

UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN
Departamento de Didáctica y Organización Escolar



TESIS DOCTORAL

**CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA IDENTIDAD PROFESIONAL DE
DIRECTORAS ESCOLARES PARA LA PRÁCTICA DE UN
LIDERAZGO PEDAGÓGICO EN CONTEXTOS DIFÍCILES**

PROGRAMA DE DOCTORADO EN CIENCIAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN

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CRISTINA CRUZ GONZÁLEZ

DIRECTOR
DR. JESÚS DOMINGO SEGOVIA

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CRISTINA CRUZ GONZÁLEZ

Para optar al Grado de Doctora Internacional por la Universidad de Granada

DIRECTOR
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After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world.
—Philip Pullman



A lo largo de la elaboración de esta tesis doctoral se ha procurado el uso de un lenguaje no sexista, sin embargo, para evitar la sobrecarga gráfica que conlleva utilizar el masculino y femenino en el lenguaje castellano se empleará el masculino genérico considerando que éste representa a ambos sexos.

Agradecimientos

A quien ha dirigido esta tesis doctoral, por su apoyo incondicional y ayuda inestimable.

A mi familia, por todo su esfuerzo y amor para que esto sea posible.

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RESUMEN

Investigaciones de las últimas décadas resaltan la importancia de la identidad de liderazgo en directores escolares para el logro de la mejora educativa. Sin embargo, el contexto educativo español necesita de una verdadera profesionalización de la dirección escolar hacia un enfoque pedagógico de su labor. Informes y estudios en esta línea indican que ser mujer supone un reto añadido a la hora de desarrollar un puesto de liderazgo como la dirección escolar. En contextos de difícil desempeño, este liderazgo se hace aún más prioritario, siendo esencial contar con identidades profesionales sólidas que orienten sus valores hacia la justicia social y el liderazgo distribuido. El propósito de esta tesis doctoral fue explorar la construcción de la identidad de directoras líderes escolares que desempeñan su labor en contextos de reto y cuyas prácticas profesionales se caracterizan por valores de liderazgo pedagógico y de justicia social.

Para dar respuesta a este propósito se requirieron una serie de estudios que finalmente conllevaron a 7 publicaciones científicas. Debido al carácter secuencial que presenta la metodología de esta tesis, cada una de sus fases presenta una metodología específica. La primera fase de exploración de la literatura se desarrolló a través de revisiones bibliográficas que adoptaron principios de sistematicidad. Tras esta fase, y con la entrada al trabajo de campo, la metodología de esta tesis doctoral presentó un carácter cualitativo con énfasis biográfico-narrativo. Las técnicas de recogida de información fueron entrevistas biográficas en profundidad a través de cascadas de profundización reflexiva y observación participante. El análisis de la información se basó en principios básicos de teoría fundamentada y análisis crítico del discurso, y se valió de recursos como el biograma y el software de análisis cualitativo NVivo 12. A lo largo del proceso de investigación se tomaron en cuenta las consideraciones éticas propias de este tipo de estudios.

De esta manera, este trabajo de investigación recoge relatos biográfico-narrativos de ocho directoras escolares que llevan a cabo su labor en contextos de difícil desempeño, y a pesar de ello, sus centros son referentes educativos. Los resultados revelan que *liderar con otros -y no sobre otros-* fue clave para lograr el cambio. Las directoras participantes desarrollaron un estilo de liderazgo distribuido y orientado hacia valores de justicia social en un intento de erradicar la desigualdad

y la discriminación en sus escuelas. Además, el factor género fue considerado como un elemento de reto para nuestras directoras escolares. A pesar de ello, sus trayectorias profesionales proyectan la construcción de un liderazgo basado en los principios de participación, democracia, compromiso, resiliencia, inclusión y apoyo mutuo.

En conclusión, los resultados de la presente tesis doctoral hacen referencia a las estrategias y prácticas pedagógicas desarrolladas en los centros educativos objeto de estudio. Los estudiantes de las escuelas de difícil desempeño a menudo sienten una sensación de desidentificación o falta de compromiso con el colegio. El liderazgo desarrollado por estas directoras para la inclusión de los estudiantes logró que el alumnado estuviera más motivado y comprometido con la escuela y su aprendizaje. Al mismo tiempo, fortaleció la confianza y la relación entre los maestros, familia y estudiantes, lo que sirvió para promover una conexión más real entre el currículo y la realidad de estas escuelas en torno a un proyecto educativo colectivo.

SUMMARY

Research in recent decades has highlighted the importance of the leadership identity of school principals in achieving educational improvement. However, the Spanish educational context needs a true professionalisation of school leadership towards a pedagogical approach to their work. Reports and studies along these lines indicate that being a woman is an added challenge when it comes to developing a leadership position such as school management. In contexts of difficult performance, this leadership becomes even more of a priority, and strong professional identities that orient their values towards social justice and distributed leadership are essential. The purpose of this doctoral thesis was to explore the identity construction of women school leaders who work in challenging contexts and whose professional practices are characterised by pedagogical leadership and social justice values.

This required a series of studies that eventually led to 7 scientific publications. Due to the sequential nature of the methodology of this thesis, each of its phases presents a specific methodology. The first phase of literature exploration was developed through bibliographic reviews that adopted principles of systematicity. After this phase, and with the entry into the fieldwork, the methodology of this doctoral thesis presented a qualitative character with a biographical-narrative emphasis. The data collection techniques were in-depth biographical interviews through cascades of reflexive deepening and participant observation. The analysis of the information was based on basic principles of grounded theory and critical discourse analysis, and made use of resources such as the biogram and the qualitative analysis software NVivo 12. Throughout the research process, the ethical considerations inherent to this type of study were taken into account.

In this way, this investigation gathers biographical-narrative accounts of eight female principals who carry out their work in contexts of difficult performance, and in spite of this, their schools are educational reference points. The results reveal that leading with others - and not over others - was key to achieving change. The participating principals developed a distributed leadership style oriented towards social justice values in an attempt to eradicate inequality and

discrimination in their schools. In addition, gender was considered a challenging element for our school principals. Despite this, their professional trajectories project the construction of leadership based on the principles of participation, democracy, commitment, resilience, inclusion and mutual support.

In conclusion, the results of this doctoral thesis refer to the pedagogical strategies and practices developed in the schools under study. Students in difficult performing schools often feel a sense of dis-identification or disengagement with the school. The leadership developed by these female principals for the inclusion of students achieved that students were more motivated and committed to the school and their learning. At the same time, it strengthened the trust and relationship between teachers, family and students, which served to promote a more real connection between the curriculum and the reality of these schools around a collective educational project.

1

Introducción

I. Introducción

I.1. Liderazgo pedagógico e identidad profesional: una aproximación teórica

Uno de los principales propósitos en el siglo XXI hace referencia a una educación de calidad. Esto ha supuesto la apertura de un debate acerca de la organización escolar y los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje para lograr esta meta (Bolívar, 2017; Schleicher, 2012). El influyente informe Coleman (Coleman, 1966) y el movimiento emergente en la investigación educativa sobre "escuelas eficaces" ya corroboraban la urgencia de avances para la mejora escolar de aquellos tiempos. A raíz de esto, se comenzó a desarrollar un gran cuerpo de investigaciones de índole internacional que examinaron la construcción de un liderazgo escolar para la mejora de los centros educativos (Elmore, 2000; Day, 2018; Marchiondo, Myers y Kopelman, 2015; Johnson, 2017). Sus hallazgos revelan que el liderazgo escolar es un elemento clave para la mejora, lo que lo convierte en un eje prioritario en las políticas educativas de todo el mundo (Bolívar, 2012; Pont, Nusche y Moorman, 2008; UNESCO, 2018). En esta línea, varios informes internacionales (Barber y Mourshed, 2007; OCDE, 2013,14; UNESCO-IIPE- IWGE, 2012) defienden la gran importancia de la presencia de líderes escolares, siendo esto un signo de calidad educativa y el resultado de procesos de transformación en la cultura profesional de los centros educativos.

En términos generales, las organizaciones educativas deben esforzarse por construir su visión y metas escolares a través de un enfoque pedagógico (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1997). Es aquí donde el concepto de liderazgo pedagógico cobra un valor especial, apostando por la ecología de la comunidad educativa y situando la pedagogía como eje clave en la praxis profesional y educativa (Male yPalaiologou, 2015). La línea de investigación sobre liderazgo pedagógico en centros escolares presenta una larga trayectoria (Day et al., 2011; Crow et al., 2017; Møller, 2003; van Manen, 1991). Este tipo de liderazgo supone uno de los factores esenciales para el logro de una educación de calidad (Llorent-Bedmar, Cobano-Delgado, y Navarro-Granados 2017). De esta manera, el liderazgo pedagógico consistiría en un proceso de influencia para el logro de metas educativas comunes que busquen la mejora escolar de un centro educativo (Muijs, 2011). Además, estaría orientado hacia el establecimiento de prácticas

profesionales colaborativas y horizontales (Leithwood y Riehl, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd y Rowe, 2008) y se valdría de valores de empatía, compromiso profesional y escucha activa para construir los pilares de las relaciones profesionales entre la comunidad educativa (Escudero, 2011). A la vez, un liderazgo pedagógico se desarrolla mediante redes profesionales y sociales, es decir, mediante un enfoque distribuido y camina hacia una cultura profesional colaborativa (Hargreaves y Fullan, 2014).

En palabras de Bolívar (2015), “este liderazgo sitúa como brújula de su acción la mejora de los aprendizajes de los alumnos” (p.24). Es por ello, que es relevante destacar que el liderazgo pedagógico presenta una clara dirección hacia el componente educativo y social para construir sus bases. En la figura 1 se muestra un modelo propuesto por Firestone y Riehl (2005) sobre cómo el liderazgo influye en los resultados de los estudiantes y envuelve para ello a toda la comunidad educativa. Los autores resaltan el desarrollo de prácticas profesionales de liderazgo conectadas a la comunidad educativa. Además, señalan la importante influencia del contexto político educativo para la enseñanza en las aulas. De esta manera, se realiza la prioridad de liderar de manera distribuida y horizontal, involucrando a los sectores que comprenden el centro escolar con el fin de obtener no solo resultados académicos, si no progresos en inclusión educativa.

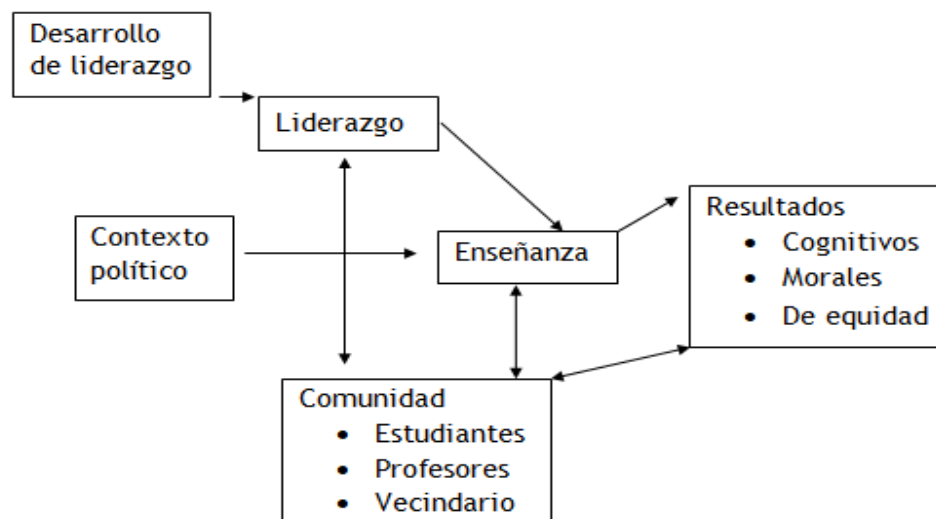


Figura 1. Modelo explicativo sobre influencia del liderazgo en resultados educativos
Fuente: Firestone y Riehl (2005, p.171)

Hace un par de décadas, se consolidó la red internacional ISSPP (International Successful School Principaship Project) en la cual se enmarca esta tesis doctoral. Bajo el

liderazgo de Christopher Day, numerosos estudios han sido desarrollados en los 25 países integrantes (Day, 2005). Mediante un análisis exhaustivo de los hallazgos recogidos, se pueden extraer dimensiones clave para el logro de un liderazgo exitoso. Inspirándonos en Day et al. (2010), la figura 2 expone de manera gráfica estas dimensiones.



Figura 2. Dimensiones de un liderazgo exitoso
Fuente: Elaboración propia con información extraída de Day et al. (2010)

A continuación se explican de manera sintética los distintos aspectos recogidos, basados en el enfoque de Day et al. (2010):

- Definición de visión, valores y dirección conjunta. Los líderes escolares presentan una visión clara y sólida de aquello que quieren para su escuela. Esto hace que se establezca un consistente propósito a conseguir ampliamente compartido por el resto de la comunidad.
- Mejora de las condiciones de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Para lograr un liderazgo exitoso es necesario optimizar la calidad del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje a través del fomento de estrategias como el *engagement*, provisión de recursos educativos necesarios e incluso mejora

de instalaciones físicas/aulas. Es vital rediseñar de forma decidida y progresiva las estructuras organizativas mediante enfoques de liderazgo distribuido, apostando por un mayor compromiso de la comunidad educativa, lo que a su vez, conlleva mayores oportunidades para el aprendizaje de los estudiantes.

- Mejora de los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje: los líderes escolares buscan de manera incesante nuevas metodologías que logren una mejora en el aprendizaje del alumnado. Para ello, proporcionar un entorno de cultura profesional docente seguro e innovador resulta de gran importancia.
- Rediseñar y enriquecer el currículum. Esto puede suponer un gran avance para el logro de resultados educativos óptimos. Para ello, es fundamental considerar que cuando los estudiantes disfrutan y están motivados, el aprendizaje es más eficaz. Por este motivo, el desarrollo de prácticas de liderazgo escolar persigue el diseño de actividades innovadoras y que impliquen además de objetivos académicos, propósitos socio-educativos y comunitarios.
- Mejora de la calidad y formación docente. Proporcionar una variedad de oportunidades de aprendizaje y desarrollo profesional para los docentes es una tarea esencial en los directores líderes escolares. También el fortalecimiento de su desarrollo profesional como docentes.
- Construcción de relaciones dentro de la comunidad educativa. Resulta clave construir relaciones positivas con todos los miembros profesionales que conforman el centro escolar, haciéndoles sentirse parte de la comunidad educativa. Para ello, los líderes escolares muestran preocupación por el bienestar profesional de sus compañeros y basan su vínculo profesional en valores de confianza y respeto mutuo.
- Construcción de relaciones fuera de la comunidad escolar. Un aspecto importante es la reputación de la escuela y el compromiso de ésta misma con la comunidad/localidad en la que se encuentra. En este sentido, crear una red de vínculos entre escuela-comunidad es un objetivo prioritario.

A lo largo de la presente tesis doctoral, se emplearán diversos términos muy próximos al concepto de liderazgo escolar, pero que presentan connotaciones

añadidas más específicas: Liderazgo pedagógico, liderazgo para la justicia social, liderazgo distribuido, liderazgo centrado en el aprendizaje, entre otras. Cada uno de estos términos contempla una serie de características particulares, pero también comunes. En todos ellos, los valores de colaboración, horizontalidad y compromiso profesional son esenciales, además de un ejercicio profesional basado en valores pedagógicos, de inclusión educativa y orientados hacia la mejora escolar (Elmore, 2008; Day et al. 2011; Day, Sammons, y Hopkins, 2009; Robinson, Loyd y Rowe, 2014).

Concretamente, uno de los términos asociados al campo del liderazgo más empleados a lo largo de este proyecto será el liderazgo para la justicia social (debido a la naturaleza de los estudios de caso que comprenden esta tesis doctoral). Este término será abordado en mayor profundidad en próximas secciones.

1.1.1. Construcción de una identidad de liderazgo en líderes escolares

La literatura científica de los últimos años asocia el desarrollo de un liderazgo escolar con las motivaciones, vocación, compromiso y en definitiva, el ser profesional de los miembros escolares (Blackmore, 2011; Crawford, 2007; Kelchtermans et al., 2011). Sin embargo, hasta hace una década este enfoque no había sido lo suficientemente considerado. Mientras tanto, diversas líneas de investigación sobre liderazgo orientaban su foco en aspectos más funcionales y competenciales sobre líderes escolares (Crow y Møller, 2017). Ante esto, Møller resaltó la necesidad de volver a poner *en línea de valor* la voz y la dimensión más humana de los líderes escolares para extraer consideraciones significativas que puedan ser de utilidad en la práctica de un liderazgo eficaz (Møller, 2003).

El concepto de identidad profesional está en continuo cambio y transformación, y ha sido objeto de debate en las últimas décadas (Bolívar, 2006). En palabras de Demazière y Dubar (1997), la identidad es “un proceso de construcción y reconocimiento de una definición de sí que sea satisfactoria a la vez para sí mismo y validado por las instituciones que, categorizándola, le enmarcan e inscriben socialmente” (p. 304). Es por ello que no se trata de una realidad objetiva y se desarrolla a partir de la *auto*percepción y *percepción de los demás*, basada en valores, impulsos, creencias, rasgos y experiencias tanto para sí como para otros (Dubar, 2000;

Ibarra, 1999; Slay y Smith, 2011). A la vez, su significado varía en matices según su procedencia geográfica, lo que lo convierte en un tema complejo pero a la vez de gran interés (Crow y Moller, 2017). Se trata de un elemento de naturaleza transitoria (Day, Elliot y Kington, 2000) y cambiante (Townsend y Weiner 2011). Según Dubar (2000), la identidad puede definirse como el resultado de las interacciones personales y el contexto social, cultural y organizativo. Esto significa que la identidad no puede separarse de las relaciones personales y el entorno, que siempre están sujetos a la influencia de factores históricos y culturales (Baumeister, 1986; Trede, Macklin y Bridges, 2012; Wenger, 1998). En este sentido, el desarrollo de la identidad implica un proceso dual: *identidad para uno mismo e identidad para los demás* (Dubar, 2000; Ricoeur, 1996). Tal y como afirman autores de relevancia en este campo de estudio, se trata de un concepto subjetivo (Court 2005), el cual se encuentra en constante interacción social, lo que hace realzar un sentimiento de dependencia y pertenencia a grupos sociales (Bolívar 2006; Tajfel y Turner 1979).

En relación con la identidad profesional, Crow, Day y Møller (2017) la asocian con aspectos tanto profesionales como también personales. De esta manera, podríamos definir la identidad profesional como el resultado de un proceso progresivo en el que entran en juego diferentes experiencias vitales y profesionales que consolidan el modo de sentirse y dan sentido a la labor profesional (Bolívar, 2006). Scribner y Crow (2012) coinciden añadiendo que el concepto de identidad profesional se relaciona con el examen de los valores, creencias y motivaciones que influyen en la labor profesional y, por lo tanto, nos lleva más allá de las prácticas mecanicistas que tienen una utilidad limitada. Por ello, tal y como argumenta Ryan (2007) es importante distinguir entre lo que se refiere a *identidad* y lo que hace referencia al *rol en el trabajo*. Esto es debido a que los roles presentan un carácter guionizado y estático en el tiempo, mientras que la identidad profesional es cambiante y dinámica. La figura 3 muestra una representación próxima a la definición propuesta de identidad como elemento sistémico y dinámico.



Figura 3. Modelo de identidad como elemento sistémico y dinámico
Fuente: Kaplan y Garner (2018, p.74)

Estudios desarrollados en distintos puntos geográficos demuestran que en algunos países existe una necesidad de profesionales educativos con identidad profesional consolidadas y orientadas hacia valores de liderazgo escolar -como lo documentan Rhodes y Brundrett (2007) o Ritacco y Bolívar (2018). Sobre la base de estos hallazgos nacen iniciativas para dar respuesta a esta problemática proponiendo un mayor desarrollo de identidades de liderazgo, que se considera determinante para el éxito de las prácticas de enseñanza (Leithwood y Jantzi, 2008; Scribner y Bradley-Levine, 2010). El concepto de identidad profesional hace referencia a "... lo que influye en el comportamiento de un líder y lo que impulsa la voluntad y la capacidad de un líder para asumir y promulgar un liderazgo creativo y eficaz en una sociedad del conocimiento dinámica y con mucho en juego" (Scribner y Crow, 2012, p.245). Dado a su naturaleza versátil y voluble es de interés conocer los entresijos de su proceso constitutivo. En base al enfoque teórico de *Leadership identity construction theory* (DeRue y Ashford, 2010), un líder escolar se construye identitariamente mediante un proceso donde busca y negocia su propio ser tanto por sí mismo como por los demás. Profundizando en esto, autores como Crow et al. (2017), ofrecen una perspectiva a cerca de la construcción identitaria que comprende cinco dimensiones claves: dimensión narrativa, epistemológica, emocional, histórico-cultural y política.

- **Dimensión narrativa:** La narración identitaria supone un eje fundamental para la construcción de la identidad de líderes escolares. Las historias que los líderes cuentan sobre sí a ellos mismos y a los demás tiene una implicación importante en la formación y conformación de su dimensión identitaria (Giddens, 1991). Es por ello, que la identidad de liderazgo de profesionales educativos debe ser construida considerando aspectos temporales, sociales, emocionales, contextuales, entre otros. Concretamente, Smulyan (2000) propone estas cuatro dimensiones: histórico-culturales, del contexto profesional, políticas y personales. Consideramos de gran importancia el enfoque narrativo en el estudio de la identidad, es por ello que los resultados de esta tesis doctoral contemplan esta perspectiva para abordar las historias de vida investigadas. Desde este enfoque, la figura 4 ofrece una clara imagen de cómo se construye y (re)construye la identidad mediante elementos esenciales como los valores familiares y/o experiencias profesionales, los cuales desembocan en posibles "yo profesionales" que finalmente serán renegociados consolidando una identidad profesional siempre provisional.

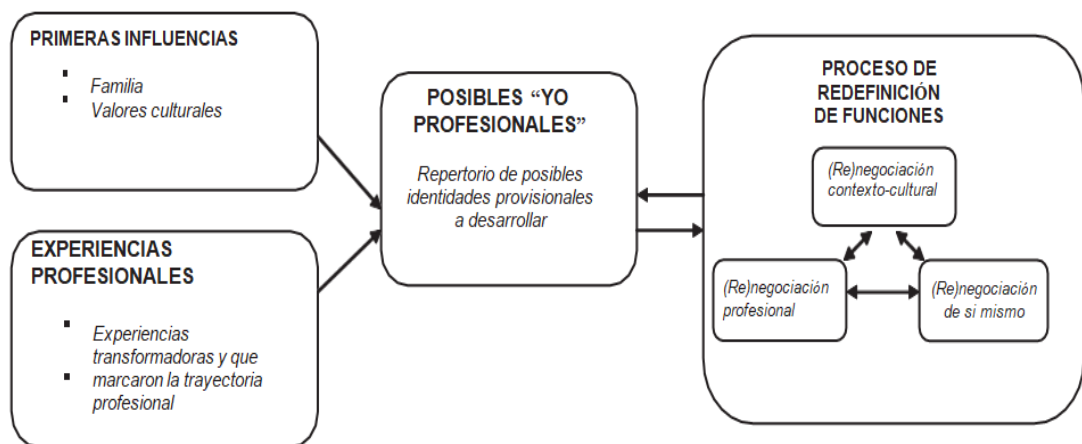


Figura 4. Proceso de redefinición de la identidad profesional
Fuente: Adaptación de la investigación de Slay y Smith (2011)

- **Dimensión epistemológica:** En la construcción identitaria de líderes escolares, sus ideales, valores y posturas profesionales son claves para formar su identidad profesional. De esta manera, estos elementos serán

esenciales para la toma de decisiones complejas en su desempeño profesional.

- Dimensión emocional: Podríamos definir las emociones como el corazón del liderazgo educativo (Crawford, 2007, Kelchtermans et al., 2011). La dimensión emocional podría considerarse como una línea en la que la literatura científica ha focalizado en menor medida (Beatty, 2000). A pesar de ello, en la actualidad esto está cambiando y cada vez son más los estudios que realzan la importancia de la motivación, vocación, compromiso o pasión profesional en la mejora escolar y los resultados educativos del alumnado (Blackmore, 2011).
- Dimensión histórico-cultural: La construcción de identidad de liderazgo se circunscribe en contextos históricos y sociales determinados. Por este motivo, las características que tintan las trayectorias profesionales de líderes escolares están profundamente influidas por épocas temporales concretas y experiencias vitales a lo largo de ellas.
- Dimensión política: Esta dimensión podría estructurarse en niveles micro y macro de prácticas profesionales. La dimensión micro haría referencia a la manera en la que los líderes se relacionan, negocian, (re)negocian y confirman su identidad profesional con el resto de comunidad educativa: maestros, familia, personal de servicios, entre otros. El nivel macro, por el contrario, tiene que ver más con aquellas esferas gubernamentales e ideales políticos y sociales. En este caso, haríamos referencia al posicionamiento de los líderes ante relaciones de poder y conflictos más generales.

De este modo, esta tesis doctoral propone adentrarnos en las historias de vida de directoras líderes escolares a través de la exploración del proceso constitutivo de sus identidades profesionales. Con el fin de aportar un escenario completo sobre el objeto de estudio, en siguientes apartados se abordarán las idiosincrasias de la dirección escolar en España, además de la particularidad de ser mujer en la dirección escolar y desempeñar la labor profesional como líder en contextos retantes.

1.2. La dirección escolar en España: hacia una identidad profesional de liderazgo

Profundizando en el área de investigación sobre el liderazgo y mejora, se ha observado que los directores escolares son figuras profesionales cruciales debido a su implicación organizativa (Schleicher, 2012) y política (Crow, Day y Møller, 2016) en los centros educativos. Se han despertado grandes expectativas sobre el papel de los directores de escuela, que se consideran clave para la mejora de las escuelas (Cowie y Crawford, 2008). Además, se han aportado pruebas significativas de la capacidad de los directores para lograr el compromiso de los miembros profesionales con una visión compartida para su escuela (Urlick y Bowers, 2014). Por lo tanto, el liderazgo es una tarea esencial que requiere el desarrollo de habilidades profesionales pedagógicas y los directores deberían orientar sus prácticas profesionales hacia este sentido (Griffith, 2004).

Sin embargo, estas habilidades se ven ocasionalmente comprometidas por inconvenientes externos o internos que dificultan el ejercicio del liderazgo. Centrándonos en el panorama español, debemos de indicar una serie de peculiaridades propias sobre esta figura. Las nuevas normativas educativas españolas alientan a un mayor liderazgo pedagógico en los centros educativos (LOE, 2006; LOMLOE, 2021). Sin embargo, existen ciertas barreras que impiden el desarrollo de una identidad de liderazgo profesional como la gran carga burocrática y administrativa a la que deben de hacer frente los directores, que en ocasiones obstaculiza o limita la consecución de los objetivos pedagógicos (Ritacco y Bolívar, 2018; OCDE, 2019; Bush, 2018). Esta limitación podría estar estrechamente relacionada con la creciente cultura de la rendición de cuentas, que está ganando terreno en las políticas educativas europeas (Connolly, Milton, Davies y Barrantes, 2018). Otros factores perturbadores son el género (aspecto clave en el desarrollo de esta tesis doctoral y que se abordará en mayor profundidad en apartados posteriores) (Arar y Shapira, 2016; Coleman, 2000; Pont et al., 2008; Crow, Day y Møller, 2016), la experiencia (Mpungose, 2010; Cardno y Youngs, 2013) o la falta de apoyo y compromiso de los miembros profesionales de centros educativos (Galdames, Montecinos, Campos, Ahumada y Leiva, 2018; Rhodes, Brundrett y Nevill, 2009). Estas particularidades del contexto educativo español han propulsado a investigadores y expertos en esta temática de investigación, junto con

directivos a través de sus Asociaciones a unir fuerzas y establecer un Marco Español para la Buena Dirección. En este marco, se subraya la necesidad de una profesionalización de la dirección escolar en España y toma en consideración lecciones aprendidas para reorientar la dirección escolar hacia la mejora (Bolívar, 2018).

Existe un estrecho lazo entre mejora educativa y liderazgo pedagógico en la dirección escolar (Cowie y Crawford, 2008). Sin embargo, como observó Thomson (2009), el liderazgo escolar “es más que una simple forma de hacer las cosas, es también una forma de ser y entender el mundo” (p. 1). En esta línea, investigar sobre el liderazgo requiere recopilar datos sobre los directores, comprender lo que piensan, sienten y creen más allá de sus acciones, lo que implica estudiar sobre la identidad del liderazgo (Sugrue, 2015). En resumen, hay razones importantes para profundizar en la comprensión del “yo director” para el logro de un liderazgo escolar (Robertson, 2017; Sinha y Hanuscin, 2017; Aas y Vavick, 2015).

Concretamente, Ritacco y Bolívar (2018) anuncian que la dirección escolar española presenta una necesidad de profesionalización identitaria hacia un liderazgo pedagógico. En este sentido, algunas motivaciones de esta compleja situación vienen justificadas por lo siguiente:

- A menudo, la posibilidad de ser director no es una opción atractiva para los docentes debido a una baja cultura de participación en la dinámica profesional de los centros escolares en España. Por ese motivo, ante ausencia de candidatos (hasta en un 60% de ocasiones), es la Administración educativa la encargada de tomar esa decisión (por un periodo de 1-2 años) (Bolívar, 2017).
- Cuando finalmente se accede a la dirección, esta es desarrollada por un docente elegido el Consejo Escolar y debe de tener más de 5 años de experiencia. Finalmente, esta posición conlleva 4 años de compromiso (con opción de renovar), y tras su finalización, este docente volvería de nuevo a su puesto. Aquí se añade otra complejidad más en el “caso español”, debido a que se establece una transición profesional *docente-directivo-docente* en la que a menudo el director tiene que (re)construir y (re)negociar su identidad profesional con él mismo y los demás en un intervalo temporal discontinuo y estrecho en el tiempo. Esto hace además que la transición de “estoy de” a “soy” no llegue a sustanciarse, y en última instancia, no exista una identidad

fuerte y consolidada de los directores escolares (Zabalza y Zabalza Cerdeiriña, 2012).

- Dentro de la identidad profesional que caracteriza a la dirección escolar en España, es importante resaltar su duplicidad identitaria. Es colega profesional-director, gestor burocrático -líder pedagógico, representante en la Administración educativa- compañero, responsable de cumplimiento de normativa - miembro profesional del centro (lo que conlleva existencia de relaciones profesionales y personales) (Bolívar y Ritacco, 2016). Esto provoca en muchos casos crisis identitarias y tensiones internas que dificultan una práctica profesional orientada al desarrollo de un liderazgo pedagógico en los centros educativos (Barrios et al., 2015).

- A todo ello, se le suma que asumir la dirección escolar implica una gran carga laboral, poca remuneración económica añadida y posibles tensiones profesionales y personales con otros compañeros (Gairín y Castro, 2010).

Ante este escenario, se puede apreciar cómo en el contexto español y concretamente haciendo referencia a la dirección escolar, el rol y la identidad no llegan a una simbiosis completa.

No obstante, y tras haber trazado un panorama próximo en cuanto a esta cuestión, ser director conlleva también una serie de potencialidades. Se trata de una figura con un gran potencial para lograr cambios sustanciales en el centro educativo (Dutta y Sahney, 2016). A la vez, una oportunidad de crear una cultura profesional orientada hacia valores de compromiso, empatía y apoyo (Grogan y Shakeshaft, 2011). Por otra parte, formar parte de la dirección escolar también conlleva la posibilidad de diseñar y establecer de manera conjunta y coordinada nuevas iniciativas basadas en la innovación educativa (Lee y Li, 2015). En definitiva, la dirección escolar es una aventura/reto de luces y sombras en la que aquellos que buscan la mejora escolar de manera activa deciden embarcarse. Lo cierto es que, al hilo de esto, el contexto español requiere de líderes escolares al mando de centros educativos y esto conlleva reconstruir el rol del director como líder pedagógico teniendo como meta prioritaria la mejora del aprendizaje del alumnado y profesorado (Bolívar, 2018).

Una vez presentada una síntesis de la situación actual de la dirección escolar en el contexto español, el siguiente apartado tratará en detalle dos de los factores

esenciales y que dan sentido a este trabajo de investigación: ser mujer y liderar en contextos de reto bajo la identidad profesional de directora. Para ello, nos acogemos a una perspectiva conceptual que concibe la identidad como un elemento en continua interacción, de carácter poliédrico y en perpetuo cambio (Dubar, 2007; Ricoeur, 1996; Giddens, 1995; Kelchtermans, 2009).

1.3. Construcción de una identidad de liderazgo en directoras escolares

En esta sección se aborda el tema central de esta tesis doctoral. De tal manera, mediante un recorrido más detenido por literatura científica relevante, se exploran estudios que han centrado su foco en dos factores específicos dentro de la construcción de una identidad de liderazgo en directores escolares: ser mujer y liderar en contextos de difícil desempeño.

1.3.1. El factor género en la dirección escolar para la construcción de una identidad de liderazgo

Cada vez más, las mujeres están ganando representación en puestos de liderazgo (Hryniewicz y Vianna, 2018). Es por ello, que numerosas investigaciones están dirigiendo su mirada hacia el análisis de cómo construyen estas mujeres su identidad de liderazgo ante un escenario tradicionalmente masculinizado (Meister, Sinclair y Jehn, 2017; Martin y Phillips, 2017). Esta tesis doctoral se centra específicamente en sus historias de vida para encontrar respuestas. De la misma manera que lo hace el género, las identidades se construyen a través del diálogo y las experiencias (Fivush y Buckner, 2003). Sin embargo, en ocasiones el factor género es algo "olvidado" o "no cuestionado". En relación a ello Butler (1996) acuñó este aspecto como *performatividad de género*, es decir, "*el modo discursivo por el cual se instalan los efectos ontológicos*" (p.112). En este sentido, Butler defendió que el género se desarrolla desde un enfoque performativo de manera que cuando nombras a una persona se están estableciendo categorías determinadas que consolidarán un significado (Tyler y Cohen, 2010). Es por ello que resulta esencial remarcar nuestro posicionamiento ante esta idea, indicando que el género no cataloga lo que "somos". Según nuestra perspectiva y apoyándonos en una serie de investigaciones, el género cobraría sentido mediante lo que "hacemos" (Fletcher, 2004; West y Zimmerman,

1987). Resulta imposible desconectar de nuestro yo cuando entramos a nuestra jornada laboral. Por esto que "hacemos género" en nuestro desempeño profesional día a día (Gherardi, 1994).

Un gran cuerpo de investigaciones resalta que estudiar la influencia del género en la dirección escolar es significativo (Armstrong y Mitchell, 2017; Arar y Shapira, 2016; Jones, 2017; Mendez-Morse et al., 2015; Murakami y Tornsen, 2017; Nickens y Washington, 2016). La popular frase "Think manager, think male" (Schein, 1973) abre un interesante debate sobre cómo las mujeres se enfrentan a un escenario complicado en el que sigue persistiendo una caracterización masculina en puestos de gestión. La teoría de Margaret Mead (1935), antropóloga estadounidense cuyo campo de interés se centró en la cultura y el género, nos orienta hacia una concepción muy marcada por la cultura para la construcción del género en nuestro "yo". Al hilo de esto, teorías de enfoque psicológico tratarían de dar respuesta a la desidentificación de la mujer en el mundo del liderazgo, como por ejemplo la Teoría de la Disonancia cognitiva de Festinger (1954). Esta teoría defiende que cuando un individuo tiene conocimientos de sí mismo y su contexto cultural que no son coherentes entre sí, se produce un estado de disonancia cognitiva que provoca una actitud de rechazo. De tal manera, este pensamiento podría vincularse con la compleja situación a la que se enfrenta el género femenino en una cultura donde el poder es concentrado mayoritariamente en puestos masculinos.

Bajo el enfoque de que las identidades son construidas socialmente, un factor influyente en este desarrollo identitario es la dimensión de género. Esto se debe a que esta identidad socialmente construida y negociada se contextualiza en entornos sociales y jerarquías de poder (Billing y Alvesson 1997). La postura de Hofstede (2001), coincide con esta visión, defendiendo el papel que representa la cultura en el establecimiento de estereotipos de género en función de la cultura referente. A la vez, desde teorías como la del Prejuicio hacia Mujeres Líderes, fruto de otra propuesta décadas antes Teoría de incongruencia de roles (Eagly 1987), se argumenta que en un sistema social en el que coexisten líderes y seguidores, sus actitudes están basadas en guiones culturales que contienen estereotipaciones en torno al género y que desembocan en la consolidación de conductas esperadas en función de si se trata de femenino o masculino. Además, esta teoría indicó cierta incongruencia percibida entre "género femenino y liderazgo" provocando una distorsión cognitiva que ayudó a seguir

perpetuando discriminaciones hacia la mujer. En su investigación, Dunker (2002) apuntó a un liderazgo desarrollado por mujeres comúnmente basado en valores de democracia y participación grupal, mientras que el liderazgo ejercido por la figura masculina solía tintarse de un carácter más competitivo y directivo.

De esta manera, Lupano (2011) explica que en culturas patriarcales, el número de hombres que ocupan posiciones de liderazgo suele ser muy elevado y los valores que caracterizan su desempeño se asocian a la competitividad, autoritarismo y seguridad en la toma de decisiones. En contextos culturales donde se desarrolla un liderazgo por una figura femenina, este suele caracterizarse por valores de consenso, empatía y apoyo profesional.

