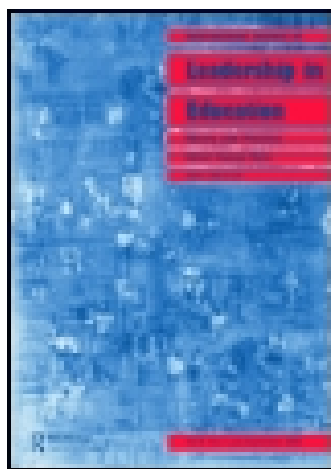


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Birth pains: emerging school leadership policies in eight school systems of Latin America

JOSÉ WEINSTEIN and MACARENA HERNÁNDEZ

School leadership has a core position within education policy worldwide. Comparative research in this area has been mainly focused on developed countries and has tended to neglect the situation of developing nations, including Latin American countries. Considering the above, this article presents the current status of school leadership policies in eight systems of Latin America: Argentina, Ceará/Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Dominican Republic and Peru. The results highlight that, while in the majority of these systems measures aimed in this direction have been implemented, school leadership policies are still at an early stage, with several problems, contradictions, and lack of internal and external coherence. The article ends with a discussion about the tensions embedded on the translation of the Anglo-Saxon discourse of school leadership to the particular context of Latin America and suggests the need to rethink a regional local-response to the goal of promoting principal leadership.

Background: school principals in Latin America

School leadership has taken an increasing importance in the contemporary educational discussion. Specialized research has recognized the significant role of leadership on school improvement, being considered the second most significant 'intra school factor' (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012). Several studies have explored the diverse ways by which leadership has influence on school results, such as the differential impact of leadership styles (Blase & Blase, 2000; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Spillane, 2006); its indirect action by way of teachers over student performance (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) or its importance on the generation of relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

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The study of school leadership has been concentrated primarily in developed and Anglo-Saxon countries (Oplatka, 2004). In this context, several studies have underlined the key factors that are essential to improve school leadership in school systems (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Dempster, Lovett, & Flückiger, 2011; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008), providing relevant orientations and strategies to be adopted by policy-makers in order to enhance it. Within these trends, the interest towards the study of non-Anglo-Saxon national realities has only recently begun to emerge within comparative research (Hallinger & Huber, 2012). These studies have stressed the complexities embedded on the transference of the school leadership perspective prevailing in literature to developing countries. Moreover, scholars have questioned their impact on school leaders practices and have revealed tensions that arise for their effective enactment from the political, social and cultural contexts of these countries (Brown & Conrad, 2007; Litz, 2011; Oduro, Dachi, & Fertig, 2007; Oplatka, 2004; Simkins, Sisum, & Memon, 2003).

The reality of Latin American countries in terms of the situation of school leadership has been scarcely addressed by research (Avalos, 2011; Vaillant, 2011). In this scenario, the most valuable information existing in the region comes from general data of school leaders' characteristics that has been collected as an appendix of studies aimed to diagnose student learning (such as SERCE-UNESCO or OECD PISA tests). The information obtained is an important first descriptive approach to this topic (Murillo, 2012; Murillo & Román 2013). However, major questions remain unanswered, such as the definition of the principal position and policies that governments have implemented regarding school leadership, as well as the critical problems faced within initiatives orientated in this direction.

Given this gap, this article examines the situation of school leadership policies in eight school systems in Latin America. In a major level of analysis, after describing the main regional trends, tensions and contradictions embedded on policies oriented to this purpose, the study questions the appropriateness of the Anglo-Saxon discourse to the Latin American reality and claims for a strong consideration of the socio-educational, cultural and political contexts in the journey of promoting school leadership (SL).

School leadership policies: dimensions of study

The growing importance of SL within research and its impact on student learning has contributed to its introduction in education policy agendas around the world (Pont et al., 2008). Hand in hand with these changes, international literature has moved towards the development of comparative studies that reveals the status and characteristics of SL policies in its various dimensions (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Barber, Whelan, & Clark, 2010; Pont et al., 2008; Taipale, 2012).

