Effective practices in leadership for social justice. Evolution of successful secondary school principalship in disadvantaged contexts.

Abstract

This paper investigates the evolution of leadership for learning that has occurred in four secondary schools located in disadvantaged contexts in the province of Granada (Spain) over a period of two years, performing a comparative analysis on the values, qualities and strategies that characterize their principals during the academic years 2013-2014 and 2015-2016. The investigation uses case studies and conducts interviews with principals, teachers and education administrators. It is supported by the group-case method, as well as the longitudinal prospective method. The results show that only one of these principals has maintained a leadership aimed at learning and achievement of all students in the school, at the same time as students' academic results have been improving. This paper concludes by providing information on values, qualities and strategies of successful leadership in disadvantaged contexts in Spain that distinguish them from other less successful leaders.

Keywords: Successful leadership, leadership for learning, social justice, leadership effectiveness, disadvantaged contexts.

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Introduction and objectives

Schools have long been considered an essential instrument for social change and improvement. Freire's basic approach that education does not change the world, but changes people who are going to change the world, gives the school a privileged role as a vehicle to balance social differences (Freire, 1992). However, this approach sometimes seems to be

rhetoric used by educational policies rather than reality (BOE, 2016). The fact is that schools in deprived contexts cannot be promoters of social change but rather a "social reproducer" since the association - poor classes with poor children - continues to be maintained and repeated (Althuser, 1988; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979).

The research conducted on social justice highlights the need to investigate effective practices in order to end inequalities and identify the traits and competences leaders need to fight against social injustice, encompasses a range of terms such as equity, inequality, equal opportunity and diversity (Blackmore, 2009). Specifically, we find research on social justice that refers to the fact that a leadership for social justice must be focused on improving student learning outcomes (Carper and Young, 2014; Chapman and Harris, 2004; Furman, 2012; Harris, 2010a; Kose, 2007; McCray and Beachum, 2014; Muijs et al., 2004; Shields, 2003). The current OECD (2012) motto "equity based on quality" is based on the approach of exercising leadership for learning and for improving students' academic results, since without an improvement in student learning, schools will not be able to achieve the expected social change.

The study presented belongs to the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) (Day and Gurr, 2014; Day and Leithwood, 2007), and is focused on identifying the characteristics, attributes, qualities, skills and strategies of successful school principals in a wide range of social, economic and cultural circumstances and in different countries. In some cases, the ISSPP project has specifically identified traits and particular strategies of successful principals located in disadvantaged contexts and promoters of social justice in countries like England (Day, 2007), Norway (Moller and Vedoy, 2014), USA (Merchant, Garza and Murakami-Ramalho, 2014) and Indonesia (Raihani, Gurr and Drysdale, 2014).

One subgroup of the Spanish research team participating in the ISSPP at the University of Granada contributed to the project by carrying out a comparative study on the leadership applied at four schools in disadvantaged contexts in the province of Granada, Spain. The purpose of the study was to identify values, qualities and strategies of the leadership aimed at improving students' academic progress and achievement, practiced by four principals of different secondary schools (Schools A, B, C and D). The schools were selected on the basis of student progress and achievement. Schools A and B showed greater progress in improving learning outcomes and had better educational inspection reports than secondary schools C and D. Nevertheless, the academic results of these schools were never better than those of schools with similar ISC, schools from the same educational area or schools from the Andalusia region (Academic Year 2011-2012). Our study on these schools began in the academic year 2012-2013, collecting data on the type of leadership for learning that took place in them (Author et al., 2024, 2016) and, during the academic year 2013-2014, we carried out the interview protocols provided by ISSPP in order to analyze schools in disadvantaged settings and with lower results than expected. The research study outcomes indicated that, although principals in the four secondary schools had similar values and qualities, principals of schools A and B also demonstrated more energy, passion for the school project, strength and control, and used different strategies to manage the learning processes, especially in terms of the emphasis they placed upon collaboration and the extent to which they distributed leadership (Author et al., 2017). This study presents two styles of leadership for working in disadvantaged contexts: one of them shows a principal who adopts a passionate and hopeful attitude that things can change, within a culture of '*it can be done*', firmly insisting on implementing the strategies for the leadership for learning model (School A and B). The other style is characterized by accepting to some degree that '*this is how things are*', assuming a position that principals refer to as a '*realistic approach*', where they

accept that the curriculum is fundamentally aimed at achieving social inclusion (School C and D).

Taking into account the results of the first year of research, we have continued analyzing these schools in a second year (2015-2016) in order to find out whether the successful leadership aimed at improving students' learning and achievement was sustained through these years, checking whether there have been any changes in the type of leadership that has taken place in these schools during the period 2012-2016. In order to do this, we used the data obtained by carrying out the ISSPP interviews in the academic year 2013-2014 and gathered data for a second time during the academic course 2015-2016 using the protocols provided by the ISSPP in the second year study. Our purpose is to provide data to the ISSPP project giving information on characteristics of successful leadership from Spain and, we try to analyse, specifically, to what extent a leadership aimed at student learning and achievement is being applied, or not, in these four secondary schools located in disadvantaged contexts in the province of Granada (Spain), and, to what extent, this leadership for learning stands or evolves over time.

Theoretical framework

Leadership for social justice in disadvantaged contexts

The challenge of improving schools in the most disadvantaged contexts is currently of concern in many countries as they face socio-economic deprivation and are usually full of students with diverse ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds and low literacy levels. These schools have students from families with unemployment problems, immigration issues and family break-ups, all of which result in a powerful amalgam of social and economic problems (Lupton, 2003; Mulford, 2007). Schools in disadvantaged contexts can find themselves in a

"vicious circle" of poor parents - poor children. School education may be one of the few ways society has available to do something about improving the situation of people living in disadvantaged areas (OECD, 2012; Shields, 2003) and getting rid of PISA data in Spain: educational outcomes in deprived areas are worse than those in non-deprived areas (OECD, 2016b).

Schools in disadvantaged contexts have higher failure rates, the quality of learning experience is lower and there are also lower expectations regarding the chances of student success (Lalas & Morgan, 2006; Shields, 2003). The curriculum is less significant (OCDE, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2007), the teachers in these schools are of lower quality (Darling-Hammond, 2007) and they exercise less instructional leadership and less learning-oriented leadership than in high-level schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Schools with socio-economic disadvantages also lack the capacity for internal improvement and teachers are usually not very motivated to work in them (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Muijs, et al., 2004).

