

# The integration of the functions of principals and deputy principals in the management of secondary schools

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## **Abstract**

*This paper presents and compares the results of two qualitative studies about leadership roles in secondary education. Both studies were conducted in the northwest of Mexico. The results show that in the first instance principals and deputy principals do not form work teams and show little concern for participation with one another. The functions of the deputy principals focus on the control of the institution, while the principals address the broader dimensions of administration, organization, social participation and pedagogy. This difference could lead to problems of sustainability of leadership because there is no platform for preparation and promotion. In addition, the absence of training programmes in Mexico limits the professionalisation of deputy principals. It is recommended that the functions performed by the principals and deputy principals be integrated.*

**Keywords:** *Sustainability of leadership; principal; deputy principal; school administration*

## **Introduction**

In the past the role of the deputy principal has been neglected (Marshall & Hooley, 2006) and there have been calls to redefine and clarify the position (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2012). There are at least three reasons why the role is critically important. The first reason is to plan for school succession. The deputy principal often becomes the principal and takes over leadership of the school. The learning experience as a deputy provides either good or bad preparation. The second reason to enhance the role of deputy principal is to create a collaborative team that will be able to improve instruction in the school. When leadership is solely concentrated in the hands of the principal, there is less possibility for change than when leadership is distributed through extended networks of collaboration that facilitate school improvement (Spillane, 2012). Spillane (2006) discusses distributed leadership as both an analytical lens and a desired practice. It goes beyond the heroic leadership of one person and acknowledges multiple sources of influence.

The third reason to revise the role of deputy principal is to promote social justice. To provide education to all groups in schools, principals, deputy principals, and teachers must critically reflect on their own practice in constant examination of how students are potentially marginalized or neglected (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2012).

This study investigates the extent to which deputy principals in Mexico are having experiences that would prepare them to become principals and the degree to which they are involved with the principal in plans to improve instruction. The objective of this study is to compare the functions reported by these administrators to determine the nature of the work that they do. Specifically, what do deputy principals report as their primary responsibilities and what do principals report as their primary responsibilities in the Mexican context?

## **Framework**

“Leadership can be defined as the set of processes that guide individuals and teams in a particular direction towards excellence and organisational learning, mainly without coercion” (Pozner, 2000, p. 9); however, these processes may have different orientations.

Educational leadership has been discussed from a wide variety of perspectives. Leithwood and Duke (1999), through an extensive literature review, identified six main perspectives from which school leadership is

addressed in the literature. The authors identify instructional leadership, focused on activities related to teaching and teaching support (Blase & Blase, 2003); contingent leadership, which concentrates on the attention of the context and situations in specific scenarios (Fiedler, 1967; House, 1996; Vroom & Jago, 1988); moral leadership, which is oriented toward value development (Quick & Normore, 2004; Brown, 2004); distributive leadership (Spillane, 2006) which promotes the sharing of decisions; and transformational leadership, which changes the motivation of the participants (Bass, 1985; Leithwood, 1992).

An emerging orientation in the study of leadership is the perspective of Hargreaves and Fink (2008) who develop the idea that to make substantial changes and maintain them, leadership must be sustainable in school, so that management practices and leadership styles that have been effective in specific contexts will be prolonged and sustained. For such sustainability to be possible, the actors must acquire a deep learning developed along with others and must make plans for the succession of leadership; both aspects are developed through distributed leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008).

Hargreaves and Fink (2007) point out that leadership sustainability is a difficult process that seldom succeeds, for it is common for charismatic leaders to be succeeded by leaders who are unable to sustain the momentum of improvement. The authors argue that a successful transfer of leadership involves, among other things, preparing for the transition in advance of the promotion and not at the last minute. The same may also be true of teachers. Marcelo (1995) described learning that teachers acquire before taking charge in the classroom. The experiences that teachers have before being responsible for a class of students offer them an initial understanding of what it means to be a teacher. This notion of learning the functions prior to occupying the position is transferable to the experience of school principals, who construct preconceptions about what it means to be a principal, as a result of the learning acquired by observing other principals in action.

### **The Mexican context**

In Mexico, compulsory elementary education has been public and free since 1917 (DOF, 1917). Presently, elementary education consists of preschool, primary, and secondary schools for students between 3 and 15 years of age. Secondary education includes students between 12 and 15 years of age. Classes are organized by subject.

