

The Challenge of Leading Teacher Peers: Towards the Characterization of Middle Leadership and the Relevance of Tolerance and Freedom in a Literacy Program¹.

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Abstract

Nowadays, a large part of teacher leadership studies have been focused mainly on the principal as a key factor in the results of students' success. Nevertheless, some recent literature is available that discusses other faculty members who without leaving their classroom responsibilities, assume distinct directive responsibilities on an intermediate level. This article explores some of the salient characteristics that distinguish the leadership of teachers in charge of other teachers, and discusses in particular the importance of tolerance and freedom. The text gives some clues about the process in which teachers feel challenged when they undertake the responsibility for an educational improvement project, being in charge of their peers, but without the managerial authority to exercise the influence over them. The evidence presented corresponds to the findings from a case study conducted on the topic of middle leadership from a group who coordinate a program to improve education in the area of language, in socially at risk schools in the Bío Bío region of Chile. The results of the study show among other aspects that both coordinators and peer educators agree that a necessary condition that characterizes middle leadership is to allow group members certain levels of initiative, decision making, and action in their tasks in the program.

Key words

Distributed leadership, middle leadership, instructional leadership, school improvement.

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The Leadership of Teachers in charge of their Peers

A new trend has emerged in the study of school leadership which has called the attention of new research. This distributed perspective focuses the interest on one specific source from those centered on the figure of the principal (Supovitz, Sirinides y May, 2010). Actually, the study focuses on the influence that the teachers have over their peers, which is not always under the authority of a formal position.

Nowadays, teachers have begun to take on additional responsibilities and tasks other than their traditional classroom duties (Danielson, 2006) in a variety of contexts. The experience of the educational reform in the United Kingdom, Webb (2005) highlights that the increase of duties of principals has led them to delegate responsibilities to other teachers who then function as substitute principals, Senior Management Teams (SMTs), and curriculum coordinators. This transformation of responsibility has led to the creation of new midlevel managerial positions, suggesting that department heads that perform as leaders of every subject, are practicing distributed leadership (Harris, 2003).

It has been established that leadership among teachers can be more varied than that of the principal, with respect to form and function (Leithwood, 2009) as similarly delegated tasks from senior management teams. The faculty can perform a series of functions and assignments in parallel to their classroom duties, such as: head teacher, department head, special program coordinator, or mentor. Moreover, it is possible to assume additional activities, such as those that are connected to the representation of the school through decision making at the district or school subunits (Cooper, 1993 en Leithwood, 2009). However, it has been recognized that teachers can also perform important roles in motivating the professional growth of their colleagues (Wasley, 1991), acting in their defense (Bascia, 1997) and ensuring better decision-making (Malen et al, 1990). It has also been recognized that teachers can perform more informally, which means they can exercise influence over various tasks that are generally related to support work in professional learning communities, such as change initiatives in the school (Grossman et al, 2001; Wolf et al, 2000 en Leithwood, 2009).

The distribution perspective of leadership has been the object of research principally by James Spillane and collaborators (2006). In Chile, there is significant evidence that has shown how the leadership of the principal is a factor that indirectly influences on the collective efficacy of teachers and indirectly on the outcome of high school students (Volante, 2010). According to these findings, the concept of leadership does not emerge from a title, or a formal responsibility, but from the interactions between individuals, tasks, and situations. In fact, available studies regarding faculty leadership towards their peers has recognized the relevance of collaborative interactions involving teaching topics, as with learning and the development of instructional advice networks, as key aspects (Supovitz, Sirinides y May, 2010). Therefore, discussions related to professional work among teachers, such as building relationships and collaboration, has been researched (York-Barr y Duke, 2004). Similarly, Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2010) point out other studies that have emerged from the interaction of faculty peers, as those of collaboration, the collegiate factor, and the importance of trust between teacher and teacher (Bryk y Schneider, 2002).

One of the key strategies of influence among teachers is peer training, as the observation of one another, as well as the analysis of class work, which provide essential elements to observe this influence. It is established that another form of incidence between faculty leaders and their peers is through seeking instructional advice through social networks (Supovitz, 2008) and the relationship between communicative and behavioral patterns.

