

Reflexivity: An Essential Feature of Teacher Leadership in Mexico, Colombia and Spain¹

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of educational policy documents on leadership and teacher development in Spain, Colombia, and Mexico, countries that are represented in the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL) (Webber, 2018). We are comparing public policies in three participating countries that do not declare an explicit discourse on teacher leadership.

This work presents some elements to answer whether teacher reflexivity is an essential attribute of teacher leadership, especially in highly complex contexts. To answer this question, we explored content on reflexivity in central public policy documents related to teachers and their professional development.

We also reviewed academic materials related to teacher leadership. The results show that reflection is an appropriate category to explore the association between the international discourse on teacher leadership – especially in highly complex

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contexts –and the discourse in these countries on teacher development, without making any reference to the concept of teacher leadership.

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Introduction

The interest in the study of educational leadership, and particularly teacher leadership, emerged in the 1980s as a counterpoint to the results of the Coleman Report: “School doesn’t matter” (Coleman et al., 1966). Subsequent educational research led to an opposing position, which presents schools as “basic units for improvement,” leading to movements of “school effectiveness” and “school improvement” and later on, “improvement of school effectiveness” (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017). This evolution involved modifying teacher practice and adapting school organizations to such purposes (Hopkins, 2001). A Western understanding of leadership - with the United States and England as their places of origin - pervades such school contexts, linked to that of educational improvement: there is no improvement without leadership, and leadership without improvement has no direction (Weinstein, 2016; Weinstein & Muñoz, 2017). The importance of leadership is also associated with the need to empower the teaching profession, which has been subject to excessive control in the recent past. It is also associated with the evidence that genuine educational change is not achieved by prescriptions or mandates from a higher authority, but

rather that the importance of leadership is delivered in collaboration with the people (Hopkins, 2017).

From other geographical and theoretical references, the field of studies on teacher development has produced extensive research and teacher training proposals in the three centuries of history in Europe as well as in Latin America (Carr, 1996; Gimeno & Pérez, 1992; Tardif, 2004). In recent years, reflexivity on teacher learning and teaching profession -reflexivity understood as "the act of turning and looking inside oneself" (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 28)- has a broad consensus (Hirmas & Blanco, 2016; Poggi, 2013; Perrenoud, 2006). The proposal is that teachers should not continue to be regarded as mere executors of theories or strategies developed externally to their context of work and practice, but rather that they be considered professionals who interpret, build, and assign new meaning to their professional knowledge through reflection processes performed in action and on such action (Schön, 1998). Such critical assumptions are common in studies on leadership, as well as in studies on teacher reflection.

The analysis of the research done by Harris (2017) on teacher leadership has allowed us to identify a series of attributes on teacher leadership. Moreover, authors such as Flessa (2019), Bolívar & Murillo (2017) and Oplatka (2016) highlighted the importance of context in their studies on leadership, especially when such contexts are highly complex.

This work reports a cross-cultural exercise consisting of comparing the results of documentary research on public policies related to teacher development based on the category of teacher reflection. We are comparing public policies in three countries that do not declare an explicit discourse on teacher leadership: Spain, Colombia, and Mexico. The central assumption of this study is that



depending on the content and importance given in public policy to teacher reflection, we will be able to infer if these countries are promoting teacher leadership, explicitly or implicitly. We want to explore if reflexivity is considered as an essential attribute for teacher leadership, especially in highly complex contexts.

Context of the Study

This work is developed in the context of *the International Study of Teacher Leadership (ISTL)* (Webber, 2018). The general purpose of this study is to contribute to the understanding of teacher leadership in ten countries² around the world. The early stage of the project was oriented towards the analysis of public policy to determine the country's vision of teacher leadership. The methodology in this stage was primarily deductive, drawn from predetermined categories by the leader of the study: accountability, advocacy, cultural responsiveness, inclusiveness, openness to change, professionalism, reflexivity, risk-taking, shared vision, stability, and teamwork (Webber, 2018).

