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Leadership Distribution in Schools. The Evidence from Social Network Analysis

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Contribution

Leadership Distribution in Schools. The Evidence from Social Network Analysis

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).

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

The use of daily logs is being combined with an extensive social network analysis of most of the schools participants in the first phase of the inquiry. As well as the team led by James Spillane in the Northwestern University did, we have administered a School Social Network Questionnaire to the whole staff of the 39 schools that have accepted to participate in this stage of the inquiry (Pitts y Spillane, 2009). Data are being processed and analysed by means of UCINET/NETDRAW software. The social network of each school is being represented as of the responses of the participants selecting his/her preferred colleagues to address issues related to four domains: teaching, school management, social relationships at work, and social relationship regarding personal issues. Such methodology is interesting as the focus is projected over the informal relationships through which power and influence are exerted, letting emerge the central/peripheral role played by every member of the school community.

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 Social Network Analysis, the other will focus on the Daily Log of the School Activity. Particularly, the discussion of such results pretend to broaden our knowledge about the social nature of the leadership phenomenon as well as the power circulation dynamics into schools as organizations.

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