Focusing mainly on the reality of successful school systems, some studies have pointed out key policy orientations in this area which, briefly, correspond to: (i) the introduction of a clear definition of principal responsibilities and the focus on instructional leadership, by building

school leadership frameworks or standards and providing higher degrees of autonomy in school management; (ii) the enhancement of preparation and professional development opportunities for school leaders; (iii) the professionalization of recruitment processes; (iv) the installation of a systematic evaluation processes; (v) the distribution of school leadership within schools; and (vi) the strengthening of the attractiveness of the profession, through improvements in working conditions, salaries and a leadership career (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Pont et al., 2008). The promotion of SL policies has been related to a greater movement within education policies, which have favoured an increasing decentralization and autonomy for schools and, at the same time, a stronger responsibility of schools and their principals for student outcomes. Hence, decentralization, autonomy, accountability and school leadership have tended to go together (Elmore, 2010; Leithwood, 2001).

The literature review conducted for this research highlights seven dimensions for the study of SL policies in Latin America, which are illustrated in the figure below. These include: (i) responsibilities and standards; (ii) autonomy in diverse areas of school management; (iii) recruitment process; (iv) appraisal of performance; (v) working conditions; (vi) school leadership teams; and (viii) training. These different areas are intrinsically linked by the definition of the core responsibilities of school leaders and leadership frameworks or standards, which plays a pivotal position in respect to the others, by organizing and giving meaning to the rest. The study of SL policies should be complemented by the recognition of the institutions commissioned within the state administration to address this area. Likewise, they should also be analysed within

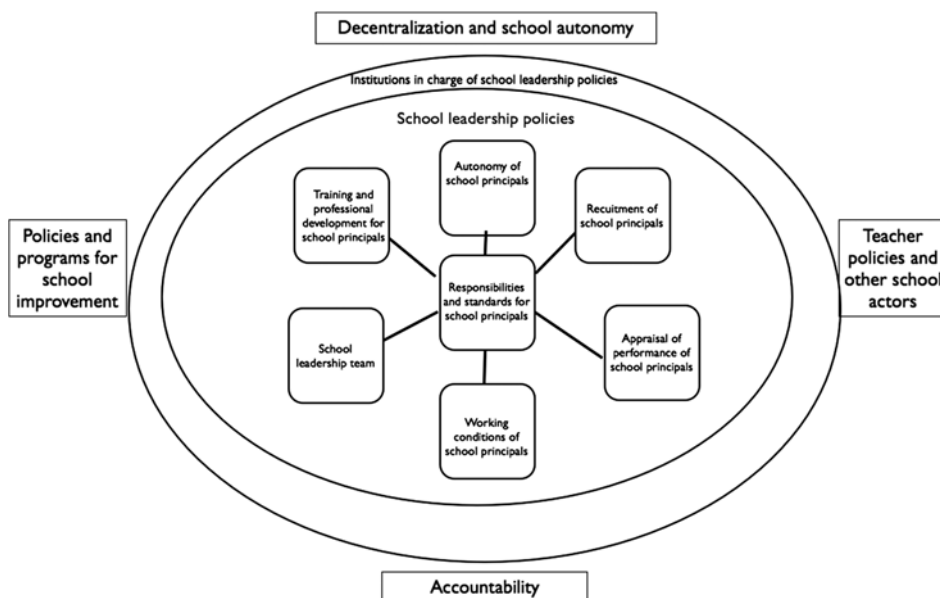


Figure 1. Conceptual device for the analysis of school leadership policies in Latin America

Source: author's elaboration

that the broader contexts of educational policies, in which some, in particular, have a close connection with SL (Figure 1).

