Fighting Windmills: A Female Principal's Story during COVID-19

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Abstract

The arrival of covid-19 had a major impact on all sectors of the population, especially education. The closure of schools and later the health measures adopted forced schools to a rapid conversion towards a digital scenario. Faced with this crisis situation, the existence of school leaders became even more essential. For this reason, in order to face this challenge, it is necessary to establish a school management that moves towards horizontality, social justice and professional commitment. Using a qualitative approach, we offer the story of a female principal who leads in a challenge context. The findings reveal how fighting windmills was one of the predominant sensations throughout this period. This manuscript also describes the different leadership strategies developed. It also points out the different supports and obstacles experienced by the professional team of the school. Finally, we discuss new horizons within the field of school leadership in times of crisis.

Keywords

Covid-19, Leadership, female principal, management, school improvement.

Introduction

This article explores the impact of the COVID-19 on the conditions of a local public school and the performance of a headmistress and her team in Granada, Spain. The principal "Dulcinea", maintains a focus on the school's priorities in a culture of inclusion, where work and effort is being directed by policies of school improvement and greater family responsibilities. The study is based on research that focuses on the analysis of leadership strategies and the promulgation of inclusion actions by the direct, her team and the rest of the educational community, during a period of rapid change such as the current pandemic and which is of interest to research on leadership in contexts with similar socio-economic and political conditions. The conditions that accompany the centre are characterised by the problematic situations of the students, which are characterised by socio-cultural disadvantage and family nuclei with difficulties, especially caused by culture shock. There are also problems of coexistence and a great absenteeism and premature abandonment, especially affecting girls.

Since the health crisis caused by the SARS CoV 2 virus, these problems have increased considerably. This is why it is considered of vital importance to carry out this type of study, in order to analyse the impact of the pandemic on schools. In addition to exploring the strategies used by schools in general and by the management in particular, in order to try to alleviate emergency situations. In this way, authors such as Hallinger and Heck (2010) or Llorent-Bedmar, Cobano-Delgado and Navarro-Granados (2017), defend school leadership carried out by school principals as a priority for school improvement. Harris (2020), indicates in his studies how school leaders responded and how the distributed and collaborative leadership actions carried out by principals were key points in tackling the health crisis

This article, which focuses on a specific case study, is part of a larger research project ISSPP (International Successful School Principalship Project). ISSPP is the largest and most sustained network of research on successful school leadership and has among its main objectives, to conduct case studies of principals who lead effectively throughout the world. These studies are particularly valuable in the current situation that accompanies us, in order to overcome situations of great difficulty, stress and great socio-economic and cultural disadvantages.

Literature review

Leadership in schools in times of pandemic

In the face of new situations or paradigm shifts, Kuhn (2012) asserts that the key for leaders is to move forward but without rushing decisions. It is true that in the face of the crisis that has befallen us worldwide, leaders have had to act very quickly, foreseeing at the same time as carefully guarding against the consequences of the decisions taken (Netolicky, 2020). Nonetheless, and based on the same author, leadership in times of crisis is uncertain but the drive to overcome obstacles and challenging moments must prevail.

School principals continue to lead their schools but have had to change their practices in a very short time. They have moved to lead through a whole screen, leading from their school but with a reduced number of staff and students and interacting with parents and members of the online community. In this sense, COVID-19 has had an impact on all sectors, but in education, leaders have been forced into a very painful "separation" from their student body (Harris, 2020).

A successful school leader encourages others to follow and move in the same direction and educational sense. Achieving this purpose by connecting to a computer or reducing hours of face-to-face meetings to virtual ones is more complex, but not impossible. The leader, therefore, must make more effort to keep the relationships and the community alive (Leithwood et al., 2020). Despite the difficulty and the titanic efforts on the part of the principals and other school leaders, education has not stopped and there is a positive response to the challenges caused. In this panorama of crisis, there is still little scientific production, but some authors already point to certain patterns of leadership that are flourishing: distributed, collaborative, and networked and community leadership (Harris, 2020). A leadership that needs the joint support of families and the community.