In Spanish schools in disadvantaged contexts, we find similar circumstances to those already mentioned. Spanish schools in disadvantaged contexts achieve poorer academic results, pupils have lower expectations and, what it is more worrying, this is permitted and accepted (González, 2014), even justified systematically and structurally (Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Young, 2011). These results are not just a consequence of a disadvantaged environment, but are also due to the social structure of the school they attend. These students are locked out of the world of oportunity and advantage as something they simply take for granted (Harris, 2010a). These data show marginalization and social injustice because school failure penalizes children for life (OECD, 2012).

Research into school effectiveness and school improvement has identified strong leadership as one of the most significant correlates of effective and improving schools and

improving learning results (Day et al., 2010; Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). In fact, strong, successful school leadership has been found to reduce the depressing effects of disadvantaged contexts, by acting both directly and indirectly to change them (Mulford, 2007). The research carried out on leadership for social justice is mainly aimed at recognizing and showing these circumstances of inequality and marginalization, as well as showing practices to eliminate them. Furman's definition of leadership for social justice shows the diversity of nuances and strands encompassed by leadership research: "Leadership for social justice is action oriented and transformative, committed and persistente, inclusive and democratic, relational and caring, reflective, and oriented toward socially just pedagogy" (Furman, 2012; pp. 195). Therefore, we find the works of Shields (2003) and Jansen (2006) highlight the need for leaders to act as a morally transformative and proactive agent leaders to counteract marginalization and injustice, the work of Lalas & Morgan (2006) and Theoharis (2007; 2008) that show a committed and persistent leader, the work of Cooper (2009), Wasonga (2014), DeMatthews & Mahinney (2014) that refer to the construction of a democratic community and shared decision-making, in a community of dialogue (Ryan & Rottman, 2009), getting involved in a critical self-reflection (Dantley, 2008) and the development of a deep examinations of personal assumptions (Brown, 2004). But, we also find works that highlight the figure of the leader for social justice, essentially interested in raising the academic achievement of students, focused on improving learning outcomes and oriented toward socially just pedagogy (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Furman, 2012; Kose, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2008; Riester, Pursch & Skrla, 2002; Theoharis, 2007, 2008). Some focus on designing a curriculum that is meaningful and motivating enough to eliminate social barriers faced by socioeconomically disadvantaged students (McGray & Beachum, 2014; Riley, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Although it should be noted that what you are looking for is to achieve not only a social inclusión in school envirotments (Cooper, 2009;

DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Ryan & Rottmann, 2009; Wasonga, 2014) but especially the improvement of the results of the learner and the development of inclusive instructional practice from a systematic and ecological perspective (Furman, 2012). This strand of research runs parallel to the objective of attaching equity with quality in education and ending the idea that disadvantage means low performance and ensuring that students are not penalized twice - because of their own disadvantaged background, and because they attend school that heightens this with (OECD, 2012). For this reason it is necessary to delve further into the features that characterize successful principals in disadvantaged contexts and understand how these features sustain success.

Traits and strategies of successful school leadership

The impact of leadership in improving the results of apprenticeship has been demonstrated by different investigations. They show that effective school leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and on the achievement of students (Day et al., 2010, 2011; Robinson, Looyd & Rowe, 2008). This influence is determined by the possession of a series of values, dispositions, attributes and the use of a series of strategies (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Day et al., 2011; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Day & Gurr, 2014; Kose, 2007; Mulford, et al., 2007; Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2007).

In relation to the characteristics, dispositions and values of successful principals, the research indicates that they show tenacious commitment, arrogant humility, visionary passion (Theoharis, 2008), and focus on achievement within democratic values, consultative and approachable, providing support, caring and attentive, understanding the needs of staff and pupils, having strong vision and values and being firm, fair, flexible and resiliente (Day et al., 2011; Notman, 2014; Pashiardis & Savvides, 2014; Theoharis, 2007; Torres-Arcadia & Flores Kastani, 2014), fostering a collaborative leadership with democratic and distributed components (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Harris, 2014), not taking a heroic bureaucratic figure

nor supervising the teaching staff but interacting with teachers managing the teaching and learning programme (Day & Gurr, 2014; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Moss, Johansson & Day, 2011).

In relation to the strategies and leadership model that successful principals put into practice to achieve better student learning outcomes, some investigations make reference to a type of instructional leadership as the real promoter of improved learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985) particulary a shared instructional leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003). Other studies make reference to a transformational leadership (Leithwood & Sun, 2012) and some consider that a successful leadership relies on a mix of transformational and instructional styles (Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016). The ISSPP project concludes that successful school leaders maintain a post-heroic leadership style that combines transformational and instructional strategies (Day & Gurr, 2014; Day & Leihtwood, 2007). The ISSPP project has established the following core dimensions of successful leaders: 1) Setting directions: Identify the vision of schools, establish clear and well-defined school goals associated with performance expectations; 2) Developing people: Professional development of teachers, intellectual stimulation, support and consideration; 3) Refining and aligning the organization: Building a collaborative culture that allows distribution of leadership and develops a productive relationship with families and communities; 4) Improving the teaching and learning programme: Focusing on the coordination, development and monitoring of the curriculum (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Day et al., 2011; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Moss et al., 2011).

The *leadership for learning* movement developed by Hallinger (2009, 2011) and Hallinger & Heck (2010), or by Knapp (2014) and Knapp & Portin (2014), is also built on the basis of transformational and instructional leadership models and highlights the critical role that leadership plays in creating and sustaining a school-wide focus on learning. Leadership for

learning outlines a principal capable of creating the conditions conducive to generating capacity for improvement in school, as well as working directly with teachers in improving the teaching-learning program from a shared and collaborative perspective. It moves away from a vision of a principal managing the improvement process in a solitary and domineering way and is supported by the figure of a principal who works in collaboration with teachers (Halliger & Heck, 2010), through instructional teams (Knapp & Portin, 2014; Marks & Printy, 2003)

Leadership for learning takes on a collective vision for understanding leadership. In this vision, professional learning communities (Harris & Jones, 2011) and instructional leadership teams (Knapp & Portin, 2014) play an essential role. This approach is based on collaborative work aimed at improving the school and towards its sustainable change that requires the participation of all staff (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Harris, 2014). The principal is considered the central facilitator of the academic capacity of the school, but his figure is qualified from the image of a 'hybrid' type of leadership proposed by Gronn (2008, 2009). The proposal is built on a collaborative leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010) or a shared instructional leadership (Marks & Printy, 2003), a leadership model with distributed, democratic traits (Harris, 2014; Harris & Jones, 2011; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004), as it is considered the only alternative truly capable of transforming the school (Harris, 2010b). The collaborative and distributed models will extend leadership in the organization and ultimately impact on the school's academic capacity through an open dialogue between principals and teachers and shared decision-making on issues related to teaching-learning processes.