A minimal definition of the dimensions addressed in this study is as follows:

- Responsibilities and standards are the definitions that systems adopt to establish the main duties to be performed by principals. They are explicit and are generally established in the educational legislation. Frameworks or standards set these tasks and levels to be achieved (CEPPE, 2013).
- Autonomy corresponds to the effective spaces of decision-making that are transferred to the principals. They refer to different areas of school management, such as human and material resources, policies regarding students (admission and discipline) and curriculum, among others.
- Recruitment corresponds to the criteria and procedures set to elect principals. They define the mandatory and desirable characteristics required in applicants, the procedures for assessing these criteria as well as the decision-making process related to recruitment, with their responsible authorities.
- Performance appraisal is the judgement, by higher authorities, on the work of a principal in a given period, focused on the responsibilities that have been assigned. The result may or may not be linked to positive or negative consequences for the principal.
- Working conditions are labour standards regulating the exercise of the principal position, including remuneration, working schedule, type of contract and length in office, monetary and non-monetary incentives, and the compatibility with other functions.
- School leadership team is constituted by other managers who collaborate with the principal in his duties. They may have roles and responsibilities more or less defined, and the principal may or may not participate in their recruitment.
- Training consists of professional development opportunities that the principal can or should do in order to acquire or develop specific skills. Stages can be distinguished in terms of pre-service, induction and in-service. It may be voluntary or mandatory, and linked or not to a principal career. It could be funded by various sources.

The comprehensive view of SL policies must take into account additionally two key aspects: on one hand, the *internal coherence* of the school leadership policies concerns the extent by which these different dimensions are coupled, both in its content and in its processes, timing and procedures. *External coherence*, on the other hand, refers to the correspondence between these policies with other education policies that are relevant to school leadership. In particular, there seems to be at least four areas to pay special attention to because of their incidence, actual or potential, on SL policies, namely:

- Level of decentralization of the school system and the correspondence between the existing school autonomy and decisions that the school and its principal can take effectively (Pont et al., 2008).

- Accountability systems and demands that are made to schools and principals in terms of their results as well as their associated consequences (Leithwood, 2001; West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010).
- School improvement programmes, which can impact on the principal work by setting priorities, gathering resources or establishing technical support resources for school (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009).
- Policies towards teachers and other school actors that can set powers, responsibilities or restrictions on the exercise of leadership (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Methodology

With the purpose of deepening the situation of school leadership policies in Latin America, eight school systems were selected: seven countries and one sub-national state, option taken in Brazil's case, where diversity amongst states was so dramatic that it did not seem possible to rely on only one national report. The cases considered correspond to Argentina, Ceará (Brazil), Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Dominican Republic and Peru. These systems were selected considering the criteria of diversity regarding characteristics, such as size, enrolment, public and private sector proportion of students and levels of decentralization. A table comparing some key features of the school systems and their number of principals is presented in Appendix 1.

The information of each school system was compiled from a standard and open questionnaire, which addressed the different dimensions of SL policies defined. This instrument was answered by a national senior researcher of each country.¹ The information provided by local researchers was complemented with a review of official statistics, current educational regulations and laws in progress and, when available, national studies on this subject. Subsequently, a validation workshop of the raised information and a comparative analysis of the same were conducted. The documentation was gathered and analysed in the second half of 2013 and early 2014.

This study is focused on the public sector for two reasons: private schooling accounts for a minority of students in most jurisdictions (except Chile), and there is little publicly available information about private schools.

In what follows, the article presents the results obtained from the information collected on the different dimensions of SL policies. Conclusions and discussions arising from a cross-reading of the data are developed in the last section.

The current state of school leadership policies in Latin America

Institutions and scope of school leadership policies

At a cross-level, policy for school principals in Latin American countries is governed by the Ministry of Education. In the cases of Brazil and

Argentina, in view of the greater degree of decentralization of their systems, these are defined by the Ministries of Education at the sub-national level.

Unlike the growing trend in advanced countries to establish national institutions dedicated to guide leadership policies (Pont et al., 2008), in the Latin American systems, no presence of specialized institutions or specific units in charge was identified within the respective Ministries of Education. Conversely, there is a low level of differentiation between institutional structures in charge of teachers and principals. Indeed, policies towards school leaders are anchored in an undifferentiated manner within the institutional framework, which—at a broader level—designs and develops education policies.

Sometimes, the prominent position of the Ministry in this area is shared with other actors. This is the case of Mexico, where the liability of policy aimed towards school principals and, more widely, to teachers, has historically been generated based on agreements between the Ministry of Public Education (MPE) and the National Union of Education Workers (NUEW) (Santibáñez, 2008). However, the political omnipresence of NUEW policy towards teachers and administrators in the country is currently in a period of change.