COVID-19 is not affecting everyone equally: leadership for social justice

School leaders focus their efforts on ensuring that students find well-being at all levels and leadership for social justice is advocated (Murillo et al., 2010; Ryan, 2006). Multiple international studies have found that the economic gap significantly affects particularly vulnerable groups of students, such as students with low socioeconomic status, ethnic minorities, impoverished social classes or immigrant students, in low school achievement and lower rates of school success (Lalas and Morgan, 2006). In the context of the health crisis, school leaders have become more aware of this sometimes camouflaged reality surrounding individual family situations. COVID-19 has clearly exposed the inequalities and inequities that already existed in education (Harris and Jones, 2019), but which have been exacerbated.

This situation is compounded by the digital divide (Lai and Widmar, 2020) with the result that many students have been left without access to education. The disparity in access to digital resources (such as computers, mobile phones or tablets) and the internet has become apparent. It

is precisely these particularly vulnerable groups that the digital divide has most deeply penetrated (Gillis and Krull, 2020; Stelitano, 2020), thus increasing educational inequalities across the board. Therefore, the health crisis is not affecting everyone equally, in terms of social, economic and health contexts, but undoubtedly in the educational context. Efforts, as Harris (2020) states, are now focused on achieving the inclusion of all students in education systems around the world. In this scenario, school leaders must make efforts to direct their actions towards proposals for social justice.

Particularities of the Spanish context

Although the health crisis has left its mark on every part of the world, it can have an impact on each territory with different characteristics. Similarly, the leadership actions taken by school leaders vary from place to place depending on the health and political measures imposed by governments. This article, based on a case study of a principal, focuses on the Spanish context. Therefore, it is necessary to offer some particularities of leadership, school management and the impact of COVID-19 in this particular context.

School management in Spain, as some authors argue (Bolívar and Ritacco, 2016), is characterised by a particular focus. Managers are not permanent; they are teachers who apply for the job by fulfilling a series of requirements. After 4 years as principals (which can be extended), they return to their teaching posts. This teacher-teacher transition, as Carver (2016) states, means that they sometimes do not feel identified with and committed to the managerial position. In the face of disconcerting situations, of great changes and high levels of stress such as those caused by the health crisis, it is necessary to have leading principals with strong and adjusted identities to achieve school progress and success (Bolívar, 2019). Therefore, this situation that characterizes Spain, may be affecting the good performance of school leadership when it comes to managing schools in the face of the different problems caused by the pandemic.

The study on delayed inequality and the digital divide in Spain carried out by the UGT (UGT, 2015), indicates that Spain is behind Europe in homes with Internet access, behind the European average and in fourth place within the so-called EU-515. This fact has been increased and consolidated by the virtualisation of schools. This fact has been increased and consolidated by the virtualisation of schools. Not all families have technical support or the same opportunities to access it, especially the most vulnerable families (Fernández et al., 2020).

Methodology

The aim of this research was to analyse the impact that the Covid-19 generated in an educational environment in a challenging context. More specifically, the experiences and strategies used by the school management in the face of this health crisis situation will be studied.

Due to the eminently qualitative nature of this study, a single qualitative case of study was selected (Stake, 2007). As Yin (2010) points out, case studies are the most appropriate for studies that seek to take into account the context, thus allowing for global and broader explanations, interpretations and visions of the object of study (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2010). Through this methodology, the aim is to analyse both the impact generated by the covid-19 and the different leadership strategies carried out in a Challenging centre.

The selection of the case was decided on the basis of some fundamental requirements that had to do with its relevance to the purpose of the study and the degree of exemplarity. Likewise, the criteria established by the international project within which this study is framed (ISSPP) were taken into account for the selection of informants and the study context. In this sense, the chosen centre presents educational results that are higher than expected according to its socio-cultural context (based on its ISEC[1] and the results of the AGAEVE[2]). Furthermore, this centre is characterised by the development of leadership for social justice as the principal herself and her professional team point out.

Data collection

Information was collected through semi-structured and in-depth interviews with the principal of the centre. The interviews were carried out in a process consisting of 3 cycles of interviews, which were articulated one above the other (Kelchtermans, 2016). Due to the health situation, the interviews were carried out through a virtual platform (Google Meet). In this sense, each interview consisted of two phases. A first phase focused on examining the previous interview with the aim of validating, clarifying and deepening different aspects. And the second part focused on conducting the semi-structured interview. The following table shows the thematic categories and subcategories that were established in each of the interview cycles.