Although these strategies can be diverse, the influence of these actors is principally centered in the task of education: teaching and learning. Therefore, the leadership practices of these teachers are primarily related to a more instructional type. While there is no consensus on a particular leading style in educational settings, the model of instructional leadership has been promoted unlike other styles such as transformational and transactional, due in part to a focus directed more to the core of educational duties: that is teaching and learning, in addition to its impact on school achievements. Robinson et al (2008) concluded that the effect of instructional leadership on school performance was three or four times higher than transformational leadership and greater than other leadership styles.

Therefore, the influence of these teachers is related to instructional practices, focused on teaching and learning as well as in the behavior of the teachers when they work with students. Accordingly, the influence of the leaders is centered on the student's learning through the faculty. Bush (2008) shows that the emphasis is placed on the impact and direction more than in the process of influence itself. Robinson (2010) defines instructional leadership as those sets of practices that involve planning, evaluation, coordination, and improvement of teaching and learning. Some authors have called this particular style, "learning-centered leadership" (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot y Cravens, 2009; en Robinson, 2010).

Most studies conducted on the topic of leadership among teachers are qualitative, characterized by a direct approach of those involved, emphasizing the study of beliefs and attitudes related to the possibilities and obstacles in inserting influence among teachers. Descriptive in nature, research dealing with the study of teacher leadership among their peers is based on case studies (Yin, 2003), considering focus group and ethnographic techniques of data collection methods such as: interviews, semi-structured questionnaires, and field notes. In some studies (Supovitz, Sirinides y May, 2010) there is the use of interviews following the protocol developed based on existing leadership research, and literature related to school improvement (Muijs and Harris, 2003). Other points of interest that have been addressed in the research has been the analysis of materials in portfolios as evidence of activities, and the data collection impact in classrooms, such as the student work, school newsletters, course materials, and assessments.

The Leadership of Teachers in Middle Management Positions

As mentioned before, teachers have begun to take on a series of different tasks in their typical classroom duties (Danielson, 2006). It is known that teachers in primary education frequently make use of some kind of middle leadership in at least one of the curriculum's areas (Hammersley-Fletcher y Krikham, 2007). Additionally, studies indicate that a major part of the coordination work of teaching-learning process works at a middle organizational level in schools (Fitzgerald, 2002). However, a few years ago the literature overlooked the crucial role of teachers in middle

management positions, without noting the relevance of exercising leadership among peers in order to ensure the development of curriculum, evaluate programs, and other faculty.

Following the traditional organizational model in schools, the principal together with the faculty management team is the main leader of the institution. On another level, the responsibility for the direct professional leadership (instructional or curricular) is delegated to middle management positions (Cardno, 1995 en Fitzgerald, 2002). There is no further evidence about who these middle managers are with regard to their characterization, role, and responsibilities (McMahon & Bolam, 1990; McLendon & Crowther, 1998 en Fitzgerald, 2002). A large part of teachers in middle management positions report feeling in an unspecified situation since they are not a part of the senior management staff nor are they just classroom teachers. In fact, their role is barely understood (Turner, 1996; Blandford, 1997; McLendon & Crowther, 1998 en Fitzgerald, 2002).

Even though the literature related to the roles of this type of position is dispersed, it is known that the job they perform is naturally two-fold, assuming many administrative functions within the school in addition to classroom responsibilities. While there is not a precise and unambiguous definition that explains who the middle leaders are and their characterization (York-Barr y Duke, 2004), available studies reveal their importance as a bridge between higher management and their teacher peers.

Some Teacher Functions in Middle Leadership

Leaders with middle management responsibilities tend to be professionals whose relevance, in general, is not always advertised in schools, just as Moore (2007) characterized in his description of them as “unsung heroes”. These leaders support the link between the higher management and their colleagues, assuring that the general school’s policies and the planning are implemented in the classrooms. Thusly, these teachers become just as much drivers of discussions as interpreters of decisions taken by upper management.

One of the most criticized challenges that these teachers face, according to Fitzgerald (2002), is dedicating themselves to education as well being in charge of a group of people. It is suggested that if schools want their middle leaders to perform their tasks effectively, then there must be some investment in professional development.