One of the results of this stage of documentary analysis is the fact that public policy in Mexico, Spain, and Colombia share the lack of a discourse related to teacher leadership. This finding suggests the question of whether the lack of discourse on teacher leadership demonstrates that such content is absent, or whether different terms imply. To answer this question, we chose the central category on **reflexivity** in the study of teacher leadership, as this category had the most significant number of references in public policy documents in Mexico, and because it was evident in the papers in Colombia and

² The participating countries in the ISTL are Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Spain, Romania, Turkey, China, Tanzania, South Africa, and Australia.

Spain. Moreover, teacher reflection has been considered significant in international studies related to the professionalization of teaching in the past three decades (Anderson, 2013; Poggi, 2013; Tardif, 2013).

First, we present an overview of relevant data related to each country in order to acknowledge the complexity of the challenges that schools, and teachers face in their political, social, and educational contexts.

Spain is organized in 17 autonomous communities under a parliamentary monarchy. Its GINI index (which measures the degree of inequality in the distribution of family income in a country) is 0.345; this means that income inequality levels are moderate. The proportion of international students is 8%, with a trend to increase; this represents one of the fundamental challenges to the system due the migration processes. On the other hand, in the past years, Spain has ranked 26 in the Human Development Index (The United Nations Development Program)-PNUD, 2018). The Global Impunity Index in Spain is an average level of 52.31 (Center of Studies on Impunity and Justice-CESIJ, 2017). Spain is in the 32nd place of the Global Peace Index (Institute for Economics and Peace-IEP, 2018). As a member of the European Union since 1986, Spain has adopted supranational policies and several agreements on school systems. The 2020 Strategic Plan leads the Spanish education system towards increased flexibility and equity of education, taking into consideration the elements of entrance, permanence, and results (Ministry of Education and Professions-MEFP, 2020).

Colombia is a unitary republic. It has a presidential system as its form of government. Its GINI index is 0.508, which reveals a much higher level of social inequality. The Colombian state has set a priority on the universalization of primary education for the past



decades, especially for the most vulnerable populations due to the high levels of poverty and social inequality, as well as the phenomenon of the internal guerrilla groups. Colombia has a high level of impunity, 66.57. (CESIJ, 2017). It is in the 145th place of the Global Peace Index with a score of 2661 (IEP, 2018). Some organizations, such as the United Nations (2019), recognize that Colombia suffers endemic violence. Their *Let's All Learn Program* is intended to increase the coverage and quality of education (National Ministry of Education-MEN, 2015).

Mexico is a federal republic -bordering the United States, Guatemala, and Belize- with a presidential system as the form of government. Its GINI index is 0.426, which accounts for significant levels of inequality. The National Survey on Demographic Dynamics (National Institute of Statistics and Geography-INEGI, 2018) reports that in Mexico, 18% of the total population is a domestic or foreign migrant. Mexico also has a high level of impunity, with a score of 69.21 (CESIJ, 2017). Regarding the Global Peace Index, Mexico is in the 140th place with a score of 2583 (IEP, 2018), which reflects very high levels of constant internal violence.

Both Political Constitutions of Colombia and Mexico recognize their citizens' ethnic and cultural plurality (National Constituent Assembly, 2019; Congress of the Union, 2019). However, both countries have had poor assessments in the Human Development Index in the past years (PNUD, 2018).

According to the information above, we could say that teaching practice in Mexico, Spain, and Colombia takes place in "difficult circumstances" in "complex contexts" or in "impoverished communities" (Flessa, 2019, p.318). Such circumstances bring us to present the need to promote a type of teacher leadership that allows

schools to be better prepared for the complex situations that students and the countries' development process demand.

Rationale

This comparative analysis of educational policies related to teachers and their professional development in Spain, Mexico, and Colombia intends to explore the construction of the attribute on teacher reflexivity. Moreover, it seeks to present it as a possible category that will allow the association of the discourse on teacher leadership in contexts of high complexity with that of teachers and their professional development, as such policies do not present explicit references to teacher leadership. In the case of Spain, "a search in institutional documents for the words 'leader' and 'lead,' found no results" (Gratacós, Ladrón de Guevara, & Rodríguez, 2019, p. 732). On the other hand, a study from Colombia reports: "The document analysis carried out so far indicates that 'leadership' is mainly conceptualized in terms of the role performed by principals and hierarchical figures" (Pineda, 2019, p. 743). In this preliminary review, Mexico reports that 'teacher leadership' does not appear as an explicit concern in Mexican politics. (Fierro & Fortoul, 2019)³.