Aterrizando más concretamente en el ámbito educativo, estudios que han explorado la identidad profesional de líderes escolares coinciden en realzar la particularidad de ser mujer en posiciones de liderazgo dentro de la organización escolar (Arar y Shapira, 2016; Jones, 2017; Toure y Dorsey, 2018). Murakami y Tornsen (2017) aportan hallazgos en su estudio que indican que las directoras líderes escolares participantes afrontaron el reto desde un enfoque democrático y basando su práctica profesional mediante el diálogo, entendimiento mutuo, compromiso y horizontalidad. Nickens y Washington (2016) comparten también la idea anterior añadiendo que, en su estudio con directoras escolares, el liderazgo distribuido, las responsabilidades compartidas y la comprensión fueron esenciales para el desempeño de su práctica profesional. Resulta, por tanto, importante señalar que investigaciones que estudiaron la identidad profesional de directoras escolares consideraron elementos clave en su desempeño profesional un sentido de comunidad y acción a través del liderazgo democrático (Johnson, 2017; Oplatka, 2014; Weiner y Burton, 2017).

1.3.2. La particularidad de liderar en contextos de difícil desempeño

Estudios e investigaciones internacionales identifican logros diferenciales en liderazgo escolar en función del contexto y el entorno (Spies y Heystek, 2015; Rigby, 2015; Rhodes, Brundrett, y Nevill, 2009; Cowie y Crawford, 2009; Jo, 2014). Esta influencia contextual demuestra que el liderazgo escolar no se aborda desde una perspectiva estándar (Ryan, 2007). Incluso, en contextos similares, la manera de desarrollar prácticas de liderazgo tiene efectos desiguales (Shields, 2003).

En esta línea, se han realizado varios estudios para comprender la construcción de la identidad profesional, los efectos que el entorno sociocultural y educativo presentan, y los elementos que obstaculizan o impulsan la consecución de un liderazgo pedagógico (Bolívar y Rittaco, 2016; Carpenter et al., 2017; Bahous, Busher y Nabhani, 2016). En todos ellos se coincide en que el contexto y cultura escolar son elementos significativos para desempeñar prácticas profesionales de liderazgo. Por tanto, se podría considerar que el contexto influye indudablemente en la construcción de la identidad y en las prácticas de liderazgo adoptadas (Toure y Dorsey 2018).

En contextos de especial dificultad, investigaciones apuntan aún más a la necesidad de un liderazgo pedagógico y horizontal (Harris, 2002). En referencia a estos contextos de difícil desempeño, Ball, Maguire y Braun (2012) los clasifican en:

- Contexto situacional: hace referencia a características geográficas e históricas de la escuela
- Contexto profesional: hace referencia a características de la cultura profesional del centro educativo
- Contexto material: hace referencia a la infraestructura del centro.

En concreto, en la mayoría de los casos este tipo de situaciones vienen acompañadas de un bajo nivel socio-económico y cultural en el entorno, que provoca frecuentemente bajas expectativas en resultados educativos tanto por parte de los propios estudiantes, como también incluso por las familias, profesores o escuela en general (Lyman y Villani, 2002). Estudios internacionales apuntan que ante este tipo de contextos, el equipo directivo tiene que adaptar su práctica profesional hacia un liderazgo adaptado y que realmente responda a las necesidades específicas de la escuela (Theoharis, 2007). De no ser así, se estaría ampliando aún más una brecha invisible que agudizaría un peor rendimiento educativo entre aquellos estudiantes más vulnerables (DeMatthews, 2015).

En todo este escenario emerge el concepto de liderazgo para la justicia social. Este liderazgo se rige sobre los valores de moralidad e inclusión educativa. Tiene interrelaciones consistentes entre comunidad democrática, aprendizaje y justicia social (Furman , 2012). A la vez, se inspira en una pedagogía que pretende alcanza una sociedad justa e igualitaria y para ello se vale de procesos educativos democráticos.

Apoyándonos en Furman y Shields (2018), se muestran las dimensiones centrales de este liderazgo:

- Dimensión ética y democrática. Los propósitos educativos caminan hacia la búsqueda de la justicia social con el fin de lograr una comunidad democrática. Para ello es fundamental establecer una postura ética en la que exista respeto por todos los individuos que conforman el centro educativo: sus costumbres, culturas y tradiciones. A la vez, esto se debe plantear desde un proceso dialógico crítico y abierto. En todo esto, la teoría del liderazgo moral es de gran relevancia (Hodgkinson, 1991; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1994). En esta teoría, el liderazgo se centra en los valores y ética de los propios líderes escolares para establecer sus prácticas profesionales.
- Dimensión contextual y comunitaria. La verdadera democracia nace de la voz de la propia comunidad. En relación a esto, la participación de la comunidad educativa en la dinámica escolar cobra un sentido especial. Desde este enfoque, por tanto, entrarían en juego dos teorías de liderazgo de suma relevancia: la Teoría Constructivista del liderazgo (Lambert et al., 1995) y la teoría del liderazgo distribuido (Gronn, 2002). En primer lugar, la Teoría Constructivista del Liderazgo propone un liderazgo que construya su significado a través de los propios miembros de la comunidad a partir de sus relaciones comunicativas. Por otro lado, la teoría del liderazgo distribuido defiende un liderazgo compartido entre muchos actores, huyendo de enfoques que consoliden el peso en los directores escolares (Smylie, Conley y Marks, 2002). Desde esta perspectiva, el liderazgo no solo estaría repartido por diferentes miembros de la escuela sino que además multiplicaría su valor a través de las relaciones e interacciones sociales nombradas anteriormente.
- Dimensión procesual. El liderazgo para la justicia social supone un esfuerzo progresivo para el logro de equidad e inclusión en los centros educativos. Para ello, la comunicación, unión, colaboración, respeto y empatía son elementos de vital importancia. Lograr esto conlleva una serie de procesos de creación, sostenimiento y renovación de la comunidad democrática, los cuales permitan aflorar significados propios de la justicia social. Aquí de nuevo entra en valor la teoría constructivista del liderazgo (Lambert et al.,

1995) poniendo en relevancia la dimensión dialógica y comunicativa. Se trata de una de una dimensión procesual en la que líderes escolares deben ser facilitadores y promotores de una colaboración y diálogo abierto por toda la comunidad educativa.

- Dimensión transformadora. La lucha por la justicia social trae consigo procesos de crítica y transformación. Es por esto que orientar estos procesos debe ir orientado hacia necesidades concretas y reales detectadas de manera previa. Goldfarb y Grinberg (2002) afirman que:

"los líderes interesados en fomentar y hacer avanzar la justicia social deben problematizar las prácticas existentes y las propuestas de reforma con el propósito no sólo de ser más eficientes en hacer más de lo mismo, sino con el propósito de imaginar y construir nuevas posibilidades institucionales" (p. 162)

De nuevo, otro modelo de liderazgo emerge en todo este escenario, el liderazgo transformador (Day, 2000; Quantz, Rogers y Dantley, 1991). Este liderazgo propone orientar sus prácticas hacia la superación de las barreras al cambio social y ofrecimiento de nuevas posibilidades institucionales.

- Dimensión pedagógica. Como avanzábamos anteriormente, liderar desde un sentido democrático y orientado hacia el logro de propósitos sociales requiere la necesidad de un enfoque pedagógico. Esto quiere decir que el diseño del currículum escolar tiene que abordar estos matices y el papel de líder escolar sería clave en esto.

En la figura 5, Furman y Shields (2018) muestran de manera gráfica lo anteriormente explicado.

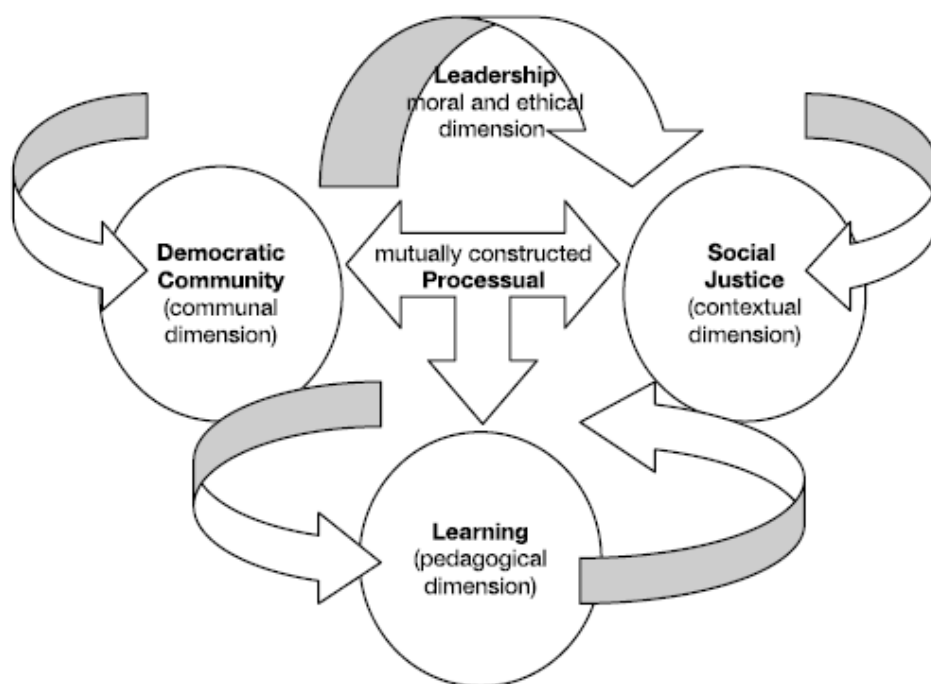


Figura 5. Marco conceptual para el liderazgo de la comunidad democrática y la justicia social en las escuelas
Fuente: Furman y Shields (2018, p.131)

Por consiguiente, y como defienden McKenzie et al. (2008), este liderazgo se basa en un fuerte sentimiento de responsabilidad social y ética para potenciar prácticas educativas fundamentadas en la inclusión y equidad. Es por ello que uno de sus principales fines es la creación de dinámicas escolares que formen a los estudiantes como ciudadanos concienciados de desigualdades e injusticias sociales (Brooks et al., 2007). Apuesta por una comunidad escolar participativa y unida en la que sectores como la familia, profesorado, dirección escolar, estudiantado y personal de administración y servicios conformen una comunidad heterogénea pero con una misma filosofía y meta: el centro escolar como elemento de unión (Shield, 2009). Por tanto, liderar en contextos de reto mediante valores de justicia social se ha convertido en prioridad en los últimos tiempos (Ryan, 2010).

Para concluir, los directores que pretenden tratar de crear escuelas más justas desde el punto de vista social deben construir una educación adaptada a las particularidades de su contexto (DeMatthews y Mawhinney, 2014), debido a que cada centro tiene diferentes situaciones, individuos y casos, los cuales suponen puntos que tener en cuenta a la hora de desarrollar prácticas de liderazgo (Bogotch, 2002).

2

Justificación del problema de investigación y objetivos

2. Justificación del problema de investigación y objetivos

Esta tesis doctoral se enmarca en dos proyectos de investigación más amplios. El primero, el proyecto I+D+i estatal “*Identidad de la dirección escolar: Liderazgo, formación y profesionalización*” (EDU2016-78191-P). El segundo, el proyecto internacional “*International Successful School Principalship Project*” (ISSPP), específicamente en el 3er Strand “*Principals’ Identities*”. Estos dos proyectos tienen como objetivo estudiar las identidades de directores líderes escolares a través de estudios de casos singulares en distintos contextos. A la vez, se inscribe dentro de la red RILME (Red de investigación sobre liderazgo y mejora de la educación) y el grupo FORCE (Formación Centrada en la Escuela- HUM386).

La investigación presente propone analizar la construcción de la identidad profesional de directoras escolares que desempeñan o han desempeñado su labor en contextos de especial desafío. Adentrándonos en sus historias de vida, identificamos los incidentes críticos, acontecimientos más significativos, personajes influyentes y leitmotiv que han determinado y reconfigurado su actual identidad de liderazgo.

Informes internacionales defienden la gran relevancia de una identidad de liderazgo pedagógico en directores escolares para el logro de la mejora educativa en los centros escolares (OCDE, 2013, 2018). Sin embargo, en el contexto educativo español, la figura de la dirección escolar a menudo presenta una identidad inestable y *desdibujada* (Ritacco y Bolívar, 2018). A la vez, estudios indican que ser mujer supone un desafío más a la hora de desempeñar la labor de dirección escolar, un perfil profesional asumido tradicionalmente por la figura masculina (Díez, 2016; Eagly y Karau, 2002; Schein, 2001). En contextos de especial dificultad, es aún más prioritario contar con identidades profesionales sólidas que orienten sus valores hacia la justicia social y el liderazgo distribuido (Leithwood et al. 2009).

Por todo ello, esta tesis doctoral fija su propósito en explorar la construcción de la identidad de directoras escolares cuyas prácticas profesionales se caracterizan por valores de liderazgo pedagógico y de justicia social. Estudiaremos identidades singulares de mujeres profesionales que asumieron el reto y afrontaron las

adversidades *liderando con otros, y no sobre otros*. Seremos pupilos de su *ser profesional*, orientado y comprometido a luchar contra injusticias sociales y la desigualdad educativa. Indagaremos en los diferentes episodios, sucesos y lecciones aprendidas que comprenden sus historias de vida, y que han cristalizado en su actual identidad profesional.

Objetivos de la investigación

Esta investigación parte de una cuestión central:

“Las prácticas exitosas de liderazgo en contextos de especial dificultad dependen de identidades profesionales directivas orientadas hacia valores pedagógicos y de justicia social”

Al tratarse de una investigación de enfoque (auto) biográfico- narrativo, se plantean tres cuestiones derivadas que persiguen el propósito de:

- Identificar acciones, circunstancias y procesos que fomenten la (re)construcción de la identidad de liderazgo de directoras comprometidas con la mejora educativa.
- Examinar en qué medida se vincula una identidad de liderazgo pedagógico en centros de difícil desempeño con la mejora educativa de centros escolares
- Indagar de qué manera el factor “género” influye en la construcción y desarrollo de una identidad de liderazgo en directivos escolares.

A partir de estas cuestiones, se presentan los siguientes objetivos:

1. Identificar indicadores y factores clave en la labor profesional de las directoras que conlleven a la práctica de un liderazgo pedagógico y eficaz
2. Analizar relaciones entre la identidad profesional de liderazgo en directoras escolares con los resultados de aprendizaje del alumnado, la mejora educativa, el desarrollo de la profesionalidad del profesorado y con la mejora de la cultura profesional de su centro
3. Analizar en qué medida el trabajar en contextos desafiantes supone algún tipo de incidencia en su identidad profesional, desarrollo profesional y en el de la comunidad profesional ampliada
4. Identificar hitos, leitmotiv, momentos, personas, retos y contextos que han incidido en el desarrollo de su identidad profesional de estas directoras y si su condición de mujer ha tenido influencia en su desarrollo profesional.
5. Construir líneas y procesos de desarrollo de identidad profesional en relación a su trayectoria profesional, el grado de desarrollo como directiva y las comunidades y contextos en los que ha trabajado
6. Extraer claves comprensivas acerca del impacto de las cuestiones anteriores en la identidad profesional, personal, social, etc.

3

Metodología

3. Metodología

Esta tesis doctoral se aborda a través de una metodología cualitativa, con énfasis biográfico-narrativo (Bolívar, 2002; Rosenthal, 2004; Taylor y Littleton, 2006). Este tipo de investigaciones emplean historias de vida, relatos biográficos y/o estudios de caso singulares para comprender y explorar, desde un enfoque descriptivo, interpretativo y dialógico, los significados que los participantes atribuyen a su propio entorno y a sí mismos (Goodson, Antikainen, Sikes y Andrews, 2016; Kelchtermans, 1993). Se trata de un diseño metodológico de estudios de casos (Creswell 2007; Stake 2005; Yin 2003), de los cuales se fue profundizando en concretamente 3 de ellos, resultando 3 historias de vida debido a su alta contribución y riqueza al campo de estudio.

Debido a la naturaleza de su proceso metodológico, el desarrollo de esta investigación tuvo un carácter secuencial. En un primer momento, se realizó una exploración sistemática de la literatura relevante sobre la temática *objeto de estudio*: construcción de una identidad de liderazgo en directores escolares. De ahí, emergieron distintas temáticas iniciales que conformaron un sistema de categorías integradas y por consiguiente, reorientaron nuestro foco de estudio hacia dos cuestiones más específicas que surgieron de esta revisión: ser mujer y liderar en contextos de reto.

A la misma vez de esta revisión de la literatura, se establecieron tomas de contacto iniciales en búsqueda de identidades fuertes y consolidadas en la dirección escolar que pudieran ser interesantes para nuestra investigación. Debido a los hallazgos encontrados en estos dos procesos simultáneos, se reforzó la idea de que investigar identidades de liderazgo en directoras escolares que desempeñan su labor en contextos de difícil desempeño era una cuestión prioritaria.

Se seleccionaron las informantes clave mediante los criterios propuestos por los dos proyectos de investigación que encuadran esta tesis doctoral (ISSPP y el Proyecto I+D+i “*Liderazgo, formación y profesionalización*”) los cuales se sintetizan a continuación:

- ✓ Los estudiantes presentan un rendimiento educativo superior al esperado
- ✓ Ser considerado/a tanto por sus pares profesionales como por el resto de comunidad educativa como un líder pedagógico exitoso

Además de ello, aplicamos el criterio de ser mujer y liderar en contextos de reto debido a las variables de estudio prefijadas con anterioridad. Igualmente, para la elección los casos nos basamos en recomendaciones metodológicas sobre enfoque (auto) biográfico-narrativo (Bolívar y Domingo, 2019). Estas recomendaciones animan a los investigadores a la búsqueda de casos singulares que contribuyan significativamente al campo de estudio y que presenten un verdadero compromiso en el transcurso de la investigación (Pujadas, 1992). Para encontrar estos casos singulares, expertos recomiendan hacer un buceo que permita la búsqueda de historias profesionales reveladoras, ricas en experiencias, valores, pasión y lecciones aprendidas. A través de un proceso de *bola de nieve* encontramos a 8 directoras escolares que cumplían con nuestras variables de estudio deseables (Rosenthal, 1993).

Desde el inicio del proceso de bola de nieve, empezamos a documentar todos aquellos aspectos de relevancia en nuestro proceso de investigación a través de nuestro Cuaderno Bitácora (Coffey, 1999). Este cuaderno fue de gran ayuda para recoger aquella información sobre la cartografía social del contexto en el que se está investigando y las impresiones y sentimientos que surgen a lo largo del proceso de investigación (Martínez, 2007). A la vez, fuimos estableciendo tomas de contacto iniciales con las directoras participantes con el fin de explicarles las características de la investigación, el grado de compromiso esperado, aquellas variables de estudio que pretendíamos explorar, entre otras cuestiones. Moriña (2017) cataloga esta fase como clave de principios éticos dentro del método de historias de vida y estudios de casos. Cuando se logró establecer un vínculo más estrecho y cercano, se procedió a las entrevistas biográficas en profundidad (Hopf, 2004; Fischer-Rosenthal y Rosenthal, 1997). Estas entrevistas se desarrollaron mediante cascadas de profundización reflexiva en las que de manera progresiva se fue profundizando en aquellos elementos más significativos y emergentes de la vida de nuestras líderes escolares (Kelchtermans, 1993). En la figura 6 se muestra este proceso desarrollado en las entrevistas.

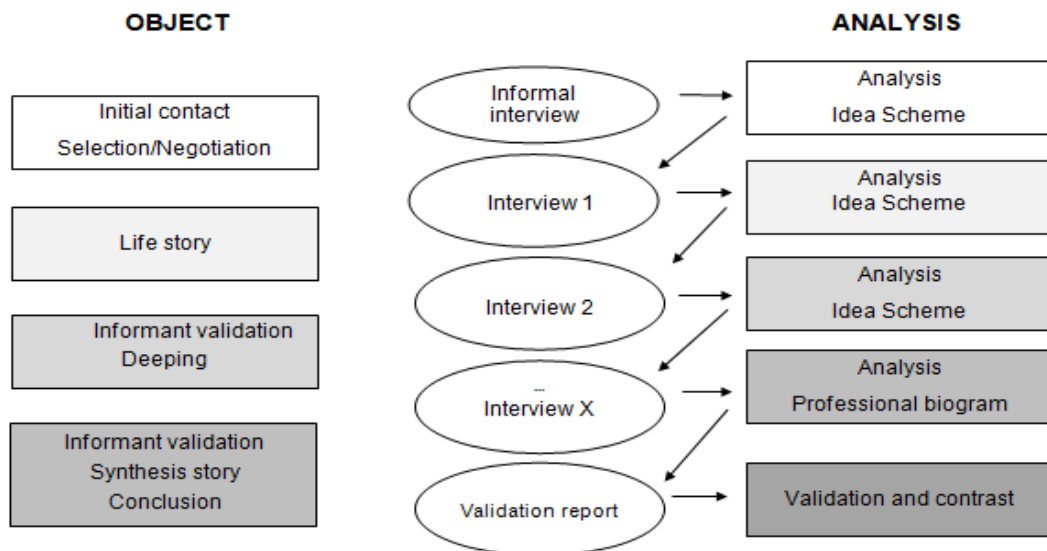


Figura 6. Proceso de recogida y análisis de información a través de cascadas de profundización reflexiva
Fuente: Cruz-González, Viseu y Domingo (2021)

En todo esto, el valor dialógico es esencial. De tal manera que a través de la validación dialéctica, nuestras informantes fueron corroborando nuestro análisis parcial de sus narrativas, siendo ellas co-autoras de este análisis discursivo (Geertz, 1989). De esta forma, la recogida y análisis de la información fue en cierta parte de manera simultánea en esta investigación. Tras la finalización de este proceso de profundización reflexiva, y la creación de un informe final del análisis de narrativas subyacente de este proceso, también se hicieron otra serie de análisis cualitativos a partir de principios de Teoría Fundamentada y análisis crítico del discurso (Strauss y Corbin, 1998; Van Dyck 2012). Para ello fueron muy útiles herramientas como el Biograma o software de análisis cualitativo Nvivo 12.

La figura 7 sintetiza el proceso de investigación explicado. Sin embargo, los artículos compilados en esta tesis doctoral explican de manera pormenorizada el método empleado en cada uno de los estudios que la componen.

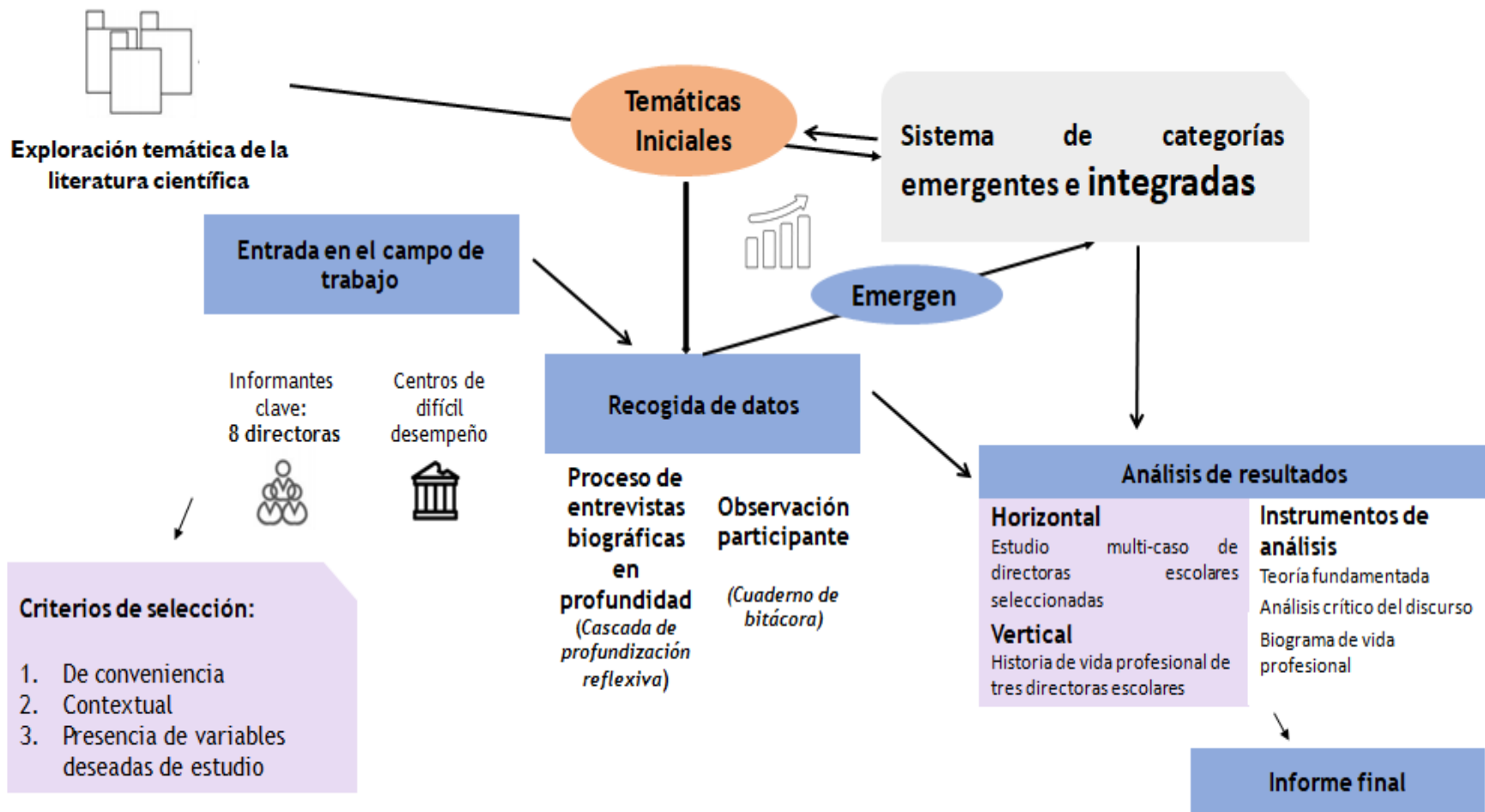


Figura 7. Proceso de investigación desarrollado en tesis doctoral
Fuente: Elaboración propia

Tras explicar el desarrollo del proceso metodológico de esta investigación, a continuación la tabla I muestra una breve síntesis de la información metodológica más relevante de las publicaciones que conforman esta tesis doctoral.

Artículo/ Publicación	Diseño metodológico	Participantes/ muestra	Recogida de información	Análisis de información
School principals and leadership identity: A thematic exploration of the literature	Exploración temática basada en los principios de revisión sistemática.	28 estudios fueron incluidos en la revisión. 22 fueron estudios cualitativos, 4 estudios de enfoque cuantitativo y 2 revisiones sistemáticas.	Aplicación del protocolo Prisma. Exploración de bases de datos seleccionadas: WOS y SCOPUS	Análisis temático basado en los principios básicos de Teoría fundamentada, a través del software de análisis cualitativo Nvivo 12
Female Principals and Leadership Identity: A Review of the Literature	Exploración temática basada en los principios de revisión sistemática	22 estudios fueron incluidos en la revisión. 20 fueron estudios cualitativos, 1 estudios de enfoque cuantitativo y 1 de enfoque mixto.	Aplicación del protocolo Prisma. Exploración de bases de datos seleccionadas: WOS y ERIC	Análisis temático basado en los principios básicos de Teoría fundamentada, a través del software de análisis cualitativo Nvivo 12
Professional Identity of Spanish Female Principals: A Systematic Review of the Literature	Exploración temática basada en los principios de revisión sistemática	19 estudios fueron incluidos en la revisión. 4 fueron estudios cualitativos, 5 estudios de enfoque cuantitativo, 5 de enfoque mixto y 6 revisiones sistemáticas.	Aplicación del protocolo Prisma. Exploración de bases de datos seleccionadas: WOS, SCOPUS y DIALNET.	Análisis temático basado en los principios básicos de Teoría fundamentada, a través del software de análisis cualitativo Nvivo 12

How to research the professional identity of female school principals through life stories?	Protocolo metodológico desarrollado en el estudio de caso	1 directora de Educación Infantil y Primaria	Cuaderno bitácora y entrevistas autobiográficas en profundidad mediante cascadas de profundización reflexiva	Biograma profesional, análisis cualitativo basado en principio básicos de Teoría fundamentada y análisis crítico del discurso
Female principals leading in Spanish schools: Exploring professional values and challenges through their voices	Estudios de casos	8 directoras de Educación Infantil, Primaria y Secundaria	Cuaderno bitácora y entrevistas autobiográficas en profundidad mediante cascadas de profundización reflexiva	Análisis cualitativo basado en principio básicos de Teoría fundamentada y análisis crítico del discurso
Marta's story: a female principal leading in challenge contexts	Historias de vida	1 directora de Educación Infantil y Primaria	Cuaderno bitácora y entrevistas autobiográficas en profundidad mediante cascadas de profundización reflexiva	Biograma profesional, análisis cualitativo basado en principio básicos de Teoría fundamentada y análisis crítico del discurso
Learning from the Flight of the Geese: The life stories of two female principals who lead in vulnerable contexts	Historias de vida	1 directora de Educación Infantil y Primaria y 1 directora de Educación Secundaria.	Cuaderno bitácora y entrevistas autobiográficas en profundidad mediante cascadas de profundización reflexiva	Análisis cualitativo basado en principio básicos de Teoría fundamentada y análisis crítico del discurso

Tabla 1. Tabla-resumen de información metodológica más relevante de los artículos que conforman esta tesis doctoral
Fuente: Elaboración propia

4

**Resultados y
discusión**

4. Resultados y discusión

A continuación se presenta el agrupamiento de publicaciones de esta tesis doctoral. Dentro de ellas se encuentran los resultados obtenidos y la discusión de los mismos. Estos resultados consisten en publicaciones previamente sometidas y/o publicadas en revistas y editoriales científicas. Debido a que las publicaciones presentes proyectan el proceso secuencial de esta tesis doctoral, hemos decidido agruparlas por bloques, tal y como se expone en la tabla 2.



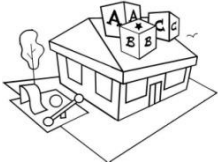
BLOQUE I Exploración temática de la literatura científica 	Publicación I School Principals and Leadership Identity: a Thematic Exploration of the Literature
	Publicación II Female Principals and Leadership Identity: A Review of the Literature
	Publicación III Professional identity of Spanish Female Principals: A Systematic Review of the Literature
BLOQUE II Diseño metodológico de la tesis doctoral 	Publicación IV How to Research the Professional Identity of Female School Principals through Life Stories?
BLOQUE III Resultados obtenidos durante periodo de investigación en centros educativos 	Publicación V Female Principals Leading in Spanish Schools: Exploring Professional Values and Challenges through their Voices
	Publicación VI Marta's Story: a Female Principal Leading in Challenge Contexts
	Publicación VII Learning from the Flight of the Geese: The Life Stories of two Female Principals who Lead in Vulnerable Contexts

Tabla 2. Bloques que estructuran los resultados de la presente tesis doctoral
 Fuente: Elaboración propia

BLOQUE I

Exploración temática de la
literatura científica



School principals and leadership identity:

A thematic exploration of the literature

Cruz-González, C., Domingo, J., y Lucena, C. (2019).

Educational Research, 61(3), 319-336.

School principals and leadership identity: a thematic exploration of the literature

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Structured Abstract

Background: In the last decade, much research attention has been paid to notions of leadership and the professional identity of school. It is widely agreed that school principals play a very important role in school improvement; international reports point to “school leadership” as a key factor in education quality, and recent studies suggest that the leadership identity of principals is critical for achieving effective leadership in schools worldwide.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to conduct a thematic exploration of the literature relating to school principals and leadership identity.

Design and methods: A scoping review was carried out. Two major databases were searched for papers published on this topic in the last decade. Once we had established an overview of research on this subject, we conducted a thematic analysis to identify the topical focus of research.

Results: We found that the literature reflected an increasing and intensified interest in the topic of school leadership as the decade progressed. Furthermore, a range of emerging subtopics were identified. These included the relationship between school culture and professional identity in school principals; the influence of ethical and personal factors on the professional development of principals; the dilemmas of balancing education policies and personal experiences; and the relationships between gender identity, racial identity, professional experience/career, training, and leadership identity.

Conclusions: Several key issues emerged from the studies included in this review, such as the importance of external and internal influences in the construction of the professional identity of school principals. Some of the research suggested that school leaders felt the need to develop a new professional identity. Overall, the study indicates that school leadership and its relationship with school improvement should remain an important focus for educational research investigation.

Keywords: Review, School principal, Educational leadership, Professional Identity, School improvement, Professional development

Introduction

School leadership and the development of professional identity have received increasing attention from the research community in recent years (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Beauchamp and Thomas 2011), and there is an extensive literature at both a national and international level on the relationship between school leadership and school improvement (Bell, Bolam, and Cubillo 2003; Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall and Strauss 2010; Murphy et al. 2007; Robinson et al. 2008). More specifically, several studies that have focused on identity demonstrate that the exercise of pedagogical leadership is best achieved when leaders have a strong professional identity (Bolívar 2006; Bolívar, Fernández, and Molina 2005; Izadinia 2018). Discussion of the relationship between leadership and school performance is not a new phenomenon. Several decades ago, the influential Coleman report of the 1960s (Coleman, 1966) and the movement known as “effective schools” had already drawn attention to the influence of leadership on

education quality (see Llorent-Bedmar, Cobano-Delgado, and Navarro-Granados 2017); more recently, whilst several international reports (OECD 2013; UNESCO-IIEP-IWGE 2012) have indicated the crucial role that school leaders play in improving the quality of education.

It is important to note that the conceptualisation and definition of school leadership has evolved in recent decades. In general terms, leadership is defined as the ability to influence other stakeholders to pursue shared goals. In the same vein, authors such as Pont (2013), Bush (2018), and Day and Sammons (2013) consider that school leadership encompasses the terms coined in recent decades. School leadership also emphasises the influence of a shared vision on the school community and the relevance of collective work and professional feedback in obtaining attitudinal, motivational, and behavioural changes. Authors including Crow, Day, and Moller (2017) and Leithwood (2009) suggest that school leadership is primarily based on a shared vision and relies on the commitment and mutual support of the school community, which can result in improved educational outcomes. Therefore, school leadership is thus considered to be of critical importance in improving school outcomes (Bolívar 2010).

The impact of the professional identity of school leaders on the practice of leadership is an important area worthy of greater attention. Principals play a key role in the design and implementation of strategies aimed at improving school outcomes. As Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), Day (2017), and Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) indicate, pedagogical leadership can improve learning outcomes and promote inclusion in education centres. For this reason, it is important to explore the concept of professional identity and understand better the factors that can help school leaders to build a successful leadership identity. Professional identity could be defined as what represents and gives meaning to teachers (Crow and Moller 2017; Murakamy, Hernández, Méndez-Morse, and Byrne-Jiménez 2016; Sachs 2001). Several authors focus on the complex nature of this concept. In particular, this identity is not static (Dubar 2010), but is continuously evolving and being reconstructed, and is, thus, defined as a transitory (Day, Elliot, and Kington 2005) or changing (Townsend and Weiner 2011) identity. In addition, when discussing the construction of this identity, it is important to mention both the internal experiences encountered by the individual and the surrounding social, political, and cultural context (Day 2018).

Aas and Vavik (2015) and Marchiondo, Myers, and Kopelman (2015) highlight the association between leadership identity and professional identity. According to these authors, individual professional development is as important as the collective contribution of the school team. Accordingly, the identity of leadership is not an intra-individual but, rather, a collective (DeRue and Wellman 2009; Kouzes and Posner 2003) and negotiated process. It follows that professional practice should be oriented towards school leadership. For this purpose, it is important to first determine the key dimensions that define school leadership. The McKinsey report (Mourshed et al. 2013) and other international reports, including the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD 2014) point to the relevance of leadership identity in principals, who are identified as major actors in the improvement of educational outcomes. Recent studies conclude that it is crucial for efforts to be made to promote effective leadership in schools worldwide. This is regarded as an effective way to respond adequately to local needs, where school leaders are considered key drivers of change towards improvements in education (Aas and Vavick 2015; Pont 2013; Gonzales and Lambert 2001; Sinha and Hanuscin 2017).

Purpose

The present study offers an exploratory review of the current research literature on the construction of the professional identity of principals in relation to the achievement of pedagogical leadership. The main objective of this review was to establish a general overview that includes the existing studies and research from the last decade and the main findings within this field of study. Based on previous reviews, such as those of Hallinger and Bridges (2017),

Ramírez-Montoya and García-Peñalvo (2018), and DeLuca et al. (2015), we pose the following research questions:

1. What is the composition of the research literature on “principals and leadership identity” (in terms of volume of articles and geographic location) between 2009 and 2018 from the databases Web of Science (WoS) and (SCOPUS)?
2. What is the topical focus of research identified by thematic analysis?
3. What pathways for future investigations have been identified by researchers?

Methods

This study is a scoping review (Arksey and O'Malley 2005; Levac et al. 2010) based on the principles of the systematic review (Gough, Oliver, and Thomas 2012), in order to answer the research questions proposed previously. Scoping reviews aim to outline the field of study in question (Mays et al. 2001), extracting the key features of the body of research (Davis, Drey and Gould 2009), as well as synthesizing the future implications for the research established by the studies included. (De Luca et al. 2015). Adopting this approach, our study aimed to provide a descriptive overview of the literature in this area of study and summarizes the key factors, important topics, major challenges, and improvement opportunities identified in the literature. The review was divided into two phases in order to respond to our research questions more effectively.

In the first phase, search filters were used to conduct a bibliographic mapping (Hallinger 2013) of the selected databases (WoS and SCOPUS). An overview was obtained of relevant data published so far. A summary of the most significant findings was then made and a conceptual map was built to provide a visual representation of the results. In the second phase, we conducted a thematic analysis of the studies selected. This phase involved a more thorough analysis of our object of study. The PRISMA protocol (Moher et al. 2009) was applied, whilst Nvivo was used to systematize and operationalize information analyses.