Features and strategies for sustainable successful leadership

The ISSPP has also studied the sustainability of leadership (Moss et al., 2011) and for this purpose numerous investigations have been carried out in order to verify if the characteristics

and strategies of the existent leadership obtained in the first data collection are maintained over time (Day, 2011; Drysdale, Goode & Gurr, 2011; Jacobson, Johnson & Ylimaki, 2011; Moller, Vedoy, Presthus & Skedsmo, 2011; Ylimaki, Gurr & Drysdale, 2011).

Successful leadership aimed to improving learning results goes through a series of phases (Hopkins, Stringfield, Harris, Stoll & MacKay, 2014), which Day et al. (2010) specify in the principals' performance in the following way: 1) Early phase: principals improving the physical environment and the conditions for teaching and learning, setting, communicating and implementing school-wide standards for pupil behaviour and implementing performance management systems for all staff; 2) Middle phase: principals prioritising the wider distribution of leadership roles and focusing on the use of data to inform decision-making on pupil progress; 3) Later phase: principals' key strategies related to personalising and enriching the curriculum as well as wider distribution of leadership. This improvement process is not linear but it happens in layers, called "multilayered". Layers are supported among themselves and some are necessary for others to be generated (Day, 2009; Day et al., 2011).

In addition, successful leadership requires basic sustainability, requiring engagement in the complexities of continuous and consistent improvement (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008). A heroic leader cannot sustain and maintain the improvement on his/her own, the burden is too heavy and it has been proven ineffective (Yulk, 1999). The results of the ISSPP project speak of a post-heroic leader who distributes leadership effectively, builds a collaborative professional culture, generates a collective responsibility and guides the organization through the establishment of clear objectives firmly set. This is a leader who creates a learning community in which everyone participates, and which is grounded in the principles of trust and shared responsibility (Day & Gurr, 2014).

In particular, we find studies on how to sustain the 'turnaround' in schools serving challenging communities (Minor-Ragan & Jacobson, 2014; Torres-Arcadia & Flores-Kastanis, 2014; Yaakov & Tubin, 2014; Ylimaki et al., 2011). These studies show principals who have passion, beliefs and knowledge to move schools from 'failing' to at least 'good'. We also find works focusing on social justice, such as those by Merchant, Garza & Murakami-Ramalho (2014), Moller & Vedoy (2014) and Raihani, Gurr & Drysdale (2014), which describe the work of principals committed to providing an outstanding education for all students through the active and continued promotion by means of high expectations, appreciating diversity and difference, fostering equity and social justice, establishing an active relationship with the local community and encouraging, at all times, open dialogue between staff to help reach collective responsibility.

Successful principals are those who can facilitate professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2014) and a collaborative work culture (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). These two key factors are considered essential to ensure sustainable improvement, because, as shown in some research, the differences between good and bad schools are found in the degree of social connection and trust between their members, which allow distribution of leadership as well as the emergence of a genuine collective responsibility (Harris, 2014).

The work of Day (2007) basically summarizes three essential strategies that successful managers use to achieve and sustain success in schools in disadvantaged contexts: a) Moral purpose and social justice, maintaining vision and resilience; b) Organizational expectations and learning, creating expectations for high achievement, shared responsibility and fostering a 'learning centered leadership; c) Identity, trust and passionate commitment, defining and maintaining individual and collective identities, renewing trust and passion for the work of educating.

Methodology

The study we submit is trying to show to what extent those underperforming schools located in disadvantaged contexts that we started to analyze in the first stage of the ISSPP research project during 2012-2013 (Author et al., 2014, 2016), have made changes, or not, regarding the strategies aimed at improving learning results throughout the period between 2013-2014 y 2015-2016.

The methodology used by strand 2 of the ISSPP project for studying underperforming schools (Strand 1 ISSPP – Leadership in Successful Schools; Strand 2 ISSPP - Leadership in Underperforming Schools; Strand 3 ISSP: Leadership Identity), is based on case studies using interviews with principals, teachers, parents, students and educational administrators. In addition to conducting case studies of four underperforming schools in disadvantaged contexts (Stake, 1995), our research has applied the group-case method (GCM) (Teddlie, Tashakkori and Johnson, 2008), as well as the longitudinal prospective method (Ruspinei, 2008), as the research involves a comparison of four case studies on schools in disadvantaged settings and their evolution over time. The participant is asked, via repeated interviews, to provide information about behavior and attitudes regarding leadership for learning over a period of time between 2013-2014 and 2015-2016.

Sample selection

The selection of the four case studies (schools A, B, C and D) was made according to similar socioeconomic and cultural contexts and according to their scores in relation to their academic results. Schools A, B, C and D are located in economic and social disadvantaged areas and cater to an ample student population from different towns and villages in the Granada region, who come from families that, in some cases, are from Romany communities, as well as immigrant families (35% of population from immigrant and Romany

communities). A great deal of the students accepted by these schools comes from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These are families in precarious employment situations, or in unemployment, and with very low education levels, as some of their members do not have any education whatsoever and even, in some cases, are illiterate. In addition, the schools also accept students coming from families with average socio-economic backgrounds and middle education levels.