This taken into account, the interest of this study is to pinpoint whether public policies in these countries promote teacher leadership, considering that there is an essential reference to teacher reflexivity, even if there is not an explicit reference to the concept of leadership.

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Conceptual Framework

The methodological-epistemological perspective of the interpretative research focuses on analyzing the description of a phenomenon without addressing its causes or consequences. We share a non-neutral epistemological assumption of critical theory that acknowledges the dependence of social and cultural reality in social phenomena (Tello, 2012). This study incorporates notions of philosophy, sociology, psycho-pedagogy, and institution management.

We have conducted empirical work based on the analysis of public policy documents, with prefixed categories, and we will interpret such public policy using these categories. The analysis involves coding the information whilst contrasting it to generate new categories, in order to allow the emergence of new hypothesis or recurring relationships among categories emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Summary of Relevant Literature

Teacher Leadership

In Latin America, the topic of educational leadership was marginal in school management until the 1980s, when it became a central aspect of educational improvement. It became relevant, once principals stopped being regarded as mere staff who had to apply standards, programs, and policies in their institutions; and started being recognized as proactive and assertive actors who need to drive deeper processes for pedagogical change (Weinstein & Muñoz, 2017). Currently, there are vigorous academic debates and questions around the concept of educational leadership. However, there is still no

consensus on the scope of its performance, the actors who implement it, nor the factors or critical conditions to deploy or inhibit such processes within school organizations (Webber, 2018; Weinstein & Muñoz, 2017; Consensa, 2015; Leithwood, 2007; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

This same situation is present in teacher leadership, whereas its interpretation and comprehension are incredibly diverse (Harris & Mujs, as cited in Harris, 2017). The study of teacher leadership is a Western construction of its definition, orientation, and interpretation. However, “most academics agree that teacher leadership is present inside and outside the classroom to pervade in the pedagogical practice of the whole school” (Harris, 2017, p. 234).

Considering all the characteristics of teacher leadership proposed by Harris (2017), we select the following important aspects of teacher leadership, which are also shared by other authors:

(a) *The influence played in the actions and in the beliefs of directors and colleagues as well as when defining common goals*, (Anderson, 2004; Rutherford, 2006; Sato, Hyler & Monte-Sano, 2014; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

(b) *This influence is based on the credibility of their teaching practice*, which is the result of their expertise in curricular content and in their classroom pedagogical skills (Angelle & Dehart, 2010; Rutherford, 2006; Wells, 2012).

(c) *Reflection is the fundamental tool for developing teacher leadership*: the intentional exercise in reflecting on the teaching practice and to focus on the construction of meaning is the way to find new meanings and to adjust practices to the needs of each specific learning context (Anderson, 2008; Lambert, 2003).



(d) *Such influence might be individual or collective, it might be formal or informal, and it can be found inside or outside the classroom (Anderson, 2004; Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).*

(e) *The primary purpose of this influence is to improve or transform teaching practice (Chew & Andrew, 2010; Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001; Patterson & Patterson, 2004; Sato, Hyler & Monte-Sano, 2014; Vermon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).*

(f) *The influence exerted it is oriented to encourage a learning community in the school, sheltered by an environment of trust (Chew & Andrew, 2010; Katzenmeyer & Moller 2001; Lambert, 2003; Vermon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012).*

Teacher Leadership in Highly Complex Contexts

Research on school leadership in Latin America is subject to many tensions, as most studies are based on models or frameworks developed in foreign locations (Flessa, 2019). Consequently, such studies do not focus on the challenges faced by Latin America (Oplatka, 2019), which do not allow for a local endorsement on the research (Aravena y Hallinger, 2018). In this sense, there is a need for a framework on school leadership that reflects regional realities, where the notion of leadership “in difficult circumstances” is highlighted, or leadership in “complex contexts” or in “impoverished communities” (Flessa, 2019, p. 318). This realization is a shared perspective among other authors, such as Bolívar and Murillo (2017): “More often teachers and specialists around the world demand that the school becomes a privileged space to fight against social injustice

(...). Sure, to improve, but en route... to where?" (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017, p.90).