Finally, regarding their scope, SL policies have been mainly focused on the public sector, leaving a relative autonomy to private providers. While private schools share 17% of the proportion of students in the region (Bellei & Orellana, 2014), as shown in Appendix 1, these figures vary according to each system, being significantly higher in Chile (57,7%). In spite of the differences, the requirements for school principals in the private sector are, in most countries, only regulated around the eligibility criteria for the position. This broad autonomy granted to private education in Latin American differs from other international cases, in which freedom of education coexists with an important central regulation (for example, Holland as stated by Bal and de Jong, 2007).

Responsibilities and standards for principals

Educational legislation worldwide tends generally to define a vast number of responsibilities for principals, which are not always centred on instruction (Cuban, 2001). Comparative research conducted in the early 2000s in Latin America highlighted that principals were conceived as administrators with a role mainly focused on norm compliance and executing actions ordered by superiors (Borden, 2002).

Nowadays, with the exception of Ceará/Brazil where there is not an official definition of the principal role, official legislation of each system introduces the main tasks assigned to school leaders. Evidence regarding their core responsibilities in the studied systems, which are summarized in Table 1, reveals that with few exceptions, principals face a multiplicity of functions. Although their number varies from system to system, they are usually over 20 (in the province of Buenos Aires being 65!). These responsibilities tend to cover dissimilar areas and principals are held accountable for

Table 1. Main responsibilities of school principals

System	Main responsibilities and emphasis
Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High number • Dimensions: instructional, administrative and social • Well-defined instructional responsibilities
Ceará/Brazil	–
Chile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused definition • Emphasis on instruction and goal setting
Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of dimensions: goal setting, generation of organisational conditions, administration and instruction
Ecuador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High number • Variety of dimensions: goal setting, generation of organisation conditions, administration and participation of the school actors • Instruction with low emphasis
Mexico	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High number • Emphasis on administration and low presence of instruction
Peru	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low number • Variety of dimensions: goal setting, administration and instruction. • Limited emphasis on instructional leadership
Dominican Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low number • Variety of dimensions: goal setting, generation of organisation conditions, administration and participation of the school actors • Instruction with low emphasis and clearness

Source: authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

Note: in Argentina, the definition varies according to provinces. In Ceará/Brazil, a definition of the leadership role in the educational legislation does not exist. In México, the definition varies according to the level of education.

administrative tasks, management of school climate and school actors' participation, strategic management of plans or education projects, and the generation of the organizational conditions for the operation of their schools, with diverse emphasis according to the case. However, with the exception of Chile and Argentina, a general result emphasized by the table below is that the dimension less prominent in most systems—as Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Dominican Republic—is the instructional one. Indeed, principals' core responsibilities do not include generally classroom monitoring and feedback, evaluation of teaching performance or active participation in the professional development of teachers.

While the instructional role of principals has been strongly emphasized by literature focused on SL, in Latin America, there remains a strong belief that the teacher is an independent professional, who is not subject to the pedagogical authority of the principal. In other words, the role of school principals in the support, evaluation and development of teacher

quality is minimal or non-existent. Additionally, although they are not usually identified in the general responsibilities stated within educational legislation, principals are accountable for the implementation of a wide range of school and after-school programmes that are promoted by national or sub-national authorities. These programmes are of great importance in education policy since they constitute the specific modalities by which the driven guidelines ‘go down’ (Aguerrondo, Nuñez, & Weinstein, 2009), many times containing resources of great value for schools (as it happens with computers in the programs ‘Conectar Igualdad’ from Argentina or with textbooks in Ceará/Brazil). Moreover, in several school systems, principals play an important role in social policy. In fact, they represent the intersection between education, health and other social sectors in order to reach students or even poor families targeted by specific programmes. In this respect, not only there are benefits that cover both sectors (such as school diners), but also there are compensatory transfer programmes for families (such as ‘Tarjeta Solidaridad’ in the Dominican Republic), which require principals to fulfil tasks of identifying the student beneficiaries. These broader social-educational functions of principals, which arise from the context of poverty surrounding many Latin American schools, are only made explicit as part of their task in Argentina.