Table 1. Thematic categories for information collection

Block 1. Personal data and experience	History of the principal, professional career. Years of teaching experience. Years of management experience.
Block 2. Educational and social reality of the centre	Number of students, lines and courses that the centre offers. Socioeconomic level of the educational centre Educational level of the centre, in terms of school results.
Block 3. School management in Covid's time	How they faced the months before the start of the course. The beginning of the course. The development up to the present day. Personal and professional feelings regarding the expectations at the beginning of the course and its course to date. The most critical moments. Important people. Challenges. Strategies used to coordinate the whole centre.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed later to facilitate their analysis.

Data Analysis

The collection and analysis process were carried out by means of reflective deepening cascades (Kelchtermans, 2016). In this way, as mentioned above, the interviews were carried out in different cycles with the main objective of understanding and validating the information collected. Once the interviews were conducted and validated by the principal, the qualitative analysis software Nvivo 12 was used. For the data analysis the principles and procedures of the Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) were followed. Through this approach thematic focuses emerged from the participant's own discourse.

Finally, these interviews were also subjected to an analysis using the basic principles of the institutional development processes of a school (Van De Ven and Poole, 1995; Domingo and Bolívar, 1996). This analysis allowed us to obtain a general overview of the leadership actions and strategies developed in a school to deal with each and every one of the obstacles encountered during a pandemic crisis.

Ethical considerations

It is important to mention the ethical issues taken into account throughout the process of developing this research. In this study we have considered the respect and consent of the people participating in the study to be key. At the same time, we respect the anonymity of the participants and to this end we have created a pseudonym to refer to the name of the principal: Dulcinea. On the other hand, emotional skills of empathy, respect and active listening were always present in the process of collecting information (Moriña, 2017). In our process of analysing the information, the dialectical validation of the participants and the respect and honesty when dealing with professional experiences were fundamental.

Findings

This article focuses on the leadership and inclusion strategies carried out by an educational centre that is difficult to carry out in times of coronavirus. This manuscript is part of a larger research project, ISSPP (2013), which aims to examine case studies of different schools across the globe that develops effective school leadership. Dulcinea has been teaching for more than 33 years. Specifically, she has been working as school principal at the centre under study for 4 years. Before delving deeper into Dulcinea's professional work, we consider it very important to understand the context in which she carries out her profession.

For reasons of respect for anonymity, we will not give the name of the centre. However, we will describe the characteristics that surround this school in order to place the readers in the context of the research. It is a public nursery and primary school located in one of the most depressed and marginalised areas in the heart of the city of Granada. Due to its special situation of vulnerability, the centre maintains a close relationship with the city council, which supports different socio-educational projects promoted by the school.

In general, the school's students come from immigrant families, the most predominant nationalities being African and South American. This situation generates the coexistence of three different religions: Muslim, Catholic and Evangelical. Despite this, most of the students come from North African areas, so Spanish is not their mother tongue. This aspect hinders the achievement of educational objectives due to problems related to communication.

Students' families are characterised by their low socio-economic and cultural level. The main activity in which the school families are engaged is the service sector, an area that was severely affected during the pandemic. In addition, their conceptions of education and their language problems made it very difficult for them to establish adequate communication with the school during the period of confinement. Moreover, in the midst of the pandemic, the economic problems of these families made it difficult for their children to develop a suitable online education due to the lack of technological resources. In addition to this complex scenario, some families at the centre interpreted the closure of educational centres during the pandemic as the start of a holiday. All these factors created a challenging situation for the educational professionals at this centre.

Finally, it is worth highlighting some characteristics of the school's teaching staff. The school is composed of Spanish teachers between 26 and 60 years of age. Most of the teaching staff are temporary teachers, i.e., teachers without a permanent position in the school who change location every year. As for the more senior teachers, they have a permanent position, but hardly have any experience in technological resources.

Throughout this section we gather the story of the experience of a centre in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. This story shows the lights and shadows experienced by the entire educational community during this difficult stage, and also how they developed leadership and inclusion strategies to overcome the adversities that occurred. To facilitate the analysis of the results, we have highlighted three key moments during the covid-19 health crisis.

The arrival of confinement: March and June.