The same authors emphasize the recommendation of the McKinsey report (2007) on the importance of hiring the right staff with appropriate skills to become effective school leaders. It is established that against the background of the reforms, leadership as a distributed concept has become an influential concept; however, the rhetoric of this is difficult to be implemented in the political and cultural reality of the school. It has been presented that the difficulty of the limits of leadership in terms of which individuals, or groups, should be involved in an organization is an issue, considering the distributed leadership as more than a role, but a behavior (Harris, 2003). Therefore, to determine who is the most appropriate person is to take on intermediate responsibilities turns out to be a challenge. Although the literature presents some background with regard to the functions that these leaders perform, there is not much evidence to support its characterization.

A Case Study in Middle Leadership and the Relevance of Tolerance and Freedom

As mentioned before, one of the main challenges that teachers may face is to combine the usual teaching activities with new management duties effectively, demanding professional development (Fitzgerald, 2002). Sometimes, they may have the formal authority, the particular working position to organize and require different sorts of tasks from their peer teachers, but this does not imply mechanical collaborative interaction. They may have the formal or even informal responsibility for educational improvement, but no managerial authority to exercise that influence over their peers. In fact, collaboration comes out as a result of the particular influence the teacher leader may perform, recognized as leadership and being a key factor to achieve common goals (Supovitz, Sirinides y May, 2010).

According to the information presented, and particularly inspired by the studies done by Ault (2009) that revealed four important characteristics seen in faculty leaders working as literacy specialists, a new research was made. The author highlights the ability to build personal relationships (Consideration) willingness to accept responsibility through their leadership responsibility by working with their peers and in that way achieve high standards (Initiation Structure) problem solving skills in conflict situations (Application for Reconciliation), and the desire to share leadership with faculty peers (Tolerance and Freedom). This last feature, linked to the distributed leadership perspective, seems to have particular relevance to the practice of teacher leadership in middle management positions.

Rationale for the Current Study

The current study is exploratory and qualitative and was designed to understand and characterize the type of influence exerted by the role of middle leaders, teachers who are responsible for the coordination of a literacy program at schools, in order to improve language learning in Preschool and Primary education. The innovation program implemented in the schools and considered for this study is focused on the development of reading and writing skills. To ensure the sustainability of the intervention in the schools, a cornerstone of the program is the professional development of coordinators at each institution. These coordinators are trained in instructional coaching skills to enable them to influence the performance of other teachers in the school. The study explores the type of influence that these teachers in charge of the literacy program developed and how they influenced their peers focusing on learning improvement.

Method

Sample

The research was conducted in six schools in the Bío Bío region of Chile, under the sponsorship of the Chilean National Funds of Science and Technology (FONDECYT, N° 19095170 Villalon, et. al). These public schools, located in urban areas, mainly in the town of Talcahuano, offer Preschool and Primary education to approximately 320 students with an average of 24 students per class. These schools are formally identified as socially at risk student institutions, presenting difficulties in

consistently obtaining good results in national standardized measurements. In order to overcome the shortcomings, schools participating in the program AILEM, Early Education Program for Reading, Writing, and Math were run by the Faculty of Education at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

The unit of analysis referred to in this study are those teachers who have middle leadership roles in the improvement of the teaching of literacy. Two teachers with formal responsibilities were considered, such as the head of UTP (the technical department in charge of all pedagogical matters in a school), however there were also another four teachers assigned as heads of an improvement project, such as project coordinators of the AILEM project. These teachers were selected under different criteria, considering teaching experience and expertise, good interpersonal relationships and a particular interest for school improvement and commitment. The research also considered 19 teachers who were under the coordination of teachers in charge of the project.

Measures

Data collection was conducted through various instruments and procedures, including some questionnaires to get some primary information from teacher coordinators as well as peers as well. These questionnaires included a series of subscales that group together distinct items that refer to various characteristics. The instruments used corresponded to the translated version of the original LBDQ format (Ohio University, 1963) twelfth edition, developed to study peer perceptions and self-evaluation of the leadership of those in charge of a group of people. It included a series of leadership factors on the basis of the results of empirical research. The twelfth version of the LBDQ questionnaire includes various subscales composed of five to ten items. The subscales are:

1. **Representation:** This subscale groups 5 items that refer to speaking and acting as the representative of the group.
2. **Demand Reconciliation:** Subscales that include 5 items and are related to conflict resolution and reconciliation, reducing the clutter in the system.
3. **Tolerance for Uncertainty:** This subscale includes 10 items, and refers to being able to tolerate uncertainty and the ability to postpone something without anxiety, or anger.
4. **Persuasiveness:** With 10 items, this subscale refers to the use of persuasion and argument in an effective way, demonstrating strong convictions.
5. **Initiation of Structure:** Subscales that include 10 items, and is related to the clear definition of the self role, making it clear what is expected from each member of the group.
6. **Tolerance and Freedom:** This subscale includes 10 items and refers to allowing group members levels of initiative, decision making, and action.
7. **Role Assumption:** With 10 items, this subscale includes the active practice of the leadership role without allowing others to take the lead.