A new trend that has gained strength within SL policies worldwide involves the development of performance standards or school leadership frameworks for principals (CEPPE, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Ingvarson, Anderson, Gronn, & Jackson, 2006).

Table 2. Existence of standards or school leadership frameworks

System	Existence of standards or school leadership frameworks	Year	Dimensions
Chile	✓	2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Curriculum • Management of resources • Organizational climate
Colombia	✓	2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional competencies (management, instruction, administration and community) • Behavioural competencies
Ecuador	✓	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Curriculum • Management of resources • Organizational climate
Mexico	In process		
Peru	In process		
Dominican Republic	In process		
Argentina			
Ceará/Brazil			

Source: authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

As a way to respond to the historical lack of a proper leadership profile for principals in Latin American countries (Bordem, 2002), during the last decade, there has been an expansion of standards or leadership framework in the region. As shown in Table 2, there are some school systems that already have introduced these instruments (Colombia, Ecuador and Chile), while others are in the building process stage (Peru, Mexico and Dominican Republic). Only a minority (Argentina, Ceará/Brazil) has not yet ventured in this direction. In countries in which they exists, standards are aimed to precise the principal role and to orientate it to an instructional or transformational profile. In fact, as illustrated in the table below, standards tend to specify responsibilities in similar areas, as organizational and instructional leadership, administration of resources and school climate or community.

The implementation of school leadership framework introduces, however, a major contradiction within regional SL policies. Indeed, the content of standards shows little alignment with the major responsibilities that educational regulations confer to principals already presented, and as it will be discussed later they do not enjoy a central position within school leaders' recruitment, evaluation or training.

Autonomy

Although different reforms orientated to decentralization were introduced in several Latin American countries during the 80s and 90s, Ministries of Education—in both central or sub-national levels—retain substantive authority over major issues as national policy, evaluation, curriculum frameworks and resources management (Hanson, 1997).

Coherently, principals' autonomy in Latin American schools is limited and they tend to have no decision-making capacity in the management of human resources, and particularly in the hiring and firing of teachers, as well as setting their salaries. The exception, in this scenario, is seen in the case of Chile, where there has been recently some improvement, although in a limited degree, in this area. Indeed, the Quality and Equity Act (2011) introduced the authority to annually propose to the local educational authority the dismissal of up to 5% of the teachers of the school, who must belong to the poorly evaluated group within the system of teacher professional evaluation. The autonomy on budgetary resources and the ability to decide on the use of school resources are rarely addressed by the legislation of the school systems studied. In the cases, where it exists, it corresponds only to limited resources (as in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru) or is an area to be determined in consensus with school boards (as in Dominican Republic and Peru). In opposition, principals usually have decision-making spaces regarding the disciplinary rules of the school or in respect to extracurricular activities offered. As for other curricular subjects, such as the definition of evaluation criteria or textbooks used during the school year, the situation is differentiated within the cases.

In spite of autonomy in these latter aspects, it is clear that principals in Latin America lack of autonomy over strategic areas of school management and leadership. The restricted degree of decision-making power conferred to school leaders appears as a considerable obstacle to undertake the role expected to be fulfilled within leadership standards or frameworks, and it poses, thus, a difficulty for the recent policies in implementation.

Recruitment

Historically, recruitment of school principals in Latin America is made within teachers who seek to acquire higher salaries and recognition (Vaillant, 2011). Supporting this tradition, the studied school systems, as shown in Table 3, tend to have two eligibility criteria for the principal position: the possession of a degree in education and experience as classroom teachers. These requirements may be more flexible in a few cases (as in Colombia where other non-teaching professionals can access the position after completing a specific short course) or may be complemented in others (such as Ecuador where graduate courses are required or the need, when it comes to schools with predominantly indigenous population, to dominate the respective language).