 The decision of total confinement of the Spanish population led to the closure of all educational centres. This was news for which nobody was prepared and schools had to be reconverted into totally virtual centres. This decision was prolonged during the months of April, March and June, and caused all schools to be forced to close their doors temporarily.

According to Dulcinea, the first few weeks were really complicated, as uncertainty led them to continually reinvent themselves. She admits that at the beginning they acted on the spur of the moment, as nobody was prepared for this situation. She stresses the importance of the help of the city council in these first moments. Thanks to their continuous and joint collaboration, they were able to provide school materials and digital resources to those students who lacked economic resources.

> "At the beginning we only started distributing support, revision and reinforcement material, as we were confident that this situation would be temporary. As the days went by, faced with the seriousness of the situation, we realised the importance of reinventing all our teaching, going on to digitalise ourselves by using different media such as zoom, google meet, youtube, gmail, etc.

The use of new technologies also had a strong impact on students, as not all families had sufficient digital resources for the development of new teaching:

> "Many of my students did not have laptops or the internet, and even at home conditions were not good enough for them to live, let alone learn."

The principal stresses that these were very difficult times, and that thanks to the help of the professional team at the centre and other institutions and associations, many actions were taken

to ensure that no one was left behind. Some of these were totally decisive in guaranteeing the access of students to virtual education and consisted of the provision of digital, written and support material. At the same time, the provision of internet was also key in ensuring that everyone could be present in the online classroom. Thanks to the efforts of the school and the municipality, this was possible.

However, Dulcinea highlights the great efforts that most families make to achieve an educational improvement of their children. Nevertheless, she also indicates that in this situation a great handicap is the poor communication between the centre and the family. The headmistress points out that the lack of Spanish language skills that many families often have, sometimes makes it very difficult to establish a solid bond and easy understanding with them. Before the pandemic, this complex situation was tried to be solved with added effort from teachers and families. When COVID-19 appeared, this became a major concern as it was even more complicated to establish continuous and effective communication.

> "I think the pandemic situation made everything worse. For example, many parents don't know our language and although they made an effort, it was really difficult to move forward without real contact".

Furthermore, the principal also points out that the confinement was considered by many students and families to be the end of the school year, which, together with all the aforementioned, led to significant educational problems. According to Dulcinea, before the pandemic, school results were higher than expected in the area. However, with the advent of COVID-19, educational outcomes fell, affecting, above all, those with already low scores. Dulcinea emphasises that the most affected courses were the initial ones, which did not adapt to the online modality, leading to worrying results.

> "The confinement affected, above all, the first and second grades where students were being initiated in reading and writing. Imagine how complicated it is for parents who do not know any Spanish to help their children to write or read in this language. Now we have started the year, and this deficit is noticeable. The teachers of these levels tell me how complicated it is to start the programme due to the great deficit that many students have".

Despite all this, Dulcinea highlights above all, the huge economic impact that the health crisis has generated in families. As Dulcinea relates:

> "Economic difficulties have increased due to the COVID-19. Most families were involved in building, in the service sector, in caring for the elderly, or in housecleaning, ... and unfortunately this is where the pandemic is striking hard. In addition, a large number of families have no basic formal education, and this prevents them from being able to expand their possibilities of changing their usual employment. The pandemic has left many of our students' parents out of work, and this has been terrible for supporting housing and basic needs such as food and hygiene".

These economic difficulties led, in many cases, to real food problems. According to Dulcinea, this situation was the one that most affected teachers emotionally, psychologically and personally.

> "We cannot forget that we work with people, children, parents, families in general. And we knew that with this situation some of our families were going through a really bad time. They had real economic problems; some even had a lack of food. We couldn't look the other way."

Faced with this situation, the teaching staff decided to organise themselves to help those families in greatest need. With this action, says the director, a double objective had to be achieved. Firstly, and most importantly, to alleviate the problems related to nourishment. And

secondly, to achieve a greater commitment from those families who were less concerned about their children's education and the school's life. The latter was essential especially at a time when families became the continuation of the teacher at their home. For Dulcinea:

> "This experience was not only one of the most rewarding, but also one of the most positive during this very difficult time we have had".

Anti-covid plan, bureaucracy and uncertainty: July and August

With the arrival of the end of the school year, a new period began full of obstacles and challenges for the management. In the summer, the central governments asked each centre to produce an anti-covid protocol so as to describe how their centre were going to adapt to deal with this health crisis.