There are two types of secondary schools in Mexico: the general secondary school offers education in the sciences and humanities; the technical school provides general education as well as subjects related to technology in order to develop students' skills to integrate into the field of work (Zorrilla, 2004).

In Mexican schools, students frequently attend either a morning shift from about 8:00 am-1:00 pm or an afternoon shift from about 2:00-7:00 pm. The management teams in both technical and general secondary schools are composed of the principal and a deputy principal for each shift. The principal constitutes the maximum authority of the school and has direct and immediate responsibility for its operation (DOF, 1982a, Art. 18; 1982b, Art. 18). Meanwhile, the deputy principal has the function of assisting the principal in the exercise of powers (DOF, 1982a, Art. 20; 1982b, Art. 20).

In 2013, a reform was approved in Mexico concerning the way in which teaching and management positions were assigned. The General Law of Professional Teacher Service (LGSP) (DOF, 2013) maintains the figure of the principal and one deputy principal; however, it refocused the work toward greater collaboration. The new description suggested that school principals perform the function more collaboratively and in interaction with the community.

According to the General Law of the Professional Teaching Service (DOF, 2013), staff with management functions carry out the planning, programming, coordination, execution and evaluation of operational tasks, in accordance with the applicable legal and administrative framework. They are responsible for generating a school environment conducive to learning; organizing, supporting and motivating teachers; and conducting

administrative activities effectively. They are also responsible for directing the processes of continuous improvement (DOF, 2013, Art. 4, Fracc. XXIII); promoting smooth communication with parents, guardians or other agents of community participation; and carrying out other tasks that are necessary to achieve the expected learning.

The Ministry of Education in Mexico has taken the position that the work of principals should be carried out as distributed leadership, which is used synonymously with the desired practice of shared leadership: that principals should be “involved in pedagogical work and in promotion of collaboration and professional exchange between teachers” (SEP, 2002, p. 26), and they are “to assume shared leadership, to resolve interpersonal conflicts through negotiation and agreement, to develop a strategic vision and to lead the planning, control and evaluation of educational processes” (SEP, 2008, p. 13).

### **Functions of Mexican deputy principals**

In Mexico, the study of educational management has focused exclusively on the principalship rather than on inventorying the functions performed by other school administrators (Navarro-Corona, 2015). In this regard, educational management is usually approached as the set of actions that are put into practice to run the school. Antúnez (2000), Antúnez and Gairín (2000), Bocanegra, Gómez, González and Sánchez (2001), and Elizondo (2001) agree that the principal influences the behaviour of the members of the school. They argue that the leadership of the principal should be collective in nature and always developed for the benefit of students.

The work of the principal has been described by several Spanish speaking authors. Bocanegra et al. (2001) and Sandoval (2002), as well as institutions such as the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education in Mexico (INEE, 2008) and the National Pedagogical University (UPN, 2003), have identified the work of principals as composed of several dimensions, such as pedagogical, organisational, social-community and administrative. Bocanegra et al. (2001) identified four dimensions of the principal’s role: administrative, pedagogical, political, and social-community. Sandoval (2002) agrees with Bocanegra and others in the description of these dimensions. These authors do not explain the order of exposure of these dimensions, but they do indicate that the work of the school principals demands mainly administrative tasks.

The first is the administrative dimension, which is related to the organization and management of material, personnel and financial resources that allow the educational institution to operate on a daily basis and offer a service. It includes activities such as the management of reports, inventories of books and classroom materials, records, statistics, control of information and documentation of students and school personnel.

The second dimension is pedagogical. It refers to academic activities that are directly related to student learning. These include teacher meetings, development of support programmes, selection of curricular materials, and professional development.

A third dimension is disciplinary. Limits are established in the formal and informal relations that are drawn by means of rules assumed by the members of the community (Bocanegra et al., 2001). Written and unwritten rules regulate the relationships among the members of a community.

A fourth dimension is social-community, which promotes the integration of the community into the life of the school, through the integration of parents with educational, civic, and social activities. The representation of the school in civic events and the establishment of links with other institutions are activities that are also part of this dimension. Bocanegra et al. (2001) argue that there is a need for the school to be projected into and related to the community. The many problems that may exist within the school can be addressed through the collaboration of teachers and the community in a relevant and profitable way.