Regarding the academic progress, during the period between 2011-2012 and 2014-2015, school A progressed to higher academic level than schools B, C and D. The academic progress of schools B and D decreased slightly and school C remained on the same line without any changes. During the year 2011-2012, schools A and B showed better academic results than schools C and D with regard to the percentage of students in secondary education with positive assessment in all subjects (NSE+) (School A: 44.44%; School B: 36.03%; School C: 31.28%; School D: 33.17% (AGAEVE, 2011-2012). Inspector's reports for schools A and B were better than for schools C and D. The academic development of these secondary schools in 2014-2015 shows that school A has improved its academic results (NSE+ 49.49%) and we can verify that these are better when compared with schools with similar socioeconomic index (ISC) (NSE+ 38.93%), schools from the same educational area (NSE+ 47,31%) or schools in Andalusia (NSE+ 46.77%). School B has fallen from 36.03% (NSE+) (2011-2012) to 29.71% (NSE+) (2014-2015). Secondary school C remains on the same line from a score of 31.28% to 32.21% and, finally, secondary school D has dropped from a score of 33.17% to 22.09% (NSE+). The rates of these three schools do not exceed those of schools with similar ISC, schools in the same educational area and schools in Andalusia (AGAEVE, 2014-1015).

Data collection and analysis

The ISSPP project provides outlines for semi-structured interviews to be carried out in the second year of the study (Day, 2013) and we have applied this second series of interviews in the four selected schools during February and March 2016. We interviewed principals, teachers and education inspectors from each school and used the same teacher sample that took part in the previous study (Author et al., 2017). We conducted focus groups with teachers from schools A and B, but it was not possible to create a focus group with teachers from schools C and D, as they were unwilling to participate. The combination of interviews and focus group ensures high validity to the study as it carries out a mixture of qualitative methods (interviews and focus groups) (O'Reilly and Kiyimba, 2015).

The semi-structured question scripts of interviews for principals and teachers present the same common thread as the interviews carried out in the first year of study, as they maintain similar questions in each group with respect to the perceptions of leadership and school development over time, exploring in detail the vision of the school, its culture, its characteristics, its capacity for improvement, the improvement plan, school challenges and problems, etc. Two interviews were carried out with principals and teachers in each school, using the same sample chosen in the first year of study (3 teachers in each school). The selection of teachers that were individually interviewed was based on them being representatives for the lines and projects maintained by the schools. Due to the fact that the interviewed teacher sample was very small and pre-selected, we chose to establish teacher focus groups in each school, the teachers who participated in the focus group did not have any pre-selection and were those available in the staff room at the time and who had some free time. Following the same interview script given to the teachers, we set up a focus group in which a sample of seven or eight teachers took part, with the aim to ratify the answers teachers gave during the interviews carried out in a personalized manner and in order to take an in-depth look at the data obtained from interviews and support it (Ryan et al., 2014).

Regarding data analysis, the ISSPP provides a guide for the analysis of data in strand 2 (Day, 2013). The analysis guide includes large meta-categories related to values and characteristic traits of leadership, as well as strategies for developing effective leadership: Setting Directions, Developing People, Refining and Aligning the Organization and Improving the Teaching and Learning Program (Day, 2013; Day et al., 2011). This system of categories has been adapted to the Spanish context and compared with works such as Leithwood et al. (2006), Day and Leithwood (2007), Hallinger (2009, 2011), Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Robinson et al. (2008), Knapp (2014), Hopkins (2003), Spillane et al. (2004) and Spillane (2013), who refer to leadership aimed at improving learning.

The qualitative data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using NVivo software (version 10.1.3) and the results obtained in the previous study (2013-2014) have been compared with the new ones (2015-2016), using the same leadership for learning category system applied in the previous work (Author et al., 2017). Tables 1 and 2 show the results obtained from the frequency analysis performed with NVivo 11 Plus software. Figures 1 and 2 show a comparative graphical representation for the occurrence frecuency of each of the strategies of the leadership for learning model.

Table 1

Weighted percentage - Frequency of occurrence of "Values and Dispositions". Leadership for Learning Model. Registration - principals and teachers (School A, B, C, D).

Agent	Year	School	AO	EC	RE	S	P	CI	MP	T	C	R	Total
Principal	2013/14	A	28,6	33,3	32	50	42,9	27	10	0	28,6	32,1	30,4
		B	19	15,7	22,5	3,3	14,3	14,9	26,7	25	42,8	21,4	18
		C	4,8	11,8	6,5	0	21,4	5,4	23,3	50	0	10,7	9,3
		D	9,5	3,9	5	0	0	1,4	3,3	25	0	14,3	4,3
	2015/16	A	33,3	27,4	18	43,4	7,1	32,4	6,7	0	28,6	3,6	23,3
		B	0	0	8	0	0	14,9	20	0	0	3,6	7,2
		C	0	5,9	6,5	3,3	14,3	2,7	10	0	0	3,6	5
		D	4,8	2	1,5	0	0	1,4	0	0	0	10,7	2,5
* Total frequency. Principal			21	51	63	30	14	74	30	4	7	28	322
Teacher	2013/14	A	75	22,7	24	33,4	38,5	38,5	26,1	37,5	16,7	31,4	29,8

Year	School	AO	EC	RE	S	P	CI	MP	T	C	R	Total
	B	0	10,6	20,4	30	23	20	8,7	0	83,3	3,9	18,7
	C	0	7,6	13	0	15,4	4,6	17,4	12,5	0	5,9	7,5
	D	0	10,6	3,7	3,3	7,7	1,5	8,7	0	0	7,8	5,5
2015/16	A	0	19,7	18,5	30	0	16,9	4,3	37,5	0	25,5	18,1
	B	0	15,2	7,4	0	0	16,9	8,7	12,5	0	11,8	10,2
	C	0	3	7,4	0	7,7	0	17,4	0	0	7,8	4,5
	D	25	10,6	5,6	3,3	7,7	1,6	8,7	0	0	5,9	5,7
* Total Frequency. Teacher		4	66	54	30	13	65	23	8	18	51	332

Note. AO = Academic optimism; EC = Empathy care; RE = Resilience; S = Strength; P = Passionate; CI = Commitment to improvement; MP = Moral purpose; T = Trust; C = Control; R = Responsibility; * = value adopted for weighting.

Table 2

Weighted percentage - Frequency of occurrence of "Strategies of Successful Leadership".

Leadership for Learning Model. Registration - principals and teachers (School A, B, C, D).