Faced with this situation, Dulcinea describes moments of great fatigue due to the enormous workload. In addition, she also points out that neither the inspection nor the education administration lived up to her expectations.

> "We finished the school year working between 10 and 12 hours, but in the summer, everything remained the same. There was a lot to prepare before the new year school started. We were asked to prepare anti-covid protocols for the return to school, to provide and equip the centre so that everything would be fine. But how? Nobody gave us any guidelines or instructions. And on top of that I knew that whatever I was doing, no one would supervise it."

The uncertainties and fears about returning to the classroom and the responsibility that was falling upon her characterised this period. Dulcinea adds that:

> "I was afraid and insecure about not knowing if I was doing it right. It was really stressful and exhausting. Besides, I felt a lot of pressure, it was people's health that was at stake, and I am neither a doctor nor a health expert".

Both she and her colleagues experienced that feeling of fighting against giants that were like windmills.

> "We were facing an invisible and unknown enemy. And to make matters worse, no one knew how to guide us in our actions."

Back to school: September and October.

September arrived with the desire of a better reality. The new situation and the recent health regulations led to the development of countless measures to safeguard the health of the students. Dulcinea explains:

> "We create coexistence groups of students with assigned teachers to avoid as much as possible the contacts between students form different grades. It was assigned to each group a different area of the as well as a different door to enter and exit the centre. In addition, we staggered the entrances to prevent family members from crowding the doors. We prepared with gels and mats; we closed and disabled some toilets".

However, Dulcinea reports that these measures were sometimes very difficult to carry out:

> "Classes were prepared, furniture was provided, tables and chairs were separated. We tried to keep as much distance as possible. However, it is sometimes very difficult in classes with 25 or 30 students"

In addition, the principal mentions the key role played by nurses and health workers in the development of these measures. These figures were assigned to each centre in order to provide guidance on the necessary adjustments to safeguard the health of both pupils and teachers. In this sense, Dulcinea stresses the essential role that the health workers played throughout the pandemic, not only in the fight to safeguard the health of sick people, but also in other tasks such as those that they provided at the school. Despite this, the principal complains about the slow reaction of the bureaucracy in assigning these health workers:

> "We had to have the health workers assigned before the protocol was drawn up. However, and again due to bureaucracy, they arrived once we had done so. In spite of this, their help was exceptional and very relevant, as it helped us to rethink some aspects and to be continuously informed of the advances in issues such as the transmission of the virus"

Dulcinea argues that another major challenge faced by the school was the methodological change. Until less than a year ago, the school was moving towards cooperative methodologies, with strong links between colleagues and participation. However, now hugs, displays of affection that involved contact were forbidden and it was even difficult to capture the happiness or sadness on the faces of the students because a mask was covering half their faces. Given this scenario, preparing new dynamics that would adapt to the stipulated measures of distance was, at the very least, a challenge. Furthermore, this health crisis has highlighted the fundamental role of digitalisation for both schools and teachers. The headmistress said that the lack of teacher training in this area was a major problem. In view of this, Dulcinea adds:

> "Given the low level of digital literacy we had and the situation we were facing, we considered essential to make progress in this area. So, two teachers were trained throughout the summer, and in September we created working groups son as to train the rest of the teaching staff".

On the other hand, Dulcinea points out how they had to delete all the ephemeris from the school and only follow what was strictly necessary.

> "On a curricular level ... things are going more or less well. But we have had to sacrifice a lot, we have had to abandon all those aspects that truly enrich the school and the students. For example, the Peace Day. We have focused on what is necessary, on exceedingly at least those minimum criteria for promotion".

Despite all the measures and efforts made, Dulcinea explained that she was still very afraid.

> "I was afraid of another possible confinement, afraid of not being prepared, afraid of contagion from students or colleagues, afraid of not doing things right. But I also felt sorry, sorry to see the students separated and having to fight all the time to keep their distance or to put on their masks".