8. **Consideration:** Subscale with 10 items referring to the comfort, welfare, status, and contribution of group members.
9. **Production Emphasis:** With 10 items, this subscale refers to the pressure asserted in order to obtain productive results.
10. **Predictive Accuracy:** This subscale includes 5 items and refers to the ability to visualize and predict outcomes in a rigorous way.
11. **Integration:** A 5 item subscale referring to the maintenance of the unification of the organization and resolution of conflicts among its members.
12. **Superior Orientation:** Under this subscale are 10 grouped items that relate to maintaining cordial relations with superiors, showing influence over them, and pushing themselves for a higher status.

Data collection for this study also included observation notes and semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis

As for analysis techniques, the research looked at the analysis of content, through a process of categorization and triangulation of data. The focus of content analysis was aimed at identifying the characteristics of leadership of those in charge of the improvement program. Through semi-structured interviews, we obtained a new point of triangulation with the data already obtained in the questionnaires, allowing for the inquiry about the types of organizational contexts where the main features identified originated and are developed. The study also included a relational analysis that allowed relating the perceptions of respondents with the elements of the organizations in which they work. This type of analysis was based on two central ideas: one whose focus is based on the organization and individual, and another considering perceptions of costs and benefits outlined from the role of the AILEM coordinator, as the middle leader.

Results

As previously mentioned, this case study is aimed at characterizing the leadership from those teachers responsible for a literacy improvement program at socially at risk schools in the BíoBío region, south of Chile. Although, the teachers who were selected to be responsible for the program at the schools under the name of “teacher coordinators”, were given the formal position, their authority and capacity to influence was not conferred per se. Therefore, these teachers were challenged to reach that authority not just given by their managerial position but rather from their capacity to exercise influence over their peers.

Some primary information about the main leadership characteristics of these coordinator teachers was revealed through different questionnaires. This data was considered preliminary information and showed a general tendency in relation to what characterizes the leadership of those teachers responsible of middle managerial tasks. From this perspective, the subscales that showed the highest score in both types of questionnaires administered were those related to Representation,

Integration, and Tolerance and Freedom. These subscales were described as the ability to represent others, the maintenance of the unification of the organization and resolution of conflicts among its members, and to allow members of the group, levels of initiative, decision and action respectively, in teachers in midlevel managerial positions. The results in the questionnaires administered to faculty peers found that the subscale, Representation, and Tolerance and Freedom obtained the highest scores. Moreover, the subscales with highest scores from the questionnaires given to the participating faculty leaders were Integration and coincidentally Tolerance and Freedom.

In fact, among the 12 subscales that describe the practice of leadership, Tolerance, and Freedom appear as that which is perceived as more recurring for peer teachers, as well as for the same professors working under them. Then, there is a general tendency that reveals the importance that these leaders have for leadership practices related to the openness of initiative and actions, such as "Allow the members freely realize their work", "Allow the members conduct their job the way they think best", "Promote initiative in group members", as well as "Assuring myself that my position in the group is understood by the other group members" and "I allow the group a high level of initiative" (LBDQ format, Ohio University, 1963).

A key finding for the characterization of teacher leadership responsible for a literacy improvement program is the importance of expert knowledge, skills and values, as defined by Muijs and Harris (2006) as relevant in middle leadership. This finding was the result of content analysis of the data derived from observation notes and interviews that allowed collecting more information and delving deeper into the knowledge of the leadership characteristics of these teachers.

The study reveals not only the importance of knowledge expertise but also the relevance of the know how closely related to the experience of these teachers who are also working inside classrooms. In fact, the know how is distinguished as an important issue, considered to be a benefit that is highlighted by teacher peers, principals as well as the teacher coordinators themselves.