The professionalization of recruitment processes of principals has been a particular focus of current international policies towards school leadership (Clifford, 2012). Until recent years, selection of school

Table 3. Eligibility criteria for school principals

System	Teaching experience	Teaching degree	Specialization or courses in management	Others
Argentina	✓	✓	✓	Positive teaching evaluation To be vice-principal Moral qualities
Ceará/Brazil	✓	✓	✓	Moral qualities
Chile	✓			
Colombia				Professional degree and 4–5 years of experience
Ecuador	✓	✓	✓	Native language in schools with indigenous population
Mexico	✓	✓		Positive teaching evaluation
Peru	✓	✓	✓	Moral qualities Good health
Dominican Republic	✓			Moral qualities Good health

Source: authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

Note: in México, eligibility criteria are different to the ones provided in the table for upper technical education. In Argentina, the specialization required varies according to provinces.

Table 4. Recruitment process for principals

System	Procedure		Actors involved
	Merit	Exams	
Argentina	✓	✓	Jury: it may include supervisors, teacher union and school community
Ceará/Brazil	✓	✓	School actors
Chile	✓	✓	Committee: local authority, civil service and local teacher good evaluated
Colombia	✓	✓	National committee of the civil service
Ecuador	✓	✓	Jury: school actors
Mexico	✓	Only for upper secondary	Primary and secondary: MPE and NUEW Upper secondary: MPE
Peru	✓	✓	Committee: local authority and other school leaders of the area
Dominican Republic	✓	✓	Committee: local authority, other school leaders of the area, school actors and teacher union

Source: authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

Note: in Argentina, recruitment processes vary according to provinces. In Chile, recruitment criteria are defined with autonomy by each local authority. In Mexico, current practice is in process of reform.

principals—and teachers—in Latin America was dominated by bureaucratic and political interests of teachers unions, local authorities and parties (Palamidessi and Legarralde, 2006; Scartascini, Spiller, Stein, & Tommasi, 2010). However, in almost all cases (with the exception of Argentina), school systems have recently renovated their recruitment process, to ensure certain skills among principals, as well as the primacy of technical over political criteria. As Table 4 presents, in most systems, these processes have been built combining merit and opposition exams, in which candidates must submit their professional background but also undergo standardized tests or other demonstrations of knowledge and skills (as in Peru where, after paying national qualifying test, the candidates must analytically 'solve' a problematic local case). Also, the tendency has been to constitute local juries or committees, so that the decision is not made exclusively by a sole authority, but corresponds to a more collective deliberation process in which different local actors—related to school (as in Ecuador, Argentina, and Ceará/Brazil) or to the wider locality in which it is inserted (as in Chile, Peru and Dominican Republic)—participate. Furthermore, some countries (such as Colombia or Chile) have specialized services within the state to professionalize access to public service in general, which support these new practices of principals recruitment.

The efforts to professionalize recruitment processes have not been free of conflict, since they have challenged the power of decision previously possessed by other social actors or local authorities over appointments. The Mexican case, in which the new legislation seeks to reduce the capacity of incidence of the powerful teachers' union in these appointments, is emblematic in this regard.

Performance appraisal

Performance appraisal of educators has not been a priority in Latin American school systems and, as a recent comparative research has stated, there are only few experiences of teachers' evaluation. In general, the absence of systematic appraisal systems has been related to its consideration as a conflictive political field, with significant tensions between policy-makers, unions and other social actors (OREALC-UNESCO, 2012).

Evaluation of principals is an area in which the school systems studied are venturing into in an incipient way and just partially. As Table 5 summarizes, only Argentina, Chile and Colombia have regular performance appraisal processes of their school principals, which are annually developed, while Ecuador and Mexico were building, at the moment of the study, initiatives on this direction. When an evaluation system exists, its consequences are not clearly favourable for the development of principals' capacities or the schools they run. Indeed, while in Argentina, positive results might contribute to the promotion of principals, in Chile, a negative performance may imply an early dismissal, with no explicit opportunities for their professional growth. *Contrario sensu*, the case of Colombia could be highlighted, since for more than 10 years, it has practised an evaluation system in which the required functional and behavioural competencies established on leadership standards are measured, with consequences for professional development after a first negative evaluation.