Search process

In our review, automated searches were conducted on the Web of Science (WoS) and SCOPUS databases. These two major databases were selected as they provide a systematic way of detecting high-impact research journals internationally. In this way, we were able to focus our search on studies published in international peer review publications. The inclusion and exclusion criteria used in our literature search are summarised in Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

In order to locate the studies to be included in our review, we established key words, extracted from the ERIC thesaurus; a key aspect for effective searching recommended by Hertzberg and Rudner (1999). The keywords used were: "professional identity", "principal", "headteacher" and "leadership". Table 2 displays the search strategy used for the identification of relevant studies.

[Table 2 here]

*** Article selection process**

Article selection was carried out according to the phases recommended in the PRISMA protocol (Moher et al. 2009) (see Figure 1).

[Figure 1 here]

Our process of searching and inclusion of studies was carried out collaboratively, through researcher review (Sarhou 2016) to underpin our investigation with rigour and scientific quality. After obtaining the selected articles, a thematic analysis of these articles was conducted with the use of qualitative analysis software (Nvivo) as a research tool. The thematic coding was carried out by two researchers to check for consistency of coding. Central themes were extracted emergently. Nvivo computer software was employed to identify the central theoretical themes and the main findings of included studies.

Findings and discussion

The results that provide an answer to our research questions are presented below. Bibliographic mapping (Phase 1) revealed the composition of the research literature on "principals and leadership professional identity" (in terms of volume of articles and geographic locations) from 2009 to 2018 in our selected databases.

According to our mapping, the number of studies published in the two databases on this topic increased during the time frame. Table 3 shows how publication activity in this area is concentrated in the years between 2014 and 2018, whereas there is very little publication activity evident in the years 2009 to 2013. This suggests a growing interest in this field of study, at least in respect of the databases consulted. Furthermore, we obtained a picture of the countries in which published research on this subject has been carried out in terms of the number of articles published by country in the selected databases. As Table 3 also shows, the majority of scientific studies on this topic were conducted in the USA and UK during our selected timeframe.

[Table 3 here]

Thematic analysis (Phase 2) revealed the emerging topical foci of research on professional identity and school leadership. In the Appendix table, the studies included in our review are synthesized, indicating their central theme, the methodology and the size of the sample used.

In the sections that follow, we present and discuss the predominant themes and sub-themes that emerged from the thematic analysis.

Relationship between school culture and professional identity in school principals

Firstly, many studies linked the development of a professional identity in principals to the school context. For example, Bolivar and Rittaco (2016b), Carpenter et al. (2017) and Bahous, Busher, and Nabhani (2016), among others, explained that school culture is crucial to the successful practice of leadership. For this reason, they point out that a specific context determines the characteristics and ways of working among its own professionals. Carpenter et al. (2017) observed that principals working in challenging environments developed an identity that enacted values of social justice, which drove them to adopt innovative leadership practices. In a similar vein, Bahous, Busher, and Nabhani (2016) found that, in challenging schools, pedagogical leadership is exercised by assertive principals who are able to develop a positive collaborative climate and establish team spirit through professional development. According to Ritacco and Bolívar (2018), a strong leadership identity builds a solid and active collaborative environment which is based on a shared vision and goals for the school. As the teaching practices of principals are determined by the particular context of their school, school leaders adapt school management and teaching accordingly to the needs of their school (Spies and Heystek 2015).

Another determinant of successful leadership is the presence of a supportive and trusting climate. Rigby (2015), Rhodes, Brundrett, and Nevill (2009) and Cowie and Crawford (2009) agree that a climate of this nature facilitates successful leadership. Additionally, the leadership of principals has an important relationship with the commitment of staff. In particular, Jo (2014) argues that a poor relationship between principal and teachers has a negative influence on staff commitment.

*** *Ethical and personal factors: influence on professional identity***

A number of studies have also focused on the factors that influence the professional development of principals in order to identify the aspects that hinder or preclude successful leadership. Many authors (Cowie and Crawford 2009; Crow, Day and Moller 2017; Greer, Searby, and Thoma 2015; Mpungose 2010; Notman 2017; Rigby 2015; Rhodes, Brundrett and Nevill 2009) conclude that principals need to build morale, trust, experience, and support among school staff so as to be able to exercise pedagogical leadership. Principals are expected

to be “moral leaders”. This review revealed research to suggest that some principals may not have sufficient access to skills to confront the ethical and critical challenges of their profession. For this reason, it is suggested that principals should receive training in pedagogical and moral leadership (Greer, Searby, and Thoma 2015). In this regard, it is important to mention that authors such as Crow, Day, and Moller (2017) explain that the development of pedagogical leadership skills is closely related to the feelings and experiences that define the personal identity of principals. Further, Notman (2017) notes that it is the combination of personal and professional identity that helps leaders to develop a flexible style of leadership based on values that favour adaptation to structural and educational changes.

*** *Dilemmas of balancing education policies and personal experiences***

Various investigators have drawn attention to the difficulties sometimes perceived by certain principals in terms of balancing educational policy with their professional identity when developing their work. This challenge may lead principals to develop a flexible identity as a way of adapting to what the school community expects from them (Connolly, Milton, Davies and Barrance 2018; Mpungose 2010). A particularly interesting theme highlighted in this regard is the connection between education policies and the development of a professional identity in principals. Education policies clearly exert an influence on dimensions such as school hierarchy, vision, and leadership practices. For instance, Mifsud (2015), Bolivar and Rittaco (2016a), Riveros, Verret, and Wei (2016) demonstrated that both the hierarchical structure of power and changes in education policies have a significant influence on the identity of school leaders. There is evidence that education policies influence leadership practices and that this can be a source of concern for principals, who may face challenges to accomplish the established standards and meet accountability requirements.

*** *Relationship between gender identity, racial identity, and leadership identity***

A relevant finding that emerged from the thematic analysis was that, between 2016 and 2018, several studies were conducted on the role of gender identity in the development of a leadership identity (Amstrong and Mitchell 2017; Arar and Saphira 2016; Jones 2017; Murakami and Tornsen 2017; Nickens and Washington 2017). The findings indicate that gender identity can impel principals to reconstruct their identity in the context of gendered cultural norms and power structures when exercising leadership. Some of the obstacles identified by female principals when exercising leadership included the presence of restrictive cultural norms, underlying social and political pressures from male-dominant structures, poor support and trust from colleagues, and low expectations of their work and skills. This disadvantageous situation has made female principals reconstruct their professional identity with the purpose of being able to exercise leadership successfully. Studies by Amstrong and Mitchell (2017) and Nickens and Washington (2017) suggest that, sometimes, when female principals reconstruct their professional identity, their professional practices may change: thus, female principals choose strategic responses that develop trust in their leadership skills. To this end, change in aspects of their personality, beliefs, and values by occur. Murakami and Tornsen (2017) observed that, in such circumstances, female principals generally adopt a leadership style based on justice, honesty, and ethics. This idea is supported by Jones (2017), who explained that in a challenging context, female principals feel forced to adopt a different identity to exercise leadership successfully. This is consistent with the observations reported by other authors (Murakami and Tornsen 2017; Nickens and Washington 2017). Some literature thus suggests that female principals try to promote trusting and emotionally and professionally supportive relationships, and exercise distributed leadership based on leading with others rather than leading others.

Another important factor identified in our review was the relationship between racial identity and professional identity in the work of the principal (Amstrong and Mitchell 2017; Arar and Saphira 2016; Hernández and Murakami 2016; Johson 2017; Mendez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jiménez, and Hernández 2015; Toure and Dorsey 2018). A variety of studies provided evidence that principals have to cope with racially-based pressures that are the result of

“hidden” social norms originating from racially-determined power structures. For example, pressures may be the result of traditional cultures that do not respect diversity, and show resistance or react negatively to other cultures Arar and Shapirab (2016). Challenges to the professional identity of principals also arise from the lack of a trusting and respectful environment, where racist stereotypes undermine trust in the professional abilities of others (Hernández and Murakami 2016). Studies such as the one conducted by Armstrong and Mitchell refer to principals developing a “racial sixth sense” (Armstrong and Mitchell 2017, 831) which helps them to anticipate and respond to challenges in order to be able to exercise their desired leadership. Johnson (2017) describes how principals in challenging communities feel forced to rebuild their professional identity and can become community leaders who strive for racial equality. These principals develop a strong sensitivity to the cultural and social needs of the community and build an identity based on justice and social change.

*** *Link between professional experience in management and professional identity***

Another facet of the professional development of principals is their professional experience and career. Robertson (2017) and Johnson (2017) conducted two studies to investigate whether experience in principalship is a potential determinant in the development of a strong professional identity. The authors provide relevant empirical evidence that extensive experience in principalship results in stronger emotional management, effective decision-making, and more positive relationships with the school community. According to our thematic analysis, principals' previous work experiences have a strong influence on their professional life and that this can trigger an identity crisis that guides the development of their identity as leaders (Johnson 2017). In a similar vein, Robertson (2017) observed that experience is crucial for effective decision-making and the successful management of the emotional and social challenges of everyday work.

*** *Link between training, professional development, and the construction of a professional leadership identity in management***

The studies included in our review indicated that professional training programmes for school leaders can be decontextualized and inappropriate in some circumstances. Moreover, there is the possibility that the essence of internationally established school leadership guidelines are not taken into account in these programmes (Simon, Dole and Farragher 2018; Galloway and Ishiru 2015). Challenging environments require special training and a greater commitment on the part of the principal towards the development of a strong professional identity. In relation to previous professional experiences, we observed that interest in this aspect was reflected in the first years of our chosen study period, but not so strong in more recent times.

The studies selected mention a lack of suitable training programmes for the professional development of principals in some settings. For instance, Cowie and Crawford (2009) argue that this type of training would help principals to build a successful professional identity, expand their perspectives, and consolidate their self-confidence. Rhodes, Brundrett, and Nevill (2009) state that programmes for the professional development of principals would provide school leaders with the experience, support, trust, and access to experts in this field, which would help ensure that they adopt best leadership practices in the future. However, the point is also made that training in professional development should not only focus on technical and functional aspects. For example, Galloway and Ishiru (2015) propose that equality in education is incorporated as a new standard in leadership training programmes.

*** *Future research directions identified in the literature***

With regard to the research question about proposed pathways for future research, a number of approaches are suggested. According to Greer, Searby, and Thoma (2015) and Johnson (2017), in relation to principals' professional identity, the values and beliefs of school leaders should be made the object of future qualitative studies. Thus, special attention could be paid to the

development of educational leadership skills, where ethical judgment and moral sensitivity are acknowledged as key aspects of the professional identity of school leaders. Likewise, Robertson (2017) guides future research towards the changing nature of professional identity. This, it is argued, would help principals to develop a pedagogical leadership identity by better knowing themselves. In line with this theory, Rigby (2015) recommends that future research should be conducted to identify the factors of success that ensure a better understanding of a principal's identity as a leader. This notion resonates with Rhodes, Brundrett, and Nevill (2009), who argue that research should focus on identifying the traits that promote the development of a strong professional identity.

As indicated through our thematic analysis, professional identity is determined by a complex range of interwoven factors, including those related to race and gender. Some of the research suggested that in some cases cultural norms may drive principals to reconstruct their perceived role in the workplace and adopt a somewhat different professional identity. Indeed, Murakami and Tornsen (2017) draw attention to policies that do not encourage inclusion in respect of gender; Hernández and Murakami (2016) recommend analysing race-based "microaggressions", which have a negative impact on the exercise of successful leadership. Payne and Smith (2018) note that insufficient attention has been paid to violence based on sexual identity in the context of school leadership and highlight the lack of data on the professional development of teachers and principals in relation to addressing LGBTQ issues in schools. Clearly, these important and relevant areas should be the focus of further research on professional identity.

A further pathway for future research consistently mentioned in the literature is the development of training programmes for school leaders. For instance, Carpenter et al. (2017) propose incorporating aspects related to decision-making processes and social justice in training programmes for principals. More specifically, Toure and Dorsey call for the inclusion of aspects related to "racial literacy" (Toure and Dorsey 2018, 38) in the educational community in the professional training programmes of school leaders. Other studies, such as that by Connolly et al. (2018), emphasise the need for government-level initiatives that promote professional training for principals oriented towards pedagogical leadership. Rigby (2015) concluded that analysis of experience should be included in leadership training programmes. According to this author, research should be conducted to determine whether these training programmes have long-lasting effects that lead to successful educational leadership.

* **Implications and conclusions**

As noted earlier, research on school leadership has been conducted since the 60s (Wang 2018) and Maureira, Moforte, and González (2014). Educational leadership is now regarded as a priority in the international educational agenda and interest in this issue within the field of educational research has increased over time (Aravena and Hallinger 2017; Campbell and Faber 1961; Mertkan et al. 2017; Hallinger and Heck 1996). In our scoping review, 28 articles were analysed in order to address our research questions. The purpose was to map the selected articles (published between 2009 and 2018) identifying bibliometric characteristics, topical foci and future areas of research. With regard to the nature of the search process, the results obtained confirm that the development of a professional identity oriented toward the practice of pedagogical leadership has indeed attracted attention from the scientific community in the databases analysed. This is consistent with other studies that indicate the growing interest in this field of research (Rhodes and Brundrett 2006; Hallinger and Heck 2010).

As with all studies, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the approach we adopted. One limitation of our study is the specific time period. The reason for this limit is that we wanted to review, in detail, the literature published on principals' leadership identity in the last decade (2009-2018). However, this meant that we were not able to consider earlier studies and a wider historical context. Additionally, we constrained our search to papers published in journals indexed in WoS and SCOPUS. Whilst this ensured a focus on articles that met high

international quality standards, it meant that high quality literature from other sources, which may also have provided insights, could not be considered within our analysis.

One of the main themes identified by our thematic analysis is the issue of training programmes in pedagogical leadership. Training programmes are consistently identified as a key factor in school improvement; therefore, there is a need for more research to be conducted on professional identity in principalship, as supported by Barber and Mourshed (2007). Another notable aspect that emerged from our analysis was the influence of factors including gender and race on the construction of the leadership identity of school principals and leaders. It is relevant here to refer to the cultural expectation of leadership (Dorfman, Hanges and Brodbeck 2004, Dickson et al. 2012) and that depending on the existing culture in each setting, expectations of leaders will vary. Thus, it is imperative that the complex aspects that may limit or hinder the development of a leadership identity are considered when developing training for future principals. Other research studies, such as Snaebjornsson et al. (2015), which indicate that in the last decade there has been an increase in research initiatives to study leadership and the way in which it is influenced by the culture and context that surrounds it. In addition, it is noteworthy that this scoping review revealed a predominance of the use of qualitative methodologies when it comes to studying this subject. Of course, qualitative methodologies can produce rich, in depth analyses of data that help understand the personal aspects of principal identity and professional. Alongside this, it would be helpful for future research to also include quantitative designs capable of large scale, quantitative analyses of data to examine and explore, statistically, important relationships between school quality and principal identity.

Finally, this review has shown that there are many aspects of leadership that deserve the attention of researchers. We hope that our investigation could be useful for scholars when it comes to identifying new and under-researched directions in the area of professional identity in principalship, since many questions still remain unsolved. In sum, this review undoubtedly demonstrates the high quality of scholarly endeavour in this area within the last decade. Nonetheless, further research is needed to investigate the subject of leadership identity in school principals. Our analysis and exploration of the literature suggests that future research directions should be established in relation to training in the development of professional identity, in order to support school principals to build an effective leadership identity.

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IDENTIFICATION	Number of articles identified after the application of search filters on: WoS=31 SCOPUS= 18	
SCREENING	Number of articles following duplicate removal (n=37) Number of articles screened (n=12)	Number of articles excluded (n=12)
SUITABILITY	Number of articles for which eligibility was assessed (n=37)	Number of articles excluded, and reasons for exclusion n=9*
INCLUSION	Number of articles included in qualitative synthesis n=28	

*These articles were excluded according to our criteria, as school leaders were not an object of study, and/or leadership was analyzed in entities other than education centres.

Figure 1. Phases in the selection of studies

Included in the search	Excluded from the search
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Studies from the search equation composed of the following search terms: "professional identity", 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lectures, books and sources that were not an "article" or "review" that were found on the

<p>“principal OR head teacher”, “leadership”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scientific studies published between 2009 and 2018. ▪ Scientific studies that were an "article" or "review". ▪ Scientific studies on the following areas of research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In WoS: Education and Educational Research -In SCOPUS: Social Science ▪ Studies which subject met the object of our study/analysis. 	<p>databases searched.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Studies that were conducted in a time interval different from the one we specified. ▪ Studies that did not consider principalship. ▪ Studies about organizations other than education centres.
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Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria used in the literature search.

Database	Search specifications	N articles
WoS	<p>TS= (“professional identity”) AND (principal OR headteacher) AND (leadership)</p> <p>Search filters: Subject Area: Main database of Web of Science Research domains: Social Sciences Areas of Research: Education Educational Research Document Type: Article Time period: 2009-2018</p>	31
SCOPUS	<p>TITLE-ABS-KEY("professional identity") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(principal OR headteacher) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY(leadership)</p> <p>Search filters: Subject Area: Social Science Document type: Article Source Type: Journal Time period: 2009-2018</p>	18

Table 2. Search specifications

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	TOTAL
UK	2						1		3	1	7
SOUTH AFRICA		1					1				2
KOREA						1					1
USA						1	3	2	1	2	9
CANADA								1	1		2
SPAIN								2		1	3
LEBANON								1			1
ISRAEL								1			1
NEW ZELAND									2		2
										Total	28

Table 3. Number of articles published, split by country. Source: Designed by the authors.

Appendix

Author/year	Central theoretical terms	Methodology	Participants
Amstrong and Mitchell (2017)	The intersection of race and gender in the professional identity of principals	Qualitative case study through semi-structured interviews	Principals n=2
Arar and Shapira (2016)	Gender and race barriers in the professional identity of principals	Collective case study through in-depth interviews with Muslim principals in an Israeli context.	Principals n=7

Bahous et al. (2016)	Influence of the role of principals in the development of teaching practices.	Case studies through semi-structured interviews with teachers, principals, and students of each school in four primary schools of disadvantaged communities in Beirut.	Principals n=4 Teachers n=81 Children (20 groups)
Bolivar and Ritacco (2016a)	Professional identity of the principals using a narrative approach	Collective case study through a narrative approach	Principals n=15
Bolivar and Ritacco (2016b)	Impact of school management on the professional identity of school leaders	Review of literature	-
Carpenter et al. (2015)	Leadership identity for social justice in principals	Instrumental case study design through semi-structured individual interviews	Assistant Principals= 12
Connolly et al. (2018)	Impact of political-educational reforms on professional identity and the recruitment of principals in Wales.	Qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews	Principals n=19 Assistant principals n= 11
Cowie and Crawford (2009)	Training / training for school management and leadership practice in new leaders	Qualitative study through a narrative methodological approach	Principals n=7
Crow et al. (2017)	Professional identities of school leaders	Review of international studies and research	-
Greer et al. (2014)	Moral reasoning in future educational leaders	“ Census study”	Graduate students from the five doctoral granting universities n=113
Hernandez and Murakami (2016)	Intersection of race and gender in the professional identity of principals	Counter-story as a methodological tool	Principal n=1
Jo (2014)	Influence of the principal-teacher link in the professional development of teachers	Two-step approach for a valid measurement model of variables. In the first step, the measurement model was estimated with a variety of fit indices. The second (the structural model) was estimated with the same fit indices.	Professionals with distinguished education levels n= 448
Johnson (2017)	Study of leadership identity construction through three generations of school leaders	Life stories of school leaders from ethnic minorities who led schools over a 47-year period in the United Kingdom.	Principals n= 28
Jones (2017)	Experiences of female principals in primary school	Multi-case study. Semi-structured interviews.	Principals n= 10
Méndez-Morse et al. (2015)	Barriers of race and gender in "Latina headteachers"	Survey based on issues of gender, race, ethnicity, personal and professional challenges, and factors that influence participants' leadership practice	Principals -Male n= 223 -Female n= 136
Mifsud (2015)	Circulating power and in/visibility of leadership exploring the functions of school leaders	Case study. Data collection with semi-structured interviews.	College Principal and Heads of School of three secondary schools and four primary schools
Mpungose (2010)	Factors of influence in the development of leadership	Life History approach	Principals n=6

	identity in school principals.		
Murakami and Torsen (2017)	Equity in the development of professional identities	Case study of successful high school principals in Sweden and Texas through intentional sampling based on ISSPP criteria.	Principals n=2
Nickens and Washington (2016)	School leadership and racial and gender barriers	First-hand accounts and round-table discussions	Principals n=18
Notman (2017)	Influential factors in the personal and professional identities of each principal for the achievement of educational leadership	Case study using follow-up interviews with principals	Principals n= 2
Payne and Smith (2018)	Attitude of school principals in vocational training programmes oriented to LGBTQ themes for their staff	Analysis of Reduction of Stigma in professional development programmes in schools through a qualitative study based on interviews and field notes	Education professionals: principals, teachers, counsellors, social workers, and psychologists
Rhodes et al. (2009)	Influence of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) in supporting aspirant heads	Questionnaire survey of National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) graduates and subsequent interviews with several of the graduates with different perceptions regarding the transition to headship	NPQH graduates n= 156
Rigby (2015)	Role of principals as teacher supervisors	Cross-case study through qualitative observations and interviews with first-year principals	Principals n=6
Ritacco and Bolívar (2018)	Professional identity in Spanish school principals	Qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews	Principals n= 15
Riveros et al. (2016)	Educational leadership standards in principals and deputy principals	Case study, qualitative and exploratory. Interviews with principals and assistant principals, documentary analysis and participant observation	Secondary principals n=4, Secondary vice principals n=4 Elementary principals n=5 Elementary vice principals n=3
Robertson (2017)	Transformation of principals' professional identity	Qualitative research methodology based on naturalistic, emergent, and flexible design using purposive sampling	Principals n=4
Spies and Heystek (2015)	Influence of school context on educational practices of principals.	Phenomenological research method through "professional stories" reported by principals	Principals n=4
Toure and Dorsey (2018)	Racial barriers to achieving educational leadership practices	Ethnographic case study through observations and interviews	Principals n=3

Appendix Table. Overview of the studies included in the thematic analysis.

2

Female Principals and Leadership Identity: A Review of the Literature

Cruz-González, C., Lucena, C. y Domingo, J. (2020).

International Journal of Organizational Diversity, 20 (1), 45-58.

Female Principals and Leadership Identity: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract: Recent studies have highlighted the various barriers perceived by school principals in the performance of their professional work. This study therefore attempts to provide a general overview of this field of research. A thematic analysis based on systematic principles was conducted using two of the main databases, WOS and ERIC. The findings reveal different factors that influence the construction of identity of school leaders from a gender perspective; the intersectionality of race and gender that affects school principals; and the need for leadership oriented toward social justice. The studies included agree on the current situation of inequality regarding access and professional development of women in school leadership. It is argued that gender barriers still continue to exist, whilst it is recommended that more in-depth research is carried out in this area.

Keywords: Leadership, Principal, Gender, Identity

Introduction

Educational leadership is essential for successful schools, improved educational outcomes, and a system of equity (OECD 2014; Robinson et al 2009; Ritacco and Bolívar 2018). The figure of the principal plays a critical role in this process, being the key connector of the school (Leithwood and Day 2007; Robertson 2017). Principals must guide the school community toward shared goals, thereby strengthening the sense of commitment and identity of the school. However, to assume this role from a pedagogical and educational leadership perspective is not a simple task; it is complex work that presents multiple levels, tasks, performances, and all the challenges typically associated with dealing with human groups. For this reason, when a person assumes a leadership position, he or she must be well trained, acquire a pedagogical commitment, and possess a well-adjusted and consolidated professional identity (Lingard, Hayes, and Mills 2003).

The issue of identity has gained prominence in the scientific literature in recent times due to its impact on professional development (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Beijgaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004; Mpungose 2010). Identity is continually built and rearranged according to the functions performed in society. For this reason, the construction of professional identity is influenced by personal and social experiences (Dubar 2000; Stryker and Burke 2000). On many occasions the construction of this identity is hampered for a variety of reasons, all of which affect leadership positions. In international reviews on the construction of leadership identity in school principals, a set of factors emerge that influence this construction, with gender being a particularly influential factor (Weiner and Burton 2017). Therefore, we will proceed to investigate how gender influences the professional identity of school principals.

The gender dimension decisively determines the construction of professional identity. Since this identity is socially constructed and negotiated (Dubar 2000), it is contextualized in social environments and power hierarchies (Alvesson and Billing 2009). In spite of the various

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changes that society has undergone over the last few decades, segregation and gender discrimination mechanisms can still be found (Barberá 2000). This implies a social division that affects women both horizontally (distribution within employment sectors) and vertically (organizational hierarchy), which Sarrio et al. (2002) refer to as a “glass ceiling.”

This glass ceiling is manifest in the greater difficulties faced by women when it comes to securing promotion, as well as a lack of consideration for them as professionals, caused by invisible barriers that make it difficult for them to access positions of responsibility (Carrancio 2018). Other authors refer to this scenario as the “glass maze” (Eagly and Carli 2007) due to the numerous obstacles that women must navigate during the course of their professional advancement. Recent studies have continued to investigate this issue (Caballero and Salvador 2004; Carrasco 2004; Quintero 2005; Gutiérrez 2016; Inandi 2009), and warn that this complex situation is inherent to school leadership.

The aims and methodology employed in the present study are described below. We will then proceed to present the main findings: the temporal evolution and territorial distribution of the studies included, the thematic synthesis, and implications for future research. Finally, we present the discussion and conclusions of our study.

Aims of the Study

This study set out to conduct a thematic investigation of the scientific literature on the influence of gender in the construction of leadership identity in school principals, focusing on the last decade (2010–2019). Based on this general objective, the following research purposes were established:

- To study the main characteristics of the scientific literature on gender and leadership identity (analyzing the volume of articles and their geographical location) between 2010 and 2019 in the Web of Science (WoS) and ERIC databases.
- Analyze research designs and identify topics for thematic investigation
- To examine the future lines of research proposed by the authors in the international scientific literature.

Methodology

This study consisted of a thematic investigation of the literature based on systematic principles (Gough 2007; Hallinger and Bryant 2013). This qualitative thematic analysis provided an overview of the elements that characterize the current research, allowing us to gain valuable information on key issues, along with implications for future research (Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2015).

Search Strategies

A comprehensive search of the ERIC database and the main collection in the Web of Science website served to inform our research. The quality of the articles published during the years 2010 to 2019 confirm the growing interest in gender and identity issues in school leadership.

The key words used in the search equation were leadership, principal, identity, and gender, resulting from the ERIC thesaurus. In both databases, advanced searches were conducted by combining more than two descriptors, using Boolean operators to search for records that included all terms. It is worth noting that peer review was included in the process of searching the scientific literature in our review (Levac, Colquhoun, and O’Brien 2010). Table 1 shows the search equations used.

Table 1: Search Equations Used in the Databases

<i>Database</i>	<i>Search Equation</i>
ERIC	(leadership) AND (principal) OR (headteacher) AND (gender) AND (identity)
Web of Science (WOS)	TS= ((leadership) AND (principal) OR (headteacher) AND (gender) AND (identity))

Source: González, Rodríguez, and Segovia

In addition, Nvivo (Qualitative Analysis Software) was used for thematic analysis. These two processes form the basis of the scientific quality of our study.

Inclusion Criteria

The following inclusion criteria were established in this study in order to confirm the relevance of the literature included in our review:

- The school leadership figure is considered and linked to the object of study that frames our review.
- Studies are included from the Social Science research domain (using the Web of Science search filter)
- Studies are considered that originate from the area of Education & Educational Research (using the Web of Science search filter)
- Studies are included from scientific journals, with an article format.
- To cover studies published in the above-mentioned databases (Web of Science and ERIC) between the years 2010 and 2019.

Data Analysis Procedure

The process of selecting the resulting studies in different phases proposed by the PRISMA Declaration is set out below. This statement is based on a protocol that aims to improve the quality of publications included in systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, and Altman 2009). After establishing our search equation for use in the various databases, we proceeded to screen the different studies found, through search filters. Subsequently, duplicate articles were identified, and a thematic evaluation was carried out by means of a peer review. It is important to add that in this phase of thematic evaluation, any disagreement was resolved by consensus among three researchers.

Table 2: Phases of Thematic Investigation Based on the PRISMA Protocol

<i>IDENTIFICATION</i>	Number of records identified without applying filters by searching in: WOS = 27 ERIC = 42 Total records: 69 Number of records identified after applying filters by searching in: WOS = 14 ERIC = 18 Total records: 32	
<i>SCREENING</i>	Number of records after deleting duplicate citations n = 23	Number of duplicates recorded n = 9
<i>ELIGIBILITY</i>	Number of items assessed for eligibility n = 23	Number of items excluded, with reasons n = 1*
<i>INCLUSION</i>	Number of articles included in the qualitative synthesis n = 22	

* These articles have been screened in a justified way, under the following criteria of exclusion: the school leadership figure was not considered in the article.

Source: González, Rodríguez, and Segovia

Results

We now proceed to present the results obtained, based on the research questions from which our study began. The following graph displays, in a representative and visual way, the main temporal and geographical characteristics of the articles that were finally included in our thematic investigation.

Table 3: Bibliometric Characteristics of the Studies Included in WOS and ERIC

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total Studies
Australia								1			1
Canada								1			1
United States	1		2		2	1	1	3			10
England	1		1		1			2			5
Israel				1			1				2
South Africa						1			2		3

Source: González, Rodríguez, and Segovia

Analyzing the temporal characteristics of our included studies, it is clear that there a greater proportion of articles have been published in the later part of the time period used in our analysis. It is important to note that 2017 is the year in which this increase is most notable, a trend that is observed in both sources. Further, the analysis has provided relevant data on the geographical distribution of our object of study in the selected databases. The obtained results reveal that countries/regions such as the United States and the United Kingdom account for the

vast majority of the scientific production on this subject. The following is a compilation of different research designs used in our thematic investigation of the international literature.

Table 4: Research Designs Presented in the Studies Included in WOS and ERIC

Author/s	Year	Type of Study			Research Design
		Qual.	Quant.	Mixed	
Armstrong and Mitchell	2017	X			Case study. Semi-structured interviews with two female principals of multi-ethnic high schools
Arar and Oplatka	2013	X			Open questionnaire and in-depth interview with 93 Arabic and Jewish teachers, principals and above.
Arar and Shapira	2016	X			Collective case study. In-depth interviews with open questions administered to female Muslim principals in an Israeli school context.
Davids	2018	X			Exploratory and descriptive study through semi-structured interviews with six principals.
Fuller	2010	X			Case study. Data collection through semi-structured interviews.
Hernández and Murakami	2016	X			Research method based on Counter-stories (a tool used to study life story narratives that challenge dominant discourse)
Hernández, Murakami, and Cerecer	2014	X			Case study of a K-3 elementary School Principal
Johnson	2017	X			Life stories of 28 ethnic minority educators who led schools over a 47-year period in the UK.
Jones	2017	X			Multi-case study. 90-min semi-structured interviews (actively constructed narratives) with 10 principals in 10 UK schools.
Liang and Peters-Hawkins	2017	X			Case studies of 11 principals using semi-structured in-depth interviews and informal observations
Lugg and Tooms	2010	X			Theoretical study. Theoretical reflection based on issues such as identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, educational leadership, and leadership training.
Lumby	2015	X			Case studies. Interviews with 54 female school principals in South Africa
Marshall and Marsh	2016	X			Case study
McLeod	2017	X			Theoretical study. Theoretical reflection based on feminist reforms and gender equality in Australian schools.
Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jiménez, and Hernández	2015		X		Survey on gender, race and ethnicity, personal and professional challenges, and influencing factors in the leadership practices of the participants. Male principals (n = 223) Female principals (n = 136)

Author/s	Year	Type of Study			Research Design
		Qual.	Quant.	Mixed	
Moorosi	2012	X			Longitudinal study through documentary observation and in-depth interviews with principals (n=54)
Moorosi	2014			X	Longitudinal study conducted between 2007 and 2010. Mixed method including a survey, with quantitative data and case studies. 24 principals (13 women and 11 men)
Murakami and Tornsen	2017	X			Case study of two female principals in successful high schools in Sweden and Texas, recruited by intentional sampling based on ISSPP criteria (International Successful School Principals Project).
Popescu and Gunte	2011	X			Case studies involving six female principals in public schools in Romania.
Reed	2012	X			Case study with semi-structured interviews with three Afro-American female principals.
Santamaría, Santamaría, and Dam	2014	X			Case study using Counterstories (a tool used to study life story narratives that challenge dominant discourse) based on two Mexican principals.
Weiner and Burton	2017	X			Study of nine participants enrolled on a training program for principals.

Source: González, Rodríguez, and Segovia

Thematic Analysis

The following is a summary of the main findings found in the articles included in our review.

Gender as an Influential Factor in the Construction of the Identity of School Leaders

The construction of the professional identity of school leaders is a complex process, which can be hindered by various identity sub-dimensions. In societies governed by hegemonic norms and patterns, gender is a determining factor that at times acts as a barrier to the achievement of true educational leadership. Some of the causes suggest that such identities are conditioned by social patterns, which means that, in certain cases, the role of women in school leadership is silenced or not considered equally due to the gender factor (Armstrong and Mitchell 2017). The studies included in our review all agree with regard to the influence of gender on the leadership identity of school leaders. In addition, other factors such as cultural, ethnic or religious origin, along with professional background, have also been considered as determinants (Marshall and Marsh 2016).

Therefore, our studies highlight the various barriers to school leadership caused by gender issues, to which other causes related to cultural issues can also be added (Arar and Shapira 2016; Johnson 2017). In our review, various authors have studied the intersectionality of race and gender in educational leadership (Santamaria, Santamaria, and Dam 2014; Reed 2012).

Hernández and Murakami (2016) reveal important data on cultural and gender issues and their influence on the professional identity of school principals. Their research produced substantial evidence pointing to race and gender as determining factors in the construction of

the professional identity of Latina/o school principals. Because of these factors, school principals experienced a certain social and professional isolation, feeling that they did not belong to the educational community where they worked. For this reason, female principals had to renegotiate their identities to adapt to the new context. Liang and Peters-Hawkins (2017) agree with this notion, arguing that there is currently discrimination at the macro and micro level based on social categories of gender and race. In their study, they report how Asian-American female principals fought against this discrimination by assuming full leadership and fighting the oppressive system through a cooperative process of survival. Thus, authors of other articles included in our review such as Méndez-Morse, Murakami Byrne-Jiménez, and Hernández (2015) consider that, in view of this aspect, experience is of added value in the improvement of leadership practices.

Another piece of research that is particularly concerned with the intersectionality of race and gender is that of Hernández, Murakami, and Cerecer (2014), which analyzes the perceptions of a Latina principal with regard to the subject of leadership. In such perceptions, the expectations projected on students and families, the commitment to the community, and how social justice could eradicate discrimination were all of fundamental importance.

In addition, several authors point to the existence of the famous “glass ceiling” term when discussing school leadership (Reed 2012; Popescu and Gunte 2011), claiming that even today women are still professionally categorized through stereotypes characteristic of cultures in which powerful patriarchal norms are still present. In studies analyzed in our review, these socio-cultural meanings attributed to the figure of the principal are examined (Arar and Oplatka 2013; Davids 2018; Liang and Peters-Hawkins 2017). In line with these findings, Fuller’s (2010) study delved deeper into the perceptions of leadership held by school principals. These findings revealed a rejection of binary notions of gender by some participants, denying gender as a dualistic concept.

The studies analyzed show that the identity and leadership exercised in schools is developed under the gender umbrella (Davids 2018). Despite the growing number of female principals in schools, the perception of leadership still continues to be linked to the male figure (Jones 2017). Thus, Jones (2017) explores the professional experiences of female principals, highlighting the ambiguity of their narratives. In the female principals analyzed, there are contradictory identities and leadership styles that diverge from socially prescribed gender-appropriate behaviors. The studies by Lugg and Tooms (2010) and Murakami and Tornsen (2017) agree that female principals often feel conditioned by society and destined to reproduce a style of leadership that is considered to be appropriate from a male standpoint. The role of leadership is dominated by men—qualitatively and quantitatively—which influences the modification of leadership styles. Murakami and Tornsen (2017) argue that female principals, even when they were successful, were evaluated negatively, revealing the lack of equity in the way in which they were recruited, hired, and evaluated.

Similarly, Davids (2018), in a study developed in South Africa, observed how women had very little credibility as leaders, since effective leadership was associated with physical and authoritarian terms, perceiving, again, the prevalence of masculinity. It was argued that unless female principals were willing to renegotiate how they perceived themselves, they would not be able to identify themselves as leaders (Davids 2018). Weiner and Burton (2017) found in their research that although participants of both sexes initially framed effective leadership in similar ways, the feedback they received, the conceptualizations of themselves, and their access to employment, were significantly marked by their gender.

For this reason, Popescu and Gunte (2011), in their study on how the ethics of care influenced the career of Romanian school principals, have reported domination in the professional sphere through symbolic violence. These authors also highlight a certain style of leadership exercised by the participants, based on dialogue and communication, which they

consider to be positive and necessary. These authors also highlight the importance and prioritization of the principals when faced with family issues.

Implications for Future Investigations

There is a need for more studies that examine in greater depth the construction of the professional and personal identity of school principals. It is necessary to disrupt the standardized discourse of leadership in order to recognize the complex negotiations of women as they assume leadership roles in schools, along with the influence of cultural, intercultural, and global contexts (Jones 2017). In their research, Arar and Oplatka (2013) and Popescu and Gunte (2011) propose to advance and delve deeper into the study of male and female stereotypes in the professionalization of teachers, particularly those in leadership positions. For Arar and Shapira (2016), the main focus of this research is on Muslim women, as they are a forgotten sector that faces considerable inequalities. In the same vein, Johnson (2017) focuses on BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) female educators, calling for representation in leadership positions. In this regard, this author proposes detailed demographic mapping of BAME's female principals over time to provide a national picture of those authorities that have made efforts to diversify their leadership.