At the same time, the study of the functions of deputy principals is relatively new and there were no works in Spanish that addressed it. The inventories of tasks and functions began to be shaped in the 1970s by the research of Austin and Brown (1970) and continued in the following decades with works by Reed and Himmler (1985), Reed and Connors (1982), Glanz (1994), Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary and Donaldson (2002), Johnson (2004), and Kwan (2009), to name a few.

These inventories showed the work of the deputy principal to be focused on student discipline, operational aspects of the school, organization of the classroom and conducting meetings (Reed & Himmler, 1985; Reed & Connors, 1982; Housman et al., 2002; Johnson, 2004). All of these authors came to the conclusion that the tasks performed by the deputy principals do not appear to be clearly defined, but are highly dependent on the principals' dispositions. In addition, they concluded that deputy principals have little involvement in making important decisions for schools.

### Methodology

This paper compares the activities reported by secondary school principals and deputy principals in Mexico. Results were obtained from two independent studies carried out between 2008 and 2014 (Navarro-Corona, 2010; Navarro-Corona, 2015) on the managerial functions performed in secondary schools in a district of northwest Mexico. Although the studies were independent of each other, both asked participants to report the activities or functions they performed, and this enables a comparison between the two.

According to Collier (1992), comparison is a fundamental technique of analysis that enables researchers to sharpen the level of description beyond the analysis of cases in isolation. While comparative methods have typically been developed in policy study and in international case studies, the application of their techniques is not limited to these areas. As a research method, comparison has the purpose of evaluating and contrasting hypotheses; however, the applications of comparison in research are diverse (Collier, 1992; Lazo, 2004; Morlino, 2014).

The present study compares the functions reported by secondary principals and deputy principals in two studies conducted independently. This comparison can help identify whether the position of deputy principal serves as a preparation for the role of school principal.

Table 1: Similarities between the two studies

	Study 1	Study 2
Concept of analysis	Functions of the principal's position	Functions of the deputy principal's position
Location	Northeast Mexico	Northeast Mexico
Educational level	Secondary education	Secondary education
Methodological perspective	Qualitative	Qualitative
Number of participants	Four	Four
Years of experience	More than 30 years of service	More than 30 years of service
Type of data collection	Interview	Interview
Type of analysis	Categorical	Categorical
Analytical logic	Deductive with emerging categories	Inductive

According to Lijphart (1975), comparison studies have important limitations that may affect the validity of the results. Contexts differ according to history, geography, and characteristics of the participants. Collier (1992) proposes different solutions. One of these is the concentration of comparable cases that are harmonized by their characteristics. Cases that are similar are selected and similarity is defined based on criteria. According to the definition of similarity, the number of cases that meet the criteria may be limited. For the present comparison, the selection criteria were based on methodological similarity. Table 1 shows the characteristics of both studies.

There are also differences between the two studies; each has peculiarities according to the general objectives that were established. However, they have a common methodological framework and report on secondary education in the same state in Mexico. These commonalities allow a comparison of the results about the principals' functions.

The characteristics of the areas around the schools were varied. Three types of school were found. Three schools were located in rural areas with less than 10,000 inhabitants, where parents and students engaged in agricultural activities; students moved freely through the streets. Five schools were located in towns with a little more than 400,000 inhabitants, in urban upper middle class areas. Two of these schools received a large number of migrant students, mainly from China, who were newcomers to the city; the educational system concentrated them in attendance zones. Two schools were located in towns with more than one million people, in poor areas of the city that had running water and electricity but no paved streets. Schools located in these areas had better infrastructure than students had in their homes.

The first study, "Characterization of the path of teachers of state secondary schools to reach a managerial position: Conditions, implications and learning" (Navarro-Corona, 2010), examined the roles of school principals. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four principals who were identified for their reputation as a good principal, as determined by inspectors.

All four principals had worked for more than 30 years in the Mexican educational system, with an average of three years in the position of principal, and had studied at the Normal School, the institution in charge of training teachers in Mexico. Three had an additional bachelor's degree in another career, and three a master's degree in pedagogy.

Principals who participated in the study directed general secondary schools in urban areas; mostly in areas of poverty. Each high school served between three and five groups for each grade that ranged from 300 to 600 students.