"The teacher states her interest for the program and highlights the importance of the teacher training as a benefit"

(Observation Note N°15)

"...The project has allowed the access to several beneficial learning opportunities for teachers, among the training offered."

(Observation Note N°17)

They value specific expertise in literacy strategies as a result of their long working experience, as well as the access to particular training and opportunities for personal and professional development in this field. This finding is also supported by Bennet et al (2003) from the National College of School Leadership, stating that the authority of these teachers in middle managerial positions is derived from content and expert knowledge, whose base is leading from the example. Furthermore, content knowledge is also identified as a key capability for instructional leadership, revealing the relevance of its influence when teaching and learning (Robinson, 2010). According to

Muijs and Harris (2003) middle leaders reveal the need of credibility among their peers, due to the different roles they play, such as mentor and supervisor for teachers that just start their careers and for those ones with more experience.

“...A teacher coordinator...I think she is very necessary because she is an example as a teacher when working...she is an authority for her peers having a classroom model...”

(Observation Note N°19)

The results of the content analysis and interview notes also revealed the perceived importance of other aspects such as self-efficacy. This concept was introduced by Bandura (1977) and highlighted by Leithwood (2009) as the individual teaching efficacy, explained as a teacher emotion that has meaningful consequences in school improvement. The same author defined it as: *“The capacity that a teacher thinks he/she has to improve students learning”* (Leithwood, 2009:177). The data of this case study reveal that self efficacy is present in most of the teachers leading the literacy program, perceiving themselves as such when facing different tasks and focused on results.

“...I have to see the effects and have results in everything I work for. These expectations are transferred, I don't know how but things are transferred to some teachers, taking care of things so they work well and having good results...”

(Interview N°3)

According to observation notes and interviews, these teachers are recognized to have good results not only from their peers but also from the different school authorities as well as the whole community. Accordingly, the study reports that most of teacher peers recognize the skills and expert knowledge in the literacy program coordinator, necessary elements to lead the activities they carry out.

“...I think she has a fundamental role...mainly because she is 100% involved (the literacy coordinator) and she knows what she is talking about, she applies what she says to the kids, so she is a help...for me at least, she has been a huge support...because I can talk to her, telling her the things I need, guiding my work in case I am wrong...”

(Interview N°1)

From the organization perspective, having a skillful coordinator with the necessary expertise and good results is seen as a benefit for the institution. As a matter of fact, the leadership performed under the competent authority of a teacher is perceived as essential to give the proper support for the literacy improvement program, combining these tasks with usual classroom activities.

“An outstanding aspect is training to learn what to observe. There are different activities in the program such as sharing reading, evaluation...training and the support of university professors at school have been a great”

(Observation Note N°1)

“The principal highlights the opportunity for training as a benefit at school as well as for every single teacher”

(Observation Note N°2)

Showing competence and expertise by means of good results allow the leader not only modeling teaching but also providing the necessary trust teacher peers need to believe that goals are possible to reach. In fact, this is possible due to their own experience and good results as successful classroom teachers.

“...When she talks, she does it from her own experience, I would say the program coordinator has a lot of experience, considering young and old children...I would say she knows how to work with every class and that is because she has been teaching in all those levels and she has also been under permanent training...so if she says something, she definitely does it having reasons due to she has had the experience...so if she recommends something it is because it works...”

(Interview N°8)

But expertise is not enough to influence others, the analysis shows the importance of generating relational trust and being recognized by others as people able to rely on, being a key characteristic. Teacher peers recognize the value of relational trust as the capacity of the literacy program coordinators to believe they can be successful and that everyone does what it was requested.

“...She knows how to say the things, for example, we all have an informal way to talk to her but bearing in mind she is our head and if she says something to us, that is an order, in other words, we know we have to do it...from this point of view, it is the trust we have with each other to say the things as they are, without too much wandering around...she is the person in charge, very demanding but at the same time very sweet...”

(Interview N°6)

“...She is always offering help in case someone does not understand... she gives us advice to do things...she trusts we can do the work well...”

(Interview N°7)

Relational trust has been identified as one of the main instructional leadership capabilities as well as content knowledge and problem solving by Robinson (2010) when influencing others to reach common goals. This particular finding is relevant due to the fact that it coincides with the data derived from questionnaires administered; both teacher coordinators and peer teachers recognize the importance of relational trust as a key leadership characteristic when the necessary influence is needed to achieve collaborative interaction.