This approach questions the perspective of the existence of a group of individual leadership attributes that are universal and that these attributes may be executed anywhere, independently of the context. But the context does matter. Specific leadership skills and resources need to be adapted to each local context (Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011; Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Pollock & Winton, 2015).

Considering the importance of the context in teacher and school leadership, as well as recognizing "high-complexity contexts", we can highlight the significance of two of the elements we have mentioned before:

(c) *Learning for everyone entails "a reflexive exercise to build the adequate answers to specific contexts"* (Poggi, 2018)

(f) *Promoting inclusion and learning for everyone will only be possible when schools become learning professional communities* (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017)

We can also add a new aspect related to teacher leadership:

(g) The primary purpose of the influence that teacher leaders exercise for improving or transforming teacher practice in high-complex contexts requires to be aligned towards *promoting the inclusion and education for everyone, avoiding exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination* (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017).

In summary, our vision of teacher leadership in contexts of inequality and highly complex contexts includes the following aspects:



Table 1.

Attributes of Teacher Leadership in high-complex contexts

1. The influence exercised in the actions and beliefs of their colleagues and directors and when defining goals.
2. Credibility is the basis of such influence in teaching practice, as a result of the teacher's expertise in curricular content and the teacher's pedagogy skills.
3. Reflection is the fundamental tool for developing teacher leadership in order to adjust teaching practice to the needs of each specific learning context and developing adequate answers.
4. This influence can be present in an individual or in a collective level. It can be formal or informal, and it can take place inside or outside the classroom.
5. The primary purpose of this influence is the improvement or transformation of teaching practice.
6. The influence exerted is oriented to encourage a learning professional community in the school, sheltered by an environment of trust.
7. The improvement or transformation of teaching practices in highly complex contexts has to be aimed towards promoting inclusion, learning for everyone, avoiding exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination.

These attributes, resulting from the research in this field, offer the elements to operationalize the concept of "teacher leadership." Therefore, these attributes help us establish the links with other discourses in public policies that mention these same components without necessarily addressing the concept of "teacher leadership."

Reflexivity as an Essential Element of Teacher Leadership in Highly Complex Contexts

Exercising teacher leadership in the daily life of schools requires implementing specific strategies. Gaynor (2018) and King (2017) stated that reflexivity is a key component of teacher leadership:

Leadership is an area closely linked to reflection, and this course has emphasized the importance of being a leader figure and taking the initiative and the risks. From trying new methods and strategies, we then need to reflect and see what went well and what could be improved (King, 2017, p. 22).

The function of reflexive practice is to unveil the tacitly assumed routine in the individual and the collective action for teachers to become aware and conscious of such routines. "Critical reflection means to pause consciously, to stop daily routines and to question oneself about one's ideas and actions, and the ideas and actions of others" (Ryan, 2016, p. 127).

Reflexivity consists of "the act of turning and looking inside oneself, by which individuals acknowledge the principles of those operations in which they lose themselves as individuals, with intellectual clarity and moral responsibility" (Ricoeur, 2002, p. 28). Reflexivity further promotes individuals' autonomy concerning their own beliefs, perceptions, conceptions, and behaviors, as well as their relationship with the social mechanisms of power (Giddens, 2006; Schön, 1998).

Teacher reflexivity has deep roots in socio-educational literature on teacher development and adult education (Carr, 1996; Dewey, 1989; Freire, 1969; Gimeno & Perez, 1992; Schön, 1998; Zeichner & Liston, 1990). Reflexivity is based on the modern and contemporary philosophical approaches as well as the sociological approaches (Ponce, 2009). It is considered by Giddens (2006),



Heidegger (1971), and Ricoeur (2002) as an indispensable quality of humankind as a social being, driven by specific subjective intentions.