Further, Murakami and Tornsen (2017) justify increased education policy research (McLeod 2017) in order to address the lack of support for the inclusion of female principals. For this reason, they argue for an in-depth study of the expectations projected for female school principals in different countries and the influence of the political-cultural factor in this regard. In relation to this, Lumby (2015) adds that, in spite of progress that has been made, there are still biases in the ways in which women are perceived in leadership positions.

The paucity of literature on the ways in which race and gender affect management is revealed in various studies (Reed 2012; Santamaria, Santamaria, and Dam 2014). The production of publications dedicated to the intersection of gender and race in the field of school management is encouraged. Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) and Reed (2012) suggest greater political involvement that fights against hegemonic and exclusionary mechanisms from a gender and racial perspective in school leadership. Alluding to the race factor, Hernández and Murakami (2016) propose the need for more work oriented towards learning how micro-aggressions affect the principles of leadership exercised by Latina principals. At the same time, they highlight the need for internal policies to address the need for gender, race, and LGBT groups (Lugg and Tooms 2010) to be included in educational leadership programs and the recruitment of women into leadership positions. This thought is shared by Hernández, Murakami, and Cerecer (2014), who propose that priority should be given to the training of principals to improve the conditions of students of color through a reflection on their values, their beliefs and their own practices. In this regard, Moorosi (2012, 2014) calls for greater quality and effectiveness of such programs, bringing them closer to reality and giving further depth to human and personal dimensions of the educational leader.

In short, more work is needed to shed light on other benefits of diversity in leadership in educational settings (Santamaria, Santamaria, and Dam 2014).

Discussion and Conclusions

The main objective of the study presented here was to review the scientific literature on leadership identity in school principals from a gender perspective in the WoS and ERIC databases. The aim was to provide a synthesis of high impact international research on this issue, whilst also analyzing the guidelines proposed by its authors. The main findings of our review are consistent with international studies that point to the persistence of gender-based barriers and constraints in school leadership. These barriers are driven by significant differences

in perceptions and expectations of leaders based on gender. It is therefore essential to recognize the importance of organizational cultures that combat this stereotypical view (Collard 2001; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Van Engen 2003; Krüger 2008). In the case of the Spanish context, several studies have revealed this approach with the claim that there is a disproportionate number of women in leadership positions in the field of education (Coronel, Carrasco, and Moreno 2012). Relating our findings with international research results, we found that social, political, and professional factors sometimes limit the access to leadership positions in the female collective (Arar 2018). Some studies point to the fact that such obstacles have been present for several decades in different geographical locations (Gross and Trask 1964; Ramseyer 1955; Hallinger, Dongyu, and Wang 2016). As women have assumed leadership positions, research has begun to explore their experiences (Fuller 2015). The temporal constancy of this problem justifies a review of the literature on this topic.

In the studies included in our thematic investigation, a variety of purposes and aims have been indicated, which underpin a central question: how does gender influence the construction of the professional identity of principals? Cultural, religious, and educational factors occupy a prominent position in the emerging themes detected. It is then that our findings can be linked to related research results (Collins 2000; Jean-Marie et al. 2009; Ritzer 2007) that attribute great importance to the intersectional approach when talking about our object of study.

On the other hand, it is important to refer to the greater percentage of studies of a qualitative nature, as opposed to the notorious scarcity of the quantitative approach. This could be due to the fact that the qualitative approach is more suitable for studying the voices and contributions of our object of study (Bolívar 2002). The proposal of a leadership style oriented towards social justice in school management is one of the options put forward by certain authors as a way towards achieving greater educational equity (Arar and Oplatka 2013; Hernández and Murakami 2016; Marshall and Marsh 2016; Hernández, Murakami, and Cerecer 2014). This idea is in line with other similar studies that propose more extensive training for principals in social justice issues (Hernández and Fraynd 2014; Lugg and Tooms 2010; Galloway and Ishimaru 2015).

At the same time, there are many others who have attempted to analyze the influence of gender in management through theoretical perspectives such as critical race theory (Hernández and Murakami 2016; Santamaría, Santamaría, and Dam 2014) or black feminist theory (Armstrong and Mitchell 2017; Reed 2012) with the intention of explaining the reproduction of exclusionary and discriminatory practices in relation to the teaching profession. Studies external to our review have also tried to address this complex situation through different theories and approaches. For instance, the research conducted by Eagly and Karau (2002) resorts to the Role Congruence Theory to explain how society assumes leadership characteristics according to gender, the most common being the male gender role.

The future lines of research proposed by the studies included in our review call for a greater expansion of research related to the gender perspective and its influence on the career path and professional dimension of educational professionals, highlighting the school leadership figure.

Some studies agree on the need for more extensive and complete training for school principals in order to eradicate the inequalities and injustices typical of male hegemony, which still continue to exist in the educational sphere (Oplatka 2004). Education on equal opportunities through educational policies and institutions could be an effective way to improve this situation.

Nonetheless, various limitations were found throughout the development of our study. Undoubtedly the research method employed here is subject to the literature collected according to the different sources used, leaving a large spectrum that can be overlooked. Focusing on the WoS and ERIC databases means that any research that is not indexed has not been analyzed.

Moreover, during the search process, we found that certain articles on the target topic did not appear in the search, and this is because their descriptors or abstracts do not faithfully describe their topic. In addition, for certain articles, in spite of appearing in the databases, there

is no evidence of their existence. Moreover, in spite of implementing the necessary filters during the search process, in some instances the articles do not belong to the topic, and had to be read previously by the researcher, after which the decision to exclude or include the article was dependent on his/her criteria. It is important to point out that in this research we have focused exclusively on scientific articles of international impact, leaving aside books, reviews, book chapters, or any other type of document.

The present study demonstrates the need to investigate the construction of professional identity and to highlight the limitations found in such development at an international level. In this regard, gender has emerged as a strong influence and, on many occasions, constitutes a barrier that directly affects women (Popescu and Gunte 2011; Reed 2012) and ethnic minorities (Santamaria, Santamaria, and Dam 2014; Davids 2018). If we want to have a high quality, equitable educational system, we must promote the figure of the female principal as an educational leader. Government support could encourage an increase in the number of women in leadership positions to eliminate the glass ceiling that is still palpable and latent today. Despite the progress that has been made in educational and social equity, inequalities still remain today (Jones, 2017). Equal opportunity education through educational policies and institutions could be an effective way to improve this situation. It is therefore essential that the topic of leadership for social justice is integrated into training programs aimed at school leaders (Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastián 2006).

As shown in this review, the databases analyzed include studies from different geographical locations. With this in mind, we intend to conduct further international research on the construction of the leader's identity, paying special attention to female principals. This is because this group is the one that is most vulnerable when it comes to securing a principal/leadership position due to the way in which this role has been masculinized over time.

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3

Professional identity of Spanish Female Principals: A Systematic Review of the Literature

Cruz-González, C. y Lucena, C. (2019).

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**PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF SPANISH FEMALE PRINCIPALS: A
SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership is considered a fundamental pillar for the achievement of educational improvement and equity (Hitt and Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2007; Walker and Hallinger, 2015). In this context, school principals have a key role to play, and are primarily responsible for coordinating, organizing, energizing and guiding the rest of the educational community towards common goals, thus achieving commitment and strengthening the sense of school identity (Day and Leithwood 2007; Shengnan and Hallinger, 2018). The administrative role assumed from a pedagogical leader profile is far from simple. On the contrary, it requires him to take on great challenges, to be prepared personally and professionally, to "be" and "feel" a school leader, that is, to present a consolidated and adjusted professional identity (Ritacco and Bolívar, 2018; Theoharis and Brooks, 2012).

Studies on identity as a determining element in professional development have increased in the scientific literature in recent times (Mpungose 2010; Murakami, et. al., 2016). Research focuses on describing how professional identity is constructed in order to understand its influence on professional practice (Dubar, 2000; Stryker and Burke, 2000). Following Claude Dubar, in his work "La crise des identités. L'interprétation d'une mutation", he shows how identity is a difficult concept to define because of its subjective, personal and changing character, but at the same time how it depends on the social context in which it develops. The person, in this case, a principal who acts as an educational leader, is indivisible from his or her perception, but neither can he or she be separated from the perception others have of him or her. In this sense, the construction of professional identity is built on the basis of personal experiences, culture and the functions performed in society (Stryker and Burke, 2000)

Cruz-González, Lucena and Domingo (2020) argue that the identity construction of the professional can be hindered by various factors depending on the context, the race and the gender. This last one, for Weiner and Burton (2017), is particularly sensitive. Numerous investigations point out gender as a limiting factor in the development and construction of leadership identity (Inandi, 2009; Liang and Peters-Hawkins, 2017). As mentioned above, each individual's identity is unique and socially negotiated, influencing the context around them. If this context is embedded in patriarchal cultures where gendered segregation and discrimination persist, women may face different obstacles in accessing positions of power and responsibility (Barberá, 2000; Carrancio,

2018). Ridgeway (2001) argues how gender creates a web of restrictive expectations and interpersonal reactions that is the main cause of a "glass ceiling". In the Spanish context, the influence of gender in the construction of identity is joined by other challenges and barriers to be overcome by school principals. As Bolívar (2010) explains, the challenges are mainly due to the individualistic culture in the professional sphere, making it difficult to carry out transformational and distributed leaderships despite the attempts to do so in the educational laws. There are also difficulties in assuming the managerial position due to its ambivalent situation and provisional trajectory (teaching - management - teaching), added to the scarce interest in access to the position due to the low salary incentives and the numerous workloads (Bolívar and Ritacco, 2016).

On this basis, our research interest is focused on carrying out a systematic review of the literature on the construction of the identity of women principals who exercise educational leadership in a school, paying attention to the Spanish context. Specifically, through the analysis of scientific documents, we aim to analyse the main findings of the scientific literature on the influence of gender and the construction of the identity of women principals, to show the bibliometric characteristics of the articles analysed and finally, to examine the research methods that have been used in the different documents. In order to respond to these research purposes, an analysis of the Spanish scientific literature indexed in three databases was carried out: WoS, Scopus and DIALNET.

2. METHOD

The study consists of a systematic review of the literature (Gough 2007). It was carried out through two phases of research. The first provided an overview of the "bibliographic elements" that characterize the current research (Hallinger, 2007), including in these temporal, geographical and methodological data; and the second, in which qualitative thematic analysis was carried out in order to obtain the focuses of interest detected in the analyzed literature. The two research phases were carried out following the PRISMA statement, bringing rigour to our research. This statement aims to improve the quality of the publications included in the systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Urrútia and Bonfill, 2010).

2.1. Search strategy

A search for indexed articles in the WoS, Scopus and DIALNET databases was established to inform our research. To locate and include the literature, a search equation was formulated using keywords extracted from the ERIC thesaurus (see table 1). In the databases mentioned, advanced searches were carried out combining descriptors and handling Boolean operators.

Data bases	<i>Web of Science (WOS)</i>	<i>SCOPUS</i>	<i>DIALNET</i>
Search equation	<i>TS= (leadership) AND (principal) OR (headteacher) AND (gender) AND (identity)</i> <i>Filtres: Spain</i>	<i>TITLE-ABS- KEY("gender")AND TITLE-ABS- KEY("leadership")AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("head teacher") OR TITLE- ABS-KEY ("principal") LIMIT- TO (AFFILCOUNTRY "Spain")</i>	<i>Descriptors: Género, Dirección Escolar, Liderazgo. Countries: Spain</i> <i>*The descriptors were written in Spanish because it is a Spanish database</i>

Table 1. Equations and descriptors used in the search process
Source: Prepared by the authors

2.2. Screening criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established in the literature search process. On the one hand, the filters of the databases were used (countries, date, indexation...) and on the other, filters established by the researchers after an exhaustive reading of the literature were included. Finally, those articles that met the following requirements were considered optimal:

- Scientific literature in the social sciences and education were considered for inclusion in "article" format
- Contextualised studies in the selected country (Spain)
- Articles whose descriptors coincide with the contemplated research (gender, school management, leadership)
- Studies whose purpose will be contemplated in our object of analysis.

Therefore, all studies that did not come from the educational field under study that were not Spanish, that were any other format than an article and that did not represent a working purpose under analysis were excluded.

2.3. Information collection and analysis process

This section outlines the process of article collection and information analysis following the stages of the PRISMA Declaration (Moher et al. 2009). Initially, and after applying filters to the databases themselves, duplicate articles were identified and read and analysed. This analysis was carried out through a peer review and subsequent consensus among researchers, and qualitative analysis software (Nvivo 12) was used to facilitate the process.

		WoS	Scopus	Dialnet
Identifying	Number of records identified without applying filters by searching in	n=34	n=21	n=15
	Number of records identified after applying filters by searching in	n=17	n=12	n=6
Screening	Number of records after deleting duplicate citations	n=25		
Eligibility	Number of items assessed for eligibility	n=20		
Inclusion	Number of articles included in the qualitative synthesis	n=19		

Table 2. Flowchart
Source: Prepared by the authors

3. RESULTS

This section consists of two main parts. The first presents the main characteristics of the studies included in our systematic review (central themes and research designs). The second consists of a thematic analysis of these selected researches.

3.1. General description of the studies

Table 3 illustrates the different theoretical themes of our selected studies on research with regard to leadership, gender and female school principals.

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Central Theme</i>
Diéz, E.J.	2016	Glass ceiling in the school management
Cruz-González, C., Domingo, J. and Lucena, C.	2019	Influence of the gender factor in the development of a leadership identity in principals
Cruz-González, Pérez and Domingo, J.	2020	Influence of gender, personal and professional factors and professional background on the development of a leadership identity in female school principals
Cruz-González, C., Lucena, C. and Domingo, J.	2020	Gender barriers in the construction of a leadership identity in female school principals
Díaz de Greñu, S and Anguita, R.	2018	Stereotypes and barriers in the leadership of female school principals
Valle, J.E.	2012	Inequality of opportunity between male and female principals
Murillo, F.J. and Hernández-Castilla, R.	2015	Influence of gender in the performance of pedagogical leadership and in the distribution of their working time in school principals
Barrios, R., Camarero, M., Tierno, J.M. and Iranzo, P.	2015	Management and leadership models in principals due to gender and/or experience in the position
Coronel, J.M., Carrasco, M.J. and Moreno, E.	2012	Obstacles and challenges to leadership development for school female principals
Carrasco, M. J.	2004	Management styles of women in schools

Sarrió, M., Barberá, E., Ramos, A. and Candela, C.	2002	Glass ceiling in the professional promotion of women
Padilla, M.T.	2009	Barriers in the access to school management
Cáceres, M.P., Trujillo, J.M., Hinojo, F.J., Aznar, I. and García, M.	2012	Leadership of female managers in educational institutions at different levels
Cuadrado, I.	2003	Influence of leadership styles on access to management positions
Díez, E.J., Terron, E., Centeno, B. and Valle, R.E.	2003	Leadership and gender in educational organisations
Padilla, M.T.	2008	Access to school management for primary and pre-school female teachers
Gómez Delgado, A. M., and Moreno, E.	2011	Barriers limiting women's access to school leadership in infant and primary education
Cruz-González, C., Viseu, S. and Domingo, J.	2020	Researching the professional identity of school principals through life stories
Cruz-González, C., Lucena, C., and Domingo, J.	2020	Female Principals and Leadership Identity

Table 3. Central themes of the included articles in our systematic review
Source: Prepared by the authors

3.2. Methodological designs used in the selected research

In this section we present a table that shows the research designs used in the articles included in our systematic review of the literature.

<i>Author(s)</i>	<i>Methodological designs</i>	<i>Study participants</i>
Diéz, E.J.	Questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus groups	Male and female principals and teachers
Cruz-González, C., Domingo, J. and Lucena, C.	Thematic exploration of the literature	-
Cruz-González, Pérez and Domingo, J.	Life history approach	A female principal
Cruz-González, C., Lucena, C. and Domingo, J.	Systematic review of the literature	-
Díaz de Greñu, S and Anguita, R.	Two case studies through participant observation and a questionnaire	Teenage students from secondary schools
Valle, J.E.	Questionnaire and semi-structured in-depth interviews	Male and female principals
Murillo, F.J. and Hernández-Castilla, R.	Special exploitation of the General Diagnostic Evaluation of Primary Education carried out in Spain in 2009	-
Barrios, R., Camarero, M., Tierno, J.M. and Iranzo, P.	Questionnaire	Male and female principals
Coronel, J.M., Carrasco, M.J. and Moreno, E.	Multi-case qualitative research design through in-depth interviews, observations, document analysis and field notes	Female principals
Carrasco, M. J.	Telephone survey, questionnaires, interviews, participant observation and document analysis	Female principals of educational centres in Andalusia
Sarrió, M., Barberá, E., Ramos, A. and Candela, C.	Bass and Avolio multifactorial leadership questionnaire	Male and female principals
Padilla, M.T.	Scale on Access to Management	Female principals and teachers in Andalusia
Cáceres, M.P., Trujillo, J.M., Hinojo, F.J., Aznar, I. and García, M.	Literature review	-
Cuadrado, I.	Literature review	-
Díez, E.J., Terron, E., Centeno, B. and Valle, R.E.	Literature review	-
Padilla, M.T.	Ad hoc questionnaire	Infant and Primary School Female Teachers

Gómez Delgado, A. M., and Moreno, E.	Questionnaire	Male and female principals
Cruz-González, C., Viseu, S. and Domingo, J.	Methodological protocol for guiding life history research on female school leaders	-
Cruz-González, C., Lucena, C., and Domingo, J.	Systematic review of the literature	-

Table 4. Methodological designs used in the selected research
Source: Prepared by the authors

3.3. Thematic analysis

Once the main theoretical and methodological characteristics of our selected studies have been shown, we present and discuss the issues that emerged from our analysis.

- ***Being a woman in a masculinized position: a challenge for female school principals***

Certain articles included in this systematic review point to difficulties experienced by women in accessing and working in leadership positions. Valle (2012) and Díaz, Terron and Centeno (2003) point out in the results of his research an inequality of opportunities between both sexes. The participating female principals argued that it is very difficult to reconcile the heavy workload of school management with domestic and family tasks. However, the male and female principals interviewed made no mention of this aspect. While the women interviewed saw access to school management as the achievement of a different professional experience, the men highlighted the greater autonomy and decision-making power. Similarly, Coronel et al. (2012) and Sarrió et al. (2002) identified many obstacles and challenges for female principals participating in their study, and recognized the experience as a positive aspect for their professional development and the achievement of democratic and participatory leadership by all members of the school.

Padilla (2008) argues that to a large extent, these barriers may be caused by internal role conflict or the lack of supportive policies in the maternity of those women who are in the education profession and who want to aspire to or are currently working as school principals. In this sense, Cáceres et al. (2012), Gómez and Moreno (2011) and Díez (2016) explain that although the number of female teachers is greater than that of male teachers in schools and institutes, at an international level, management positions have been and are mainly occupied by men. However, these authors announce that this is currently changing. In a review of the literature on this subject, Cruz-González, Lucena and Domingo (2020) indicated that despite the great advances, there is still a current situation of inequality in access and professional development of women in school management and they recommended extending the lines of research in this direction.

- *The peculiarity of being a female school leader*

According to our perspective, gender does not determine behaviour or skills between men and women, but it is true that studies that study the professional identity of female school leaders point out that those professionals who lead in school contexts often have characteristics based on democracy, participation and commitment to social justice. Authors such as Díaz and Anguita (2018) explain in their article that this fact is perceived even by students, so that in their research the results revealed that students perceived a different leadership style on the part of women (characterised by dialogue, closeness and listening).

Barrios- Arós et al. (2015) show in the findings of their articles that different management and leadership models appeared in principals due to gender and/or experience in the position. Depending on the principal's gender, different performance priorities and work models were presented. In this sense, Murillo and Reyes (2015) agree explaining that in the male and female principals participating in their research they found significant data on the influence of gender on the performance of pedagogical leadership in school managers and on the distribution of their time.

A study that investigated in depth the professional identity of a school female principal who led in challenging contexts showed as its main result that factors such as family, personal background, experience and school environment can be decisive in the construction of a leadership identity. In fact, in the face of the different adverse circumstances that the participating female principal overcame, she showed professional values of commitment, dialogue, the fight against social inequalities and empathy (Cruz-González, Pérez and Domingo, 2020). Studies such as Pérez-Varela (2014), Cuadrado (2003) or Carrasco (2004) have similar findings to the previous study, explaining that their research detected relevant factors in school management that led to a collaborative professional culture in the centre and that, coincidentally, these factors coincided with the characteristics of the female figure in school management. In this type of studies, Cruz-González, Viseu and Domingo (2020) explain that a sound methodological approach is essential. Studying the professional identity of school leaders involves analysing and exploring the more intimate and human dimension of teacher professionalization. Therefore, this entails a study with suitable instruments that can capture this objective.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this research was to analyse the articles published in the Spanish educational scene on the subject of professional identity and leadership in female school principals.

After analysing the results, it is important to point out an increase in scientific production on this subject, as can be corroborated in Table 3. This data may be significant if we compare it with other international research projects which coincide in a greater production of research in this area (Arar & Oplatka, 2013; Popescu and Gunte, 2011; Marshall and Marsh, 2016). One of the main themes of this systematic review is the obstacles and limitations encountered by principals in accessing and promoting school management. Reed (2012) or Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) agree on this aspect explaining that despite the enormous efforts and initiatives carried out, this is still a pending task that requires further investigation. Another of the issues emerging from this review is the peculiarity of being a woman in management positions. Our included studies coincide with other research such as that of Popescu and Gunte (2011) which explains that the leadership of female leaders is often characterised by values of listening, participation and democracy.

As for the methodological aspect, it can be observed that literature review studies and mixed studies using questionnaires and/or semi-structured and in-depth interviews predominate. If we analyse these results in more depth, we can see that questionnaires are useful for collecting descriptive information about what we want to investigate, and therefore represent a more effective tool for finding out the opinion about the influence of gender on a larger scale than if we only focused on isolated cases. However, if what we want is to investigate this more identitarian dimension, it would be more useful to design qualitative and biographical-narrative research (Cruz-González, Viseu y Domingo, 2020). In this sense, instruments for collecting information such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation are a valuable means of approaching the most intimate and human part of the participants.

One of the main implications that we can draw from our findings is that, according to the selected studies, gender is an influential aspect in the professional performance of women principals. In several studies this aspect is linked to the emergence of obstacles in the access and promotion of female school leaders. This may be caused by a patriarchal and traditional culture that still persists in the current professional and

educational context. Therefore, this fact could be a reason for the struggle and demand for policies and initiatives to protect this situation. Furthermore, this leads us to encourage researchers dedicated to similar issues to investigate this question, with the aim of extracting keys to guide the professional practice of school managers and principals.

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BLOQUE II

Diseño metodológico de la
tesis doctoral



4

How to research the professional identity of female school principals through life stories?

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How to research the professional identity of female school principals through life stories?

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Abstract: In recent decades, female school principals have received more attention in research on the field of professional identity and educational leadership. Being a woman in a traditional masculinised scenario, such as school management, is sometimes a peculiar challenge. Several studies point to personal and professional barriers in the construction of a professional leadership identity in female leaders. Life histories are a privileged approach for understanding the construction of these professional identities. This study is part of a larger research project: International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP). The aim of this study is to describe a qualitative methodological process followed to carry out Marta's life history, a female principal who has led in challenging contexts. This paper has a didactic character that provides guidance to orientate research on life histories. Through this work, our aim is to illustrate the potential of this methodology for studying the identity construction of female school leaders. For this purpose, we will present the process of collecting information through field diaries and in-depth biographical interviews, as well as the process of analysis, characterized by cascades of reflective deepening, discourse analysis based on the principles of grounded theory, and a professional biogram. Finally, the strengths, constraints, and limitations of this approach are described, along with recommended future lines of research.

Keywords: life history, professional identity, leadership, gender, biographical-narrative research, female principal

Introduction

In this paper, we propose to delve deeper into how the life stories of female school leaders can be studied. In order to achieve this, we present the research process developed to elaborate on the life story of Marta, a female principal who has led throughout her professional life in various challenging contexts, including disadvantaged schools in Spain (the findings of this study can be seen in Cruz-González, Pérez & Domingo 2020). Specifically, these are educational institutions located in areas that the Education Administration identifies as being of a low socio-economic and cultural level, with academic results below those expected according to these circumstances, showing vulnerability to academic failure and processes of exclusion.

Numerous studies in the field of social sciences have used life stories for studying identity (Manolas, Hockey & Littlelyke 2013; Hirsch, Litvak & Lazar 2014; Kwapisz 2015), many of which have employed life stories to study the professional identity of female leaders (Hernández & Murakami 2016; Jones 2017; Nickens & Washington 2016). However, relatively few have described the process of collecting and analyzing these voices.

This leads us to ask ourselves one key question, that is, how is the gender factor a decisive element in the construction of the professional identity of female educational leaders? Therefore, the study of professional identity and leadership, specifically in female school leaders, is a field of research that requires a special process of analysis and for this purpose we propose that life histories provide a rich path towards a better understanding of the complexity of these phenomena.

We could view life stories as ideal vehicles for studying the processes of development, construction, configuration, and reconstruction of identities, making it possible to narrate the

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experience acquired, recalling individual or collective knowledge and memories, and placing their current situation within a spatial and temporal context (Bolívar & Domingo 2019). Life histories and other biographical-narrative methods have been emerging in the field of education in recent decades (Bolívar 2002; Breuer 2000; Cotan-Fernandez 2019; Hong 2004; Hirsch & Lazar 2014; Janotta 2009; Kainan, Rozenberg & Munk 2006; Moríña 2017; Muñiz 2018; Rojas, Susinos & Calvo 2013 Valentine 2008). Various authors such as Goodson and Sikes (2001) or Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf (2000) point to the emergence of postmodernism as a cause which has, in turn, led to a greater awareness of the social and human aspects. Whilst studying identity involves delving deeper into the more personal and intimate part of the subject, studying this identity from a gender perspective also requires a specialized focus. In particular, Bolívar and Domingo (2019) explain that biographical methodologies such as life histories are a very useful means of investigating the configuration of identities. This notion is also supported by authors such as Ricoeur (1996) who explains that identity can be understood as a story, the elements of which are open to analysis, including the plot, timeline, main characters, and context. For these reasons, qualitative methodologies are appropriate for conducting these types of studies. This theoretical stance makes use of narrative identity theory from a dual perspective in relation to permanence throughout time. Thus, two dimensions of identity can be distinguished: one that begins from the essence of oneself and remains stable over time, and another that is of an evolutionary and changeable nature. This duality led to the theory of narrative identity, which allows us to study the construction of identity by exploring the essence of identity that is maintained over time and the other dimension that changes over time and context. Further, Ricoeur (1996) argued that identity can be understood as a story that brings meaning to one's lived experience. Therefore, people construct their identity through their own "self-telling". From this perspective, the subject of study is the protagonist, who generates a dialectic that encompasses his or her own identity construction through a narrated story. By adopting this approach, the narrative of the subjects investigated would be rich with meaning about the construction and reconstruction of their own being, told in an order that would be both meaningful and coherent.

Based on the narrative approach and ideals such as those of Ricoeur (1991,1996), we show the life story of a female school leader through an argumentative plot, and describe the temporal, contextual, milestones, and leitmotif factors that marked her professional career. We do not resort to a descriptive approach, but rather we delve into interpretation and hermeneutics, addressing the specific moments and experiences that were key, and identifying their impact on his personal and professional life.

This study forms part of two larger research projects. The first of these is a national R+D+i project entitled "Identity of school management: leadership, training and professionalization". The second is the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP, 2013). The main purpose of this project is to explore international case studies on successful schools and leaders. More specifically, this study is part of the 3rd Strand, which focuses on the importance of a strong and positive sense of professional identity in school leaders. On this occasion, we propose to present a research process carried out for studying the professional identity of a female school principal. This leader was selected according to the criteria of the ISSPP project: the school showed academic results above those expected by its socio-cultural context, and in addition, the professional team of the school considered this school principal to be a successful leader. This article describes how this research was conducted using a life story. The data collection and analytical tools that were used and a synthesis of the main findings are the key elements presented in this article.

Researching the construction of a leadership identity from the voice of a female

This section presents the design of the research, clarifying how the case was chosen, the data collection and analysis and, finally ethical aspects that supported the basis of the research process.

Stage 1: The choice of the case

The choice of our participant was based on the criteria proposed in related research by other authors (Bolívar 2012; Bolívar & Domingo 2019). These authors argue that the search for "good cases" and key informants in this type of research is essential. In order to achieve this, the selected informants must provide real contributions to the subject to be studied, whilst presenting a high degree of commitment to the development of the research. For this reason, experts in this type of methodology propose a real "diving into" the field of study. This is possible through contact with various cases, developing snowball processes that guide us towards finding truly constructive and relevant stories.

In this respect, Pujadas (1992, 68) argues that some of the most important elements are being able to show willingness to take part in the interview, having the necessary time for the subject to tell their life story and being able to contextualize this within the social framework required by the research.

In addition, Bolívar (2002) and Goodson (2012) explain that the selection of individuals who could be part of our study must be deliberate. For this reason, the participants, are chosen for the interest in their own life story and their suitability for our research purposes.

In our case, the selection of our female school principal followed a singular process. The first contact with the possible participants of our study was made through the Atlántida Project. This project is run by a working group made up of teachers from schools and institutes, advisors, counsellors, principals and educational researchers who dream of a better and more equitable school.

In particular, this study focused on the Atlántida Seminar of this project in the province of Granada. This group establishes weekly and monthly meetings in which various educational issues and formative needs are discussed in order to achieve an improvement in the educational practices of the participating schools. In addition, members of the university are invited to collaborate in the functioning of these schools. To this end, we first held a meeting with various principals in order to exchange valuable and preliminary information regarding our study objective: how to build a leadership identity in educational professionals.

Following this first meeting, subsequent meetings and interviews were held in order to investigate in greater depth their professional careers and the values that underpinned their work. We also interviewed other professional colleagues to ask the question of who are the real educational leaders in their school. The selection of our cases was based on the principles of the research project of which our study is a part, that is the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP 2013). These criteria were based on two fundamental principles: first, the school in which the principal carries out her professional duties must present educational results above her expectations in relation to her social context; second, the educational community must consider our participant to be a school leader. Following a snowball process, we concluded that Marta would be an ideal case to investigate. First of all, her school colleagues considered Marta to be a true school leader. Moreover, she works in a disadvantaged school that is located in an area with a low socio-economic and cultural index, and which achieves academic results above the projected expectations in relation to its socio-

economic context. These two reasons are in line with the main criteria proposed by the ISSPP for the choice of case studies.

Stage 2: Information collection process

This section focuses on the description of the information collection process. As authors specialized in life histories explain, the biographical-narrative approach goes beyond a simple collection of dialogues from the participants. This approach aims to explore the deepest meanings of their stories, and therefore biographical inquiry is essential for identifying the main factors that have consolidated the identity of the subject, the impact of different events on their life history and/or the critical incidents that have characterized their trajectories (Smith 1994).

Moreover, Bolivar & Domingo (2019) argue that in order to implement this biographical inquiry, the instruments for collecting and analyzing information must be appropriate. Many of these instruments were used in the construction of Marta's life story

The logbook: observations and field notes

The field diary, or Logbook, could be defined as the instrument used to record ethnographic observation processes (Coffey 1999). This diary should always be accompanied by an analysis in relation to the social cartography of the context in which it is being researched (Martínez 2007). The nature of this resource enables the researcher to be able to collect those impressions and feelings that arise throughout the research process (Punch 2012).

To record and take note of all our impressions, we collected the relevant information in a Logbook. More personally, we like to consider the field diary as the term referring to "ship's log". This term refers to the book in which, in ancient times, sailors recorded incidents and events that occurred under their watch.

After each encounter with Marta, we wrote in our diary the most significant elements that escaped the audio recording made. Within this logbook we noted aspects coming from non-verbal language, from our own sensations, informal situations and/or personal intuitions. In addition, we also made a brief personal reflection after analyzing our encounter.

The field observations were made during the time period 2017-2019. Throughout this time, the researchers were visiting the participant in our study twice or three times a week. During these visits, we went into the day-to-day professional work of Marta, trying to become natives in her professional environment. After each visit, we wrote down in our logbook all the events, along with our thoughts and impressions. Below is a series of photographs taken, which symbolically show the values and vision that Marta and her team wish to provide of their centre.

CRUZ-GONZÁLEZ ET AL.: HOW TO RESEARCH THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF FEMALE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS THROUGH LIFE STORIES?

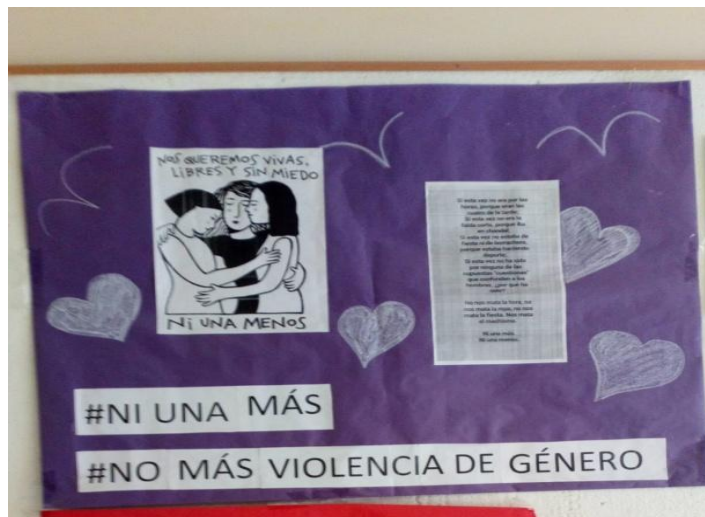


Figure 1: Photographs taken at the school where Marta works

Source: Prepared by the authors

As can be perceived from the images displayed here, the school where Marta works as principal shows a strong social commitment to gender equality and educational values of equity and social justice. Thus in every corner of the school, phrases and images can be found that refer to these ideals, with hashtags and messages such as #PasaAlaAcción, the Equality Corner, #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, Together we are better.

As explained by Bolívar, Fernández and Molina (2005), in this type of research it is important to integrate other voices and different perspectives on the subject of study in order to increase the understanding and credibility of the study, and to achieve a methodological triangulation. For this reason, in each of our encounters we also recorded the anecdotes, comments, and opinions of other colleagues and professional members surrounding Marta. All this information was also registered in our field diary. It is important to highlight that we took into account the voice of other members close to the participant in order to supplement and triangulate the information collected.

In-depth biographical interviews

Hopf (2004) argues that one of the best ways to access life stories is through biographical interviews. Fuchs (1994) delves further into this type of interview. Fuchs recommends combining both semi-structured and narrative biographical interviews. In this way, we could collect relevant information on the focal points of topics that most interest us at any given time, and at other times we could gather information on sequential life episodes. A total of seven biographical interviews were conducted in the study of Marta's life, each of which lasted for approximately two or three hours.

In our interviewing process, we relied on the narrative interview phases proposed by Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal (1997). This process is explained in detail below.

1. Invitation to participate in the research. The proposal of this research was put forward in an initial meeting with the participant, explaining all the details and fundamentals underlying this study.
2. Biographical self-presentation. In this phase, Marta (our female principal participating in the study) told us in different meetings about her professional life, emphasizing those milestones, crucial moments and leitmotifs, and how she was professionally impacted.
3. Narrative-generating enquiries. This phase of interviews was crucial in order to delve further into the key points of her biographical self-presentation. In this regard, this time point was essential for delving into the most significant moments and themes of Marta's professional career.
4. Conclusion of the interview. At this point, we summarized the most relevant and representative episodes in Marta's professional life and how they impacted her identity. At the same time, we proposed that Marta indicate to us any other topics, factors and/or events that could have been forgotten in this overview, in order to validate and complete our information.

In addition to all that has been explained, it is important to point out that, based on these principles and suggestions, the biographical interviews in our study were conducted sequentially and through the validation of the discourse collected on each of the encounters in the previous interview. In this regard, when we speak of the notion of discourse we focus on Marta's self-presentation through language and try to gain a deeper insight into how she positions herself in a certain temporal and spatial context. For this reason, the validation of this discourse is conducted through a researcher-researched dialogue and consists of verifying that the information collected during the previous interview is correct.

Thus, in the first part of the interview, a brief summary was made of what had been said on the previous occasion. From this point on, the new interview began. This process served a double function; firstly, to provide validation of the information of the dialogue by the informant herself, and secondly, to serve as an introduction and reminder about the research

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topic. The following sub-section will describe in more detail the validation carried out throughout the process of information collection and analysis.

During the course of the interviews we also benefited from some suggestions indicated by Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal (1997, 418), which are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Types of narrative follow-up question and several examples of questions proposed by Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal (1997, 418) and examples of questions in our study

<i>Initial contact to open the interview</i>	<i>Example of questions and expressions used in our study</i>
<i>Explanation of the nature of the investigation</i>	<i>Our research pursues the aim of ... This requires a mutual commitment, involving consistency over time, dedication, and respect for the participant...</i>
<i>Declaration of interest</i>	<i>I'm interested in your life story. I'd like you to tell me what you think is interesting and what you feel that you would like to share.</i>
<i>Some introductory questions</i>	<i>In this first phase, could you tell me what were the most important events you have experienced during your professional career?</i> <i>For what reason do you think these were important?</i>
<i>Types of narrative follow-up question</i>	<i>Example of questions in our study</i>
<i>Steering towards a particular life-phase</i>	<i>Could you tell me a little more about this time?</i>
<i>Steering towards a situation mentioned in the main narrative</i>	<i>Focusing on the stage indicated on... What impact do you think those events had on your professional performance, and what impact do you think these will have in the future?</i>
<i>Steering a sample narrative towards an argument</i>	<i>This event is really interesting, could you tell me more about it?</i>

Source: Prepared by the authors

In our research, by using an autobiographical-narrative approach, we have highlighted the dialectical validation that has been conducted by Marta and other sources consulted. For this reason, throughout the in-depth and biographical interviews, Marta was asked to verify the information collected and analysed, in order to provide our study with consistency (we will discuss this issue in more detail in the next section on Reflective deepening cascades). Throughout the course of our field work, in addition to our interviews with Marta, we also made contact with various professional colleagues who provided us with relevant information about Marta and her professional performance. We also conducted the dialectical validation process with these informants.