Agent	Year	School	SD	DP	RO	ITLP
Principal	2013/2014	A	13,5	25,4	22,2	13,2
		B	26,2	12,3	25,1	19
		C	14,3	7	4,3	6,35
		D	8,7	13,8	5,4	8,65
	2015/2016	A	23	26,2	29	28,7
		B	1,6	4,6	7,9	11,5
		C	4	6,9	3,2	6,3
		D	8,7	3,8	2,9	6,3
* Total frequency. Principal			126	130	279	174
Teacher	2013/2014	A	27	17,4	24,7	10,9
		B	15,5	20,3	26,2	18,7
		C	6,2	8	3,6	13
		D	6,2	2,9	2,5	5,9
	2015/2016	A	26,4	35,5	25,6	22,6
		B	3,9	5,8	9,6	18
		C	7,8	5,8	4,7	5
		D	7	4,3	3,1	5,9
* Total frequency. Teacher			129	138	446	239

Note. SD = Setting Directions; DP = Developing People; RO = Refining Organization; ITLP = Improving teaching and learning program; * = value adopted for weighting.

The comparison of case studies (A, B, C and D), together with the longitudinal study carried out thereafter, guarantees the reliability and validity of the investigation and its degree of authenticity (Bush, 2009). Although it is a qualitative investigation based on case studies and, therefore, can never guarantee generalized and absolute 'truth or knowledge', we can consider, as does Flyvbjerg (2013), that the results obtained have great conceptual validity. This validity is based on the thesis that knowledge from specific cases is more valuable for

human learning than what can be obtained through procedures to extract general knowledge from an independent context, as highlighted by a number of studies on the possibilities of qualitative research (Denzin, 2011; Lincoln et al., 2011), with the only possible knowledge in social sciences being specific knowledge from a dependent context.

The investigation also uses a prospective study that is considered the most 'truly longitudinal' (and consequently preferable when analyzing micro social change), because information is periodically gathered on the same individuals, who are asked the same sequence of questions at regular intervals (Ruspini, 2008).

Findings

The analysis on the data collected in relation to the characteristics, dispositions and strategies of the four principals analyzed in secondary schools in disadvantaged contexts shows great differences with regard to the way they face their tasks as well as to their performance. In relation to _traits and dispositions,_ there has been a significant change in school B, as this school hired a new principal who brought about a significant change in the school direction. This principal had to leave his position for personal reasons at the end of the academic year 2013-2014. In the first year, all principals showed similar traits (empathy, high sense of responsibility, moral purpose, etc.), but the principals of schools A and B showed traits of energy, passion, strength and control. However, in the second year of analysis, these traits have been maintained by all principals (empathy, care, high sense of responsibility, moral purpose, etc.), but only the principal of school A has maintained traits of passion, overwhelming energy, control and strength. Teachers of school B miss the firmness, control and authority of the previous leader: "*The previous principal was more authoritarian, but not in a negative sense; this one is not so and that confuses us a bit*" (Teacher 2 of school B) (T2-B). "*This new principal gives you so much freedom and flexibility that you miss the strength*

of the previous one" (T1-B). "*Metaphorically speaking, this principal is a chess player who observes the play and eventually takes part... while the presence of the other principal was more visible (in the corridor, at the door...)... he had everything under control..."* (T3-B). Inspector for School B: "*having such charismatic leaders produces some advantages and disadvantages, because when they go... they leave the school without resources*" (Inspector-I-B).

The traits of passion, overwhelming energy, control and strength presented by the principal of school A are traits that might be associated with a charismatic or heroic leadership model. This model of leadership has been widely criticized for its ineffectiveness (Yulk, 1999), although, as Day (2009) notes, successful principals are not charismatic or heroic in the traditional sense, but they have a very resolute sense of their moral purpose and personal characteristics that have become a benchmark. Slater (2008) gets to say that principals are true heroes who generate communication relationships based on trust and collaboration that allow the development of a distributed leadership. Therefore, although these charismatic traits could be questioned in some way, research highlights the need for authoritarian leaders in disadvantaged contexts (Muijs et al., 2010). Once the schools have come forward to maintain a 'hybrid' leadership (Gronn, 2008; 2009), there is a need for a balance between top-down and bottom-up models orchestrated by the principal (Gronn, 2008; Harris, 2014; Hopkins et al., 2014; Spillane, 2013).

Strategies

Firstly, with regard to strategy *Setting Directions*, there are very different positions, which show how principal A clearly maintains this strategy and how other schools do not do that so distinctly. Some researches believe that the basis for an effective school in challenging contexts rests on the capacity of the principal to build a vision towards clearly identified

goals with a commitment to improvement (Chapman & Harris, 2004). Without this unifying vision, schools are intended to be systems with a very slight connection, characterized by a number of individuals located in a common area with almost no interaction and without a common purpose (Mitchell & Sackney, 2006). The principal of school A has a clear direction and uses the metaphor of sailing to express this strategy: "*It is necessary to have a path, the boat should not go adrift… it has to sail with a direction... opening doors, roads, it is a slow process... We have to go on sailing and sailing*" (Principal of school A) (P-A). Teachers recognize the existence of this direction, "*the greatest improvement has been to create a school identity... from a leadership that has a very clear vision*" (Teacher 1 of school A) (T1-A). The previous principal of school B clearly exercised this function of setting directions, although this strategy is not so obvious with the new principal: *"The previous principal was very much a leader, he was more persuasive. This one doesn't lead very much… He was like an orchestra conductor...With this new principal, it is like 'intuitive music'"* (T1-B). Schools C and D do not seem to have a clear direction for all teachers: *"We do not have a common line and these children need a good structure and a lot of routine"* (T1-C) *"there are teachers who do not agree with the inclusion project that we have currently underway"* (T1-D). In addition, elaborating on this function of setting directions for attaining successful leadership, the vision must be based on a commitment to the success of all students in equal terms and should be prevented from being merely bureaucratic, with the power to energize and stimulate schools (Day & Gurr, 2014; Day & Leithwood, 2007; Murphy & Torre, 2015). School A inspector highlights this idea of an energizing and not merely bureaucratic vision: "*If you're in the middle -seeing what's happening-, this does not lead to anywhere, you have to have an objective... that your school is the best, looking for excellence. There are other principals who are not so enthusiastic... Principal A goes directly to excellence. He does not manage from a bureaucratic point of view, i.e. 'do what I have to do', seeking no problems...*

but now, at what cost? then, at the cost of not demanding anything from students, parents or teachers" (Inspector school A) (I-A). By contrast, comments regarding school D show that the school does not move towards improving learning but to mere social integration, using the socio-cultural origin of students as an excuse: *"In this project, we have a social perspective rather than an academic one... we are more interested in social issues, they are children with socio-cultural disadvantages, from broken families, and most of them are Gypsies"* (T1-D).