Van Manen (1997) raises three levels of depth in teacher reflexivity. The first one is related to the technical application of knowledge to achieve a specific purpose; it tends towards the efficiency and effectiveness of the means for particular purposes. The second level seeks to promote “the analysis and clarification of individual and cultural experiences, meanings, perceptions and assumptions, prejudices and presuppositions to guide practical actions” (p. 226). The third level is related to the possibility of reflecting on the moral and ethical implications of teaching practices, in favor of equity, justice, freedom and critical reflection on institutional spaces, and their management of authority and power. This last level is the one that enables a change in the personal positioning of one's professional practice (Fierro & Fortoul, 2017), and thus it needs to be promoted to develop teacher leadership.

Reflection and Teacher Development

In the three countries studied, teacher reflexivity is considered part of teacher development. Consequently, we believe it is vital to include a concise reference to the association between reflexivity and teacher development. An essential element of teacher development is to continue learning; teacher development is not merely about training, but rather life-long learning, which is known as educational formation. Educational formation differs from training as transmission and socialization (Ferry 1997).

The concept of educational formation has been elaborated by philosophers for over five centuries, taking the Latin root of “form” and considering it a process as well as a final result (Gadamer, 1997).

For the past 25 years, reflexivity emerged as a salient topic in teacher development programs, as educators want to be considered and be educated as teaching professionals who are continuously building knowledge around their profession (Hirmas & Banco, 2016). According to Ferry (1997), educational formation needs to focus mainly on generating spaces for reflexivity as well as for the development of critical thinking skills, which are essential to ensure that teachers build their professional paths. Arendt (2009) argued that educational formation is a human activity in which experience and reflection play an important role.

Methodology

The methodology followed was primarily deductive, drawn from one of the predetermined categories within the ISTL (Webber, 2018): reflexivity. According to the several stages of comparative research, and as proposed by Bereday (1968), this exercise is located in Phase III: Juxtaposition. This phase identifies similarities and differences among diverse cases of study, without altering the logic and internal organization of each of the cases, and it is carried out according to comparable criteria. The phase of juxtaposition allows establishing relationships among data without losing the reference to specific contexts as if such were isolated facts (Schriever, 1993). For that reason, we provide some general information related to each country: Colombia, Mexico, and Spain. We selected key public policy documents related to teacher development:

1) Colombia: (a) The *Colombian System for Teacher development and Policy Guidelines* defines the national conception that governs teachers' professional development and presents the principles, objectives, and particularities of each of the subsystems; (b) the



Resolution of the Ministry of Education (MEN) of June 30, 2010, which sets out the characteristics of the expected level of quality of teacher development programs, including the model of a *Teacher Profile*.

2) Mexico: (a) The *National Educational Model* is the document that is currently organizing national curriculum in the pedagogical arena and in every administrative aspect; (b) the *Teacher's Evaluation: Profile, Parameters, and Assessment Indicators* sets the parameters for the access, permanence, and advancement in the teaching profession; (c) the *Curriculum for Basic Education Teacher Training for Primary Education*, provides the guidelines for curriculum development for those educators who teach students ages 6-12.

3) Spain: (a) The *White Paper on the Reform of the Educational System*, presents Spain's Education System and its new configuration, as well as the primary factors and processes that organize it; (b) the *Lines of Action* to address the definition of a professional teaching model; (c) the information recovered from the Eurydice database related to the Higher Education Professional Teacher Development Program, as well as its corresponding elements for management.

Once the documents were identified, all references to "teacher reflexivity" were perused and then categorized according to their content, the targeted individuals, the aspects of the teaching practice subject to reflection, the primary purposes, and the disciplinary frameworks that influence teacher reflection. These aspects were used as the criteria to compare the cases under study. Furthermore, the levels of reflexivity promoted in each instance of the study were inferred according to Van Manen's (1997) approach to the levels of depth in teacher reflexivity, as we presented it previously, and considering the attributes of teacher leadership in highly complex contexts that result from the literature review.