Stage 3: Data analysis process

One of the peculiarities of our study is that, as indicated above, the collection and partial analysis of the discourse is conducted simultaneously. This provides our research with greater

rigour, credibility and quality (Bolivar & Domingo, 2019). As a result, the main resources used to analyse the data collected in our study are detailed below.

Reflective deepening cascade

In the process of understanding and gaining a deeper insight into the biographical-narrative stories, it is important to mention the methodological contributions of Kelchtermans (1993, 2016) on the use of the cascades of reflective deepening. The in-depth biographical interviews, which we described previously, are a privileged means of accessing in greater depth the meanings assigned by the participant to his or her professional and personal story (Domingo, Luengo, Luzón & Martos 2007). In order to consolidate this information, a type of interview is established that has, as its essential feature, a sense of sequentiality and deepening, as shown in Figure 2 with the process followed in our study on Marta's life history. By following this approach, throughout the interviews conducted in our study, we delved deeper into the various elements under study, starting from the validation by the protagonist herself through dialogue, and relying on conceptual maps to facilitate this process. This was also very useful for revealing the most relevant facets of Marta's life history, which provided a starting point for stimulating reflection and deepening.

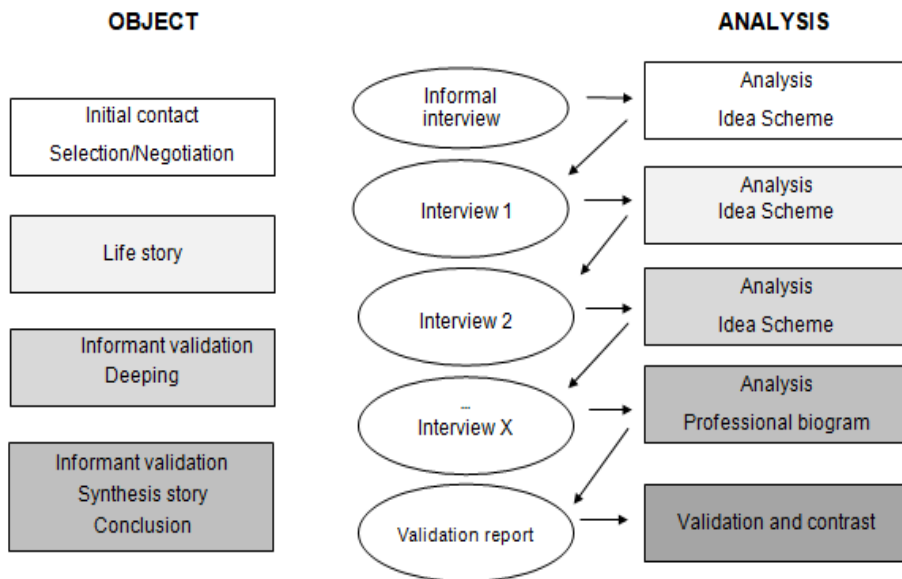


Figure 2: Process of analysis through reflective deepening cascade
 Source: Prepared by the authors

For this reason, our process of collecting information through interviews is also characterized by the use of reflective/comprehensive depth cascades (Kelchtermans 1993). This process integrates different cycles of in-depth interviews, analysis of the narrative obtained, return of the information interpreted and dialectical validation to advance in the thoughts, agreement, and consolidation of categories and evidence, starting from successive questions (Straus & Corbin 1998), until reaching saturation. The validation of this analysis by means of a

dialogue between researcher and researched (dialectical validation), helped us to achieve a better and greater understanding of our participant, as well as being a privileged way to gain maximum information.

Throughout our interviews, we sought to collect relevant information corroborated by the informant herself. For this reason, we used idea schemes, in which, after the interview, we made a conceptual map with the main ideas of the information collected. Subsequently, Marta validated this information and modified or added information about her life story.

Figure 1 displays the interview process conducted according to the principles of the reflective deepening cascade. As illustrated, each of the interviews was validated through Marta's approval of our scheme of ideas. Finally, a report was drawn up that gathered the main ideas of the dialogue obtained on the part of our participant. This report plays a key role in the research process followed. Through this resource, it is possible to build a common and mutually agreed synthesis of the story's plot. Clifford Geertz (1989, 26) agrees in this respect by explaining that:

"Ethnographers need to convince us not only that they have truly been there, but that had they been there we would have seen what they saw, felt what they felt and concluded what they concluded (...) and, for that, nothing better than a narrative report" (Geertz, 1989, 26).

As Bolivar & Domingo (2019) explain, we could consider three types of validation reports. The first of these focuses on the informant's life story, whilst the second and third should be focused on the dialogue and discussion of the results progressively obtained throughout the course of the interviews.

As can be seen in Figure 1, these suggestions for research reports were considered. Thus, validation reports were progressively written throughout the interviews with Marta (through idea schemes), after which a life story validation report was presented in the form of a professional biogram (this will be explained in more detail in the following section).

Contextualization and trajectory: Professional biogram

We think it is important to dedicate a special section to explain the professional biogram as a tool of analysis. In addition to being considered as a type of validation report in our study on Marta's life history, it was also considered as a type of own analysis.

Life histories are based on a series of principles to be analyzed. Goodson (2017) argues that:

"Narratives become better when they are fully "situated" in their time and place - action stories within context theories" (2017, 5).

Through the consideration of these factors, a desired "narrative ecology" can be achieved in order to synthesize and configure biographical, contextual, spatial and/or political and social elements. The biogram could be considered as a useful instrument to graphically represent the biographical profile of a participant(s) in a study. This includes the various milestones, circumstances, leitmotifs and key characters that have influenced her professional development. For this reason, this type of analytical tool is useful for examining the times and spaces that have built the professional and personal trajectory of a subject. In this way, and mentioning Bakhtin (1981), this resource allows us to look at the past from "the eyes" of the present through a process of dialectical interaction.

Narrative research involves active listening on the part of the researcher. This implies that before the creation of this biogram, it is necessary to listen to the whole story of the participant (Arnaus, 1995). Following these guidelines, we took some time before using this tool. For this reason we considered that the appropriate time to use the professional biogram was after having

listened to Marta's life story throughout the encounters, and having validated the information through the idea schemes (which are returned to her throughout the process in order to reach a consensus between the informant and the researcher).

One of the main purposes of the study of Marta's professional life was to identify the events and factors that had influenced the construction of her leadership identity. For this reason, in our biogram, a section was dedicated to this professional impact on the different stages of her life. In order to analyse this "impact", the analytical exercise conducted with the protagonist herself was essential. Thus, with Marta's help, we studied in depth the impact that the critical events in her professional career had made on her professional and personal development, which eventually led to the construction of her current identity. A schematic representation of the professional biogram used in our research process is shown below.

CRONOLOGY	DESCRIPTION	MILESTONE, KEY CHARACTER(S), THEME OR LEITMOTIF	PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL IMPACT
Chronology, dates or moments to highlight	Describe the professional activity exercised at that time	Describe what events, people or experiences were key at that stage.	Explain what impact it had and on what aspects

Figure 3: Diagram of the professional biogram used in our research process

Source: Prepared by the authors

In our study, we first of all actively listened to the different professional episodes related by Marta. In this way, we could outline the plot of these stories, indicating when and where (chronology and description), and what events, milestones and characters give meaning to these epiphanic episodes. Once the biogram had been constructed, it was shown to the informant to validate this information, which could then be deconstructed and/or enriched with additional details. This not only allowed us to validate our analysis, but also to stimulate memories of the participant herself.

Accessing the meaning

Once the main plot of the life story and the essential elements that give it meaning (milestones, leitmotifs, arguments and emerging categories of the stories and the dialectic about them) had been collected, it was then time to delve deeper into the issue of professional identity from Marta's own voice. The life stories themselves and the processes of reflective deepening are powerful ways of obtain emerging themes and categories. Therefore, a new phase of data analysis was carried out.

In this case, the interviews were transcribed. This phase involves a complementary analysis of the collected narrative. The choice of this analytical procedure is based on the notion that the fundamental principles of grounded theory are suitable for establishing an interpretative view of our findings. Using this procedure, a narrative meaning would be assigned to the content coming from the emerging categories (Charmaz 2004). For this reason, a thematic analysis was conducted according to the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998). This allowed us to identify the main categories and themes that emerged from Marta's life story. This was followed by a critical analysis of the discourse (Van Dyck 2012). In this analysis, the

aim was to explore, locate, and reconceptualize the life narrated through Marta’s voice, deepening the understanding and contextualization of this biographical-narrative material

To facilitate the analysis and management of the data collected, the qualitative analysis program Nvivo 12 was used. The transcripts of the interviews were entered into this software, and the thematic nodes and sub-nodes were created in an inductive and emergent process. In addition, the logbook field notes were also considered and added to this software. Moreover, memos (a resource available on the Nvivo 12 software) were used to record the ideas, feelings, and interpretations that arose throughout our analysis.

In the study of Marta's life story, the data analysis was carried out in detail according to the professional contexts experienced. In this way, the professional experiences were contextualized by temporal and situational aspects. The reading and analysis of interviews was characterized by looking through theoretical lenses of the biographical-narrative approach. Throughout the analysis of the path in its different professional stations, we delved into the professional relations with the different professional members and the meanings of their discourse, along with the way in which the experiences and lessons learned had modified their identity and way of leading in the face of future professional challenges. It is necessary to highlight that, whilst at the beginning of our research, gender was not considered as a main factor of analysis, this category emerged during the course of the research process and became a main focus of analysis.

Ethical aspects of research through life histories

One of the crucial aspects when researching through life histories is the ethical nature of the research process. As Bolivar (2014) explains, more than a methodological guideline, it is an artistic task in which the researcher must get a full version of reality through the story of a life. Therefore, sensitivity to the respect and consent of the object of study is required, in addition to an ethical commitment on the part of the researcher and the researched.

Moriña (2017) agreed with this view, adding that this ethical approach should be adopted throughout the entire research process. Following these ethical guidelines, we proposed the following plan to achieve this in our study.

Table 2: Guidelines followed for maintaining an ethical approach to our research

Before beginning the data collection process	During the data collection process	After the data collection process
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish what and who will be part of our research 2. Purposes of the design, and research questions/objectives 3. Reveal the above information to the participant before obtaining informed consent 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show emotional skills of empathy, understanding, and respect for the participant 2. Engage in active listening during interviews and meetings 3. Dialectical validation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the authorship of the dialogue 2. Being trustworthy with consensual findings 3. Respect for the participant's story and its use

Source: Authors' own

Throughout our research process, we were very conscious of complying with all ethical requirements. Thus, in our initial contact with Marta, we explained the purposes of our study and how it would be carried out. We emphasized the commitment required to participate in this research by both the researcher and the researched. We showed her an outline of how our study

would be developed along with the instruments to be used for collecting and analysing information. Moreover, from the outset we endeavoured to provide all the transcripts and analysis of interviews carried out whilst also asking her to validate this information in order to verify the rigor and veracity of the results. Following our data collection and analysis process, and the subsequent final drafting of our paper, we considered the authorship of our participant, making her co-author of the research paper itself. In this way, were able to recognize her participation and collaboration in this research.

Discussion and concluding remarks

This study aimed to show the research process carried out to analyse the professional identity of female school leaders. Life histories seek to give a voice to those participants who are the object of study, analyzing their narratives through consideration of the main milestones, circumstances, events, and leitmotifs that have shaped their identity (Bolívar, Domingo & Fernández 2001). The construction of Marta's life story through a biographical-narrative approach was designed with the purpose of providing the participant herself with a role as protagonist in the construction of her professional life.

Delving deeper into the identity dimension is presumed to be critical for extracting those elements that are key to understanding how school leaders build an identity oriented towards successful educational practices. As shown in other international research studies (Amstrong & Mitchell 2017; Arar & Shapira 2016; Jones 2017; Murakami & Tornsen 2017; Nickens & Washington 2017), the gender factor is influential when it comes to developing a leadership identity in female school principals. In this case, our study aimed to show the research process carried out for the study of the construction of the professional identity of a singular case of a female principal with a consolidated professional identity based on values of distributed leadership and social justice.

As evidenced in this paper, the use of qualitative research methods is a suitable means of responding to research purposes that seek to investigate the most humane and intimate dimension of the participants under study.

Through ethical considerations, a safe and committed scenario was created in which Marta was invited to share her professional and personal life trajectory, in order to analyze how she developed a leadership identity in the face of adversity encountered throughout her career path.

We believe that this approach is compatible with the recommendations of authors such as Van Dijk (2012) or Denzin and Lincoln (2011), which situate qualitative methods as references for responding to this type of research. In particular, research through life histories and the (auto) biographical-narrative approach allows one to become immersed in the identity of the subjects under study, exploring their experiential knowledge, their critical experiences, their professional crises and, consequently, their processes of identity reconstruction (Goodson & Sikes 2001; Goodson 2012; Ricoeur 1995). Due to its methodological nature, we considered that research through life histories would be a useful tool to explore the construction of Marta's professional identity.

Constraints and limitations of using the life history approach

In spite of all the strengths of this methodological approach for achieving the aims of our study, it is also important to acknowledge certain constraints and limitations.

Constraints related to the work field include the fact that it is not always easy to find a unique and singular participant, or at least one that is available and prepared to show commitment to the research. In the words of authors such as Pujadas (1992), the commitment on the part of the researcher and the subject of study is fundamental in this type of research. In

our research process, we were fortunate that our participant was committed and interested in participating in our study.

Because of the intimate and personal nature of the discourse involved, certain individuals may refuse to participate in this type of study for fear of making public aspects that could damage them when shared. In our case, the exposure of certain professional and personal crises in Marta's life was always conducted with her consent in order to preserve her confidence and respect, and to show an attitude of honesty along with gratitude for her collaboration.

In terms of limitations, life stories are often criticised because the findings cannot be generalized or are difficult to compare with other contexts. Nevertheless, life stories are a recommended means of guiding other professionals in their educational practices and analyzing those influential factors (such as gender) that are key in the trajectory and professional experience of the participants being studied (Denzin 2009).

Future research

This article presented the research process employed to study the silenced voices of female school leaders. The work described here suggests that life stories could be useful for carrying out an in-depth analysis of the professional identity of female leaders such as Marta, allowing researchers in this field to "become natives" in the lives of the subjects researched in order to learn lessons and acquire highly relevant knowledge that might otherwise be difficult to access in this field of study. Whilst some authors have attempted to examine the obstacles that women face when accessing leadership positions in the Spanish context (Díez, Terrón and Anguita 2006; Grañeras, 2003; Díez 2016), there is, however, a lack of studies that focus their attention on the identity construction of these female individuals using the life stories approach.

Authors such as Baxter (2002) recommend an analysis of feminist poststructuralist discourse in order to provide a voice and a protagonist role to those vulnerable and silenced collectives, in this case due to gender issues. This type of discourse analysis is a privileged means of exploring power relations and giving a voice to silenced female figures of the past and present (Baxter 2002). Therefore, from this analytical lens it would be possible to study how gender is constituted through discourse. Authors such as Zittleman and Sadker (2003) explain that by using this specialized approach, it would be possible to deconstruct the cultural nuances that favour dominant patriarchal structures. Thus, we encourage future researchers to use this type of discourse analysis to focus on qualitative gender studies.

Moreover, comparing the information extracted from biographical interviews and field notes with the professional and personal impact on the person being researched raises interesting questions. For example, how does the narration of the milestones and leitmotifs that sustain the life of the researched person influence his/her current identity? Could it also be useful for the participant to reorganize these aspects in order to give meaning to his/her own way of being and acting personally and professionally? On the other hand, could the participation of the researcher as co-author in the construction of the life story of an individual suppose a bias of some sort?

This study goes beyond the approach of conducting one-off interviews to respond to a study objective. For this reason, we recommend that in future studies the research processes are designed to involve a deeper look into the context of study and to broaden sources of

information to understand, in a holistic way, the professional identity of the individual being researched.

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October 5, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Common Ground Research Networks, I am pleased to announce that the article "How To Research The Professional Identity Of Female School Principals Through Life Stories?" (Work ID: 74764) by Cristina Cruz González, Sofía Viseu and Jesús Domingo has completed a two-way anonymous peer review. On August 12, 2020, the peer reviewers deemed the academic quality of this article as accepted for publication. Pending our inspection of the final submission, this article is anticipated to be published in *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social and Community Studies*. More information about the journal can be found at: <https://thesocialsciences.com/journals>.

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5

Female principals leading in Spanish schools: Exploring professional values and challenges through their voices

Cruz-González, C., Lucena, C. y Domingo, J.

*Este artículo se encuentra "Under Review" en la revista "Research in Educational
Administration and Leadership"*

Female principals leading in Spanish schools: Exploring professional values and challenges through their voices

Abstract

Using an auto-biographical-narrative approach, this qualitative study explored the voices of eight Spanish female principals in order to study the construction of their professional identity as school leaders. This study forms part of a larger research project (ISSPP). First, we found that the principals reported an influence of gender in the construction of their professional identity as school leaders. Secondly, our participants pointed out that throughout their professional careers, they have had to combat gender stereotypes. In the face of these challenges, they developed leadership identities based on values of empathy, commitment, collaboration, and professional support. We conclude that there is a need to establish future lines of research on this issue and to promote political and social equality to favour the inclusion of women in leadership positions.

Key words: female principals, leadership, professional identity, gender

Introduction

As a result of the economic and social changes that have taken place in recent decades, the role of women has changed significantly. The entry of women into traditionally masculine positions has supposed a dramatic cultural change (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Despite the incessant number of initiatives and social movements aimed at advancing these issues, social beliefs and stereotypes still persist in relation to the leadership role exercised by women (Prime et al., 2008).

In recent years, there has been an increased scientific production around the difficulties encountered by women in accessing leadership positions (Coleman, 2011; Robinson et al., 2017; Shakeshaft, 2015).

In particular, within the field of education, leadership is considered to be one of the most important factors that influences educational improvement (Akkerman & Meijer 2011; Laursen, 2020; Leithwood et al. 2010). Research from different countries points to the influence of gender on the development of school leadership (Cruz-González, Domingo & Lucena, 2019). Studies such as that of Méndez-Morse, Murakami Byrne-Jiménez, & Hernández (2015) highlight the "double effort" that female directors often have to make in order to lead in their professional environment. Arar & Saphira (2016) argue that this situation is the result of the existence of social and educational contexts with patriarchal and androcentric overtones. Furthermore, Armstrong & Mitchell (2017) have drawn attention to the professional exclusion that some female leaders experience when they access positions of responsibility, which

prevents optimum professional development and sometimes leads to episodes of professional loneliness and marginalisation. In this scenario, female leaders (re) build their identity based on the challenges they face (Cruz- González, Pérez, & Domingo, (2020). In this regard, Nickens & Washington (2016) report that in the face of an identity crisis, female leaders often tend to develop a special style of leadership, leading alongside others as opposed to over others. However, this study did not focus on the barriers perceived by female school principals when entering leadership positions. The research presented here therefore seeks to explore the way in which female participants assume the role of school principal when faced with the challenges they encountered, and particularly how they (re)built their professional identity based on values of leadership, empathy, commitment, and professional support.

This study is part of two larger research projects. The first is the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP, 2013). It is an international network composed of research teams from 25 countries around the world that seeks to deepen the knowledge and understanding of school management, with the goal of studying the professional identity of principals working in successful schools. The second is the R+D+i project entitled "Identity of school management: leadership, training and professionalization". This research project aims to contribute to the improvement of school management in Spain by analyzing and promoting its professional identity.

These two projects therefore move towards research on school management leadership in different international contexts. Due to the peculiarities of the Spanish context, it is of great importance to deepen the gender gap that exists in school management and how school principals deal with this situation. Reports from the Ministry of Health, Equality and Social Policy) and the CNIIE (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport), reveal an imbalance in the proportion of women in leadership positions within the Spanish education system (Grañeras Pastrana et al. 2012). One of the characteristics representing the professional body in the educational field is the predominance of women (Salvador & Rodríguez-Hoyos, 2012). However, when the educational level is higher or when it comes to occupying leadership positions, this proportion drops significantly (Cuadrado, García and Navas 2001; or Osca and López-Sáez 1994; Sarrió et al. 2002).

Despite the existence of research studies at the Spanish level on school management and gender (Gómez and Moreno, 2011; Grañeras-Pastrana et al. 2012), we have identified the need for more research focused on studying how female principals build their professional identity by facing the obstacles linked to the mere fact of being a woman. Furthermore, although an extensive body of research has focused on examining the importance of the principal in the achievement of school leadership (Blackmore, 2010; Hallinger, 2018; Johnson, 2009), very few studies have delved into the more intimate and human aspects of this figure or identified the factors which influence the development of this leadership.

In the following section we provide a brief summary of international research in the field of leadership, gender and school management. Subsequently, we reviewed the

scientific literature at the Spanish level that shows the situation of female principals. We then presented the methodology used in this study and described the narratives of our participants. Finally, we conclude with a series of recommendations for future research and implications for professional practice.

Theoretical Framework

Female principals and the construction of a leadership identity

An extensive body of international research has examined the influence of gender on the development of a leadership identity in female principals (Hernández, Murakami & Cerecer, 2014; Jones, 2017; Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Lumby, 2015; Moorosi, 2014; Weiner & Burton, 2017). In this way, in the analysis of these professional identities, gender inequalities emerge, which have a determining effect on the development of school leadership (Blackmore, 1989; Coleman, 2000; Reynolds, 2002). Professional identity is built through a complex process in which both an internal and external dimension come into play in which values, cultural beliefs, social policy and experiences are key (Dubar, 2000; Ibarra, 1999; Slay & Smith, 2011).

The peculiarity of being woman in a position such as school principal has been confirmed across a range of geographical contexts (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Arar & Oplatka, 2014; Johnson, 2017; Coronel et al., 2012). At the same time, it is argued that, in this regard, it is also important to anticipate possible cross-cultural differences (Jonsen, Maznevski y Schneider, 2010). Thus, the culture of a particular context determines a particular meaning to gender, influencing social beliefs and stereotypes regarding the role of women (Snaebjornsson, et al. 2015). In this sense, research in the field of leadership has deepened the intersection of gender with ethnic, cultural or even religious aspects, which influence this identity construction (Cerezo et al. 2020). In certain societies where patriarchal and hegemonic cultural elements are still present, women in school management positions can face a number of barriers. In particular, female principals could become silenced or neglected figures, limiting the development of a successful leadership identity (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017). For this reason, several studies warn of the strong influence of cultural patterns on leadership and gender issues (Arar & Shapira, 2016; Johnson, 2017), particularly when it comes to the figure of the female principal (Santamaría, Santamaría & Dam, 2014).

The construction of professional identities towards a school leadership is a procedural aspect that is experienced by both men and women. However, research indicates that female leadership identities often develop differently (Eckman, 2004). Research carried out by authors such as Hernandez & Murakami (2016) and Liang & Peters-Hawkins (2017) has particularly emphasised how the female principals participating in their studies recounted episodes of social and professional isolation when carrying out their duties. Other studies have highlighted the low self-consideration as educational leaders that the female principals attributed to themselves, being forced to reconstruct their identity to incorporate more masculine attributes in order to be visible in their leadership position (Davids, 2018). As a result, it could be argued that

the famous *glass ceiling* in school management is still present. This glass ceiling could have its origin in the cultural and stereotyped patterns that still persist in present-day societies, resulting in the masculinization of the school leadership role (Reed 2012; Popescu & Gunte, 2011).

Faced with this complex scenario, female principals are forced to reconfigure their identity and develop survival and resilience skills in a challenging context that is characterised by numerous obstacles (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017). Several research studies have aimed to identify the strategies adopted by female principals in order to tackle these challenges and become effective educational leaders. According to Hernandez, Murakami, & Cerecer (2014), the basic pillars that underpin the construction of a leadership identity in female principals are all linked to the support and commitment of students, families, and teaching staff. In addition, Popescu & Gunte (2011) argue that in the face of this complex situation, female principals tend to reject authoritarian and vertical leadership styles, developing educational practices based on dialogue, active listening, and empathy. Nickens & Washington (2017), Arar & Oplatka (2014) and Grogan & Shakeshaft (2010) support this idea, indicating that in situations of professional crisis, female principals tend to develop a professional identity based on democratic and collaborative values.

Challenges faced by Spanish female principals

One of the most characteristic features of Spanish educational institutions is their large proportion of female professionals. These data, however, are not the same when it comes to the number of women who accept school management positions (Díez, Terrón & Anguita, 2006). Studies in recent decades have shown the asymmetry present in school management positions, with the male figure occupying these positions in more than half of the cases (Gairín & Villa, 1999; Grañeras, 2003; Diez, 2016). In this scenario, current research in the Spanish context such as that of Diez (2016) and Gómez & Moreno (2011) indicate that there are fewer women in educational leadership positions.

There are various political and social movements that seek to advance gender issues in Spain. However, on a day-to-day basis, social reality continues to lay bare the various invisible barriers that women encounter when they decide to occupy leadership positions in public and/or private institutions (Moncayo & Villalba, 2014). Moreover, in recent decades, research has begun to echo this complex situation. As a result, Cuadrado, Navas & Molero (2006) argue that the issue of women and their representation in leadership positions is a topic of current interest in the Spanish context.

Several authors began to define this scenario as the "glass ceiling". It is an expression that emerged a few decades ago but one that has, in fact, existed since ancient times. It refers to the intangible and transparent barrier that limits the female collective when accessing leadership positions in the institutions where they work (Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1987). An important point to note is that the approach

to this is not always determined by external agents. Santos-Guerra (2015) highlights the personal reasons that also underlie the glass ceiling. These refer to the self-exclusion imposed by women themselves due to the difficulty of reconciling work with family and domestic duties, and the false conceptions about their capacity and characteristics to run a school, or the perceived insufficient support from the educational community for their entry to the management position. In accordance with this notion, Diaz & Anguita (2018) note that sometimes principals speak of the great difficulty in reconciling the considerable work involved in school management with the demands of their domestic situation. Despite the progress that has been achieved in recent years, some women continue to assume primary responsibility for the care of offspring and domestic tasks, leaving issues associated with career advancement in the background (Cabrera, 2005). In this regard, a recent study explained that female school principals often decide to prolong their transition to school management, or even do not consider it at all because of the difficulty of reconciling work and family responsibilities (Canetto et al. 2017). Elderly care, child-rearing or household chores are often an impediment to school principals considering taking on this leadership role. This is not the case in societies with more egalitarian values, where work and family compatibility and a more gender-aware culture are prioritized (Madsen and Scribner, 2017). For this reason, a balanced work-life balance is a priority way to improve this situation (Hill et al., 2004).

This situation of discrimination and inequality has encouraged many Spanish researchers to study the factors underlying this invisible barrier. Their findings have revealed that gender was a restrictive factor in the number of professional positions of responsibility occupied by women (Cuadrado, García, & Navas, 2001; Oisca & López-Sáez, 1994; Sarrió et al., 2002). Several authors have pointed out that when a woman holds a leadership position, she is at greater risk of being evaluated unfavourably in comparison with her male peers (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992; Murakami & Tornsen, 2017). An example of this is described in the book "The Third Woman", written in 1999 by Lipoyetsky, which indicates the fear of success conceived by the female gender resulting from a culture that is on a "downward slope". In view of this, Schein (2001) describes a difficult situation in which there is a strong relationship between leadership and the male figure. All of this leads to intangible discrimination against women in accessing and occupying leadership positions. Thus, it is common to associate executive thinking with male attributes, that is "Think manager, think male".

Methodology

Research questions

This study aimed to answer three main questions regarding the enactment of leadership identity and how gender influenced the construction of this identity in the female leaders that we interviewed.

1. For the female principals that participated in our study, how did gender influence access to a leadership position and the subsequent development of this role?

2. What were the milestones and challenges that marked the development of your professional identity?

3. What were the strategies developed in building an educational leadership identity in your schools?

In order to respond to these research questions, we approach this study from a biographical-narrative approach (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, 2000). This research was conducted according to the collective case study framework (Stake, 2005). A qualitative methodology was employed to explore how the eight participating female principals faced the challenges of assuming the headship, and how in response, they developed a professional leadership identity. To this end, we used an interpretive paradigm. This type of methodology made it possible to examine how female principals recount their experiences and perceptions about the professional contexts in which they have carried out their work. Through a narrative-autobiographical approach, we were able to explore the beliefs, experiences, viewpoints, and professional values that characterized the narratives of our female principals. Various studies have indicated the biographical-narrative approach as an ideal means of studying the identity dimension of participants (Bruner, 1987; Polkinghorne, 1996). In this way, this approach provides a more complete understanding of the construction of professional identity by delving into elements of great relevance such as socio-cultural contexts and life, professional or emotional experiences (Craig 2007; Kelchtermans 1993).

Participants

Our study focused on analysing the professional identity of female principals with an already established leadership identity. For this reason, the principals included in this research complied with the requirements of the research project of which this study forms a part. This is the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP, 2013), which involves the participation of various international academics in studying cases of successful leadership (Gurr, 2015; Leithwood & Day, 2007). Specifically, this study is part of the 3rd Strand that focuses on the identities of school principals. ISSPP focuses on schools that present academic results above those expected on the basis of their socio-economic level, and where the professional team and educational community consider the principal to be a successful leader.

As indicated above, personal and professional backgrounds are of great relevance when studying the identity construction of school leaders (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). For this reason, table 1 provides relevant information on participant's personal background and current leadership position.

Participating female principals	Participant's personal background and current leadership position
Principal A	60 years old, widowed, 2 adult children. Principal in a pre-school and primary school
Principal B	52 years old, married, 2 teenage children. Principal in a pre-school and primary school
Principal C	49 years old, married, no children. Principal in a high school
Principal D	54 years old, single, no children. Principal in a pre-school and primary school

Principal E	55 years old, married, 3 adult children. Principal in a pre-school and primary school
Principal F	36 years old, married, 2 children. Principal in a pre-school and primary school
Principal G	56 years old, married, 3 adult children. Principal in a high school
Principal H	51 years old, married, 2 adult children. Principal in a pre-school and primary school

Table 1. Personal background, education, and current leadership position of the participants

Data sources and analysis

The resources used for information collection were in-depth biographical interviews (Hopf, 2004; Fischer-Rosenthal & Rosenthal, 1997), as well as field notes that were recorded in a logbook. All events, details and situations that might be relevant to our study on visits to our principals were noted in this logbook. The interviews were recorded in audio and subsequently transcribed. In order to ensure the conformity and consent of the participants, all transcribed interviews and their corresponding analyses were sent to our participants. Interviews were conducted throughout the period 2017-2019, within school hours. Five meetings were held with each of the female principals, as shown in Figure 1. Each interview lasted approximately 2 -3 hours.

The analysis of the data in this study was carried out through the use of cascades of reflexive deepening (Kelchtermans, 1993). These cascades were integrated by a series of cycles of interviews in which through the hermeneutic analysis of the discourse, the narratives of the participants were deepened. After each of the interviews, the researchers carried out this analysis and shared it again with the directors under study in order to achieve a dialectical validation. Through each of the interviews, the relevant themes emerging from the discourse were further deepened and reflected upon. This achieved the consolidation of emerging categories, from successive questions (Straus and Corbin, 1998), until they reached saturation.

This process is shown in Figure 1. We adopted this approach in order to better understand and validate the discourse of our participants.

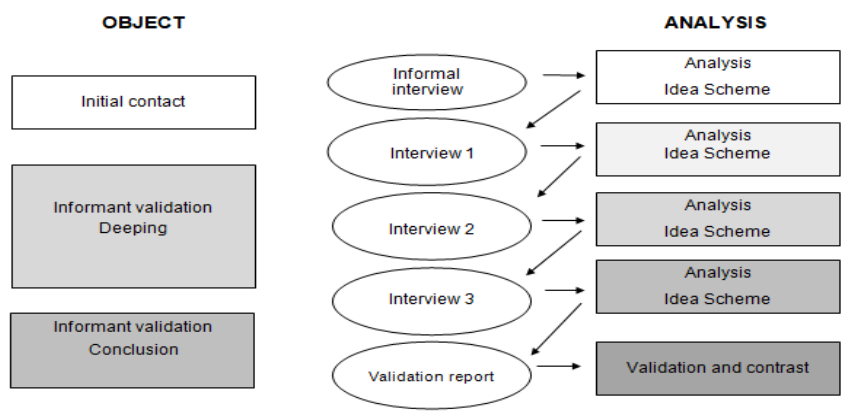


Figure 1. Process of analysis based on the principles of reflective deepening cascade

Source: Authors' own

At the end of each interview, we analysed the information and prepared an idea scheme with a synthesis of the information collected. This idea scheme was shown to the principals at each of the meetings in order to confirm its accuracy. A final validation report (Bolívar & Domingo, 2019) was conducted in order to compare the synthesis of their narratives.

Following the in-depth biographical interviews through cascades of reflexive deepening, we conducted a second phase. In this phase, the transcribed interviews were analyzed based on the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The main thematic categories emerged from the participants' speeches. From this prism, thematic nodes of their professional life stories were consolidated. Following this approach, the transcripts of the interviews and the field notes were entered into the qualitative analysis software Nvivo 12. This analysis programme was useful in developing the exploration of the main emerging themes. Through the principles of critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 2012), the narrated life of school principals was explored and (re)conceptualized, deepening the understanding and contextualization of this biographical-narrative material.

Findings

The findings are structured into three main categories. The first category focuses on the reasons why our participating female principals accessed leadership positions, exploring their motives for making this decision. We then analysed the various obstacles faced on account of being a woman in a "masculinised position". Finally, we examined the strategies that they used to build a leadership identity in the face of these barriers.

The transition to school management: challenges and obstacles from the voice of our female principals

The culture that surrounds the individual is characterised by a series of stereotyped patterns that determine social behaviours and preferences. The female principals participating in this study shared initial career paths that were certainly similar. All of the principals began their professional careers with a strong sense of vocation with regard to teaching, and at the beginning they never questioned the idea of assuming a leadership position such as that of school principal.

"I honestly never thought I would be a principal. Since I was a little girl I dreamed of being a teacher, it was a goal for me and I never questioned anything else. In fact, I never thought that exerting a leadership position was appropriate for me, I preferred to focus on my classroom tasks and my students" (Principal C)

"When the former principal proposed to me to become the principal of the school, I was terrified of the idea. I was a happy teacher, and I didn't want to change that. It's true that he, little by little, convinced me to assume the position and in the end I took a risk, but the truth is that I would never have thought that I would end up being a

principal. It was an unknown role, and I admit it wasn't attractive to me in the first place” (Principal E)

The early stages of a professional career are usually characterized by a strong sense of ambition with the aim of advancing and making progress. However, our participants did not consider access to school management as an initial option. In relation to this, another interesting finding to emerge from our study is the age at which our participants accessed their leadership positions. In spite of their early entry into the teaching profession (with an average starting age of approximately 20 years old) most of them did not assume this position until aged 45 and above.

Delving more deeply into the reasons why our female principals transitioned to school headship was a key and decisive point for understanding the stories of our participants. In this case, their impulses and motivations were varied:

“I thought it was the perfect time. I had already had extensive professional experience as a teacher. I wanted to make changes; I had female colleagues who shared my ideals and the need for a better school. We dared to present a project and we were chosen, to our surprise” (Principal A)

“The principal retired, and I was appointed by the Education Authority for one year. In that period of time, I realized that management was a real challenge, and I could and wanted to achieve improvements in the school. I had many new ideas. The centre was characterised by an individualistic and traditional professional culture at the time. There were many older teachers who were retiring and I saw a challenge for the future” (Principal F)

Professional support was a fundamental value when making the transition to school management. This notion is also echoed by our Principals B and D:

“Many of my colleagues in my school considered me to be the best candidate and they transmitted this to me. This was crucial for me. I had been in school management before and they wanted me to continue. Having taken possession, little by little, of leadership roles, I also felt capable” (Principal B)

“My life was fully dedicated to my work. I was involved in everything related to school and I loved it. I didn't have any family burden and getting involved in school duties brought me to life and an enthusiasm. For me, my school colleagues were more than that, they were my family and they supported me in the idea of being a principal” (Principal D)

Domestic responsibilities were limiting factors in making the decision to become a principal in the case of our Principal G and Principal H. As they relate, caring for the family was an incentive to delay their decision to assume a leadership position in their school in the beginning:

“Being a principal was a challenge for me after working a few years as a teacher in a school in a difficult context. I considered that in this role, practices could be developed to achieve real educational improvements. But I decided not to make that decision until my children were older. At that time, I couldn't spend too much time away from home in the afternoons. After eight years, I considered that my family conditions were better, and I put myself forward for a management role” (Principal G)

“I was a teacher and it was a very beautiful time for me, professionally. My colleagues encouraged me to make the decision but I was afraid of that change. In addition, my mother was ill and at that time, the time that I could dedicate to school management would have been insufficient” (Principal H)

Professional background and, in particular, the transition to school management was an important aspect for our principals. A strong commitment to education was a common thread running through all of them. At the same time, the desire to be an engine of change for the achievement of a better school. However, their personal situation (concerning family responsibilities or care of the elderly) had a decisive influence on whether they took over the school management or delayed that option. This was not the case for those female principals who did not have children.

Combating gender stereotypes in school management: Roles, behaviors and attributes that society assigns to women

The voices gathered in our study highlight how gender stereotypes continue to haunt today's society, impacting on education systems. These stereotypes influence the way in which the female principals interviewed perceived themselves as leaders and the ways in which others perceived them.