Regarding the category <u>*Developing People*</u>, research shows that a teacher prepared, capable and competent with ample professional capital is needed in order to improve learning outcomes in disadvantaged contexts. Authentic '*cracks*' are needed, as Hargreaves & Fullan (2014) point out, to meet such challenges, because education demands high levels of skill, knowledge and experience. Principal A gives great importance to this aspect. He knows that the key to success in school is the strength of its staff and greatly cherishes working with all teachers, with all the intensity he can give, through external training courses and very sensitive strategies that are connected to teachers:

"When I arrived here, there was no interest in innovation within the staff. But I managed to win them through acting in three fields: from person to person, listening to them and supporting them in their initiatives and projects... The important thing is to attend to teacher diversity. Children diversity is important, but more so is teacher diversity ... We have to stimulate people... this is a living thing, like a plant, you cannot disregard it, because it will dry out and die" (P-A).

Day et al. (2011) discuss strategies for Developing People, as principals provide individualized support, care and personal attention, as if it were a living thing that must be cared for, and they have to offer incentives and encouragement. Inspector A shares this idea and says:

"professional development and improvement is closely linked to the motivation of teachers, but this illusion for improvement has been transmitted by the principal; he is the most excited about this and he conveys this illusion... their enthusiasm wins over many teachers... this has to do with charisma, that is, the principal is the first one to believe and then he tries to make everyone to follow and, gradually, he achieves it" (I-A).

Against this, we find the reactionary stance of teachers in schools C and D who complain about their working conditions, the discouragement suffered and the lack of motivation: "*Teachers do not want to spend their free time in training... the teachers' working conditions have worsened"* (T1-D); "*we are burned out"* (T2-D); "*after 12 years, things have not changed, I see no solution or improvement, I feel completely pessimistic"* (T3-C). Research shows that it is difficult to recruit teachers for such schools, no one wants to work in them, and it is much harder and very difficult to sustain improvements. Teachers are unmotivated and tired (Lupton, 2003; Muijs et al., 2004). The analyzed results from school C and D show that teachers have no desire to improve, they are tired, listless, depressed, and "l*ook forward to escape*" from problems. It is true that there are teachers in schools C and D who want to change and improve, but there is an unpropitious environment for professional development: "*teachers have been looking forward to escaping for a long time and this is normal, this is very intense! when year, after year, after year... you run out of ideas and you reach a moment when you get a little collapsed* "(T1-C). The principal of school C is aware of this lack of encouragement with regard to teachers "*although the management team supports all initiatives, it's easy to see that the energy is fading"* (P-C). Against this pessimistic stance, we find the optimistic position of the principal of school A. He is aware about the poor working conditions endured by the staff: "*With the amount of problems affecting the staff, the lack of rights at work, the burden of excessive hours, and they are developing 19 projects… the principal does not do this, the teachers do this*" (P-A). Besides, we find the optimistic

contribution of teachers of school B who openly state their certainty that, although with difficulties, they will continue to be trained to implement the necessary innovations to improve the quality of teaching.

Regarding the category *Refining and Aligning the Organization*, in order to achieve capacity for improvement in school, there should be a collaborative culture of participation and involvement of teachers. An effective school leadership does not depend on the figure of lonely principals, but on a system of shared responsibility and distributed leadership that extends through the school organization generating performance routines and decision making shared as something systematic and habitual (Harris, 2014; Spillane, 2013). Although, as Muijs et al. (2010) point out, in the early stages of improvement, schools in disadvantaged contexts are not recommended to act through a distributed leadership, and as Day et al. (2010) state, in the initial stages of improving, an autocratic leadership builds a degree of trust and confidentiality with teachers and the community, and in the medium and final stages, a distribution of roles and responsibilities is needed to be performed. Nevertheless, as discussed below, the principals of the different schools do not respond the same way to the task of creating a collaborative culture, because not all of them have the same level of confidence and the same system of communication with staff members. At school A, this degree of trust and collaboration can be noticed: "*The school does not sail on its own, but this does not mean that all the decisions of the school are democratic and reached by consensus*" (P-A). The inspector of school A confirms the existence of a high level of trust among teachers. This environment of shared decision-making and trust also exists in school B and a strong teacher leadership is appreciated in school A and B. The principals of these two schools recognize the leading role of teachers in running schools. By contrast, although there are also dynamic and passionate teachers in school C and D to generate new projects and proposals, the same principals and teachers recognize that not all

teachers are involved: "*most of the teachers come to teach their class and nothing else...
there is little participation... also, if we add the bad working conditions, we noticed it in our
health, throat, tiredness*" (T1-C). Besides, it should be taken into account that the
organization is restructured to be open to the community and families. This is another basic
element when the organization is aligned and refined in a successful leadership, although as
Muijs et al. (2004) note, relationships with parents are worse and more difficult in schools in
social and economic disadvantaged contexts. This opening to the community and families
occurs in schools A and B, but it is not found in schools C and D, and even in school C "*there
is no AMPA (Parents Association) and the degree of distrust of families is widespread*" (P-
C). Faced with this situation, principal A states:

"*When I started working as principal of this school, I had 23 families targeted at AMPA,
there are now 200 families... we have a very troubled population... but we have a climate of
collaboration. If this were not so, I can tell you that the school would be a "time bomb", the
day-to-day running is very hard... when you have a school with 700 students and 700
families in front of you, it is unbearable! I would not manage such a school*" (P-A).

The principal of school C expresses the same feeling that principal A is willing to scape
from: "*We are fighting as if it were a dwarf against a giant. Relationships with families are
not going very well... because we have no resources to do so... and this is like a wall rising
up...*" (P-C).

Regarding the category *Improving the Teaching and Learning Programme*, as noted in the
introduction to this article, theoretical research on leadership in disadvantaged contexts have
revealed that the curriculum is not as rich or instructional as it occurs in schools with
economic and social advantages (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; González, 2014). Nevertheless,
research on successful leadership in disadvantaged contexts, such as Muijs et al. (2004),
James et al. (2006) and McCray & Beachum (2014), show that successful leadership in these

contexts has essentially an academic focus, although connected to real life experiences and practice of students, not less demanding but aimed at stimulating higher levels of thinking and metacognition. For this section, we can start confronting a unique question about the innovations of teaching. We find two different stances in schools A and D.