Findings

The study's focus was to identify the aspects of reflexivity referred to as central elements of teaching. In the following Table we present the review of the public policy documents:

Disciplinary Frameworks Considered in Teacher Reflexivity

Table 2 shows that teacher reflexivity is a central element to teacher leadership. All three countries address it from a multidisciplinary perspective related to didactics (reflecting on the objectives, contents, teaching strategies, and evaluation techniques); to sociology (analyzing socio-cultural contexts and matters that need to be taken into account in the classroom); to pedagogy (reflecting on the different types of interactions among the members of the school community); and to psychology (analyzing the psycho-evolutionary and personal characteristics of students). However, there is not a perspective related to philosophy (reflecting on the goals of education, the epistemology, anthropology, or ethics of educational practice) in any of the countries. At the same time, the perspective related to sociology focuses primarily on knowing the context rather than reflecting on how the context affects the educational process, equality, or justice.



Table 2.

Disciplinary Frameworks Considered in Teacher Reflexivity

Disciplinary Frameworks for Reflexivity	Colombia	Spain	Mexico
Philosophical			
Didactics	X	X	X
Pedagogical	X	X	X
Sociological	X	X	X
Psychological	X	X	X

Areas Considered as the Object of Teacher Reflexivity

Table 3 shows that all three countries refer to teacher reflexivity aimed to analyze what happens within the classrooms, schools, and local communities. They consider key aspects of teacher leadership, acknowledging it as an influence – both inside and outside the classroom – and that it inquires, deliberates, and promotes answers that respond to the local contexts and the need of education for everyone. At the same time, none of the countries contemplates that teachers should be involved in curricular matters such as study plans or programs, evaluation systems, or other related aspects. Moreover, they do not mention that teachers should reflect on the organization nor on structural matters of the educational system.

Table 3.

Areas Considered as the Object of Teacher Reflexivity

Area	Colombia	Spain	Mexico
Classroom	X	X	X
School	X	X	X
Local community (social and community environment)	X	X	X
Curriculum			
Educational System			

Goals for Teacher Reflexivity

Table 4 shows that teacher reflexivity is a critical element to professionalize teaching practice, in particular, the teaching practice that improves students learning outcomes. It is also considered a much-needed resource for the continuous advancement of teaching performance. In Mexico and Colombia, the discourse on the professionalization of teaching is present since the 1980s (Bolívar, 2010). This discourse presents teacher reflexivity as one of the political-pedagogical strategies that contributes to the recognition of teachers in regard to other professions that are socially consolidated, such as medicine, law, engineering. On the other hand, the three countries refer to reflexivity as a device for teacher education, both in initial and continuing professional development (MEN, 2013; SEP-Ministry of Public Education, 2012, 2017; MEFP-Ministry of Education and Professional Training, 2018). Only Mexico refers to reflexivity as an attribute in the descriptors of the *Teaching Profile* (SEP, 2016).



Table 4.

Goals for Teaching Reflexivity

Purposes	Colombia	Spain	Mexico
Component of the Teaching Profile			X
Professionalization	X		X
Teacher development	X	X	X

Targets for Teacher Reflexivity

Table 5 shows that teaching practice, students, their learning outcomes, and the socio-economic and cultural contexts of schools are referred to as the objects of teacher reflexivity. Thus, they implicitly recognize teacher leadership, highlighting its orientation in favor of inclusion, education for everyone, and building environments of trust through teaching practice, both inside and outside the classroom.

All three countries recognize the importance of teacher reflexivity rooted within teaching practice. Spain stresses the importance of developing a reflexive practice rather than maintaining a normative orientation in educators' teaching practice (MEFD 2018). Research on teaching practice as an element for improving student learning outcomes is the line of action, which entails recording, analyzing, and explaining teaching practice. Only Colombia will refer to reflexivity as a component to promote the autonomy of teachers (MEN, 2013), and it is connected to matters of inclusion and non-violence. Finally, the documents suggest that reflexivity is an essential element in situated teaching practice. This suggestion allows us to deepen the understanding of educational situations and problems in specific contexts (SEP, 2012) and to interpret the reality

under critical assumptions (MEN, 2013). All of the above describes a reliable reference to the aspects of teacher leadership in highly complex contexts, without necessarily using the specific term of 'leadership.'

