

EERA: Leadership Distribution in Schools. The Evidence from Daily Logs of the School Activity

Author(s):[Julián López-Yáñez](#) (presenting), [María José Carrasco](#), [Eduardo Garcia](#) (presenting), [Inmaculada Gómez-Hurtado](#), [Inmaculada González-Falcón](#), [Nieves Oliva](#)

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Contribution

Leadership Distribution in Schools. The Evidence from Daily Logs of the School Activity

The current literature has emphasised the key role of leadership on school improvement (Hallinger and Heck, 1996; Harris and Muijs, 2005). In this sense, a growing consensus is being developed around the idea that the leadership that produces a real impact on school results is in a great extent *distributed* (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2009). This idea assumes that leadership can proceed from many *places* and agents (Anderson, Moore and Sun, 2009) and instead being associated to a particular role or status it is embedded in the specific workflow that a community of practitioners unfold (Gronn, 2003) and in the organizational learning and knowledge that such social dynamics produces.

An important part of the research literature on distributed leadership has focused on the complexities of such distribution in schools: sources, scope, effects (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2004), and particularly on the patterns and modalities of distribution that different schools adopt in order to meet its own needs (Spillane, 2006; Anderson, Moore y Sun, 2009; MacBeath, 2009).

On the other hand, the extend of the interest about the distribution of leadership in schools should lead us to a deeper understanding of the nature of power and influence in educational settings, which is ?far from any doubt- a pending debt of the leadership and management studies (Busher, 2006; Thomson and Blackmore, 2006). Similarly, the distributed approach should lead the field to a more informed reflexion on the barriers and possibilities of a more democratic functioning of schools (Woods, 2004; Hatcher, 2005).

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However, the research methodologies applied to the analysis of leadership and power dynamics in the school organizations have failed to capture the complexity of the phenomenon. Usually they put in the hand of the researchers a limited amount and type of data. In the research project presented in this paper a wide variety of methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative are being developed in order to get the big picture of the influence and power phenomenon in school organizations. The project is being developed in 39 primary and secondary schools in two Spanish / Andalusian provinces: Huelva and Seville. The research methodologies being applied include: daily logs of the leadership practice; social network analysis; shadowing; in-depth interviews; and observation of meetings and rhetorical discourse analysis of such meetings. The two first methodologies are being developed right now in a first, extensive phase of the inquiry, while the rest will be developed in a second, qualitative phase with a reduced group of the schools participants in the first stage.

Method

Daily logs let us capturing the real activity of school leaders and its characteristics. The advantage provided by the daily logs in contrast with questionnaires and other self-report methodologies is mainly that they don't need to appeal to far memories or preferences got from any exercise of introspection, but just to the raw practice recently developed. For the purpose of our inquiry a Daily Log of the School Activity was built (adapted from Spillane y Zuberi, 2009) and sent to 42 school leaders from 39 schools during two weeks in November 2012. A total amount of 390 questionnaires was collected during such ten days in total. The Daily Log asked the participants to provide information at the end of each school day about the most relevant activity in which they had been involved, including: who organised and led the activity, where and how it took place, who were involved in it, what was its purpose and the issues addressed.

Expected Outcomes

Data gathered are being processed right now. The two papers submitted to ECER 2013 about our project will be in charge of presenting the results and conclusions of the first phase of the inquiry. While this paper will focus on the results gathered from the Daily Log of the School Activity, the other will focus on the Social Network Analysis. Particularly, the discussion of such results pretend to broaden both our knowledge about the activities in which leadership is unfolded in school settings, and the people involved in such activities.

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Author Information

Julián López-Yáñez (presenting)

Universidad de Sevilla

Teaching and School Organization

Seville

María José Carrasco

Universidad de Huelva, Spain

Eduardo Garcia (presenting)

University of Seville

School of Education

Sevilla

Inmaculada Gómez-Hurtado

Universidad de Huelva, Spain

Inmaculada González-Falcón

Universidad de Huelva, Spain

Nieves Oliva

Universidad de Sevilla, Spain