you are looking for an effective educational change, then politics must bet on and commit to these goals.

## **Conclusions**

Facing the new educational scenario and the demands of the 21st century society, it is essential, for school improvement, to rethink management and traditional leadership models and to bet on an approach centered on pedagogy, distributed leadership and teaching development. The latest evidence suggests that this is the most effective way to achieve sustained improvements in the quality of education, in the management of schools and, therefore, in the student learning and educational system in general.

Under this new approach, leadership and school development are matters related to entire school community. Teachers, as key players of that community, should be actively involved in these matters to promote them. This refers to the concept of teaching leadership which has gained increasing importance in recent years and it is emerging today as an essential

element of pedagogical leadership and successful school. By gathering other contributions from literature on leadership and school development, a theoretical approach to the concept of pedagogical leadership has been developed, highlighting its role in improving education and school. As a result, its own definition and a list of essential characteristics were proposed. By addressing the concept of teaching leadership as a fundamental element on pedagogical leadership, we conclude that teachers, their leadership potential and pedagogical leadership create a new comprehensive notion of school that has as its principles to benefit the students' learning, human development and professional development. This new school is the driving force behind its own development and the main engine of development of the educational system it belongs to.

It is considered significantly important that every teacher and principal is aware that the pedagogical leadership has an enormous potential to impact positively on the performance of the education system, since they are key players in making this potential is well used. The establishment of the pedagogical leadership and teaching leadership in the educational practice depends largely on political decisions by which the various participants of the education system are properly trained and empowered. But the fact that teachers and principals are aware of their influence power, their central role in educational change, and the ways of achieving the related demands, is already an important prerequisite and a starting point for it. In order to renew traditional educational practices and contribute to the development of twentieth-century schools, it is recommended to:

- Raise awareness through workshops to the various participants in the educational community. Awareness about the concept and function of the modern school and the need for a participatory change. Analyze together in these workshops, the current situation of the school and, based on it, set goals for improvement.
- Perform regular training about managerial practices for teachers, and about organization of school activities and improvement

performance projects with the involvement of various participants in the educational community. Also, school development conferences in which diagnostics on the situation of the school are updated periodically, achievements are identified and new goals and action plans for improvement are set.

- Create learning communities among teachers who work on pedagogical issues in regular meetings, provide advice and mutual visits to class that generate confidence and support networks.
- Transfer leadership to teachers, demanding their active participation in the decision-making processes, requiring the management of learning communities, allocating mentoring and mediation roles (between students, between parents and the management team, between other teachers, between students and other teachers, between the student and the management team, etc.), and creating opportunities for academic specialization, such as: conflict resolution, prevention of misconduct, educational management, research, curriculum development, etc.

It is also recommended, for future researches, to create a more qualitative evidence to help understand the particular situations of management and leadership in schools, as well as the problems and challenges they face; and to conduct quantitative studies on the impact of implemented measures, so that they can be modified or optimized according to specific needs. Considering the key role that teachers play in leadership and educational practice, it is also recommended to carry out directing research efforts - both qualitative and quantitative - to know and understand their situation and their work at schools: Which of their strengths and weaknesses influence their way of teaching? What would this imply in the proposals for teacher training in universities and colleges? What do teachers think about their daily work at schools? What disturbs them greatly or what aspect do they find more difficult? What do they need? What motivates them? Worrying about competent, satisfied, motivated and committed teachers is essential to

bring the school on the right track and to develop its internal leadership and sustained improvement.

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