In this regard, our female principals illustrate, through their discourse, the challenge of dealing with these stereotypes in an educational trajectory in which school management has traditionally been dominated by men, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

“It is curious to observe how, throughout my career, the number of female teachers exceeds the number of male teachers, but when you think of the principal, you think of a man, practically every year that I have been here, it is men who lead the school. It is a profession that has been socially associated with a male profile ... it is difficult when you try to get into a place that socially "you do not belong" as a woman.” (Principal A)

When they occupied leadership positions, they had to break gender stereotypes, or, in many cases identities oriented towards what is socially linked to the masculine role in order to achieve what was expected of them. Three of the participants in this study showed this need for change when assuming the management role:

“I was the first female principal in the school, all my predecessors were males. I knew that I had to change the school because it was necessary, but at the same time

I felt that I was being observed by everyone. I think that at some point they thought that I would not be able to lead the school as previous colleagues did” (Principal F)

“In the beginning, I assumed the school management role without being sure and convinced of it, I changed my way of being, I wasn't me, I didn't feel like I was... rather I assumed a role that was perhaps tougher, more masculinised. Little by little I began to be me” (Principal E)

“In my case, when I became a principal I knew I had to show who I really was, no one knew me too well. That's why I met with all of my colleagues and opened up so they could get to know me a little better. I was able to move the school forward no matter if I was wearing a skirt or trousers” (Principal C)

The influence of social and cultural contexts on this gender inequality was highlighted by one interviewee (Principal C). She explained how many women had to make a greater effort than men in order to feel respected. This was perceived not only by some colleagues within the school, but also by the families. The female principal, however, added that this perception of inequality had decreased in recent years, although it was still latent.

“I have noticed it, especially in my early years, in the vision that parents had of me. I had to fight against that. When I started, family was a complicated aspect. The school belongs to a "difficult" area of the city and breaking these stereotypes was not easy. Being a woman, to a certain extent, can be considered an impediment in some respects to the leadership role even if you have all the skills. I think we make more effort than a man to be valued to the same extent.” (Principal C)

Moreover, the voices of our female principals indicated how socially attributed female roles negatively affect the execution of their professional practice. These roles — associated mainly with domestic duties, family and childcare, upbringing, and emotional support — are rooted in the lives of our interviewees such that they experience a work overload that adds to their duties as a leader.

“Assuming this position meant I spent many more hours at school. It made me feel like I was leaving home and my family, it took up my time. Until I adapted, well, some time passed... because I felt overwhelmed combining my work as a mother and as a principal” (Principal A)

In the same way, principal F told us that success in her professional career had affected her negatively in her personal life. She also expressed this feeling of overload in her daily life.

“You return home after a hard day's work. You've had meetings in the morning and afternoon. You just want to relax and you can't. My children need my love, and I also have to prepare lunches, dinners, showers...it's true that my husband helps me, but sometimes not enough” (Principal F)

Principal B recalls the significant changes that took place in her life with the birth of her children. She explains that:

"There was a difference in my early years as a principal when I didn't have any family responsibilities. When my children were born the work was harder for me. My aspirations remained the same, along with the desire to improve the school, but I had less time. It was more complicated to reconcile family and work when I had my children". (Principal B)

Due to the stereotypes and roles that are still rooted in society, gender inequalities continue to exist in the lives of our female principals. The low numerical representation of female principals in the Spanish context, the social expectations (based on gender stereotypes) when encountering a woman under the direction of the school or the overload of work due to upbringing and domestic tasks were obstacles perceived by the participating female principals. However, this was not an impediment, but a reason to continue fighting for real equity.

Building a leadership identity as a way of resisting gender barriers

In this section, we present the narratives of our participants with regard to how they faced times of special difficulty due to gender issues in their work as female principals. Faced with the challenges of school management, exercising shared leadership has been crucial. Thus, our participants explain that:

"I believe that in the face of the challenges of a patriarchal society in which we live, we cannot stand idly by. But we must follow a series of steps, it is not worth acting deliberately. In management, for others to respect and value you it is very important "not to express yourself in order to be noticed", I always advise listening, being informed, and then acting (...) I would describe my leadership as a leadership of trust in others and active listening." (Principal H)

In addition, when faced with complex situations and reluctant environments, the search for a solution involves "breaking down those contaminating dynamics" that limit an improvement in the school. One of the participants in our study recalls a lived episode with these characteristics:

"At first, I realized that everything we did was "in the air". We got together, some colleagues contributed with good ideas for improvement, but then, these ideas weren't put into practice. I felt like I wasn't leading well. That's why I learned and changed my attitude. I proposed to everyone to design a Centre Project together (...) Each of the teachers has collaborated on it and signed a commitment agreement. So, when they forget something, I encourage them to review it and comply with their proposals and ideals for the school"(Principal A)

Here again, it is apparent how, in order to develop their leadership, they chose to involve everyone in the process. The strategy to achieve this was to engage the entire professional staff. This assured her that if at any time someone did not comply with

what had been agreed, he/she would consider that he had not been judged by the management team but that it came from something created by him/her and the rest of his colleagues.

However, there are still events that evidence the difficult gender barrier that women encounter when occupying leadership positions. The interesting thing, in this case, is to value the way in which female principals face complex situations. The story of Principal G again shows a rejection of an autocratic or vertical model for exercising their leadership

"There was an episode that cut through me. I was in class and the students were unruly. I was asking for silence and they didn't pay much attention to me. Suddenly, a male teacher exclaimed "Silence" and there was a radical change in the environment. The teacher didn't scream. It impacted on me so much. I thought of my role as principal, I didn't want that. I've always said it, I don't want my colleagues to obey me for my position. I want to be considered for my work, for any support or advice (...) That is not my style of leadership" (Principal G)

Rejecting leadership styles that present a vertical model is a shared idea in all the stories analysed. Principal D defines her role as one in which she is in charge of encouraging and promoting the capacities of others. The sense of inclusion of all members of the professional community and their enthusiasm for the active participation of the entire centre is evident throughout her dialogue.

"I learned from experience that in order to support the teachers, the family, the students... it is essential that they feel included, self-confident, that they are capable of doing what you ask of them. That's why I would define my way of exercising leadership as something distributed, I consider that making everything depend on me is a mistake. I must be the promoter of their objectives and projects" (Principal D)

Socially rigid identity categorizations are still present in today's society. Thus, that which is not "normalized" provokes in others the cognitive dissonance. Principal E's story gives us a very close-up view of this notion:

"I'm not going to lie, even I myself as a woman, I had low expectations of myself in terms of being able to lead a school. I had to put myself to the test. That's when I saw that I was strong and competent. When I was empowered, some colleagues told me that I had a male leadership style, which bothered me. I even felt I had to justify myself, and I was just doing my job well" (Principal E)

In all the dialogues of the female principals interviewed, the need to "work twice as hard" to fit in with the professional community of the centre was evident. Principal B told us about "hidden codes" within the school: *"They are invisible to the human eye,*

but very obvious to me". According to this principal, there are several colleagues who had the same feeling.

Principal B also explains that in order to build her professional identity, it has been very important to express her professional values to her colleagues and to set an example. For this reason, she explains that it is not only important to state who she is, but that all her actions are in accordance with these premises. It is only in this way that the rest of the colleagues are able to do their work in the correct manner.

The narratives reveal a special leadership approach of our female participants. In this way, leading through values of democracy, professional commitment, empathy, active participation and respect were key elements in building a leadership identity in our participating principals.

Discussion and concluding remarks

This study examined, using autobiographical narratives, how female principals constructed their leadership identity in spite of the gender-related barriers that they encountered. In this section, we will discuss the results found within the scientific literature on professional leadership identity and the influence of gender on this construction.

In spite of the fact that Spain is recognized as a democratic and egalitarian society, the female principals in our study identified real barriers to accessing leadership positions such as that of school principal. In accordance with the findings of other research on this issue in the Spanish context, it is evident that the professional culture of the educational system is still characterised by traditional values, particularly the notion that school leadership is primarily a masculine role (Callejo, Gómez & Casado, 2004; Coronel et al., 2012; Padilla, 2008).

Their commitment to improving the school and the support of their colleagues were two of the main reasons why our female principals decided to venture into the profession of school principal. In spite of this, some of the dialogues reveal a low (self) consideration of their talents and self-worth for the position at early points in their career. Murakami & Tornsen (2017) agree with these findings in their study, indicating that female principals entering positions of leadership are often characterised by a low (self) perception of their professional effectiveness.

The incorporation of women into leadership positions at an advanced age is another of the issues highlighted in our findings. Authors such as Schein (2001) associate this with the traditional masculinisation of school management that has persisted throughout the ages. For this reason, and based on theories such as social representation theory (Moscovici, 2001), there is an incoherence perceived by society when associating the female figure with a hierarchical position. This, perhaps, would explain that minority predisposition of professional women in positions of representation and hierarchy in early professional beginnings

Another of the key points identified in the dialogues of our participating female principals was the work overload resulting from the need to reconcile their duties as principal with the demands of family life. Santos-Guerra (2015) explains that the lack of attractiveness of the principal position for female teachers in Spain could be underpinned by the complexity of the career-family conundrum, the perceived support of their peers, or a lack of confidence in their leadership capacity. In line with this possibility, Jones (2017) indicates the strong concerns that female principals often have with regard to the negative impact that the role of school principal could have on their family life.

The narratives of our interviewees indicate a re-construction of their identity when they became principals. As Armstrong & Mitchell (2017) explain, when leadership roles are numerically dominated by men, female principals are forced to inhabit different identities, thus modifying their agency and leadership style.

Being scrutinised, questioned, or undervalued by various sectors of the educational community was one of the obstacles faced by our principals. Combating these stereotypes was, for them, the solution to this complex situation. Popescu & Gunte (2011) and Reed (2012) argue that even today, women continue to suffer discrimination due to cultural stereotypes that still favour the normalization of patriarchy.

Retreat from battle was never an option. For this reason, faced with the various obstacles and limitations encountered in their professional careers, the principals participating in our study decided to accept the challenge, building, in the face of adversity, a professional identity based on distributed leadership practices.

Some of the dialogues analysed advocate a style of leadership that is shared with the entire professional staff, coinciding with the principles of distributed leadership (Bush, 2013; Harris, 2007). Furthermore, other female participants consider professional support and active listening to be fundamental to the development of their leadership. As Hallinger, Dongyu & Wang (2016) and Arar & Oplatka (2014) argue in their studies, interpersonal skills, dialogue, and assertiveness are all linked to the characteristics of leadership exercised by female leaders.

The dialogues of the principals with regard to how they built their identity to practice their leadership reveal one important detail. When the female principals had to face the obstacles that they encountered in the early days of their career, they rejected an authoritarian style when developing their professional practice. This aspect is also identified by Ozga (1992) who defines the leadership style adopted by women as "less hierarchical and more democratic" (p.11). In a similar vein, Coleman (2002) explains that female leaders are characterized by a willingness to implement educational practices based on collaboration and solidarity.

- Implications for professional practice, education and future research

How could the voices of our participants have implications for educational practice? It is important to emphasise that the findings presented here should not be generalized or compared. In addition, the participants in this research are successful women who are recognised by their own communities. This is an important caveat and limitation of this study and warrants studying female principals from less successful schools or those who have a hard time being acknowledged by their communities.

However, we consider that the narratives of these leaders could be useful for guiding the professional practice of female school principals. The dialogues of our interviewees could reflect the viewpoints of other female leaders who have lived through similar professional experiences. Moreover, the narrative of how these principals faced the barriers encountered along the way could serve as an example and guide their professional practices. Improving the quality of education and training future generations in the values of equal opportunities and social justice is essential. For this reason, gender equality must also be a visible aspect in the structure and organisation of our schools. In respect of school leadership preparation, the findings of this study highlight the need for specific school leadership training for school principals. This training could include empowerment strategies to develop a leadership identity by addressing the obstacles as well as the potentialities of being a woman in leadership positions. Furthermore, the development of critical social awareness and empowerment could be key.

Greater awareness at the political level would be of great importance in moving towards a more just and egalitarian society. In addition, from a political level, more specific tests should be developed to help identify gender barriers in school management. These results could lead to significant considerations and greater social awareness to eradicate gender barriers.

To conclude, we consider it necessary to establish future lines of research in relation to educational policies that promote the inclusion and parity of school principals in primary and secondary schools in the Spanish context. This study warns about the continuing existence of certain instances of discrimination against women who assume leadership positions in spite of the state and international initiatives aimed at finding a space for equal opportunities.

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6

Marta's story: a female principal leading in challenge contexts

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Marta's story: a female principal leading in challenge contexts

Abstract

Recent international research highlights the importance of a strong professional identity based on pedagogical leadership to achieve educational improvement. Several studies indicate a clear relationship between the role of gender identity and the development of a leadership identity. This article tells the story of a female school principal in a Spanish school context. Using a biographical narrative approach, we explore how this female principal built a professional identity oriented towards leadership based on professional commitment and social justice. This study is part of a more extensive international research project whose main objective is to explore the factors that influence the construction of a professional leadership identity for school principals. The analysis was based on an outpouring of deep reflections through a professional biogram. We identified a series of key events in Marta's life that had a clear professional and personal impact and consolidated her current professional identity. Marta's story shows the influence of gender, personal life factors, socioeconomic status, and the socio-political environment on the development of a professional identity of leadership along with the challenges encountered as a woman. Facing these challenges has led to the reconstruction of an identity that is more oriented towards social equality and professional commitment.

Introduction

There is a wide variety of international studies on the development of a strong professional identity and its influence on the way in which pedagogical leadership is exercised (Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Crow, Day and Moller 2017; Cruz-González et al. 2019) whilst a growing body of studies has focused on the important role of the principal in the achievement of such successful leadership (Hallinger 2018; Johnson 2009). However, less attention has been paid to examining the factors that influence the construction of a principal's leadership identity.

The recent literature has established a clear relationship between the role of gender identity and the development of a leadership identity (Lumby, 2015; Weiner and Burton 2016). In these studies, the findings indicate several obstacles that are faced by female principals when they are in leadership positions. Construction of professional identity is based on a cultural process in which characteristics of the society are influential. For this reason, patriarchal societies are often a battleground for educational leadership in female principals (Haase 2008). Several international events and initiatives have been witnessed in recent decades to make visible the current situation of women in our societies. One example of these initiatives is the #MeToo movement. This movement became an ideal means to give voice to silenced collectives through social networks, seeking real change and equal opportunities (McKinney, 2019). More specifically, the international campaign Time's Up against discrimination and abuse of women in various contexts and especially in the work environment (Bell et al. 2019). Focusing on our research context, Spain, there are several movements that attempt to shed light on this complex situation. Evidence of this are the protests celebrated last March 8 (International Women's Day), which brought together millions of people who were pursuing a dream: the eradication of situations of inequality and gender discrimination. The foregoing justifies the importance of studies such as the present one, which approaches research on school leadership from a gender perspective, bringing to light

the adversities encountered by women when faced with historically masculinised work contexts.

This study is part of the 3rd Strand of the International Successful School Principals Project (International Successful School Principal Project (ISSPP)). This key strand intends to explore the importance of a strong and positive sense of professional identity in the work of a principal, with Spain being one of the participating countries. This study forms part of a more extensive research project focusing on a unique and exemplary life story about the construction of a female principal's leadership identity. Furthermore, the female principal was selected on the basis of the following ISSPP criteria: the school had a record of student academic achievement that was above the average for expectations in the area, and professional members of this school perceived the principal as being successful. It is important to consider how the cultural expectations of leadership can differ according to the social environment, and for this reason, we investigated the practise of pedagogical leadership in the Spanish context.

This article tells the story of a female principal, who relates some of her key professional experiences and how these have influenced the development of her leadership identity. Although she has faced certain difficulties in her professional career, she regards these as being relevant lessons and important events that have helped her to achieve her current professional identity. Going deeper into the gender approach, this raises questions about precisely which challenges she has faced in her professional life.

Marta's story is composed of different circumstantial elements, which show the influence of gender, social class, political environment, and social context on the achievement of pedagogical leadership. Some studies have similar purposes (Hernandez and Murakami 2016; Jones 2017; Nickens and Washington 2016), but in this case, we present a unique case to represent the link between personal factors and the development of a leadership identity in challenging contexts.

We traced the evolution of Marta's professional identity, focusing on the following central question: what are the influential factors in constructing a female principal leadership identity?

The next section describes a theoretical framework of the leadership identity of school principals and the influence of the gender factor on the construction of this identity, followed by a research context section that describes the peculiarities of the school administration in Spain.

Female principals and the construction of a leadership identity

Relationship between gender identity and leadership identity

Several studies about gender identity and its influence on the construction of a leadership identity have focused on different geographical locations (Hernández, Murakami and Cerecer 2014; Jones 2017; Lumby 2015; Weiner and Burton 2016). It can be seen from their findings that gender is a critical factor in the construction of professional identity.

In particular, Schein (2010) explains that there is a complex situation for female principals, arguing that there exists a strong link between school management and the masculine professional role. A number of studies have identified some of the obstacles

perceived by female principals. In this regard, it is important to note the relevance of the political and social environment (Shah 2010). The presence of patriarchal and restrictive cultural norms results in a disadvantageous situation for female principals (Arar and Saphira 2016). Hernandez and Murakami (2016) argue that these gender barriers are conducive to creating a sense of social and professional isolation. For this reason, female leaders have to make twice the effort to exercise their leadership successfully (Méndez-Morse, Murakami Byrne-Jiménez and Hernández 2015)

Some theories such as Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957) argues that when an individual has knowledge that oneself and their cultural context are not coherent with each other, a state of cognitive dissonance is produced that provokes an attitude of rejection. This perspective might help to explain the complex situation faced by the feminine gender in a culture where positions of power are mainly occupied by males.

Research studies such as Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) visualize these complex scenarios. In these studies, the findings revealed the factors that underlie the social and professional exclusion suffered by female principals. Exclusion factors interact with the hidden management curriculum, leading to marginalization and exclusion of female principals, which impedes their development as professional leaders.

When facing crisis situations, female principals develop a particular leadership style, which is based on dialogue and communication. In the majority of cases, female principals build a close and solid relationship with teachers, students, or student families (Popescu and Gunte 2011)

Furthermore, some authors argue that in a professional development crisis, female principals reconstruct their identity through the exercise of distributed leadership, leading with others rather than leading others (Nickens and Washington 2017). Coinciding with this idea, authors such as Arar and Oplatka (2014) or Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) describe female professional identity that is based on empathy and a sense of community values, adopting a democratic and collaborative leadership style.

Construction of a leadership identity in a challenging context

In the last decade, several studies have highlighted the peculiarities found in the construction of a leadership identity in a challenging context (Carpenter et al. 2015; Toure and Dorsey 2018; Riveros et al. 2016)

Referring to the influence of context in the construction of a leadership identity, it is necessary to highlight the different types of challenging context that could be addressed. The first of these is "the situated context" which contemplates the historical, geographical and social location of the school. The second is "the professional context" which encompasses the professional culture of the school. Thirdly, "the material context" refers to aspects of infrastructure. Finally, "external contexts" refer to political and social pressures and expectations (Ball et al. 2012).

With regard to the situated context, authors such as Spies and Heystek (2015) analysed the construction of a leader identity in rural school principals. The findings of this study indicate that each principal responds uniquely to the demands of his or her particular school. In this way, the location and characteristics of the educational community were determining factors in developing adapted educational leadership strategies.

On the other hand, a study by Jo (2014) focused on the importance of a collaborative professional culture. The findings demonstrated the relevance of the relationships and professional commitment between the teaching staff and principal. However, other studies such as that of Arar and Shapira (2016) or Nickens and Washington (2016) argue that the professional culture of a school context can restrict the way in which female principals in particular can develop their leadership.

Thus, the cultural context determines the lifestyles, professional expectations and power structures of school principals, and social and ideological backgrounds determine their way of developing leadership practices (Arar and Oplatka 2014).

School leaders who have to deal with complex educational realities must develop a leadership for change. They must be analytical with regard to the new social realities that involve their students and must adapt the school to these social, personal, and academic demands (Carpenter et al. 2015).

According to this perspective, the term "social justice leadership" becomes significant (DeMatthews 2018; Ozdemir 2017). In a changing educational environment, the growing cultural diversity in the school, the imbalance between educational policy and reality in the classroom, or the socio-educational inequality of the students (which affects their academic results) are notorious (Furman 2012; Shields 2004).

In general, the term "social justice" encompasses three main axes: distributive, cultural and associational justice. Thus, a leadership for social justice would base its principles on social equity (distributive justice), the non-supremacy of dominant social groups (cultural justice) and the active participation of traditionally marginalized groups (associational justice) (Furman 2012).

The literature that focuses on this type of leadership indicates that the principals who develop this type of leadership are those who guide and adapt their professional practices according to issues of race, gender, and social class, amongst others (Theoharis 2010).

Finally, political pressures and educational reforms pose a challenge when it comes to developing a leadership identity in principals. In light of this situation, Connolly, Milton, Davies and Barrance (2018) explain that the principal's real professional identity should be rethought. They suggest that, from state levels, a greater linkage of their work with inherent aspects of professional practice should be encouraged.

In particular, when focusing on "female principals", many studies have yielded a series of findings that highlight the need for lines of action in this regard. For instance, Murakami and Tornsen (2017) analysed the influence of the evaluation, hiring, and recruiting of female principals on their professional identities. The results reported indicate that local education policies did not ensure the inclusion of female principals in leadership positions.

Female principals in Spain

As explained in the previous sections, the national school context plays a decisive role in determining the way in which school principals develop and conceive their professional identity.

The under-representation of women in the management of educational institutions is a reality, both nationally and internationally. This fact is even more alarming given the predominance of this group in the field of education (Cubillo and Brown 2003). With regard to the Spanish context, it is interesting to consider the numbers of women in leadership positions in the education system.

Statistical reports provided by the Women's Institute of Spain (Ministry of Health, Equality and Social Policy) and CNIIE (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport) show that women made up more than two-thirds of the professionals who were part of the education system (Grañeras- Pastrana et al. 2012). Díez (2016) highlights the complex Spanish educational scenario in his study, stating that "there is a much larger number of women at the bottom of the pyramid, in pre-school and primary education and in small schools considered less influential or prestigious due to their size" (p.343). Authors such as García-Prince (2008) or Torres and Pau (2011) have given this phenomenon the name of "sticky floor". The pyramid hits women so hard that they cannot move up to higher educational levels. The term "glass ceiling" or "glass barrier" has also been used by various authors in the context of research in Spain to refer to the invisible barriers that block women's access to senior positions (Valle 2012; Gómez and Moreno Sánchez 2011). Furthermore, it is interesting to question their low presence in leadership positions, when the same conditions of access to management have been established for both genders (Coronel, Carrasco and Moreno 2012).

In Spain, the last decade has seen an increase in the scientific literature on this subject (Gómez Delgado and Moreno Sánchez 2011; Moncayo Orjuela and Pinzón López 2013; Moncayo Orjuela and Villalba Gómez 2014). All of these studies agree that women are poorly represented in leadership positions.

A number of studies have suggested some possible answers to this question. For instance, the shortage of women in leadership positions could be due to the structural issues inherent to a patriarchal society (Coronel, Carrasco and Moreno 2012). García (2006) argues that the main motive is the "fear of success" of women in a professional role as masculinized as the figure of the school principal in Spanish society. The expectations of the traditional role of motherhood and care were also arguments found in the literature (Santos-Guerra 2000).

To this we should add another aspect that is very significant and worthy of special attention. In the Spanish context, there is a certain reluctance or refusal to participate in the position of school principal, so much so that, a low number of candidates apply for this position and, in many cases, it is the Educational Administration in charge of electing the principal in the school (Batanaz 2005).

All these questions pose a need for research that analyses how a leadership identity is constructed in the face of a challenging scenario, particularly for the female population in Spain.

Research methods

This study tells the story of a female school principal, leading in challenging contexts. Using the life history method (Alderton 2017; Keddle and Holloway 2019; Keddle 2016; Mills and Niesche 2013), this study explores the construction of the professional leadership identity of this principal. A biographical-narrative approach was used (Craig 2007; Kelchtermans 1993).

Bolívar and Domingo (2019) argue that life histories should focus on exemplary or singular cases. According to these authors, the cases covered by life stories must comply with a series of requirements in order to guarantee: their relevance to the object of study, and relevance and/or degree of exemplarity. In our case, Marta's life story meets the desired study characteristics for analysis:

- ✓ To be a female principal
- ✓ To have a school leadership identity
- ✓ To have lived through professional experiences of particular difficulty
- ✓ To have a professional commitment oriented towards social justice

In addition, the selection of this key informant was made on the basis of the criteria of the international project within which this study is framed (ISSPP). The school where Marta carries out her professional work presents higher educational results than those expected according to its socio-cultural context (based on her ISEC¹ and the results of AGAEVE²); and both the educational and social community considers our participant to be a successful educational leader. Several studies argue that the narrative approach is truly successful in deepening our understanding of professional identities (Clandinin and Connolly 2000; Watson 2006). For this reason, authors such as Craig (2007) argue that narrative as the most appropriate means by which to study human life experiences, taking into account the spatial-temporal dimension.

In our study, Marta's professional life story has been contextualized in the socio-cultural context in which it was developed, based on Bolívar's approach, which argues that life stories should be inscribed in the social and historical context in which they are immersed (Bolívar 2014). Based on these principles, we trace the biography of a female school principal, in order to delve deeper into the way in which her professional identity was built to develop a strong leadership identity within a historical educational context.

We conducted in-depth interviews to analyse the participant's professional biography. In order to achieve the proposed objective, we conducted our interviews through the process of cascade of reflexive deepening (Kelchtermans 1993) (see Figure 1). This was useful to validate the information gathered in each of the interviews conducted by the participant herself, in addition to orienting the topical focus of each interview towards our main objective. After that, these interviews were transcribed and analysed through a biogram (Domingo, Fernández and Barrero 2013), which is displayed in Table 1. This biogram allowed us to analyse Marta's life story, contextualizing it with historical-political academic sources. In our in-depth interviews, our conversations with Marta focused on the milestones, leitmotifs and/or key characters that shaped her professional life, and how these personal and professional experiences impacted her current leadership identity. In order to manage the information collected from the interviews, and to be able to translate it in a rigorous way in the professional biogram, we use the qualitative analysis software Nvivo 12.

Figure 1. Process of analysis through Cascade of reflective deepening
Source: Prepared by the authors

Marta's story

¹ Indices of the cultural and economic status in PISA

² Andalusian Agency for Educational Evaluation

In this section, we tell Marta's life story. In order to visualize and present our findings, her professional biogram is shown in Table 1. In this biogram, the most significant moments of her professional life and the impact they have had on her professional and personal identity are collected.

Table 1. Biogram of Marta's life story.
Source: Prepared by the authors

Background and context of Marta's early experiences

Marta was born in 1958 in a village in the fertile plain of Granada. Being within a dictatorial regime, Marta grew up in a simple family. Despite the patriarchal ideals of that time, her parents shared a concern for their female children's education, and as Marta explains

"My parents never told me that for being a woman I could not access certain things, even though in those days, that wasn't normal. I did not notice the gender bias in my house".

The Primary Education Law (1945) regulated Marta's academic journey. She points out that as her level of education increased, she noticed that her female childhood friends were staying in their village and acquiring the roles of a patriarchal society, leaving the educational system and devoting themselves to household chores, while she moved along a different path.

Even the school curriculum differed according to gender, so much so that in the Elementary School stage, the women's school curriculum included subjects about housework, receiving an education where the school was intimately linked to the church and the values of that time. In addition, she perceived there to be differential treatment according to economic and social status. Marta relates this educational stage with rigidity and inflexibility. Looking back, she remembers the absolute absence of women in leadership positions, and even in such a feminized professional as that of a teacher:

"There was no female school principal at that time. If there was any female principal, she belonged to a religious order"

This whole social scenario provoked feelings of frustration in her. From very early on, Marta independently developed a political and social conscience. As a teenager, she reminisces about how she began to question everything. She started reading authors such as Herman Hesse. She remembers one of his books "Steppenwolf", which consisted of a reflection on the profound spiritual crisis suffered by Hesse. Marta identified herself with this book consistently.

She relates her passage through Secondary Education in the following way:

"It was a dark period. Teachers did not make us think. At school, the characteristics of society were replicated: poverty and social inequality, unequal treatment, repression (...)"

Political transition in Spain (1975-77) was a relevant development for her. This period coincided with Marta's Elementary Post-secondary education. For this and other reasons, this academic period was decisive for her. She relates it as follows:

“Political transition marked me. It was a period of methodological innovation, a change of educational values. I perceived it as openness toward freedom, logic, and reasoning. I was able to reflect on other realities that were there. Up until that point, I never thought it over. There was talk of social classes, social exclusion and vindication of the human rights of the underprivileged groups”

When she began her university studies to become a primary school teacher, she knew two professional referents. They fuelled her love of education by the values of methodological innovation, external openness, and responsible freedom.

Marta relates that her academic trajectory was a base to establish her first professional values. A series of factors were key for the construction of her professional identity until that moment: having been educated in a family context with ideals of equal opportunities and a high value to education; having experienced in first person the transition from an education based on inequality of opportunities and rigidity, to an education that sought freedom of thought and social equality; and having met two professors who became references for her because of their good educational practices.

Professional beginnings and construction of Marta's leadership identity

After finishing her university studies, Marta began her professional career. Her first professional position was in an adult education centre in 1984. This type of education had not been provided by the Spanish education system until then. Thus, she faced this first professional experience with a high level of personal exigency but also, and especially, with great enthusiasm.

Adult education was created for a particular reason. During the Spanish dictatorship, there were a large proportion of illiterate and culturally deprived people. With the establishment of a democratic government, this type of education was created with the aim of fighting against the cultural and educational poverty that was present in a large proportion of society.

For this reason, Marta became one of the pioneers of adult education. In this context, she felt the responsible freedom that she so highly valued.

“...it was my professional beginning (...) the most exhilarating professional stage that I have experienced (...) I remember the first day in that centre... It was necessary to build everything! I had to develop and produce all my curriculum materials myself. No one said to me how to work among other things because there was no adult education. I understood this freedom as a responsibility and a demand on myself”

Marta describes this professional stage as a key event for the construction of her professional leadership identity.

"I had to develop a self-entrepreneurial capacity. I wished to achieve satisfactory results working in something that fascinates me. Working with adult people contributes to many learning experiences. My class was characterised by a broad range of ages, and cultural and cognitive differences. For this reason, I had to

design an exploratory study to adapt my teaching methods to such a diverse classroom. This provided me with the basis for the construction of professional identity towards inclusive leadership: giving to each what was needed for learning”

In 1985, Marta's mother became ill and she made the decision to move to a closer destination in order to care for her mother along with her sister. In 1986, Marta met her husband. She explains that

“For me, my husband was one of the most important axes of my life. He encouraged me and accompanied me to advance in my profession and in my life. He was a person who respected me, he strengthened me in all the initiatives and ideas that excited me professionally. We shared very important values such as solidarity, respect, effort, the struggle for social justice, commitment... Despite this great bond, he always knew how to respect my freedom”

His new professional destination was also an adult education center. In that centre, for the first time, she was school principal. She took inspiration from pedagogy of liberation, based upon Paulo Freire. She aimed to achieve educational improvement through active engagement, educational renewal and social transformation, critical thinking, and reflections on reality. In a challenging context, she wanted to educate to liberate.

“I had it very clear since the beginning. I wanted to develop critical thinking in our students. In that moment, I began to particularly devote my efforts towards gender relevant issues”

With regard to the characteristics of the school context, the students were predominantly female, with a low socioeconomic level, unexpectedly high levels of illiteracy, and conditioned by a patriarchal mentality.

“A high proportion of my students were female students. They lived in a patriarchal atmosphere; you could see it in their eyes. They did not know what freedom was. They were made to feel uncomfortable going to school, because they were not dedicating their time to household chores. When I perceived this problematic situation, I decided to act. I tried to project a transformative capacity through my teaching. I tried to help my female students to become empowered women. How did I do it? We opened our doors to the outside, to the local community. We became more visible in the village”.

Such is Marta's gender awareness that she tried to promote, even creating — together with a local councillor and some of her students — an association for women "Lazos", radio programmes, and even magazines called "Yo también escribo" (I also write) and "La Ventana" (The Window). In the interview she relates how her students had a hunger for culture; they wanted to escape from darkness. Numerous educational workshops and activities were implemented to educate about equality as a social value. Such was their success they received an UNESCO prize for their educative activities in the local community.

During this time, Marta has two daughters. She explains that motherhood was something extraordinary for her, but points out that she tried to live it a little differently than usual.

“Many women conceive of motherhood as something that inhibits them in other areas, and of course in the workplace. I considered it to be the most important thing in my life, but I thought that just being a mother was a mistake. I always tried to educate my daughters through my example. In other words, I wanted my daughters to see me as a brave woman, with commitment, participation and social initiatives. For that reason, being a mother was for me another reason to continue facing my profession with enthusiasm and commitment”

In 2002, after several years in the adult school, Marta decided to face another challenge became a teacher in a Social Guarantee Programme, in a particularly challenging context. This high school was intentionally chosen by her. The reason for this choice was the excellent collaboration and distributed leadership that existed in this high school. She attached high value to cooperative working and collaborative efforts for improving education quality. She wanted to be part of this educational team. According to this approach, she took on the challenge as a work of challenge to learn.

During this period, she alternated her teaching duties with a part-time role in a trade union. After these three years, Marta was released full time. She belonged to the union from the beginning of her work, but at that moment she was interested in seeing how this work could bring educational improvement to the centres and professionals. She relates her professional experience in the union as follows:

“Syndicalism participation was the hardest professional work for me. It was not my vocation. I was so used to teaching at the school. Trade union work was the other thing... This work relied too much on legislation. We worked in groups with a strong sense of task force. They taught me a fundamental way of practising good leadership: to break down unsuitable dynamics. When a professional team doesn't work satisfactorily, it is necessary “to break their dynamics”. I remember the secretary of the trade union saying something that has stayed with me to this day: Marta...Do you want to know why we work like that? - I was intrigued- if you notice that professional team does not work correctly, you have to change it. The most important thing is to change the working dynamics. These dynamics must be changed gradually, never in a sudden way. But always with a clear purpose: instilling different work dynamics aimed at making changes that affect the structure”

Marta argues that this lesson was key for the rest of her professional career, particularly in school management.

“These words contributed to the construction of my professional identity. Of course, it has been very important to practise my personal leadership as principal. If you project specific features in your group, these will take form gradually. It is important to believe in it. If this is so, these dynamics will develop, and over time, these dynamics will operate by inertia. If your professional team is doing things indolently or with disdain, that way of working will be expanded. It is similar to an oil stain impregnating everything. However, if you set a good example by your deeds, other people will strive to work as you do. If you work as a team, you distribute commitments and promote the participation of your group, and you will give the professional team confidence”

In her daily work, she visited schools and educational institutions with different contextual and cultural features. Marta learned another important lesson in this job:

“If you want to be useful to others professionally, you must not make hasty decisions. I advise the following: keep a sharp eye, listen to what the ear does not hear, have a pause for thought, and then, act accordingly. You must not pick up the fist card. It is necessary to listen to what the workers need”

Marta explains that, “it is a great art to know how to listen”. She practises her school leadership, in part, through her active listening. Over several years of experience in syndicalism, she came to occupy leadership positions. Marta explains that a significant turning point occurred at that moment:

“...in those places of power I could see what a patriarchal organization is, where the themes were hatched in bars or corridors, in the moments when women did not participate because they had domestic obligations that were not assigned to men”.

Marta began to notice that despite her role in the union, her immediate superior did not ask her opinion on important issues related to her work.

“... in an institution with ideals of struggle for equality, they assume that the roles of patriarchy are normalized. Their comments and language dictated much of equality.

After the change of co-workers, she began to notice that despite being an important member of the trade union organization, her new professional group treated her as an invisible entity.

“It was an institution which fights for equality, democracy and human rights. Therefore, this discrimination was not visible. But, when you (female) want to become a part of decision-making or propose initiatives, these are not considered in the same way. If you make a brilliant decision, they will ask themselves: Was it you or was not it you? Or is all that coming from you? Unfortunately, I realized that if you are a woman, you have to fight twice as hard. You must think very carefully about what you say and how you act, because if you make mistakes later, the effects are doubly worse”.

For this reason, Marta decided to leave this job and went back to being a school teacher after 7 years of trade union work.

A female principal leading in a challenging context

Following this professional change, she began to work as a primary school teacher in school located in a particularly difficult area. In spite of this, this school had excellent educational outcomes, endorsed by AGAEVE. She never considered becoming the principal of that school, but an extraordinary combination of circumstances led Marta to become a female principal.

At the beginning of her stage as a primary school teacher, she met two teachers who shared with her a special vision of the profession, and educational values. They had the same needs and desires for learning and improving the school. The school principal left during that term, and Marta and her female colleagues believed that it would be a good idea for her to be part of the school management.