The method was developed in four phases: (1) Acquisition of conceptual and contextual tools related to school management. In this phase, the different dimensions of school management that the studies reported and information about the functioning of the Mexican Educational System were reviewed. (2) Entry into the field and identification of participants in which seven secondary school principals were selected based on the reputation of their performance. (3) Realization of the fieldwork through in-depth interviews lasting approximately one and a half hours. Interviews were transcribed in full and analysis carried out. (4) Analysis of results using the technique of categorical analysis with interpretive orientation. The analysis was based on the dimensions of school management identified in the literature and integrated functions that emerged in the interviews. In addition, questions that confirmed the emerging information identified in the analysis, in search of the saturation of emergent categories, according to the recommendations of Strauss and Corbin (2002), were incorporated into the field. (5) Finally, the results were validated through the presentation of conclusions to a prestigious educational authority in the regional system of education and inspectors.

The second study, "The precursors to the ascent to principal: Career trajectories of Mexican secondary school principals" (Navarro-Corona, 2015), focused on the role of secondary school deputy

principals. Four deputy principals who were about to become principals participated in the study. All had more than 30 years of service in the Mexican educational system. Three had three years' experience in the position and one had 11 years as deputy principal.

The deputy principals worked in technical and general secondary schools located in rural, urban and high poverty urban areas. The size of the schools was also between three and five groups for each grade level.

In-depth interviews were conducted with deputy principals at secondary schools who were about to complete their deputy principal role and move to the position of principal. There were five methodological phases: (1) Documentary review with the purpose of identifying studies on the deputy principal. (2) Selection of participants and entry into the field: the five deputy principals who were to be promoted that school year were invited; four accepted. (3) Instrument design: a battery of interviews was generated with three scripts with specific objectives. The functions of the deputy principal were investigated in the second script. Subsequently, a fourth interview was held with each deputy principal to corroborate the data and seek the saturation of the categories. (4) Collection of information through in-depth interviews. Each interview had an average duration of two hours. All interviews were transcribed in their entirety. (5) Analysis of information by categorical analysis with content analysis orientation. In this phase open codes were established that were subsequently categorized and related, according to the Strauss and Corbin (2002) approach. (5) Finally, an educational authority and a school principal were consulted to verify the plausibility of the findings.

## Results

This section summarizes the results of both studies regarding the activities that the principals and deputy principals reported in relation to their role.

### *Dimensions of the principal's role*

Five dimensions of the management function were identified. The integration of the dimensions was based on the work of Bocanegra et al. (2001), INEE (2008) and UPN (2003), but the dimensions that were incorporated in the final model were selected from the information reported by the interviewees. Not all the dimensions of the research were identified in the interviews. Table 2 shows the categories that were identified in the data. Subsequently, each of these is detailed.

Table 2: Dimensions identified from the information of the principals

	Code	Reference
Actions realized during the work of the principal	1) Administrative	Bocanegra et al (2001), Sandoval (2002), UPN (2003)
	2) Organisational	UPN (2003)
	3) Social participation.	Bocanegra et al (2001), Sandoval (2001), UPN, (2003)
	4) Pedagogical	Bocanegra et al (2001).
	5) Disciplinary	Emergent.

Source: Elaboración propia a partir de (Navarro-Corona, 2010).

The principals described their activities in terms of the administrative dimension. The administrative dimension refers mainly to activities of management of material, personnel and financial resources (Bocanegra et al., 2001). The interviewees reported the administration and control of documents and reports.

The principals mentioned that the organisational dimension includes the set of activities that are carried out for the governance of the school (INEE, 2008). The principals reported the organization of activities and the allocation of commissions between the teachers and the general management of the staff. These commissions are special assignments for teachers. Generally, a commission does not imply an additional payment, but the commissioned teacher assumes all the responsibilities of the position. For example, a teacher can be commissioned as a principal. This implies assumption of the responsibility of the campus, but not the pay as principal. A teacher can also be commissioned to prepare a special event or festival.

Principals were extensively involved in pedagogy. The pedagogical dimension includes activities that they perform to coordinate the development of support programmes, academic events, promotion of knowledge and use of the plan and curricula (Bocanegra et al., 2001). In this regard, the principals mentioned as their main activity the informal training of teachers through didactic and pedagogical orientations. This was the only dimension in which the interviewees emphasized that, in order to fulfill the functions, it was indispensable to have experience as a teacher.

A large part of the principal's role was related to the social participation dimension, which includes the activities to connect the school to the community, such as the municipal authorities, the neighbours and the parents themselves (Bocanegra et al., 2001). However, this is an empty category according to the results of the interviews, because in this respect, principals report only their relationship with the parents, an activity that is usually associated with the control of students' behaviour and not the establishment of a relationship with the community.