According to a case study conducted by Ault (2009), some important characteristics perceived in middle leaders working as literacy experts are the skills to build personal relationships (Consideration), willingness to accept their responsibility through peer work to reach high

standards (Initiation of Structure), abilities to solve problems (Demand of Reconciliation) and finally the will to share initiatives and leadership with peer teachers (Tolerance and Freedom).

This case study reveals that through the entire analysis, taking into account questionnaires, observation notes and interviews, Tolerance and Freedom appear as a relevant leadership characteristic as perceived by both teachers in charge of the literacy program and their peers. In fact, the teacher coordinators themselves highlighted the relevance of Tolerance and Freedom as a professional must, requesting high levels of autonomy from teacher peers.

“...I have learned through time that, in my experience, tolerance is really important. Regarding my own work, I work with people and teachers, from whom I have to expect a lot, have lots of patience, and have results. It is a bit tiring but honestly, one gets used to a way of working, whereas tolerance is a must when working among adults. There are processes, and some of them are longer than others in some people. This issue has made me grow up, respecting others time. For some people, some things are harder than others, there are people that are faster for changes and processes but not all of them. Some others are slower...and this is part of life, it is part of what I was assigned and I have been doing...it is difficult that everyone can work on the project but at the end you realize that everyone must feel responsible for their own work. I can do many things but at the end, everybody must face his responsibility as a professional.”

(Interview N°3)

The importance of this feature is also connected with the higher degree of professional commitment that may be promoted. In spite of the fact of the difficulties faced as a consequence of not having enough time or definite working conditions to carry out multiple activities, personal commitment is seen as a key leadership characteristic.

“...I think a stronger commitment from teachers comes up when you are not pressing them, so they have the freedom to work inside the classroom without our permanent reminders.”

(Interview N°4)

Not only have the literacy program coordinators themselves stated the importance of Tolerance and Freedom but also their own peers. Tolerance and Freedom is seen as a sign of trust and concern, an outstanding characteristic that recognizes work is being done well, favoring initiative and participation.

“...She is always asking about our doubts or if we face any particular difficulty, she gives us advice about different ways to do the things. I would also say she gives us freedom, she relies on how we do the things, how everyone does the work.”

(Interview N°7)

“...She is always promoting participation in everyone; she is always concerned about our work.”

(Interview N°15)

“...I work with the classroom doors opened, I have nothing to hide”

(Interview N°18)

From the organizational point of view, one of the most difficult obstacles that involve certain costs is related to work security in the participating schools, characterized by frequent medical leaves, long absences, voluntary teacher retirement, end of contract that finally make the goals difficult to achieve, not only for teacher coordinators but also for their peers.

“In fact, the teacher states the importance of the teacher coordinator support, in spite of the fact she has no certainty if she will be still working at school, since she has no indefinite contract...the problem is there is no much work security...the council does not distinguish who is more appropriate...”

(Observation Note N°1)

“There is too much rotation...there are too many teachers that start working at school and then they leave. In first grade, we have already had three different teachers”

(Observation Note N°8)

Another main difficulty reported by coordinator teachers is carrying out the program tasks having short time available plus their usual classroom activities. Not only teacher coordinators state time is a not enough but also their own teacher peers. This situation turns into a big challenge for those teachers in charge of the improvement program because it demands from them the capacity to propose different strategies to solve their peer necessities, among them the make up of classroom resources. This type of work then implies spending time out of work, what it means high costs.

“The teacher mentions that there are great literacy strategies but they demand a lot of time to carry out in the classroom...she states that time is essential and everything extra requires personal effort, working after the school, specially taking into account most teachers have children at home so it becomes really difficult...”

(Observation Note N°5)

“One of the big problems that is mentioned by teacher coordinators is lack of time, facing many conflicts due to the complaints regarding the time these literacy strategies demand...”