Among the difficulties to install evaluation processes in the region, there is the fact that the majority situation of principals has usually

Table 5. Performance appraisal of principals

System	Existence of systematic assessment	Year and frequency	Dimensions	Consequences
Argentina	✓	Annually		Vertical promotion
Chile	✓	Since 2004 Annually	Working plan for the year and period	Possibility of early dismissal
Colombia	✓	Since 2003 Annually	Functional and behavioural competencies	Second year: return to teaching for teachers and exclusion of teacher career for other professionals
Ecuador	In process			
Mexico	In process			
Peru				
Dominican Republic				
Ceará/Brazil				

Source: authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

Note: in México, process is different in upper education. In Argentina, the dimensions of appraisal vary according to provinces.

indeterminate contracts, in which they assume an ownership of the position (which they could only lose for serious offences) and which should not be *threatened* by evaluations. Likewise, the absence of defined performance standards for principals that are fully operational inhibits the possibility of having an objective and clear benchmark to support this assessment. Finally, the usual lack of performance evaluation of classroom teachers which has dominated the school systems, otherwise weathered by teacher unions, gives account about not having yet installed a ‘culture of evaluation’ that goes beyond students learning to permeate all processes and actors of the schools.

Career and working conditions

As school leaders are generally recruited from teachers with some years of experience, the principal position is usually a terminal stage in the professional career that classroom educators might develop in their *vertical promotion* (OREALC-UNESCO 2012). In fact, in the considered school systems, teachers, once in the principal role, are in a state of near-completion of their professional career. On the one hand, there are no opportunities for mobility and professional development within the principal position, with non-existing progressive stages defined for professional performance that could set, as they move from one to another, different responsibilities. On the other hand, the rise to another position after being a school leader is not a part of the existing career (with the exception of Argentina that offers the possibility of becoming a school supervisor). The possibility of having to ‘go back to the classroom’ after being a principal is usually considered a professional setback.

Coherently, as Table 6 illustrates, it is not surprising that in most school systems—such as Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Peru and Dominican Republic—the principal position has had an indeterminate length, from which individuals quit only for retirement reasons. However, some school systems are changing their regulations, looking to have a school

Table 6. Length and dedication of the principal position

System	Length of the position	Dedication to the position
Ceará/Brazil	4 years (re-election)	Exclusiveness
Chile	5 years (re-election)	Exclusiveness
Ecuador	4 year with re-election	Combination with teaching
Mexico	Primary and secondary: unlimited Upper secondary: 4 years	Combination with teaching or other leadership positions
Argentina	Unlimited	Combination with teaching
Colombia	Unlimited	Exclusiveness
Peru	Unlimited	Exclusiveness
Dominican Republic	Unlimited	Exclusiveness

Source: authors’ elaboration using information of each school system.

leader position fixed for 4–5 years and delimited by periods (as Chile, Ecuador or Ceará/Brazil), which will necessarily raise the issue of the professional future after the exercise of this role.

Working conditions of principals vary according to the different education systems, but tend to reward with monetary incentives their increased responsibilities. Except in the case of Argentina, all school systems analysed and established a wage gap between classroom teachers and principals, with variations going from 16% in Mexico, to 200% above the national minimum basic salary of teachers for some principals in Chile. Additionally, with the exception of Ecuador, such additional amounts also vary within the same school system. In fact, there are systems that strongly reward principals which work in an urban area (like Colombia), in upper secondary schools (like Mexico), in a school with double shift (such as Peru), or in schools which have more students from socio-economically disadvantaged families (such as Chile). In any case, principal's compensation is also affected according to the actual dedication they have to the position, which—as shown in the table below—include principals who are hired exclusively and fully to perform this work (as in Ceará/Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Dominican Republic) and those which devote only a few hours of their time (combining it, in diverse proportions, with teaching) as it could be noted in Ecuador, Mexico and Argentina.

School leadership teams

One of the main policy claims surrounding school leadership emphasized during the last decade has been the approach towards the constitution of leadership teams, aimed at supporting the increasing responsibilities of principals within schools (Pont et al., 2008).