Table 5.

Targets for Teacher Reflexivity

Individuals and aspects	Colombia	Spain	Mexico
Students	X	X	X
Teachers and their professional identity			X
Teachers and their teaching practice	X	X	X
Teachers and their autonomy	X		
The context where teaching practice is performed	X	X	X

Levels of Reflexivity Mentioned in Discourse on Teacher Practices and Teacher Development

We used Van Manen's (1997) classification with its three levels of depth in teacher reflexivity (See Table 6.) In their educational policy, all three countries contemplate clear statements on teacher reflexivity as a resource for good teaching practices. Both at the first level concerning the application of knowledge to specific situations and populations, as well as at a deeper level, of identifying and valuing their own beliefs, assumptions, and prejudices – among other aspects – to assess and adjust their teaching practice.

These two levels of reflexivity refer to the elements of a deliberate exercise to identify improvements in teaching practices marked by inclusion and focused on learning, as well as in the influence of individual and collective work. Only Colombia addresses



the third level, noting the importance of promoting the ethical-political reflection of teachers based on the criteria of equity and justice. In terms of teacher leadership, this entails a recognition that teachers are fundamental actors who are capable of influencing and leading in schools, and in the processes for peace in a context of a country marked by an internal armed conflict:

Today more than ever, education in the human condition is called for as the first field for healthy coexistence and peace. It entails reflecting on the recognition of differences, educational inclusion, the demands for the understanding of interculturality, the diversity of ways of living, and being in the world... as essential foundations for peaceful coexistence. (MEN, 2013, p. 90)

Table 6.

Levels of Reflexivity in the Discourse on Teacher Practices and Teacher Development

Levels of reflection (Van Manen, 1997)	Colombia	Spain	Mexico
1 Application of knowledge for specific achievements	X	X	X
2 Analysis clarification on beliefs to guide the actions of teaching practice	X	X	X
3 Ethical-political reflection on teaching practice concerning equity and justice	X		

Elements of Teacher Leadership in Highly Complex Contexts

Finally, in Table 7 we summarize the elements of teacher leadership in highly complex contexts, as found in public policy documents in these three countries. We found that 6 of the 7 elements of teacher leadership we inferred have a reference in such materials: the influence resulting of the teaching practice, in the individual or collective level, inside or outside the classroom; the expertise in

contents and pedagogical management; an intentional exercise of teaching practice improvement which is aimed towards inclusion and education for everyone. Only Spanish documents mention the element of building learning communities related to reflection.

Table 7.

Elements of Teacher Leadership in Highly Complex Contexts

Elements of teacher leadership	Colombia	Spain	Mexico
1. Influence in the actions and beliefs	X	X	X
2. Credibility of their teaching practice	X	X	X
3. Reflection is the fundamental tool for developing teacher leadership in order to adjust teaching practice to the needs of each specific learning context and developing adequate answers	X	X	X
4. The influence can be present in an individual or collective level, formally or informally, inside and outside the classroom	X	X	X
5. The primary purpose is the improvement or transformation of teaching practices	X	X	X
6. The influence exerted it is oriented to encouraging a learning professional community in an environment of trust	X		
7. The promotion of inclusion and education for everyone avoiding exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination.	X	X	X

Discussion and Implications

The results show that reflection is an appropriate category to explore the association between the international discourse on teacher leadership and the discourse in these three countries on teacher development, without making any reference to the concept of teacher leadership. The educational policy in Spain, Mexico, and



Colombia concurs in granting an essential place to teacher reflection, directly linked to 6 of the 7 elements considered in the literature that were analyzed regarding teacher leadership (Bolívar & Murillo, 2017; Harris, 2017). (Refer to Table 7). In this sense, the information suggests that if one of the features reported in teacher leadership literature is related to reflexivity, then, Spain, Mexico, and Colombia share this fundamental aspect broadly, whilst not correlating it directly, with the concept of teacher leadership.