“We shared the same dreams, educational ideals and the purpose of improving the school. We wanted to develop an innovative methodology and train teachers in new forms of work. We definitely wanted to bring about educational improvements, but we knew that this must be achieved gradually, without sudden breaks, without overwhelming the teachers. We should give them confidence and train them in this field. If your professional team is trained in collaborative working, they will not be afraid to come together to achieve educational changes”

Marta and her two colleagues decided to present a school management project, and finally, they were chosen to form the school administration. Currently, she is the school principal. She feels satisfied with her professional career; this is a rewarding time for her. She argues that all of her professional experiences have been crucial in building her professional identity. In this way, she feels very strongly the idea about how the school could be improved and how to exercise successful leadership, setting up a clear vision of her professional purposes:

“I have a vision of my school management such as collegiate school management. All three of us are part of the school administration. We make decisions as a team so that one does not decide things without the other's involvement. However, I consider my school administration as a diversified administration. “Power” is not confined to three people, the “power” is diversified. When I highlight diversified school administration, I refer to the following: just the way I learnt in the union trade work, I distribute tasks to different people. I give them my trust, and I support them in any difficulty, Why? It is very simple... They must feel a part of the school; they must feel a true commitment. There are schools in which management teams design the school's programme. This is not how it works at our school. Our school's programme is designed by all professional members... It took us almost a year to design it. We have met weekly, we have all proposed ideas, we have reflected on this; (...) I think this point is fundamental. Throughout this process, I also guided them and served as a supporting figure. When we had a joint and definitive idea, this was approved by different school boards and educational bodies in such a way that if any professional member does not comply with this school's program, I can demand that he/she comply with that. It has been proposed not only by me, but by all”

Marta reflects that it is a product of what she has lived through. After all the learned lessons, she tries to adopt a special leadership approach:

“We want to open up to the outside of the school. I have always proposed this. In my professional experience in adult education, I learnt that it is an excellent way to empower the students. It is so important to make them feel that they can be part of the school, and what they do at school has implications for the community. My leadership is based on this vision: reach out to society, reach out to families...My doors are always open. I practice active listening, in view of what was previously explained: see, hear, reflect, and act coherently”

When Marta assumed the role within the school administration, the school presented major educational challenges. She therefore, together with her team, decided to design a diagnostic study to detect the priority needs of action in the centre. This study was based on special values such as constructive criticism and professional commitment. In

addition, they requested assistance from external agencies to achieve this educational improvement.

She explains some of her current professional challenges as a school principal. Of course, these professional challenges are shared with the rest of her professional team:

“What do we want to achieve? An egalitarian and fair society. For this, we are committing to the issue of equality. We are proposing many interesting initiatives and projects. If it weren't for the fact that family environments are still very patriarchal, we would be very developed. But that makes it very difficult”

Despite this complex scenario, Marta and her professional team are committed to the participation and development of the social and critical awareness of their students.

She explains that remembering previous professional experiences has served as a push and reference in this new professional stage. Throughout her professional experiences, Marta reflects on the fact that she has continuously sought to achieve new professional contexts for learning. In addition to her years of experience, she attributes the development of her leadership to different people and events that have marked her professional career. A number of elements (family environment, personal life factors, political context, former teachers, professional context, type of education provided, or the fact of being a woman) have constructed her identity, and at the same time, have been protagonists of her crisis and professional rebuilding.

Discussion and conclusions

This study analyses the construction of the leadership identity of a female principal, through the telling of a unique and exemplary life story. The choice of this female principal was supported by the criteria of the International Project ISSPP. One of the main objectives of this study was to explore the challenges faced by this female principal throughout her professional career from a gender perspective and taking into account the school context, in this case, the Spanish school context.

In this section, we present a discussion of our findings. Therefore, we present some conclusions and implications for professional practice drawn from the analysis of this case. It is important to mention that since this is a single case, these findings are not generalizable or comparable, although they could be useful for guiding the professional practice of school principals.

The construction of Marta's professional leadership identity began in her early childhood. As shown in her life story, from her earliest experiences she built a distinguished identity from others, due to the family, social, political and educational factors that marked her childhood.

Family values, the transition to democracy in Spain, the visible discrimination against women in the world of work, and the social injustice experienced at that time were the triggers that channelled her personal and professional trajectory towards a life full of professional challenges. This aspect agrees with findings of other studies on this issue, which link early experiences (Popescu and Gunte 2011) or the political and social situation lived (Armstrong and Mitchell 2017), with the construction of a particular professional identity.

Marta began her studies as a teacher because of her educational vocation, without thinking that at some point in her life she would become a female principal and assume leadership positions in educational institutions and unions. In this regard, national research studies (Padilla 2008; Díez Gutiérrez 2004) have highlighted the low expectations presented by female teachers for access to hierarchical positions in the education system. From her first professional experiences, Marta developed a leadership identity in the school context. Faced with a complex scenario, such as the beginning of Adult Education in Spain, Marta reconstructed her professional teaching identity and assumed a role oriented towards social justice (Furman 2012; De Matthews 2018), in which she based her practice on opening up to the freedom/knowledge of her students. At that time, Adult Education represented a vast cultural diversity, socio-educational inequalities, and curricular imbalance among students. "Educate to liberate" was Marta's response and provided the basis of her leadership in this school.

In that context, the patriarchal society that prevailed at that time was palpable. Most of her students were females. For this reason, she prioritized her educational actions to make her class a group with social and critical awareness. Given this, Marta faced this complex situation by adapting her teaching to what her students needed to do in order to "open their eyes". Among some of the various educational actions carried out, she conceived that a key aspect to empowering her students was to make them feel part and proud of their learning. This way of dealing with a difficult performance context is compatible with the results of studies such as that of Carpenter et al. (2015). In their research on how school leaders develop their professional practice in low-performing schools with marginalized populations, they argue that an analysis of the social reality of the student body is key to adapting the school's teaching model and vision. Further, this type of educational practice has also been included in other research indicating that this curricular adaptation in situations of disadvantage is extremely useful and effective (Day et al., 2010).

Throughout the course of Marta's life story, the figure of her husband and daughters was key. Her family provoked in her a feeling of illusion and professional and personal improvement, encouraging her to take on new challenges and be an example of a woman with strong values and initiatives that seek equality and social justice. Also, the value of experience in the performance of her leadership is appreciable. Méndez-Morse, Murakami Byrne-Jiménez and Hernández (2015), in their study with female principals, agree with this aspect, defining experience as being of added value for improving their professional leadership practices. It is all these professional milestones and lessons learned that have consolidated her current professional identity.

The gender discrimination suffered by Marta in the union meant a renegotiation of her professional identity. The working environment and the professional culture of the patriarchal "corridor" limited her professional practice. In relation to this situation, Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky (1992) point out that when a woman occupies leadership positions she has a greater risk of being considered unfavourably in comparison with her male colleagues. At the same time, the findings of the study by Hernández and Murakami (2016) warn us of the institutional discrimination that could exist in certain educational centres with the incorporation of the female figure in management positions, considering this to be a member who does not belong to this context. Thus, Blackmore (2005) proposes a wider political and social implication that combats the discriminatory items on the basis of gender in school management.

Marta's last stage in the syndicate was a difficult moment for her. This situation led to a re-construction of her professional identity, contributing to this new learning. What is certain is that in spite of this, Marta opted for a leadership identity based on empathy and community in her next professional destiny. The experience of suffering gender discrimination did not extinguish her love for her vocation and her aspirations for education, but rather consolidated her values of democracy, social justice, and professional commitment. In a similar study, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) share this vision, explaining that when faced with complex situations, the professional identity of female school leaders is usually related to values such as a sense of community, professional collaboration, and empathy.

On the other hand, and as can be seen in the last results section, Marta's leadership has certain peculiarities. Her previous professional experience, and the school context in particular (Spies y Heystek 2015), have personalized the way in which she carries out her professional work. She has developed a form of distributed leadership, which chooses to open the doors of the school to the outside world. In practising her leadership, she promotes the professional commitment of teachers (Jo 2014) and their teamwork skills. Knowing how to listen is a key component for her to exercise successful leadership. Linked with this, Popescu and Gunte (2011) argue in their study that most of the female principals interviewed defined their leadership in terms of attributes related to the willingness to open up dialogue and communication with the different components of the educational community such as family, students, or teachers.

Finally, Marta's life story is a singular case of a female principal who, throughout her professional life, has faced several professional destinies that have consolidated key lessons for building a leadership identity. Intentional decisions and unexpected events have led to a substantial professional life. Marta's case is a reflection of the various barriers that female school leaders have faced (Jean-Marie 2013; Kaparou and Bush 2007). However, it also represents a case of facing adversity, "leading with others and not over others". In this way, in a society that still presents certain patriarchal stereotypes, Marta's approach reflects a leadership style based on equality and social justice, despite having been the victim of clear discrimination at certain times in her life.

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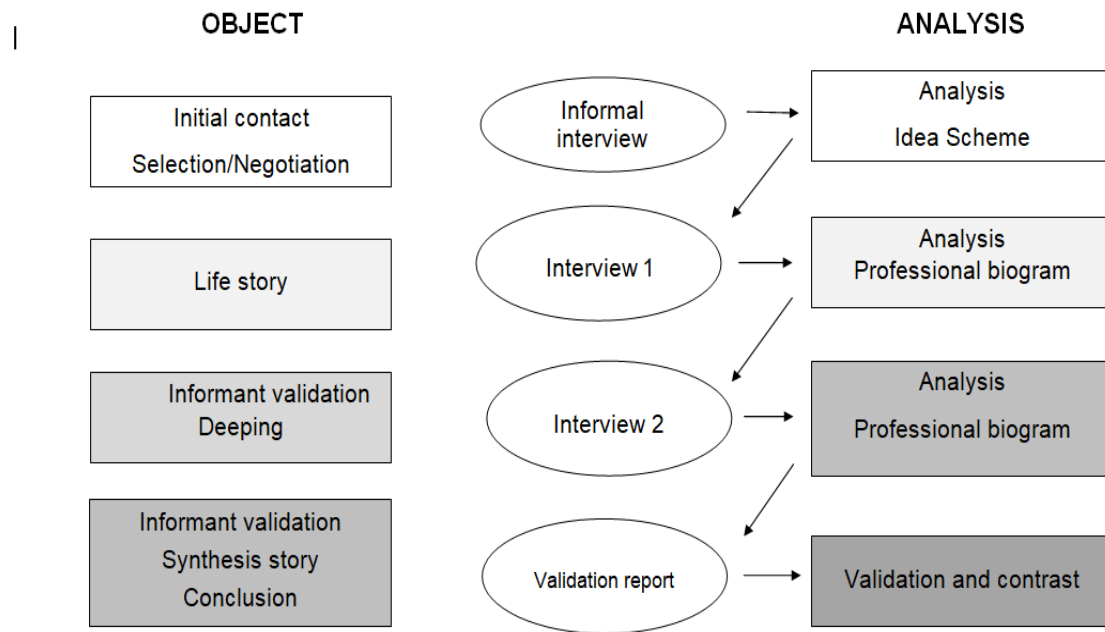


Figure 1. Process of analysis through Cascade of reflective deepening
Source: Prepared by the authors

CHRONOLOGY	DESCRIPTION	MILESTONE, KEY CHARACTER, THEME OR LEITMOTIV	PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL IMPACT
1958	Childhood and early educational experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maternal and paternal figure very committed to Marta's education. - Educational trajectory regulated by the Law on Primary Education (1945) - Dictatorial system in Spain (1939- 1975) - Social and Educational Inequalities in the School Climate - Democratic Transition in Spain (1977) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Values of responsibility, respect and solidarity attributed to her family - Critical conscience towards social injustices
1978	Teaching Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discovery of two teachers she considers to be "professional references". - Great aspirations to become a teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Values of methodological innovation, opening up schools to the outside and responsible freedom
1984	Work in Adult Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of Adult Education - First professional experience - Educational context characterized by illiteracy and patriarchal ideals - Creation of a women's association in the centre, and production of magazines and radio programmes on social justice issues and the visualization of the women's collective in the locality. - She officially begins her leadership role at the adult school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High level of personal exigency and responsibility - Development of a self-entrepreneurial capacity - Professional values based on social justice: "giving to each student what is needed for learning" - Opening up schools to the outside to empower students - Professional principle: "educate to liberate"
1986		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She meets her husband and they get married. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Her husband encourages and supports Marta in her professional illusions and becomes a supportive figure to achieve her goals.
1988		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Birth of his first daughter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maternity promotes even more in Marta the value of the struggle for equality, and professional growth and improvement.
2002	Work in a Social Guarantee Program (SGP) in a high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beginning of her work in a new type of education - Challenging school context, with adolescent students with severe learning difficulties and behaviour problems - Professional group characterized by dynamic and collaborative work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Value of teamwork for the improvement of educational outcomes in challenging contexts
2005	Work in the Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Real contact with the professional needs of teachers - Promotion to senior organizational positions within the Union - Change of working group and feeling of discrimination because of her status as a woman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Important notions of how to develop leadership in work teams - Development of good listening skills to understand the needs of professionals - Development of resilience due to discrimination against women in the world of work
2012	Principal in an early childhood education and primary school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional initiation in the context of primary and infant education - Educational context with great need for improvement - Beginning of her stage as a school principal in an early childhood education and primary school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of a school management style based on lessons learned from the past, and professional values such as collaboration, openness of the school to the outside, professional commitment, and social justice.

7

Learning from the Flight of the Geese: The life stories of two female principals who lead in vulnerable contexts

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Learning from the Flight of the Geese: The life stories of two female principals who lead in vulnerable contexts

Abstract

This study describes the life story of two female principals who carry out their work in particularly challenging schools in the Spanish educational context. This work is part of two larger international (ISSPP) and national research projects that aim to study the professional identity of school leaders. In this case, our objective was to analyse the construction of a leadership identity when faced with the challenges of working in a difficult school context, and to identify the main strategies adopted to achieve educational improvement in such adverse situations. The findings reveal that leading with others — and not over others — was key to achieving change. Our participating principals developed a style of leadership that is distributed and oriented towards values of social justice in an attempt to eradicate inequality and discrimination in their schools. Being a woman was also a determining factor in this professional performance. Learning from “the flight of the geese” was the essence of these professional stories, facing challenges with professional values of empathy, active listening, companionship, and commitment. Finally, we discuss the implications of this work for future research and professional practice.

Key words: professional identity, leadership, female principal. social justice, challenge context

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore, using the life story approach, the professional identity traits of two Spanish female principals that work in challenging contexts, analyzing their characteristics, values, beliefs, strategies and actions that characterize them as successful principals and promoters of social justice. Leading in difficult contexts can be a demanding task for school professionals. In particular, cultural and family diversity, high drop-out and/or failure rates, and low expectations of success can all pose a challenge when it comes to creating a better school (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Shields, 2004). In this paper, we tell the story of two female principals who based their professional practice on the values of social justice, commitment, and inclusion in order to transform particularly vulnerable schools into centres with excellent educational outcomes.

Studies at an international level indicate that a good educational leader is one who projects educational actions and practices based on participation, horizontality, and democracy to fight against social inequalities (Jean-Marie, 2008). As Theoharis (2007) argues, being a good leader goes beyond merely achieving good academic results and requires the collective commitment and unity of all professionals and members of the school, involving everyone in the pursuit of good educational outcomes.

The flight of the geese represents a metaphorical approach towards describing the essence of the professional identities of our participating female principals, who decided to face the challenge of being leaders by "flying" with — and not over — others, harnessing all of the efforts and skills of their professional team to achieve substantial and significant changes at the academic level in the centres where they carried out their professional work.

The need for a leadership identity in Spanish school management

In the Spanish education system, educational inequality is one of the major concerns on political agendas (Vallejo & Dooly, 2013). Educational leadership is one of the key elements required for a school to succeed in improving educational outcomes and achieving equity (Day et al. 2009). The literature links educational improvement with a strong and robust sense of professional identity in its school members (Robinson et al., 2009). Studies such as that conducted by Day and Sammons (2013) and Crow and Moller (2017) indicate that the development of a leadership identity has positive effects on educational achievement. Despite the importance assigned to educational leadership in the improvement of schools, relatively few studies have delved deeper into leadership identity construction in education professionals (Bolívar and Ritacco, 2016). Consequently, school leadership and professional identity are important areas of research that deserve greater attention (Cruz-González et al., 2019).

The principal is key to the achievement of educational leadership in schools. However, various studies conducted in Spain highlight the need for a more consolidated professional identity oriented towards educational leadership (Ritacco & Bolívar, 2018; Cruz-González, Pérez & Domingo, 2020). School principals present a series of duplicates in their professional identity due to their dual nature (they are both principals and teachers), their bivalence (representing both administration and colleagues) and their high workload which requires them to carry out both bureaucratic and pedagogical tasks (Bolívar and Ritacco, 2016). Moreover, we must point out another significant aspect that occurs in the Spanish educational context. There is a certain general rejection of access to this position by education professionals, particularly in difficult contexts (Batanaz, 2005). This entire system highlights the need for a greater focus on research into the professional identity of pedagogical leadership in school principals who lead in challenging contexts. For this reason, establishing this approach in our research could help us to understand how school principals give meaning to their work whilst enabling us to identify the key components of their professional practice.

Leadership for social justice in challenging contexts

The peculiarities found in building a leadership identity in challenging contexts are important to consider (Toure and Dorsey 2018). Context undoubtedly influences identity constructions and the leadership practices adopted. For this reason, there is a

need for horizontal and distributed leadership among all members of the educational community, particularly in challenging environments (Elmore, 2000; Harris, 2002). One of the most notable components of successful educational leadership is the establishment of visions, expectations, and goals among the professional team of the centre (Day et al. 2010). This explains why there is a need for more participatory and democratic approaches in the professional culture of schools (Szeto, 2020; Woods, 2005). From this perspective, it is important to mention the type of school leadership that transforms the professional dynamics of the school itself. Several authors have focused on the term "transformational leadership" to refer to this process of transformation that brings about the emergence of a professional culture based on respect, commitment, and mutual support (Day, 2000; Quantz, Rogers and Dantley, 1991)

Dubar (2000) argues that an individual's identity cannot be separated from their surrounding social, political, and cultural context. In this regard, Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) explain that there are various challenging contexts that a school principal can face during the construction of their leadership identity. These include the *situational* context (geographical and historical location of the school); the professional context, which encompasses all aspects of the school's professional culture; and the material context, which relates to the infrastructure of the school. Finally, the principal is often faced with external political and social expectations.

All these contextual situations that surround the school can be influenced by socio-economic and cultural levels. This is particularly true for situations in which there are low expectations on the part of students and families or the school itself, and where there are high percentages of unemployment along with dysfunctional and socio-economically deprived families (Lyman and Villani, 2002). These cases are those that fall under the category of *challenging context* and cannot be ignored by the management team. These are complex educational realities that lead to economic and achievement gaps between the most vulnerable students (or those at risk of exclusion) and the rest of the student community. These are realities that require educational change and responsive management that develops leadership practices adapted to the demands of the school (Brooks et al., 2007). Having overcome the tendency to blame the affected group itself (in terms of ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, national origin and native language, sexual orientation and disability), their families, and the context for low academic achievement and performance, it is appropriate to focus directly on professional practices and organizational policies (Marshall and Oliva, 2010).

Leading for social justice, as stated by McKenzie et al. (2008), is linked to the social and moral obligation to promote and raise the academic achievement of all school students in an equitable manner. Its purpose is to energize and promote practices that prepare students to live in society and to raise awareness, eradicating all those practices that could be unjust or have dualistic effects. Other authors also argue that within the process of achieving leadership for social justice, there must also be the aim of configuring the school as a heterogeneous community, whose common sense and

philosophy walk towards this purpose (Shield, 2009). Within this framework, the need to lead in, by, and for, social justice becomes part of the issue (Ryan, 2010)

The peculiarity of being a woman in school management

The construction of an individual's professional identity, which is built and reconstructed in a constant flow of personal and professional experiences, is influenced by the social, political and economic context that surrounds him/her, as previously argued (Dubar, 2000). Thus, in a context where traditional patterns are linked to longstanding hegemonic masculinities, identities develop in the face of barriers that could prevent or discourage women from seeking positions of responsibility, thus leading to the self-limitation of women (Schein, 2010; Arar and Shapira, 2016).

Research on leadership and school management in Spain has highlighted the low proportion of women in educational management (Díez, 2016; Grañeras Pastrana et al. 2012) despite the fact that the entry requirements are the same for men and women (Coronel, Carrasco, and Moreno 2012). In this regard, Murakami and Törnsten (2017) highlight the particularity of being a woman in school management. In particular, certain studies on leadership identity and gender have shown that the participating female principals, when faced with this type of situation, have developed the capacity for resilience along with certain leadership styles based on dialogue and communication in order to break the patterns adopted by indoctrinated societies over generations (Cruz-González, Pérez, and Domingo, 2020; Popescu and Gunter, 2011). As the same authors continue to argue, the results found in their research indicates that the participating female principals were characterized by the development of strong relationships in schools at the micro and macro levels, that is, with all members of the educational community. In a similar vein, Nickens and Washington (2016) explain that the crises suffered during the professional development of female principals interviewed are translated into the reconstruction of identity through distributed leadership, sharing responsibilities in their leadership, and not imposing their beliefs and opinions. Accordingly, a substantial body of research suggests that female school leaders, when faced with various contextual or professional challenges, have shown a sense of community and have acted through democratic leadership (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Johnson, 2017; Oplatka, 2014; Weiner & Burton, 2017).

Methodology: biographical-narrative research and life history

Life stories are a privileged means of studying the life experiences situated in a particular socio-cultural context. In the field of educational research, this type of methodology provides a way of connecting the lives of professionals with their own reality in order to explore the perceptions and meanings they give to their own world and ways of being and acting (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Kelchtermans, 2016; Sugrue, 2004)

Through this methodology we aim to investigate in depth the professional identity of school principals in complex contexts. Therefore, this study adopts a biographical-narrative approach (Bolívar and Domingo, 2019) as we explore the deepest meanings of the lives of two female principals, located in a particular time and place. We frame this approach within the category of narrative research, because it has a hermeneutic-interpretative and phenomenological character, so that the compilation of stories focuses on the meanings that the individuals attribute to their experiences (Goodson, et.al, 2016). To be more specific, we focus on the micro or personal epistemological level, in which individuals tell us of their lives through stories. Following McAdams (1993), if we want to study life stories, we need to hear people tell the full stories of their lives. Therefore, in accord with the purpose of our study, which was to investigate the identity of two female principals, we focused on gaining an insight into all their key moments, leitmotifs, and significant people in order to analyze their identity construction (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

❖ **Setting/Context**

This study focuses on the Spanish educational context, specifically the Andalusian Autonomous Community. This autonomous community has a school failure rate above 20%, a situation that gives cause for concern (Fernández-Mellizo and Martínez-García, 2017). Within this context are the two educational centres where our principals carry out their work. Specifically, these centres are located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, that is, areas with a low cultural and economic status index (ISEC) that are at risk of exclusion. However, in spite of these problems, they obtain educational outcomes endorsed by the Andalusian Agency for Educational Evaluation (AGAEVE) that exceed the expected results for these contexts.

❖ **Participant selection**

This work is part of a larger research study included in two international and national research projects: *International Successful School Principalship Project* (ISSPP) and the National R+D+i Project "*Identity of school management: leadership, training and professionalisation*". These projects analyze unique cases of school leaders that are achieving educational improvement. The stories of Estela and Rosa were extracted from these macro projects for the following reasons:

- They represent a clear example of transformational leadership in vulnerable contexts, since they played a key role in transforming the professional and educational practices of the centre, promoting a collaborative and democratic professional culture and improving the educational outcomes of the school.
- These principals are regarded as leaders by both the school and the local community.

- With the incorporation of these female principals into the centre, educational and academic results have improved in spite of the vulnerable social and economic context in which the school is located.

These criteria have also been established as priorities in the previously mentioned projects (to which this study belongs).

❖ *Collection of information*

The information collection process was carried out over two school years, and primarily consisted of in-depth biographical interviews with the informants in their educational contexts. These interviews were conducted using a cascade process of reflexive deepening (Bolívar and Domingo, 2019) (See Figure 1).

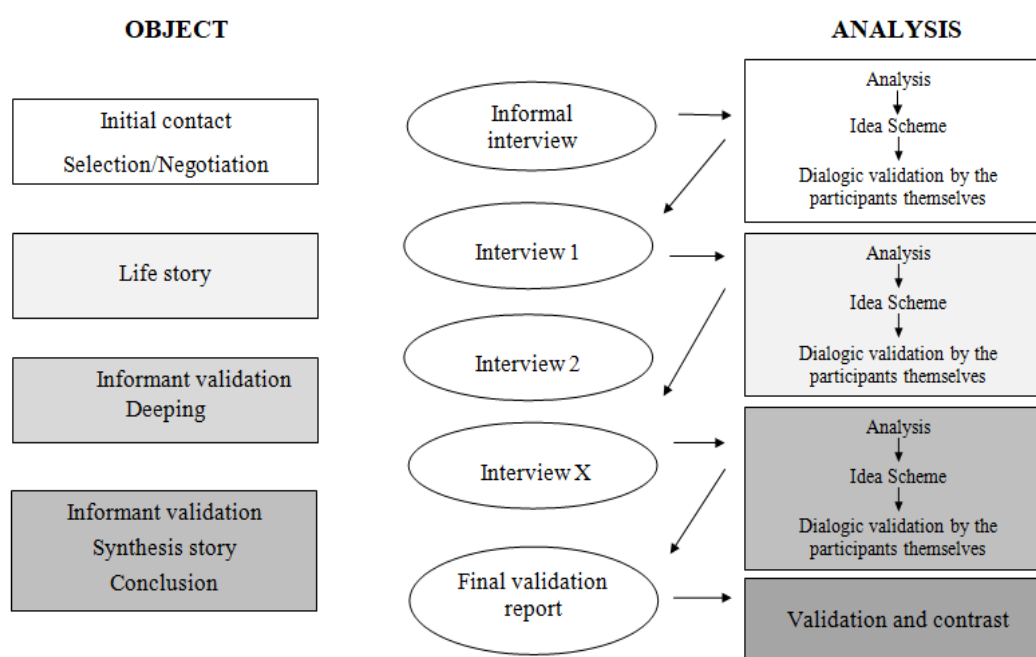


Figure 1. Process of analysis through reflective deepening cascade
Source: Prepared by the authors

The interviews were conducted in a sequential manner. Following each interview, the female principal’s narrative was analysed in order to synthesize the most important elements of their discourse. In the subsequent interview, this analysis was validated by the female principals themselves, in order to bring greater validity and coherence to the data collection process. Table 1 shows the various phases of the interviews, along with some examples of the questions formulated.

Initial contact Selection/Negotiation	Some examples of questions that have been asked
Presentation of the research study and its characteristics	<i>The main objective of this research is to... It is very important for us to have your participation... This participation requires a commitment on the part of the researcher and researched, time and continuity, respect...</i>

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Declaration of interest	<i>I'm interested in your life story. I'd like you to tell me what you think is interesting and what you feel that you would like to share.</i>
Introductory question phase	<i>What are the values that you believe define your professional work?</i> <i>Throughout your professional career, could you tell me what have been the most critical incidents and significant events?</i> <i>Why do you attribute such importance to them?</i>
Types of narrative follow-up question	Some examples of questions that have been asked
Steering towards a particular life-phase	<i>This is really interesting. Could you tell me a little more about this time?</i> <i>Why do you think this was important?</i> <i>How do you think this influenced your professional identity?</i>
Steering towards a situation mentioned in the main narrative	<i>Going back to the event described above, do you think this influenced the way you carried out your work as a school leader? What lessons have you drawn from this incident?</i>
Steering a sample narrative towards an argument	<i>This fragment of the story has impacted me. Could we go deeper into this?</i>
Validation phase	Some examples of questions that have been asked
Partial dialectical validation	<i>In the last interview we talked about... In this scheme of ideas I have captured the main themes and an analysis of the interview. Please confirm, correct or add any information where appropriate.</i>
Synthesis of story/ Final validation	<i>After a deep exploration of your professional life, there are several points and elements of analysis. I would like to examine these with you in a more synthesized manner and explore the implications and consequences of these events for your current identity.</i>

Table 1. Types of phases and questions used during data collection.

Source: Prepared by the authors

This process became an act of collaboration and co-creation, which required trust and a close researcher-researched relationship (Goodson, et.al, 2017) in order for us to become natives of their own educational contexts. We asked the participants to think of their lives as a novel in a book and to summarize its main chapters. Throughout this process, we nurtured a relationship with the interviewees that was based on honesty, trust, and respect so that they were able to speak freely about themselves and their lives. All these interviews were captured by voice recordings, and those elements that emerged from non-verbal language, that is, any observations, sensations or feelings that arose were noted in a log book for later analysis.

❖ *Analysis of information*

The information was analysed with the main aim of interpreting the essential values and visions that the female principals attributed to their surroundings, due to the hermeneutic-interpretative nature of our study. We also focused this analysis on those critical incidents, individuals and key events that marked the professional careers of our participants, and which, on occasion, involved real-life professional/personal crises that led to far-reaching identity reconstructions. The collection and partial analysis of information was carried out in a sequential and simultaneous way, which allowed us to validate the information gathered according to a scheme of ideas in each of the interviews with our participants. These initial validation reports had as their main theme the personal and professional background that make up the life story of the

interviewees. In a second phase of analysis, the data obtained from the in-depth biographical interviews and from the notes in our notebook were subjected to a thematic analysis conducted according to the principles of grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This second phase allowed us to identify the main categories and themes that emerged from the discourses of our two participants, thus showing the divergent and convergent issues. In order to facilitate the management of the collected information and its analysis, we used the qualitative analysis software Nvivo 12.

❖ *Ethical considerations*

Life history/story research applies a set of protective conditions for participants. As Bolívar (2014) states, the aspects of a life require sensitive treatment, respect, and consent, as well as an ethical commitment on the part of the researcher and the person being researched. We researchers become trusted confidantes and guardians of sensitive information, which, through their stories, the interviewees have allowed us to access. For this reason, throughout this research we have preserved the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in both data analysis and report writing. Similarly, the life stories include the description of other people such as family and friends of the participants or places and institutions that can easily identify them. Therefore, measures were put in place, such as the use of pseudonyms or altering the names of places in order to preserve this anonymity. Similarly, in compliance with ethical guidelines, we have considered the need for the commitment required to participate in narrative studies and thus, from the outset, we reveal to our participants the instruments to be used, the effects of our study, and the way in which it is carried out.

The story of two female principals: leading with others and not over others for educational improvement

Personal/Professional backgrounds

As we explained in previous sections, we are all a collection of events and circumstances. It is the attitude we adopt to deal with these circumstances that makes us special and different. In order to give the readers an idea of the fundamental elements of the professional identity of our female principals, it is essential to reveal their personal and professional backgrounds, that is, those decisive and crucial moments that mark a before and after in their professional work and that shaped their current professional leadership identity.

Estela was born in 1962 and spent her early academic years in an educational system characterised by rigidity, obscurity and oppression of freedom of expression and thought. She tells us that witnessing such harsh scenes of inequality and social injustice at school and in society caused her to have a high degree of commitment and critical awareness of social issues, while at the same time increasing her vocation to be a teacher in order to fight against such injustice.

After becoming a teacher, Estela began her professional career in a small school in a rural village. The school was characterized by its lack of facilities and didactic and educational resources. In spite of this, the family and the village were very involved in the school. Because it was a rural village, traditional and patriarchal thought was even more predominant, but there was also a feeling of community and togetherness. This is one of the reasons why Estela came to regard the family as an important point of reference. Throughout the five years that she worked in that school, she highlights that the family were involved in numerous initiatives to improve the situation in the school, which was so complex due to the scarcity of resources and the poor condition of the furniture. Further, as a result of the commitment shown by the community, several schools for parents and trans-generational projects were enjoyed. Due to the patriarchal scenario that Estela detected, these courses and activities had as their axis the notion of equality for all. From this professional experience, Estela learned a great lesson, that is, family and community are great tools that can be deployed in the fight for a fair and equal education.

Caring for her sick mother forced Estela to change her professional destiny. In this case, it was a school located in a metropolitan city, although with great deficiencies in professional culture. The methodology was very traditional and there was no perceived atmosphere of collaboration among the teaching staff. This greatly distressed Estela and was the reason why, after three years as a teacher, she decided to create a management team that would be led by her. However, this attempt ended in failure and the school continued to be led by the same male principal that had been in post six years previously.

It was a great disappointment. I was very eager to improve certain aspects of the school. I felt like the school had become stuck and was plodding along with bad practices that were undoubtedly affecting the students. I did not feel supported in the application process; however, I tried. On reflection, I think my proposed initiatives scared them. It was more a fear of change, a fear of breaking paradigms in which teachers felt comfortable

However, Estela did not stop fighting for methodological innovation and inclusion in her school. Gradually, numerous initiatives inspired other professional colleagues to work with her and to value those new ways of teaching that she employed.

I began to feel that my work was becoming more valuable when my colleagues asked me to collaborate. I proposed a (self-)training project for teachers in which we all learned from each other, and it was a success. I also helped to set up a parents' school. I started to feel supported and backed up by others, I felt happy professionally.

Her last and current professional assignment was in an Infant and Primary School in a challenging context, which will be explained in detail in the following sections.

Rosa is the second female principal of our study. She was born in 1967 in a small village near the capital of Granada. For Rosa, teaching and literature were always two of her greatest vocations. Due to her family's economic hardship when she was young, for several years Rosa had to combine her work as a seamstress with her studies of Hispanic Philology.

When she finally finished her studies to become a teacher, Rosa got a job as a teacher in a high school. For a long time, Rosa happily carried out her duties as a teacher, involving herself in numerous initiatives of methodological innovation in the centre. However, one event changed her perspective and her career path. The birth of her son made Rosa reconsider changing her workplace to one that was more accessible and closer to home.

The birth of my son forced me to leave the high school where I worked. The distance from my home was very long and I could not combine domestic and professional tasks. My husband worked all day and the situation was complicated. I made the decision to request a transfer to a closer high school
(Rosa, female principal)

Her new work context was very different. It was a high school located in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. This centre was characterised by its great cultural and ethnic diversity, and by its great need for improvement. Paradoxically, this would be the institute where Rosa would become the principal and transform this small institute, — thanks to her professional team — into a centre of reference for inclusive education and cultural richness.

Re-construction of professional identity in the face of the challenge of leading in a school of special difficulty

The stories of the female principals participating in our study share one common feature. After a long professional career, they took on the position of principal in challenging centres. In the face of this challenge, several key points were highlighted.

Research from a life history/story approach allows for the creation of a climate of trust and dialogue between researchers and researched throughout the investigative process. The continuous reflection and exploration of life stories is a fundamental aspect of the study of the life history of our protagonists. In both stories, one reflection was shared in common: “lead with others and not over others to achieve educational improvement”. After they related their professional experiences and their new challenge as principals, our participants explained that in order to tackle this challenge, they had to reinvent themselves, and adopt a resilient attitude:

“When I started working at the centre there were a lot of demands and actions to be taken. The professional culture of the teachers was very individualistic and the methodology too traditional. A change was very much needed to motivate

and engage the students. I didn't know my professional colleagues well, and at first I was limited to making progress on my own” (Rosa, female principal)

“I had had some difficult experiences in the past, and had learned some great professional lessons from them. The first years as a teacher were decisive in proving that the school was in need of great changes, and I found myself very much supported by my professional colleagues to assume the position of principal” (Estela, female principal)

At this initial time, the two principals chose to adapt positively to the adverse circumstances surrounding their work, opting for teamwork and commitment to achieving improvements in their educational centres.

Several events were decisive in this. In the case of Rosa, knowing the story of one of her students at the school was the driving force behind her initiative to become principal. The students in her school had different educational and family/emotional needs. Many of them came from shelters and others lived in very poor family and social conditions. Rosa was aware of this, and Najya was the final straw in that "almost full" glass of reasons to act. Najya, at only 13 years of age, was a student living in a poor family with no financial support to feed their three children. Najya was an artistically gifted student who stood out from her peers. However, language difficulties had always limited her educational performance. One day Najya fainted in class due to an apparent lack of food. This awakened something in Rosa.

I think the moment that changed my professional attitude was when I discovered Najya's story. It struck me and was my turning point and my reason for becoming a principal. I had to learn a lot to make improvements in the centre and I realized that experiences such as that make you re-construct yourself (Rosa, female principal)

Estela describes the great change she experienced when she led as principal. Most importantly, and as she explains, it was fundamental to have the support of her colleagues to build a professional environment of collaboration and awareness to achieve a fair and equal school.

I had never been a principal or a member of the management team before. Everything was new to me. Together with my management team, we were analyzing which were the weak points to be strengthened in order to achieve improvements in the school, and we all came to the same conclusion: a professional team with values of commitment and professional mutual support, and with a strong critical conscience with social injustices was needed (Estela, female principal)

Re-configuring their identity was essential. To do this, our principals identified the support and commitment of the rest of the educational community as being of fundamental importance. However, some sectors were reluctant at first:

Family was one of the main challenges. It was a humble and disadvantaged neighbourhood. There were families very committed to the education of their children, but others were very limited due to their terrible economic, social and work situation. This made absenteeism high, and also the involvement of the families to eradicate it. Therefore, one of the first initiatives was to build a close and continuous link with social services and other associations with the objective of achieving social and educational integration of these students. Their help and collaboration was essential to initiate the change (Rosa, female principal)

Estela believes that the family is the basis for real improvement, particularly in challenging schools. In this regard, Estela explains that at the time when she started in her role as principal, the family and other professional sectors were essential for beginning to achieve change. To do this, Estela had to create links and connections.

After all, students look to family role models as examples. I wanted to participate in improving these family habits at home. In many cases, homes were not always the best example, but this could be improved. It is therefore essential that the families themselves see the school as a place of trust and support. Therefore, we promoted, from the beginning, many projects that would achieve this inclusion of the family in everyday school life. In this way, we not only wanted to educate the students, but also to give the parents tools so that they could also participate in this education (Estela, female principal)

This initiative for the inclusion of the family in the school made Estela and her professional team, little by little, become aware of the cultural and personal richness of the students and family of her school. At the same time, this approach also improved the family's trust and perception of the professionals.

I knew the context of my students and their families much better. I placed all the highest expectations on them. In the past I was also a student without resources, and I saw myself reflected in them, I felt part of their history. I wanted them to see their circumstances as a challenge to become better, but also as a source of potential; therefore, many activities and projects were aimed at valuing their cultural diversity, their customs and traditions, what made them different... (Estela, female principal)

Estela detected many complexities when it came to the inclusion of her students in classroom teaching, due to their lack of motivation or interest. However, by involving them in this way she was able to connect with them. This was, as she recalls, the starting point.

Estela and Rosa *decided to row against the current*. Never alone, and as they relate, the change would not have been possible without the commitment of the rest of the educational community.