In spite of all this, Dulcinea explains how the entire professional team at the centre turned out to keep the centre running so that no one was left behind. The Headmistress observed the enormous commitment of the teaching staff to the school and the exceptional situation they were experiencing. She perceived the increased workload and, in some cases, significant sacrifices:

> "There were colleagues who, despite their situation as people of risk, were still at the 'bottom of the barrel', when perhaps the most logical thing would have been to take a step back. And there were others who were about to retire and with the significant reduction in working hours, decided to sacrifice this reduction in order to help as much as possible. My colleagues not only showed their commitment to me and to the school management, but to everyone: to the families, to the students, to education in general".

However, Dulcinea stands out from all her colleagues, her management team and administration staff. For the headmistress:

"The work that my fellows did was not only essential to overcome all the problems that the Covid-19 was causing to the school, but it also became the main and best emotional and personal support that I had during all this period".

These colleagues not only fulfilled the functions that their posts required, but also assumed other responsibilities with the sole aim of keeping the life of the school going. In this sense, Dulcinea relates how they assumed extra teaching hours to replace sick colleagues, who were not replaced by the system's bureaucratic slowness; or how they assumed additional coordination tasks in the face of the laziness of other colleagues.

"This situation has shown me that teachers matter relatively little. No one asks, how are the teachers? The only thing that matters is having the school open at all costs, but that's it. We have had up to six teachers leave, we have reported that we could not cover the classes. But on an administrative level, we haven't received any help".

Despite this, the director also highlights the laziness of some of her colleagues:

"What has impacted on me the most is the lack of commitment from some of my colleagues, and above all I am struck by the fact that they tend to be the youngest. Either because they don't feel the school as theirs, because they consider that they know enough, because they are not willing to share, or because they are more aware of their curriculum... I don't know why, but it is true that these colleagues were not helping. I miss more committed young teachers, what kind of teachers will we have in 15 years' time? This situation has shown me that the centre is working and that we are overcoming this crisis thanks to the older teachers".

Dulcinea underlines a fundamental learning from this unfinished experience:

"This situation has taught me that education in general and teachers in particular are indispensable. We are essential to society, just like doctors, health workers or security personnel."

Finally, the findings presented reveal how throughout this health crisis, the school developed a series of strategies and initiatives so that no one in the education community was left behind. Figure 1 shows in a more graphic and visual way the different key events throughout this period and the leadership and inclusion strategies carried out by the school under study.

Figure 1. Main moments and strategies developed during the Covid-19 health crisis.

Chronology	Description	Milestone, Theme, Leitmotiv Or feelings and emotions.	Educational strategies developed to address COVID-19
12th March 2020 to 22nd June 2020	A state of alarm is declared, and the confinement of the population is approved. Schools in Spain are forced to close their doors.	- New technologies became a fundamental element of access to education. - Many school families have a lack of digital resources, access to the Internet and basic food and hygiene. - Communication difficulties with families due to lack of knowledge of the Spanish language. - Economic difficulties in many school families as a result of confinement. - Aggravation of the curricular gap of those students who are more disadvantaged or in lower grades. - Predominance of emotions of fear and uncertainty.	- City Hall as a great support for the supply of school and digital materials and food. - Collaboration and union of the professional teaching team and school management. - Continuous virtual contact with families for monitoring students.
July and August	After the end of the course, a great increase in bureaucratic/administrative work. A request is made for the preparation of an AntiCovid-19 action plan with scarcely any guidance from the administration.	- Central governments ask schools for an adaptation plan for the return to school in September. - Lack of orientation and guidance for the elaboration of adaptation plan. - High workload and increased responsibility on the part of the management team. - Predominant feeling of loneliness.	- Increased job responsibilities by school management - Support from colleagues to answer, plan and elaborate all required administrative procedures.
From 10th September onwards	Back to the classrooms. Return to the classroom mode in schools.	- New health measures (social distancing, masks, ventilation, gels). - Lack of teacher training in new technologies. - Lack of commitment from a small sector of teachers. - Predominance of feelings of grief and tiredness	- Creation of student coexistence groups with assigned teachers to avoid and minimize contacts in the school. - Restructuring of playtime and time spent entering and leaving the school to minimise crowding - Preparation of the building to make it more sanitary. - Provision of sanitary and hygienic materials and of reminding of rules of social distancing. - Methodological adaptations to meet educational objectives while respecting health protocols. - Training in new technologies for digital literacy of teachers. - Distributed leadership and for social justice

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this manuscript was to explore the leadership and inclusion strategies developed by a difficult centre that managed to deal effectively with the health crisis that occurred.