"We are always looking for new ways; we are working now on educational innovations proposed by the Educational Administration and have 19 ongoing projects. We do not use a classic style, but a rich and attractive model for students, adapted to the 21st century... we work with Didactic Programs that are infinitely more complete, with mixed methodologies" (P-A).

"There is a lot of educational innovation by the Educational Administration, but I believe they are not realistic enough... They are impossible to apply to our students. They look wonderful, but we lack resources, and this is because there is no political disposition. I believe there is none whatsoever... there is no money... All of this is making us feel disappointed" (P-D).

There exist two positions with regard to improvement in disadvantaged contexts, which are, basically, the academic optimism of successful principals and the pessimism of unsuccessful ones. You have to believe, with energy and passion, that improvement is possible, that changes can be achieved and student learning in disadvantaged contexts can be improved (Day, 2004; 2007; Lalas & Morgan, 2006; Theoharis, 2008). Schools A and B are very optimistic, things can improve and they try to enhance expectations. In schools C and D, they are not confident that they can achieve academic improvement for all pupils alike, the schools are aimed at achieving social inclusion without focusing entirely towards improving learning outcomes:

"with some pupils, there is an academic interest, but not with all... we all get very much involved with students who want to study and are capable, we coordinate" (T1-C), *"teachers*

found many barriers to work at the same level with all students. There are barriers to achieve academic improvement, the first is the economic and labour shortage, curricular gap is large. We have to adapt to them because it would be impossible otherwise" (T2-D).

The inspector of school D corroborates this lack of interest in improving the teaching program that is accepted as natural and consubstantial to such schools "*integration for many teachers is to carry out the traditional programme with these children, with the academic system that he/she has been using all his/her life, and their motto is that children 'do not bother me'*" (I-D). Surprisingly and unfortunately, teacher number 3 from school C openly said that for him "*inclusion does not work while they still want the school to cover the entire population, the problems persist, what the school is doing now is a task of CONTAINMENT*" (T3-C). All this creates a discomfort and a very disappointing environment, as shown by the Principal C: "*I'm discouraged because I see that I am not able to provide solutions to specific problems, and I'm a little frustrated... I see we lose energy in situations where, eventually, we will not get anything positive out of this"* (P-C).

Conclusions

Given these results, we reached a series of conclusions, always bearing in mind that the work we present is a study that, although initially developed in the academic year 2012-2013, evaluates the evolution of leadership for learning between the academic years 2013 -2014 and 2014-2015. It is a brief period of time and changes in this interval may have been produced by numerous variables, not only by the principal, but by other factors such as school culture, context, resistance to change, etc. Neverthelesss, in view of the breadth of results we get to the conclusion that the principal of school A displays a more evident leadership for learning model and his academic results have progressed significantly. In conclusion, we can say that the principal of school A displays a stronger post-heroic leadership, as summarized in the

2014 synthesis of the ISSPP project regarding features and strategies for successful leadership (Gurr & Day, 2014), and displays a leadership with typical traits related to the leadership for learning model (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, 2009, 2011), or a leadership focused on learning (Hopkins, 2003; Day et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2008; Knapp, 2014; Spillane et al., 2004; Spillane, 2013). This type of leadership presents a mixture of technical and charismatic, transformational and instructional elements. In addition, school A is in an advanced stage of improvement.

In the first year of the study, secondary school B was considered a school with traits and strategies of post-heroic leadership and the leadership for learning model, although, in this second year of analysis, this kind of leadership is not as clear as before. Some teachers displayed strong leadership, trying to improve the teaching and learning programme, although we can ask: Is the school in the phase of development and enrichment stated by Day et al. (2010)? But, will this be sustained without the principal's support? How long will it remain? In schools C and D, there does not seem to be any evolution or change in leadership within them. They do not practice a leadership aimed at student learning and achievement. We can find statements like this: *"We have to be realistic and start from the beginning without having too many academic expectations from the pupils"* (P-D). Schools C and D are typical examples of schools that do not have the focus of attention in the learning of all students alike, but have a goal focused on the development of social capital of the most problematic students. These schools are immersed in an individualistic culture with principals interested in maintaining the system and not improving it.

Why do these differences occur among schools? Are schools C and D in the first stages of improvement? Nonetheless, we have to say that all schools began to implement their educational projects at the same time, but school A has made the project to become a reality. We think that the problem lies in the fact of taking or not taking a stance of "*we can do it*" (P-

A) with passion, energy and hope, accepting, or not, that this is how things are. Do they assume a *realistic approach*? The reality is that this cannot be changed, as it might be deduced from the results obtained by analyzing schools C and D. The curriculum is fundamentally aimed at achieving social inclusion with regard to the majority of the students, especially the most problematic, rather than academic improvement. We should ask ourselves: are they really doing the task of CONTAINMENT in secondary schools, as the teacher at school C says?

However, we should know that injustice also arises when it is assumed that, in the case of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the curriculum should have less rich programmes, because if a child cannot read, write, communicate and complete grade level or beyond, that child's education and odds are severely diminished for life (Carper & Young, 2014; OECD, 2012; 2016a; Shield, 2003). We need leaders who work with continuity, persistence, moral courage and who are committed to promoting substantive changes in their schools to raise the level of the most marginalized (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Furman, 2012; Kose, 2007; Mckenzie et al., 2008; Riester, Pursch & Skrla, 2002; Theoharis, 2007, 2008), avoiding practices identified and accepted as inclusive that ironically exclude children from the system (Carper & Young, 2014).

Our research shows that, although with a very small sample, we can suggest that the leadership variable may be considered one decisive variable influencing positively or negatively the learning outcome of students. Secondary school A maintains traits, dispositions and strategies of post-heroic leadership and the leadership for learning model and progresses in improving the learning outcomes: *School A currently exceeds schools located in favoured contexts in the province of Granada with regard to its academic results"* (I - A).

For all this, we send a message to secondary schools in disadvantaged contexts in Spain. If schools want to achieve changes and social improvement, and to achieve more than a simple and superficial social inclusion, the principal must have more than favourable values and qualities to social inclusion and must must go beyond simple "good leadership" (Theodaris, 2007). As Hargreaves & Fullan point out, "is not enough to have a heart of gold, you must have a treasure chest full of knowledge and experience to perform successful leadership" (2014, p.181), in order to carry out a leadership for learning model to obtain the improvement of learning results. Our research reinforces the results obtained in the ISSPP project, since it matches with other research carried out in the United States (Jacobson et al., 2011; Minor-Ragan & Jacobson, 2014), England (Day, 2007, 2011), Australia (Ylimaki et al., 2011), which state that successful managers in disadvantaged contexts focus the attention on improving learning outcomes.