We have stated that reflection facilitates intellectual clarity and moral responsibility (Ricoeur, 2002), which become an essential element in teaching as a profession. Reflexivity allows setting routines apart to be able to change tradition through innovation (Ryan, 2016;). Being conscious of the thought behind the practice supports individual autonomy with respect to their own beliefs, perceptions, and behaviors, as well as with the social mechanism of power (Giddens, 2006; Schön 1998). Moreover, promoting critical skills favors the development of one's identity model of being a teacher (Ferry, 1997). Therefore, reflection is the engine that moves self-development in a practice that needs to reinvent itself constantly because of its relational character, its complexity, and the fact that many times it takes place in highly complex environments (Fierro & Fortoul, 2017). Thus, reflecting is a resource without which a teacher may never truly achieve an authentic professional performance (Bolívar, 2010, Poggi, 2013, 2018).

The above allows us to affirm that teacher leadership requires reflection as a primary tool. An additional argument is the recognition of the individuals as actors and main characters of an educational change, which is not thoroughly achieved by prescriptions or control systems (Hopkins, 2017; Weinstein & Muñoz,

2017), but by the inquiry in action theory involved in the teaching practice (Robinson, 2016).

However, although all three countries studied have fixed importance to teacher reflexivity, they do so with different emphases and a discourse that is not homogeneous. Following Bereday (1968) and Schriever (1993), regarding the comparative research methodology, we are in the phase of juxtaposition, where we try to find similarities and differences resulting from the comparative analysis, considering the particularities of each of the study cases. Some circumstances in each country might help us explain the differences found in public policies related to teacher reflexivity and teacher leadership. For example, there is little pedagogical discourse in the case of Spain. It is rather an executive discourse, which is understood in the context of the country's political organization through autonomous communities that have education as one of their responsibilities (Barrón & García, 2018).

In contrast, Colombia presents a discourse in critical pedagogy and emancipation. Teacher reflexivity is an essential element that makes teacher autonomy salient and possible, a matter that is not referred to in any of the other countries. Leadership is highlighted in the pedagogical and social levels, within the classroom and the school, as the teacher is considered a social agent (MEN, 2013; 2015), given the context of inequality in Colombia, which is even greater than that of Mexico. All references to teacher reflexivity as a situated practice, which is contextual and focused on the attention of vulnerable sectors explains why reflexivity can be considered as an element of teacher leadership (see Table 4; MEN, 2013).

Mexico prioritizes the pedagogical aspects of teacher leadership, such as content expertise, classroom management, and the capability



of teachers to identify and address students' needs. This position can be understood by the fact that Mexico's educational system has not achieved a "regular minimum performance", especially in regard to the existence and distribution of resources, regular attendance, punctuality of teachers and students, the effective use of instructional time in the classroom, and student participation (Fierro & Fortoul, 2019; SEP, 2017). The expectation is that teachers are capable of discerning the school curriculum taking into consideration the diversity of their students, and that their teaching practice acknowledges interculturality and promotes inclusion (SEP, 2017).

Conclusion

The results allow us to assert that reflexivity is an essential attribute of teacher leadership, especially in highly complex contexts. Recognizing the undertakings of working in highly complex contexts favors a dialogue between the studies that might be developed in Latin America with that of research produced in other regions around the world. Such dialogue expects an understanding of the diversity in contexts and the particular economic, political, and social dynamics which generate different expressions in exercising leadership. It also highlights the priority of elements such as inclusion, education for everyone, the avoidance of every form of exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination, as essential elements in teacher leadership. These elements are a particular contribution from research developed in Latin America, in relation to the Western studies on leadership.

Bringing some elements of the discourse into a dialogue among different disciplines and academic traditions, as a theoretical exercise in teacher leadership and education formation, suggests that both the

English and Spanish-speaking world literature has been enriched by the contributions of the studies on reflexivity and educational formation. The literature on educational formation is rooted in philosophical and socio-anthropological foundations that collect long-standing traditions of thought; it gives great importance to the understanding of the phenomenon whereby a teacher may develop pedagogical trajectories on the path of teacher leadership. This is a phenomenon in which reflexivity represents an essential device: it offers direction about the scope, approaches, and moments for development of teacher leaders.

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