(Observation Note N°10)

In synthesis, there are certain aspects that are revealed as relevant when exploring some of the salient characteristics that distinguish the leadership of teachers in charge of other teachers. The importance of expert knowledge is considered to be a key element to exercise influence, showing great interest for teacher training as an individual and organizational benefit as well as a personal development opportunity. Nevertheless, generating relational trust and being recognized by others

as people able to rely on is also another important aspect to take into account. Teacher peers appeared to be exposed when being evaluated inside classrooms and therefore relational trust seems to be essential for improvement. Another relevant characteristic is self-efficiency, the self confidence of having good results and the belief that learning improvement is possible. In fact, the competent authority of a teacher coordinator is seen as crucial when giving the necessary support to their peers, combining these tasks with usual classroom activities.

These aspects reveal great importance, especially when teacher coordinators face obstacles to request collaboration to achieve goals. They feel usually challenged because their formal position does not appear to be enough for the completion of tasks and goals. Collaboration is not shown as something mechanical or per se, these teachers in a middle managerial position may face certain difficulties to request from their peers to do the necessary work to achieve improvement.

“...Sometimes I have warned some peer teachers about certain aspects to change in a class, using more some of the literacy strategies... one of them did not listen to the suggestions and at the end of the process you see the bad exam results that at the same time having consequences for the whole teacher team...”

(Interview N°4)

In fact, they are requested to exercise influence to overcome difficulties demanding collaboration, especially due to working conditions and mainly for time availability. Accordingly, the time perceived as necessary for the program is revealed as a not enough resource, not only to deal with managerial tasks but at same time as not enough for their peers to make use of the literacy strategies properly. They certainly demand extra time to plan, organize, and prepare resources after school.

“...This type of work demands extra time for the teacher because it requires preparing resources at home, because here at school, there is no time. In order to make the resources you have to be calm, so one has to do it later at night when you are alone at home and no having time for that there is a lot of peer teacher resistance against work on the project...”

(Interview N°7)

“...One of the difficulties is when the teacher is changed; there is a lot of replacement of teachers and this is not good because it is difficult to make a team. Some teachers leave to work at different schools...so the whole scenario is changed and some teachers lose energy to start everything again...it is difficult because I want results but this is a real obstacle...”

(Interview N°13)

The results of this case study show then the relevance assigned to Tolerance and Freedom, defined as the will to share initiatives and leadership with peer teachers. It is a sign of trust and concern that work is being done well, promoting initiative and participation.

“...It is important to be sympathetic, to be in someone else shoes and not to show knowledge arrogance because that attitude closes all the doors...step by step, the teacher coordinator needs to give and offer support...it is not easy...everything can be synthesized as willingness and tolerance to work with people, it is not easy, it is a big challenge to show concern that work can be done and when you like doing your job, everything is possible.”

(Interview N°13)

Tolerance and Freedom revealed to be as one of the most significant characteristics highlighted as the openness for proposals and actions, the possibility that peer teachers can feel free to do their work, favoring professional autonomy. It is revealed that teacher peers need to feel no fear when they are supervised inside classrooms; on the contrary they are perceived that the most relevant issue is receiving help to improve. Peer teachers value the capacity of teacher coordinators to trust that work can be done properly without a constant authoritarian request or reminder, showing concern for difference in teachers performance. Tolerance and Freedom is perceived as a meaningful characteristic teacher coordinators show because it promotes the idea that tasks and functions can be delegated and leadership also distributed.