It should be noted that our research provides information on traits and strategies for conducting and sustaining successful leadership in disadvantaged contexts, as well as traits of principals who fail to implement successful leadership for learning. Having information such as this study contribution with regard to the traits and strategies that characterize successful and unsuccessful principals, allows us to reach a deeper understanding of the complex world of leadership in disadvantaged contexts.

Although this research allows us to move forward in this descriptive line of successful and unsuccessful leadership, Crow et al. (2017) emphasize the need to reach a greater understanding, not only of what principals do, but of why they do it and what the foundations of their identity are which lead them to act in one way or another. Faced with this need, our research group is conducting a comparative study between the identities of the principals of school A and school D (Strand 3 of ISSPP), in order to provide a better understanding of the

meaning and performance of successful and unsuccessful principals in disadvantaged contexts.

We conclude with some words from the principal of school A, since we consider that they summarize the basic keys to sustain a leadership for learning able to improve the academic achievements of students and to maintain them over time: "…*schools have to work with stable and long-lasting projects based on collaboration. If this does not exist, the school will continue to function, it will not close down, the problem is to rebuild what was destroyed, this is very delicate, because it takes too long to recover, but destroying it takes very little time, in one academic year the ideas change, management teams change… you let it go a little and finally, as a living being... you have to feed it continuously"* (P-A).

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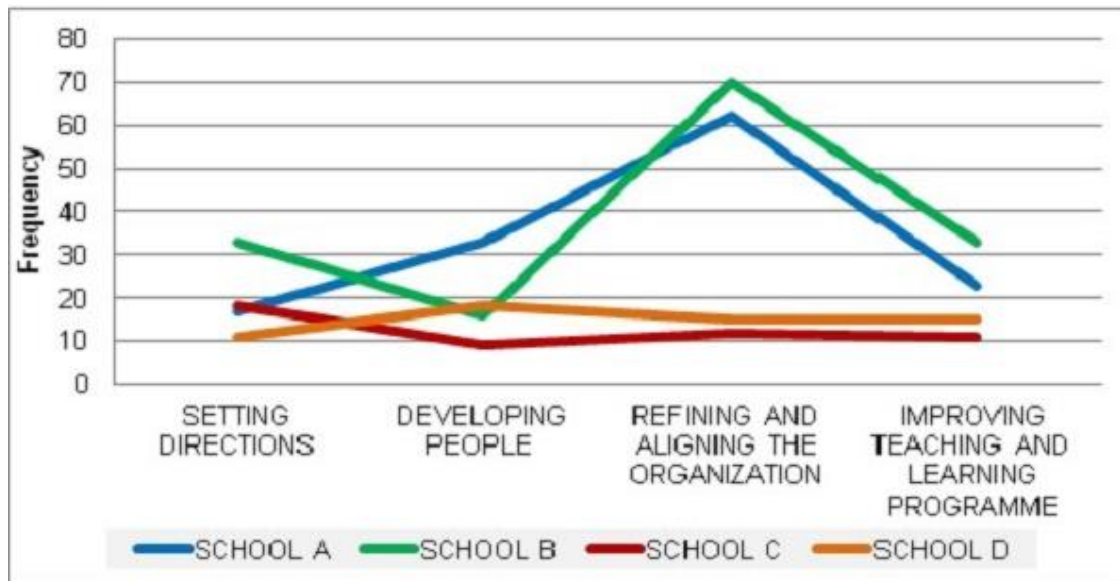
Figure 1. Frequency of occurrence of Leadership for Learning strategies. Principal A, B, C and D. Year 2013-2014.
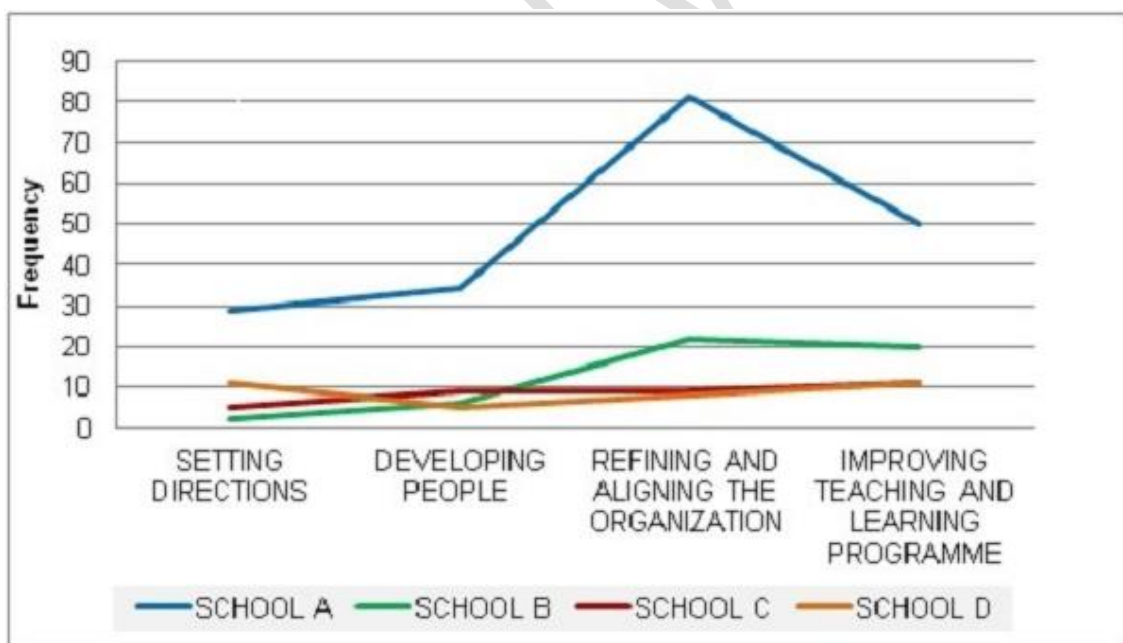

Figure 2. Frequency of occurrence of Leadership for Learning strategies. Principal A, B, C and D. Year 2015-2016.