“The school needed a radical change. After I became a principal, the first thing we did was hold a meeting with the teaching staff. In this meeting we explained what we wanted to achieve: a school for everyone and with everyone's collaboration. To do this, we spent many months designing the school's Educational Plan and everyone had to make their contribution and state that they agreed with it. I believe that this helps all the professionals at the centre feel involved and included. Of course, "engaging" and motivating the students was another important pillar. We carried out training and (self-) training in inclusive and active methodologies, and of course, initiatives and projects that had equal opportunities and gender as their focus. Undoubtedly, we put our focus on an equal and fair society” (Estela, female principal)

“When I became a principal, I asked all my professional colleagues to have a "dream" meeting. I wanted us all to be in a "dream" phase for a few weeks and to write together what we wanted for our centre and how we could achieve it. In that meeting, my colleagues came up with wonderful dreams, and through consensus we prioritized actions. The three main priorities were: a united professional team, training in new inclusive methodologies, and initiatives aimed at achieving equal opportunities for our students” (Rosa, female principal)

During that dream phase, the students had to dream too, of course. In this way, Rosa created a dream box, in which all the students of the school participated by writing down a dream to be fulfilled in the school. All these dreams were considered and analyzed. Rosa wanted to see what values her students wanted for their school.

Absenteeism, lack of motivation, disinterest... I think it's all because the students don't feel part of the school. I wanted to eliminate this. It was hard work, but I was very clear about one thing: projecting my confidence and positive expectations onto them was key. From the different dreams of the students, we carried out projects, exhibitions, workshops and even demonstrations (Rosa, female principal)

In spite of the complex scenario in which they found themselves, with effort and professional encouragement, the positive outcomes began to appear.

“In that initial stage of school management, I remember that I was very clear about my role. I had to distribute duties and tasks to my colleagues in the management team, delegate responsibilities, and trust. I did not want to be an authoritarian principal, I wanted the responsibility to be shared and for everyone to feel that they were participating in the improvement of the school.

To this end, I believe that active listening and empathy are important when exercising leadership in school management” (Estela, female principal)

“I needed the commitment of all members of the school, but also that of our local community. I can say that the school we have today is the result of the intra-centre relationships that were created years ago. We joined forces within the school so that school failure and vulnerability would not happen again. But that was not enough, we involved associations against violence, poverty, absenteeism, etc. We also strengthened our ties with the city council and the Social Services unit. Our educational programmes were also aimed at social issues. We wanted our professionals to feel part of the change, not only them, but also our students. We wanted them to see that what they were doing in the institution had a social impact” (Rosa, female principal)

The female principals argue that their previous professional and personal experiences were also key to their current professional identity. Their historical period, their different professional destinies, the typology of students and schools in which they worked, and their family factors were tracing the silhouette and body of their professional development. In the face of different challenges, they realized that what they knew up to that moment was not enough. They had to go beyond the stipulated, inhabit new identities, and plan their actions towards achieving a better society.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the professional identity of two school principals who achieved educational improvements in challenging centres through their professional performance as school leaders with a great critical awareness of social injustices.

According to their stories, learning from the "flight of the geese" was one of the most significant lessons and keys to their professional careers. There is one critical reason for the way in which geese fly (forming a "V"). Each bird, by flapping its wings, produces an air movement that helps the goose behind. By flying in a V, the whole group increases its flying power by at least 70% in comparison to flying individually. We believe that the flight of the geese is equivalent to the style of leadership adopted by the participating principals, who, in order to achieve educational improvement and inclusion, opted for a type of leadership that embodies the principles of participation, democracy, commitment, social justice and mutual support. This study provides us with a greater understanding of how education professionals built their identity and committed to transforming the school into a centre built on practices and values of collaborative professional culture and inclusion.

Investigating this professional identity does not only involve examining an individual's behavioural and professional patterns. This identity is the result of numerous internal — and sometimes external — battles. Therefore, contemplating all these elements as a whole is what a true identity study really provides. Our study, following those of Sugrue

(2014) or Kelchtermans (2016), place value in the professional trajectory, the personal context, childhood experiences or family circumstances, and even the motions were decisive in the identity development of our school principals. Other works such as those of Park, Rinke and Mawhinney (2016) and Cruz-González, Pérez and Domingo (2020) showed, in their life history studies, how these personal, contextual, political and professional elements were decisive in the development of a leadership identity for educational improvement. Those critical incidents that occurred in the lives of professionals are a decisive aspect in consolidating a leadership identity.

It was important to study the professional life stories of our principals in order to understand the different strategies developed in the process of improving the schools in which they worked. Thus, other studies such as that of Carpenter et al. (2015) focused on this element, arguing that the school context where a professional's work is carried out is key to the development of effective leadership. In this regard, the authors warn that this leadership must be adaptive and should also take into account the various social, contextual, and professional circumstances of the school itself.

The essential values that frame the educational practices of our principals are related to the equality of the students within their schools. The principals sought to break with hierarchical traditionalisms in school management and to make a detailed diagnosis of the real needs of the school from the very voices of the students, family, and teachers. Szeto and Cheng (2018) argue that in order to develop social justice leadership in schools, these hierarchical models must be destroyed and new forms and models based on horizontality and collective participation must be chosen. Unique cases such as those of Estela and Rosa show an educational model based on openness to freedom and respect, the fundamental principles of leadership for social justice (Furman, 2012; DeMatthews, 2018)

Estela and Rosa showed how first-hand experience of situations of discrimination or invisibility as 'women' had provided them with the impetus to fight for a better school (Schatz-Oppenheimer and Halpert-Zamir, 2010). It would appear that early experiences lay the foundations for tackling later personal and/or professional challenges, resonating with the work of Popescu and Gunter (2011) and Britzman (2003).

Throughout the storytelling we appreciate how gender influenced the development of their life trajectories. The birth of their children, professional isolation, or the care of relatives all colour in the outline of our participants' professional lives. A body of work has revealed that these situations are very common in the Spanish educational context, and can in many cases explain why there are relatively few aspiring female principals (Coronel, Carrasco and Moreno, 2012; Santos Guerra, 2000). However, our female principals decided to break this pattern. In order to rebuild their professional identity, they chose to construct a horizontal and participatory professional culture. Bush (2013) and Day, Crow and Moller (2017) state that this is an indispensable strategy for achieving solid and successful school leadership. In addition, our principals considered the family to play an essential role in participating towards the development of the

school day. Thus, the creation of a relationship of trust and mutual support was, for our participants, a starting point from which to work towards an inclusive school for all (Moorosi, 2010). In the words of Theoharis (2010) "by understanding (not judging) families' lives and beliefs, by committing to reaching out and listening to families, and by using persistent, diverse, and native language communication"(p. 369).

For Estela and Rosa, their institutions were never vulnerable or marginal; in fact, their schools were "fortunate due to their cultural and human richness". They chose, from an alternative perspective, to have high expectations in these contexts and to transform their difficulties into opportunities (Flecha & Soler, 2017). Thus, the professional teams that they lead chose to regard diversity as a valuable opportunity to contribute by bringing new knowledge and skills to their professional practice. Consequently, the education in their centres was not impregnated with hegemonic and dominant discourses and practices, but rather came from their own backgrounds and experiences (López, 2016; Shields, 2010).

To bring about change and improvement, our principals started by building strong and solid relationships with their colleagues at the school. They felt that in order to achieve a united professional group it was essential to care about their welfare and professional inclusion in the school. Leithwood et al (2009), on the basis of their research, argue that to develop a professional culture of distributed leadership, teachers and the community must feel part of the school's dynamic, and they must identify with its values and goals.

However, this was not the only approach that was needed. In addition, the support and collaboration with agents outside the school community was key to generating improvements in the school. Involving other actors and organisations from the local community improved student motivation and inclusion and led to the creation of a network of committed and supportive links between both school and community (Day et al., 2009).

Implications for professional practice and future research

The life stories of Estela and Rosa highlight the importance of a leadership identity oriented towards values of social justice. Students from difficult schools often feel a sense of disidentification or disengagement with the school (Hancock and Zubrick, 2015). Actions aimed at the inclusion of students in school life would allow them to be more motivated and engaged in school. At the same time, it would strengthen the trust and relationship between teachers and students, which would serve to promote a more real connection between the curriculum and the educational reality of the school.

Leading with others and not over others was something that Estela and Rosa always adopted as a professional guiding principle. As researchers in the field of educational improvement seem to suggest, working collectively and horizontally is one of the keys to success. For this reason, we believe that professional teams should orient their ways of working towards values of cooperation and horizontality in order to achieve a true transformation towards improvement (Leithwood et al., 2009)

Another notable implication of this study is related to teacher training. On the basis of the findings reported here, we consider that teacher training in distributed leadership that is oriented towards values of social commitment should be expanded (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). On several occasions, aspiring principals do not know how to carry out their work in complex contexts, which require a strong and consolidated leadership identity. This is why preparation programmes for principals must consider these issues (Coleman and Campbell-Stephens, 2010). Training educational professionals in critical social knowledge and cultural issues provides added authenticity to their subsequent professional actions. This view has been argued by authors such as Toure and Dorsey (2018), who explain that with the inclusion of these aspects in professional training programmes for teachers and school leaders, we would be closer to ending the stereotypes and discrimination in classrooms that have been so ingrained since the distant past.

Finally, we encourage future researchers to consider the life history stories of unique individuals, who can offer insights into the fundamental pillars of performance (Sugrue, 2014). Undoubtedly, the story of these female principals provides a clear example of empowered women who dedicate their professional lives to empowering others. These stories can also give visibility to certain discourses that have often been silenced due to their critical and challenging nature, and will undoubtedly be of value in the professional development of novice teachers or aspiring school principals.

Limitations of this study

Whilst we believe that life histories are a useful methodological approach for addressing the main objective of our study, certain limitations need to be recognised and these should be considered when interpreting our findings.

Life histories are often criticised because the results cannot be generalised or compared to other realities/contexts (Denzin, 2009). Nonetheless, the findings presented here could be of use in guiding the professional practice of future or current education professionals. Moreover, the educational policies and peculiarities of school management in Spain have nuanced characteristics that influence the professional identity of female principals and the functioning of the school. These elements must therefore be considered when interpreting our findings.

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Decision Letter (MIE-20-045.R2)

From: mieeditors@gmail.com

To: clucenar@ugr.es

CC:

Subject: Management in Education - Decision on Manuscript ID MIE-20-045.R2

Body: 04-Jan-2021

Dear Carmen,

I am delighted to inform you that we have decided to accept your manuscript entitled "Learning from the Flight of the Geese: The life stories of two female principals who lead in vulnerable contexts" for publication in Management in Education. The comments of the reviewer(s) who considered your manuscript are included at the foot of this letter.

Thank you for your contribution to Management in Education and I look forward to your future contributions to the Journal.

Following acceptance of your article we would be delighted if you would contribute a short blog post on the essence of your article to the BELMAS Blog to info@belmas.org.uk. This will ensure that your article is widely circulated and encourages more readers. You can find guidelines for submission here <https://www.belmas.org.uk/BELMAS-Blog>.

Best wishes,

Dr. Jacqueline Baxter
Management in Education
mieeditors@gmail.com

5

Indicios de calidad de las publicaciones

5. Indicios de calidad de las publicaciones presentadas

Las publicaciones presentadas en esta tesis doctoral reúnen los requisitos valorados por el programa de Ciencias de la Educación B22.56.I (RD.99/2011) de la Universidad de Granada. Al mismo tiempo, también se cumple el requisito mínimo de la presentación de tres o más artículos de impacto aceptados a lo largo de la trayectoria de doctorado.

* **School principals and leadership identity A thematic exploration of the literature**

Este artículo fue publicado en la Revista “Educational Research” con Print ISSN: 0013-1881 Online ISSN: 1469-5847.

- JCR Impact Factor Q2 (0.667)
- SJR Impact Factor Q2 (0.55)

Educational Research Scopus coverage years: from 1958 to 2020 Publisher: Taylor & Francis ISSN: 0013-1881 E-ISSN: 1469-5847 Subject area: Social Sciences: Education	CiteScore 2019 2.4
View all documents > Set document alert Save to source list Journal Homepage	SJR 2019 0.550
	SNIP 2019 1.110

* **Female Principals and Leadership Identity: A Review of the Literature**

Este artículo fue publicado en la Revista “International Journal of Organizational Diversity” con Print ISSN: 2328-6261 Online ISSN: 2328-6229.

- SJR Impact Factor Q3 (0.108)

International Journal of Organizational Diversity Scopus coverage years: from 2013 to 2020 Publisher: Common Ground Research Networks ISSN: 2328-6261 E-ISSN: 2328-6229 Subject area: Social Sciences: Cultural Studies Business, Management and Accounting: Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management	CiteScore 2019 0.5
View all documents > Set document alert Save to source list	SJR 2019 0.108
	SNIP 2019 0.161

*** Professional identity of Spanish Female Principals: A Systematic Review of the Literature**

Este capítulo de libro se encuentra aceptado y en proceso de edición en la Editorial Dykinson. Se encuentra posicionado en el ranking de Scholarly Publishers Indicators (SPI) en Q1.

Prestigio de las editoriales según expertos españoles. Editoriales mejor valoradas (2018)

Editoriales españolas			Editoriales extranjeras		
Orden	Editorial	ICEE	Orden	Editorial	ICEE
1	Tirant Lo Blanch	1037.000	1	Oxford University Press	1705.000
2	Alianza (Grupo Anaya, Hachette Livre)	1013.000	2	Cambridge University Press	1681.000
3	Aranzadi (Thomson Reuters)	911.000	3	Routledge (Francis & Taylor Group)	1153.000
4	Cátedra (Grupo Anaya, Hachette Livre)	906.000	4	Springer	670.000
5	Editorial Síntesis	856.000	5	Peter Lang Publishing Group	642.000
6	Ariel (Grupo Planeta)	820.000	6	Brill	526.000
7	Marcial Pons	727.000	7	De Gruyter	386.000
8	Tecnos (Grupo Anaya, Hachette Livre)	545.000	8	Sage Publications	343.000
9	Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC)	536.000	9	Harvard University press	326.000
10	Akal(Akal)	507.000	10	Elsevier	319.000
11	Comares	491.000	11	John Benjamins Publishing Company	315.000
12	Civitas (Thomson Reuters)	485.000	12	Palgrave Macmillan	302.000
13	Dykinson S.L.	456.000	13	McGraw Hill	301.000
14	Pirámide (Grupo Anaya, Hachette Livre)	405.000	14	Giuffrè	264.000
			15	Thomson Reuters	247.000

*** How to research the professional identity of female school principals through life stories?**

Este artículo fue aceptado en la Revista “International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social and Community Studies” con Print ISSN: 2324-7576 Online ISSN: 2324-7584

- SJR Impact Factor Q2 (0.108)

International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social and Community Studies

Scopus coverage years: from 2013 to 2020

Publisher: Common Ground Research Networks

ISSN: 2324-7576 E-ISSN: 2324-7584

Subject area: Social Sciences: Cultural Studies Social Sciences: Sociology and Political Science

[View all documents >](#) [Set document alert](#) [Save to source list](#)

CiteScore 2019 0
0.2

SJR 2019 0
0.128


SNIP 2019 0
0.075

*** Female principals leading in Spanish schools: Exploring professional values and challenges through their voices**

Este artículo está siendo revisado en la Revista “Research in Educational Administration and Leadership” con Online ISSN: 2564-7261

- SJR Impact Factor Q4 (0.182)

Research in Educational Administration and Leadership

Open Access 


Scopus coverage years: from 2016 to 2020

Publisher: Dokuz Eylul University

E-ISSN: [2564-7261](#)

Subject area: [Social Sciences: Education](#)

[View all documents >](#)

 [Save to source list](#) [Journal Homepage](#)

CiteScore 2019
0.5 

SJR 2019
0.182 

SNIP 2019
0.222 

*** Marta's story: a female principal leading in challenge contexts**

Este artículo fue publicado en la Revista “School Leadership and Management” con Print ISSN: 1363-2434 Online ISSN: 1364-2626.

- SJR Impact Factor Q1 (0.727)

School Leadership and Management

Formerly known as: [School Organisation](#)

Scopus coverage years: from 1996 to 2020

Publisher: Taylor & Francis


ISSN: 1363-2434 E-ISSN: 1364-2626

Subject area: [Social Sciences: Education](#) [Arts and Humanities: Arts and Humanities \(miscellaneous\)](#)

[Business, Management and Accounting: Strategy and Management](#)

[View all documents >](#)

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CiteScore 2019
1.7 

SJR 2019
0.727 

SNIP 2019
1.212 

*** Learning from the Flight of the Geese: The life stories of two female principals who lead in vulnerable contexts**

Este artículo fue aceptado en la Revista “Management in Education” con Print ISSN: 0892-0206 Online ISSN: 1741-9883.

- SJR Impact Factor Q1 (0.867)

Management in Education

Scopus coverage years: from 1987 to Present

Publisher: SAGE

ISSN: 0892-0206 E-ISSN: 1741-9883

Subject area: [Social Sciences: Education](#) [Business, Management and Accounting: Strategy and Management](#)

[View all documents >](#)

[Set document alert](#)

[Save to source list](#) [Journal Homepage](#)

CiteScore 2019	1.9	i
SJR 2019	0.867	i
SNIP 2019	1.245	i

6

Conclusiones

6. Conclusiones

La temática central de esta tesis doctoral es la construcción de una identidad de liderazgo en directoras escolares para el desarrollo de prácticas profesionales pedagógicas en contextos difíciles. Partiendo de la cuestión central de que las prácticas exitosas de liderazgo en contextos de especial dificultad dependen de identidades profesionales directivas orientadas hacia valores pedagógicos y de justicia social, se propuso investigar de qué manera construyen y (re)construyen las directoras participantes su dimensión identitaria para el logro de un liderazgo pedagógico. Los resultados de nuestras publicaciones muestran una serie de hallazgos descritos previamente. En este caso, y partiendo de ellos, mostramos las conclusiones en referencia al proceso de investigación desarrollado y sus frutos.

Debido al carácter procesual de esta investigación, comenzamos realizando una revisión y exploración temática de la literatura con el fin de identificar los principales factores y elementos que conforman la identidad profesional de directoras líderes escolares y las circunstancias y procesos que construyen su dimensión profesional hacia prácticas de liderazgo pedagógico (**Publicación I, II, y III**). Los hallazgos revelaron que la cultura profesional del centro educativo, los factores personales y éticos, la política educativa a nivel micro/macro y, en especial, el género eran elementos claves en la construcción de una identidad de liderazgo en directores. A la vez, liderar en contextos retantes o de difícil desempeño también era un elemento significativo en esta construcción identitaria (**Publicación I**). De esta manera, decidimos seguir profundizando en el estudio de la identidad profesional de líderes escolares a través de una revisión sistemática de la literatura internacional, esta vez orientando nuestro foco al factor género (**Publicación II**). Los resultados pusieron de manifiesto que existen diversos obstáculos en el desarrollo de una identidad de liderazgo en directoras. El conjunto de publicaciones que conforman la revisión sistemática coinciden en diferencias significativas en las percepciones y expectativas hacia los directores en función del género. En todo esto, elementos de naturaleza contextual, cultural, política y/o étnicos emergieron como posibles motivantes.

Con el fin de obtener una panorámica específica de la literatura vinculada en este tema dentro del contexto español, **la publicación III** tuvo como propósito la

revisión de aquellos estudios que centraran su mirada en la identidad profesional de directoras líderes escolares en el contexto educativo español. En este caso, los hallazgos de esta revisión subrayan un techo de cristal en la dirección escolar en España y resaltan el reto de ser mujer y directora en una posición tradicionalmente masculinizada. El desequilibrio en el acceso a puestos de liderazgo educativo y la existencia de estereotipos sociales fueron dos resultados claves en esta revisión de la literatura.

Por otra parte, los hallazgos recogidos en las revisiones de la literatura de las **publicaciones I, II y III** ofrecieron claves metodológicas de interés para orientar nuestra investigación. A lo largo de los estudios revisados, la metodología cualitativa y de enfoque autobiográfico-narrativo fue la más predominante. Algunos de los estudios justifican su potencialidad para adentrarse en la dimensión más íntima y humana de profesionales educativos. Este resultado coincidía con nuestro planteamiento metodológico y fue de gran utilidad para ampliar conocimientos sobre desarrollos metodológicos de investigaciones de alto impacto que compartían temáticas similares a la nuestra. La **publicación IV** hace alusión a este sumergimiento en el apartado metodológico. En este artículo mostramos el protocolo metodológico desarrollado en el proceso de investigación de esta tesis doctoral, apoyándonos en autores y expertos en metodología cualitativa con énfasis biográfico narrativo.

El proceso de revisión bibliográfica relatado fue esencial para conformar las bases teóricas y cimientos de esta tesis. Tras ello, la **publicación V** muestra los resultados de nuestro primer artículo subyacente del trabajo de campo en centros educativos de Infantil, Primaria y Secundaria. Este estudio de casos colectivo incidió en la influencia que el género tenía en la construcción de la identidad de ocho directoras líderes escolares. No sólo fueron estos los resultados principales. Las directoras participantes señalaron episodios difíciles y de lucha contra estereotipos y barreras de género, sin embargo, liderar desde valores de compromiso, colaboración, empatía y apoyo profesional fue la premisa que tuvieron para hacer frente a estas adversidades. En contextos escolares de dificultad, las directoras apostaron por liderar desde principios de horizontalidad y justicia social.

Conocer a las participantes que conforman esta tesis doctoral fue clave para el desarrollo de siguientes fases. Debido a las particularidades de tres de ellas, por sus valores y compromiso, empoderamiento, y riqueza de sus trayectorias y biografías

profesionales, decidimos seguir indagando en sus historias de vida. La **publicación VI y VII** relatan aquellos incidentes críticos, hitos, leitmotivs, factores circunstanciales y episodios que hicieron construir y (re)negociar su identidad hacia valores de compromiso y justicia social. La historia de vida de Marta (**Publicación VI**) realza el papel decisivo que juega el género, los valores y experiencias personales y profesionales o entorno sociopolítico en el desarrollo de una identidad profesional de liderazgo. La riqueza de su vida profesional muestra la esencia de liderar y enfrentarse a retos y desafíos profesionales desde principios de igualdad social y democracia. La **publicación VII** ofrece dos historias de vida de directoras escolares que desempeñan su labor en contextos de difícil desempeño y que ante las adversidades decidieron liderar con otros –y no sobre otros- para lograr cambios significativos y orientados a la mejora educativa de sus centros. La **publicación VI y VII** muestran la construcción de un estilo de liderazgo educativo orientado hacia valores de justicia social y participación activa de todos los miembros de la comunidad escolar para lograr la mejora educativa y luchas contra desigualdades y discriminación en las aulas. En los dos estudios, ser mujer fue un elemento de particularidad en la construcción de esta identidad profesional. No obstante, aprender del vuelo de los gansos fue uno de los lemas más representativos de estas historias de vida profesional, en las cuales, la resiliencia, inclusión, empatía, compañerismo y compromiso fueron pilares básicos como motor de cambio.

6.1. Limitaciones y fortalezas

A continuación se plasman las principales limitaciones presentes en esta tesis doctoral:

- Con respecto a las revisiones sistemáticas de la literatura, se presentan una serie de limitaciones propias de este tipo de metodología. Limitar nuestra búsqueda a un tiempo específico, bases de datos determinadas y tipología de publicación conlleva no considerar otra literatura de gran relevancia e interés sobre la temática objeto de estudio.
- En los estudios cualitativos con énfasis biográfico- narrativo resulta complejo encontrar participantes únicos y singulares, que contribuyan al campo de conocimiento que enmarca la investigación y que a la vez muestren un

compromiso sólido con el desarrollo de la investigación (Pujadas, 1992). En nuestro proceso de búsqueda, tuvimos la suerte de encontrar participantes que cumplieran estos criterios tan deseables en investigaciones de este enfoque.

- Existen una serie de críticas en torno al enfoque biográfico-narrativo y las historias de vida debido a que los hallazgos subyacentes de estos estudios no pueden ser generalizados ni comparados con otras realidades o contextos (Denzin, 2009).
- Las historias de vida que conforman esta tesis doctoral plasman una serie de resultados que a pesar de coincidir con literatura científica especializada en el tema objeto de estudio, no debe ser considerada de manera categórica ni extrapolar sus hallazgos a poblaciones generales.
- El protocolo de desarrollo metodológico presentado en los resultados de esta tesis doctoral se orienta hacia una temática concreta y con una serie de particularidades teóricas y contextuales, por lo que las fases metodológicas expuestas pueden servir como orientación a investigaciones de naturaleza similar, pero se deben de atender características específicas de cada proyecto de investigación.

A pesar de las limitaciones expuestas, esta tesis doctoral también contiene una serie de fortalezas:

- Estudiar las historias de vida de líderes escolares nos ofrece la posibilidad de identificar factores y elementos clave que podrían servir de guía y orientación para prácticas profesionales de líderes escolares futuros y/o en acción.
- Este enfoque metodológico supone un medio potencial para dar voz a colectivos *invisibilizados o silenciados*. Debido a la situación tan particular de las directoras escolares que lideran en contextos de desafío, valorar su voz como vehículo para adentrarnos en su dimensión identitaria supone un elemento clave, y las historias de vida ofrecen esta oportunidad.
- Otro de los principales puntos potenciales fue contar con el compromiso y la disposición activa y desinteresada de las directoras participantes en esta investigación.
- Esta investigación, a su vez, presentó una doble fortaleza. Para nosotros, tener la oportunidad de investigar a mujeres líderes adentrándonos en sus antecedentes y contextos personales y profesionales más importantes. Para ellas (en sus propias palabras) facilitar una mejor comprensión y digestión de episodios profesionales críticos, además de valorar el pasado como el fruto del esfuerzo de una vida personal y profesional destinada a luchar por sus sueños y metas profesionales, por una escuela mejor y por la inclusión educativa.

6.2. Implicaciones para la práctica profesional, educativa y futuras investigaciones

Los hallazgos de esta tesis doctoral ponen en relieve la importancia del estudio de la construcción de una identidad de liderazgo en directoras escolares, aún más cuando realizan su labor en centros de difícil desempeño.

En primer lugar, las publicaciones presentadas muestran cómo una identidad sólida y consolidada de directoras escolares tiene efectos importantes en la mejora educativa del centro, y en el aprendizaje y desarrollo profesional tanto de profesores como de estudiantes. En contextos de vulnerabilidad, el alumnado suele presentar sentimientos de desidentificación con el centro educativo al que pertenece, las familias a menudo muestran baja implicación en la vida del centro y la situación socio-económica del colegio o instituto se caracteriza mayoritariamente por ser de nivel bajo (Marshall y Oliva, 2010). De esta manera, las actuaciones y modelos de liderazgo presentados por las directoras participantes podrían servir de orientación para construir estrategias y prácticas de liderazgo orientadas hacia fines pedagógicos y de justicia social. Sus relatos muestran cómo a partir de un liderazgo transformador fueron capaces de lograr un cambio en la dinámica del centro educativo incluyendo a todos los miembros de la comunidad escolar en esta lucha.

Profundizando más en estos modelos de liderazgo, y como se ha resaltado en secciones anteriores, las directoras escolares basaron su práctica profesional en valores de colectividad, horizontalidad, democracia, participación activa y compromiso social. Las lecciones aprendidas que relatan a lo largo de sus historias de vida profesional podrían ser esenciales para establecer líneas de actuación, y formación en la preparación de futuros aspirantes a la dirección escolar, más especialmente para aquellos que desarrollen su labor profesional en contextos de reto. De esta manera, en el plano de formación de profesionales educativos, los programas formativos podrían valorar el potenciamiento de un conocimiento social crítico que propusiera como núcleo la educación para la igualdad y diversidad, y tuviera como prioridad acabar con los estereotipos sociales que dificultan el acceso y promoción de la figura femenina en posiciones de liderazgo en el contexto educativo.

Además, aquellos directores/as que se encuentran en ejercicio podrían encontrar en estas historias claves para mejorar y reorientar la cultura profesional de sus equipos de trabajo hacia valores de cooperación y horizontalidad. Estos relatos son también un medio para dar visibilidad a ciertos discursos que a menudo han sido silenciados debido a su naturaleza crítica y desafiante, y sin duda serán de valor en el desarrollo profesional de los maestros noveles o aspirantes a directores de escuela.

Por último, exponemos una serie de orientaciones para futuras investigaciones en esta línea temática. Estudiar la identidad de liderazgo de profesionales educativos supone un elemento clave en la mejora de su profesionalización, y por consiguiente, de resultados educativos en sus centros. Debido al surgimiento de varias líneas actuales que apuestan por un enfoque más humano e identitario, animamos a futuros investigadores a adoptar este prisma para enfocar sus estudios.

En este sentido, se considera necesario el desarrollo de más estudios que profundicen en la construcción identitaria de líderes escolares, y en concreto, analizar el factor género en este proceso constitutivo. Creemos preciso promover investigaciones que deslumbren la complejidad a la que la mujer se enfrenta al asumir roles de liderazgo que tradicionalmente han sido ocupados por figuras masculinas. Por esto, investigar relatos de vida profesional de directoras líderes escolares puede contribuir de manera sustancial a ampliar el campo de conocimiento sobre liderazgo y mejora educativa. Los enfoques biográficos y narrativos resultan muy útiles para dar visibilidad a discursos que posiblemente no han sido considerados de manera justa y merecida.

6

Conclusions

6. Conclusions

The central theme of this doctoral thesis is the construction of a leadership identity in school female school principals for the development of professional pedagogical practices in difficult contexts. On the basis of the central premise that successful leadership practices in particularly difficult contexts depend on professional identities oriented towards pedagogical values and social justice, it was proposed to investigate how the participating female principals construct and (re)construct their identity dimension for the achievement of pedagogical leadership. The results of our publications reveal a series of findings described above. In this case, and based on them, we present the conclusions regarding the research process developed and its results.

Due to the processual nature of this research, we began by conducting a thematic review and exploration of the literature in order to identify the main factors and elements that shape the professional identity of female school leader principals and the circumstances and processes that construct their professional dimension towards pedagogical leadership practices (Publication I, II, and III). The findings revealed that the professional culture of the school, personal and ethical factors, educational policy at the micro/macro level and, in particular, gender were key elements in the construction of a leadership identity in principals. At the same time, leading in challenging or difficult contexts was also a significant element in this identity construction (Publication I). Thus, we decided to further study the professional identity of school leaders through a systematic review of the international literature, this time focusing on the gender factor (Publication II). The results showed that there are several obstacles to the development of a leadership identity in female principals. The set of publications that composed the systematic review coincide in significant differences in perceptions and expectations towards principals according to gender. In all of this, contextual, cultural, political and/or ethnic elements emerged as possible motivators.

In order to obtain a specific overview of the literature on this issue in the Spanish context, the purpose of publication III was to review those studies that focused on the professional identity of female school leaders in the Spanish educational

context. In this case, the findings of this review underline a glass ceiling in school leadership in Spain and highlight the challenge of being a woman and a female principal in a traditionally masculinised position. The imbalance in access to educational leadership positions and the existence of social stereotypes were two key findings in this literature review.

On the other hand, the findings obtained in the literature reviews of publications I, II and III offered methodological clues of interest to guide our research. Throughout the studies reviewed, the qualitative methodology and the autobiographical-narrative approach was the most predominant. Some of the studies justify its potential to delve into the most intimate and human dimension of educational professionals. This result coincided with our methodological approach and was of great use in broadening our knowledge of methodological developments in high-impact research that shared similar themes to ours. Publication IV refers to this immersion in the methodological section. In this article we show the methodological protocol developed in the research process of this doctoral thesis, relying on authors and experts in qualitative methodology with a narrative biographical emphasis.

The literature review process described above was essential to form the theoretical bases and foundations of this thesis. Subsequently, publication V provides the results of our first article based on fieldwork in pre-school, primary and secondary schools. This collective case study focused on the influence of gender on the identity construction of eight female school leaders. These were not the only main findings. The participating female principals pointed out difficult episodes and struggles against gender stereotypes and barriers, however, leading from values of commitment, collaboration, empathy and professional support was the premise they had to face these adversities. In difficult school contexts, the principals opted to lead from principles of horizontality and social justice.

Getting to know the participants in this doctoral thesis was key to the development of the following phases. Due to the particularities of three of them, because of their values and commitment, empowerment, and the richness of their professional trajectories and biographies, we decided to continue investigating their life stories. Publications VI and VII relate those critical incidents, milestones, leitmotifs, circumstantial factors and episodes that made them build and (re)negotiate their

identity towards values of commitment and social justice. Marta's life story (Publication VI) highlights the decisive role that gender, personal and professional values and experiences or socio-political environment play in the development of a professional leadership identity. The richness of her professional life illustrates the essence of leading and facing professional challenges and challenges from principles of social equality and democracy. Publication VII offers two life stories of school principals who work in difficult contexts and who, in the face of adversity, decided to lead with others - and not over others - to achieve significant changes aimed at improving education in their schools. Publications VI and VII show the construction of an educational leadership style oriented towards values of social justice and active participation of all members of the school community to achieve educational improvement and fight against inequalities and discrimination in the classroom. In both studies, being a woman was a particular element in the construction of this professional identity. However, learning from the flight of the geese was one of the most representative slogans of these professional life stories, in which resilience, inclusion, empathy, companionship and commitment were basic pillars as drivers of change.

6.1. Limitations and strengths

The main limitations present in this doctoral thesis are presented below:

- With respect to systematic reviews of the literature, a series of limitations inherent to this type of methodology are presented. Limiting our search to a specific time, specific databases and type of publication entails not considering other literature of great relevance and interest on the subject under study.
- In qualitative studies with a biographical-narrative emphasis, it is difficult to find unique and singular participants who contribute to the field of knowledge that frames the research and who at the same time show a solid commitment to the development of the research (Pujadas, 1992). In our search process, we were fortunate to find participants who met these desirable criteria in research of this approach.

- There are a number of criticisms of the biographical-narrative approach and life stories because the underlying findings of these studies cannot be generalised or compared to other realities or contexts (Denzin, 2009).
- The life stories that compose this doctoral thesis reflect a series of results that, despite coinciding with scientific literature specialised in the subject under study, should not be considered categorically or extrapolate their findings to general populations.
- The methodological development protocol presented in the results of this doctoral thesis is oriented towards a specific topic and with a series of theoretical and contextual particularities, so that the methodological phases presented can serve as an orientation for research of a similar nature, but the specific characteristics of each research project must be taken into account.

Despite the limitations outlined above, this doctoral thesis also contains some strength:

- Studying the life stories of school leaders offers us the possibility of identifying key factors and elements that could serve as a guide and orientation for the professional practices of future and/or current school leaders.
- This methodological approach is a potential means of giving voice to invisible or silenced groups. Because of the very particular situation of female school leaders leading in challenging contexts, valuing their voice as a vehicle to get into their identity dimension is a key element, and life stories offer this opportunity.
- Another of the main potential points was the active and disinterested commitment and willingness of the female principals participating in this research.
- This research, at the same time, presented a double strength. For us, it was the opportunity to investigate women leaders by delving into their most important personal and professional backgrounds and contexts. For them (in their own words) to facilitate a better understanding and digestion of critical professional episodes, as well as to value the past as the fruit of the effort of a

personal and professional life destined to fight for their dreams and professional goals, for a better school and for educational inclusion.

6.2. Implications for professional and educational practice and future research

The findings of this doctoral thesis highlight the importance of studying the construction of a leadership identity in female school principals, even more so when they carry out their work in difficult schools.

Firstly, the publications presented demonstrate how a strong and consolidated identity of school principals has important effects on the educational improvement of the school, and on the learning and professional development of both teachers and students. In contexts of vulnerability, students often have feelings of disidentification with the school to which they belong, families often show low involvement in the life of the school and the socio-economic situation of the school or institute is mostly characterised by a low level (Marshall and Oliva, 2010). In this way, the actions and leadership models presented by the participating principals could serve as a guide for building leadership strategies and practices oriented towards pedagogical and social justice purposes. Their stories show how through transformative leadership they were able to achieve a change in the dynamics of the school by including all members of the school community in this struggle.

Going deeper into these leadership models, and as highlighted in previous sections, the female school principals based their professional practice on values of collectivity, horizontality, democracy, active participation and social commitment. The lessons learned from their professional life stories could be essential to establish lines of action and training in the preparation of future school leaders, especially for those who develop their professional work in challenging contexts. In this way, in terms of the training of educational professionals, training programmes could value the enhancement of critical social knowledge that proposes education for equality and diversity as the core, and prioritises the elimination of social stereotypes that hinder the access and promotion of the female figure in leadership positions in the educational context.

In addition, in-service principals may find in these stories clues to improve and reorient the professional culture of their work teams towards values of cooperation and horizontality. These stories are also a means of giving visibility to certain discourses that have often been silenced due to their critical and challenging nature, and will undoubtedly be of value in the professional development of novice or aspiring school principals.

Finally, we offer a number of possible directions for future research in this thematic line. Studying the leadership identity of educational professionals is a key element in improving their professionalisation and, consequently, educational outcomes in their schools. Due to the emergence of several current lines that are committed to a more human and identity-based approach, we encourage future researchers to adopt this approach to their studies.

In this sense, it is considered necessary to develop more studies that delve deeper into the construction of identity of school leaders, and in particular, to analyse the gender factor in this constitutive process. We believe it is necessary to promote research that highlights the complexity that women face when taking on leadership roles that have traditionally been occupied by male figures. For this reason, investigating the professional life stories of women school leaders can make a substantial contribution to broadening the field of knowledge on leadership and educational improvement. Biographical and narrative approaches are very useful to give visibility to discourses that may not have been fairly and deservedly considered.

7

**Referencias
bibliográficas**

7. Referencias bibliográficas

—A continuación se muestra el listado de referencias bibliográficas por orden alfabético, usadas en los diferentes apartados de la presente Tesis Doctoral, excepto las usadas en las publicaciones, que se citan y referencian según convenga en cada una de ellas de forma específica—

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