The disciplinary dimension appears as an emergent dimension of the functions reported by the interviewees. Participating principals commented that their participation in behavioural correction of students is the last step of a process that begins with actors closer to the student, such as the teacher. In the report on activities of this dimension, mention was made of the participation of the deputy principals.

### *Scope of the deputy principal's role*

In the review of the literature, no studies in Mexico were identified that would classify the activities of the deputy principals; however, in the U.S. authors agreed that the role of deputy principal is usually one of control within schools (Glanz, 1994; Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Kwan, 2009). This study confirmed the same orientation toward control in Mexico. Four main themes emerged from the transcripts, which all connect with control in four different areas.

The first area that deputy principals were concerned about was student control. The activities reported by the deputy principals were mainly for student discipline, meeting with parents to discuss misconduct, attendance and compliance with the schedule. The second area addressed the functions of control of personnel. They were concentrated in the granting of permission for teachers to enter and leave the campus and observation of teachers' classes. The third area referred to assurance of the continuity of the service. These were activities related to the care of people outside the school, the search for substitute teachers or the replacement of the missing teachers themselves, instructions to work for the staff and substitution of principal in case of absence. Finally, they were responsible for supervision of the conditions of the campus. They opened the premises and supervised the cleaning of classrooms and external areas.

Table 3: Matrix for comparing dimensions of the principal's and the deputy principal's work

Dimension	Activities of the principal	Fields	Activities of the deputy principal
<i>Administrative</i>	Control and management of income. Control and management of documents, records and procedures. Management of campus improvement.		
<i>Organisational</i>	Staff coordination Establishment of objectives. Assignment of special tasks to teachers. Establish a link between school personnel and the Mexican educational system.	<i>Supervision of plant conditions</i>	Open the campus, classrooms and offices. Supervise the cleanliness of the grounds in general. Supervise the cleanliness of the classrooms.
<i>Social participation</i>	Establishing links between the school and parents to solve problems. Representation of the school at external events.		
<i>Pedagogical</i>	Motivation and development of faculty.		
<i>Disciplinary</i>	Correct and sanction the behavior of employees and students in advanced stages of the disciplinary process.	<i>Supervision of students</i>	Address discipline cases. Attend to parents due to student discipline. Supervise the comportment of students. Supervise attendance in the classroom by the students. Verify that students meet their schedule.
		<i>Supervision of teachers</i>	Monitor attendance of teachers in the classroom. Verify compliance with the schedule. Monitor teacher classes.

Source: The elaboration is based on Navarro-Corona (2010) and Navarro-Corona (2015).

### Comparison

This section establishes relationships between the reported functions. After the functions of the post were identified by the principals and deputy principals in the independent studies, a classification matrix was constructed in which the general areas and the specific functions reported by the participants were integrated (see Table 3).

The comparison of the functions carried out by the principals and deputy principals presents two different fields of work that are weakly connected. The participation of the deputy principals was limited and not well-integrated.

### Conclusions

Although, according to the Mexican regulations, secondary school management must function as teamwork, the comparison of the reports of functions made by both principals and deputy principals does not show collaboration between the positions for the development of management from an integrative perspective. Only the correction of student behaviour is mentioned as a dimension in which both the principal and the deputy principal participate.

The results of the deputy principal study show that the main function is control and assurance of service. This conclusion in Mexico is consistent with studies carried out in other countries such as the United States (Hausman, et al, 2002; Johnson, 2004) and Japan (Kwan, 2009). Principals do not show evidence of joint work with the deputy principal, a conclusion that also mirrors the literature reviewed.

These conclusions, coupled with concept of leadership sustainability and school change, allow us to hypothesize that changes are difficult to establish in schools and that the efforts made by those who are leaders of educational programmes come to an end after they withdraw from schools. To install a substantial and sustainable change in the school, requires changes in practice that allow the consolidation of cultures of work based on collaboration and exchange, in the assumption of joint responsibilities that allow the sustainability of improvement.

We recommend greater integration between the functions performed by the principals and deputy principals so that they do not operate in two independent fields of work but function as an integrated team that defines a path for the institution. In its current form, the work of the deputy principal is not a platform for preparation for promotion, which, coupled with the absence of training programmes in the country that prepare for the posts, limits the professionalization of these educators.

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