Conclusions

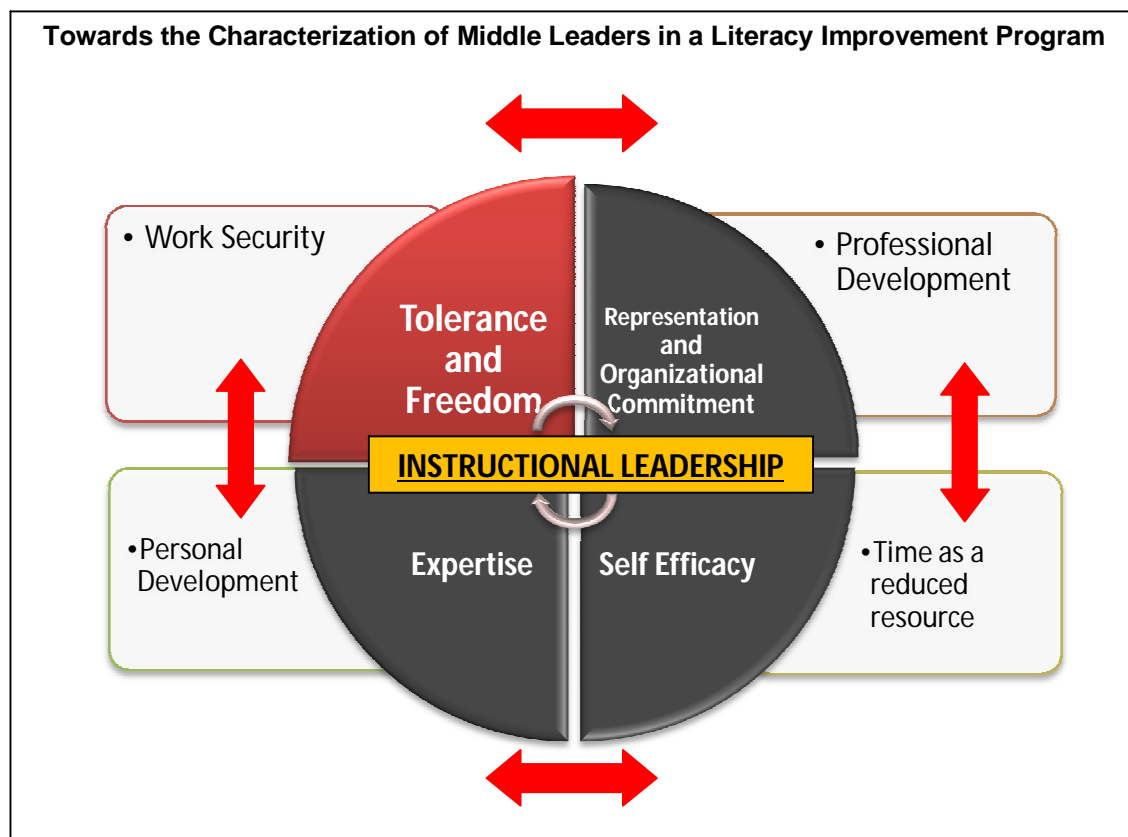
The results are consistent with the literature that highlights the trend for middle leaders in schools to share leadership with their peers. In fact, the importance of collaborative interaction versus educational issues such as learning and developing instructional advice networks is understood (Supovitz, Sirinides y May, 2010). The literature has recognized the importance of discussions between pairs of teachers regarding professional work and building relationships (York-Barr y Duke, 2004). Similarly, the findings reveal the importance of having expert knowledge, revealing great importance for peers credibility through teaching modeling and showing good results. Expertise is seen as a relevant source of authority, representing confidence to give proper support.

Tolerance and Freedom, allowing levels of initiative and shared decisions, agree with the importance of the collegial middle leadership factor (Wasley, 1991) and trust between teacher and teacher (Bryk y Schneider, 2002).

This point is particularly significant because the findings of this study reveal the importance of promoting and building trusting relationships on the part of the middle leader. This underlines the confidence that others will fulfill obligations and expectations for the shared task of educating children, as well as the importance of showing expert knowledge and some capacity to solve problems: capabilities that have been identified as distinct elements of a particular Leadership style focused on teaching and learning, the core of the work of a teacher (Robinson, 2010). In other words, this case study offers important key aspects that distinguish the leadership of these teachers in middle managerial position closer to a more instructional leadership style towards their peers.

To understand leadership in intermediate positions, it is necessary to understand how the influence operates when given the responsibility for educational improvement, but without the managerial authority to exercise that influence. Therefore, in this particular case study the management dimension of peer relations and influence in freedom emerges as a key feature of this type of school leadership.

The implications of this research suggest the link between Tolerance and Freedom in these leaders and instructional leadership. Therefore, the confidence given to the initiative, and decision making, brings better cooperation, translating into more social support and a stronger feeling of mutual obligation, combining efforts of teachers, principals, and parents. Tolerance and Freedom represent a distinct element in this context that advances in the characterization of the leadership of those teachers to their peers in middle management positions and they emerge as key issues related to instructional leadership, as it is shown in the following diagram.



The implications also suggest the need of study this phenomenon in other contexts and the comparison in different organizational cultures. The findings of this research open new challenges for leadership training programs and public policies that promote different guarantees for middle leaders, taking into account the principle of Tolerance and Freedom.

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