As reported throughout the findings, the educational practices developed in the school studied were based on a methodological (re)conversion towards an irreversible scenario due to this global pandemic (Harris, 2020). To this end, the teaching team based their professional work on school leadership values, establishing a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve, in what way and what the role of each one of them was in order to make this possible. Studies such as Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2020) argue that this leadership is key, even more in complex times such as the present.

Furthermore, Day et al. (2010) already indicated that one of the main key dimensions of school leadership refers to building relationships both within and outside the school community. Our findings agree on the importance of building networks and links with institutions and agencies outside the education community, which can sometimes be complex and can be a determining factor in the implementation of inclusion strategies in schools.

The school principal works in a school with adverse circumstances, which was hit hard by the appearance of the COVID-19. The economic and social situation in which most of the families found themselves was truly alarming. This is why the centre considered adopting measures that could respond to those educational and social needs that the pandemic had increased. Llorent-Bedamar, Cobano-Delgado and Navarro- Granados (2017) stress that these initiatives are vital in order to guarantee basic social and educational rights in disadvantaged contexts. One of the great complexities when it came to overcome the challenge of adapting to the virtual mode of teaching at this school was the lack of knowledge of the language that many families had and the lack of digital resources to have access to virtual teaching. This made it even more difficult to achieve a true engagement with the students (Netolicky, 2020), although thanks to external bodies such as the town council, the school was able to distribute basic digital resources for access to an online educational scenario. This also highlights another extremely important aspect, the duality between pedagogy and technology: although technology has taken on a priority role in the COVID-19 crisis, the human dimension is vital if education is to be truly effective and reach everyone (Hargreaves 2020).

Following this premise, the school studied developed different strategies to overcome the difficulties caused by the pandemic. Our findings set the scene for a school with a difficult performance, which thanks to the leadership exercised by the director and the rest of the educational community managed to address the difficulties encountered throughout the process. Thus, the redistribution of primary material goods, the valuing of cultural, social and personal differences and the participation of the entire educational community were fundamental values and principles of this leadership (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). In this sense, it is relevant to point out that these educational practices in a challenging context coincide with those leadership values developed by female school leaders. In fact, several studies suggest that in contexts of difficult performance, female school principals promote leadership strategies and actions based on collective commitment, mutual support and social justice (Armstrong y Mitchell, 2017; Cruz-González, Pérez and Domingo, 2020; Murakami y Tornsen, 2017).

Landing in the Spanish context, and as we have already pointed out in other sections, school management finds itself with a "blurred" professional identity that is weak on most occasions

(Ritacco and Bolívar, 2018). Among other reasons, work overload can be one of the main ones due to the fact that school directors are often flooded with bureaucratic and administrative procedures which take away hours from other issues of a pedagogical nature. The results of our study coincide with this previous research, pointing out that even when what prevailed was a pedagogical and cooperative action to deal with the COVID-19, school directors were succumbed to hundreds of bureaucratic procedures that took up a lot of time (or caused them to take time away from other aspects).

In addition, we must add that the managers and educational professionals found themselves with a scenario that was not expected and for which they were not trained. For this reason, the ability to manage crises and changes is now one of the priority skills that every school leader must present. Also, a united team that faces adversity together is needed. The participating headmistress tells of initial moments in which there was improvisation because no one was prepared. In spite of this, her encouragement and enthusiasm to continue assuming this challenge lay with a large part of the school's committed professional team, who acted as a collective glue to ensure that, in the face of any problems caused, everyone would be there to respond.

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the need for greater professional training in educational technologies (Fernández, Moreno and Guerra, 2020). In fact, our results already confirm the key role of having digital tools and skills for a situation of this magnitude. Furthermore, as Harris and Jones (2020) explain, a significant rethinking of leadership models is considered fundamental, adjusting them to current needs and demands and orienting their principles to those skills and practices necessary to respond to the current situation. In short, the COVID-19 crisis has dismantled urgent needs in the field of school leadership, and everything points to the fact that, for the very near future, school leaders will need to be experts in educational technologies and virtual teaching methodologies.

Footnotes

1. Indices of the cultural and economic status in PISA.
2. Andalusian Agency for Educational Evaluation.

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