In the Latin America school systems studied, as Table 7 indicates, while principals are accountable personally for the progress of the school setting, there are generally other managers who have some degree of impact on the organization and form part of the team on which the principal may rely for his role, with the sole exception of Peru. Typically, leadership teams are more present in schools with higher enrolment and on secondary schools. The distributed leadership structure within the school systems studied presents variations in the specification of the roles assigned to each member: in some cases, there are precise definitions (such as Mexico or Ecuador) and in others, vagueness prevails or they are seen as flexible supports that principals can activate to their own convenience (as in Colombia). In general, as stated in the table below, team leaders—which could include vice-principals (as in Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico and Republic Dominican), coordinators, secretaries or inspectors, among others—tend to fulfil tasks in matters of administration, discipline or instruction. There are some cases where they must have a specialized profile in the instructional field and should play a significant role in this area (as in Argentina with vice principals, or heads of pedagogical units in Chile).

Table 7. School leadership teams

System	Composition	Role and responsibilities
Argentina	Vice-principal Secretary	Mainly pedagogical Administrative
Ceará/Brazil	Coordinator Secretary Financial and administrative adviser	Pedagogical Administrative Budget
Chile	Vice-principal Unit of pedagogical and technical issues Inspector	Same tasks as the principal
Colombia	Coordinator	School discipline, instruction and non-teaching tasks
Ecuador	Vice-principal Inspector	Mainly instructional Administrative, and school discipline and climate
Mexico	Vice-principal	Mainly instructional
Peru		
Dominican Republic	Vice-principal Counsellor Coordinator	Instruction, school climate and other school policies Psych educational Mainly instructional

Source: authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

Note: in Argentina, functions vary according to provinces. In Chile, an individual definition of positions does not exist. In Ecuador and Mexico, the existence of a team depends on the size and/or teaching level of the school.

A significant contradiction noted within the existence of leadership teams in the systems studied is that principals, with the recent exception of Chile, tend to have no authority in their hiring, and they do not have an influence in their performance evaluation, their wages or eventual dismissal. With regard to teachers, strategic decisions on the school human resources are taken directly by national or sub-national authorities.

Training and professional development

Although limited, earlier studies about school leadership in Latin America have raised an important concern regarding the opportunities for preparation and professional development of school leaders in the region and have appealed for a stronger effort from school systems to improve this area (Borden, 2002; Vaillant, 2011).

Coherently with previous research, school systems analysed tend—unlike the most successful school systems (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Kelley & Peterson, 2007)—to not have clear and coherently structured training policies for principals. Indeed, as Table 8 presents, existing training opportunities stand for not covering the different stages of principals career and are generally focused on continuous professional development. As it could be seen, there is a strong weakness in the pre-service stage,

Table 8. Training opportunities for principals in each stage career

System	Pre-service	Induction	In-service
Argentina	✓		✓
Ceará/Brazil	✓		✓
Chile			✓
Colombia		✓	✓
Ecuador	✓	✓	✓
Mexico			✓
Peru			✓
Dominican Republic			✓

Source: authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

which is only set as a requirement and available as a specific preparation programme in some Argentinian provinces, in Ceará/Brazil and Ecuador. However, even in cases where having completed postgraduate studies is a formal prerequisite to access the position, existing programmes are criticized in terms of their quality and relevance. Even more complex is the situation in the induction stage, in which training does not exist in most of the analysed systems. When opportunities are available (as in Ecuador and Colombia), they correspond to a brief update on general topics of education policy.

On the other hand, within the most extended opportunities for in-service training, the trend is towards developing programmes for principals to access voluntarily, as Table 9 illustrates. In general, studied school systems tend to have a mixed educational offer for principals training, which is developed both by private providers (universities, foundations, etc.) and public providers (Ministry of Education, state universities, etc.).

However, opportunities for principals' professional development have several problems. Firstly, providers are often not specialized in school leadership (with the exception of the School of Principals recently created in Dominican Republic), and their action in this field is an appendix, usually secondary, inside training and professional development offered to teachers.² Secondly, the ability to ensure quality training to school leaders as an integral part of education policy is usually restricted by a regulatory weakness of public institutionality. Indeed, in most countries, there is not an adequate capacity to evaluate or track the on-going training programs. In addition, there is a clear absence of short and long-term promotion actions (an exception is the programme 'Excellence principals of Chile') that could enhance the capacities of the existing providers. Finally, the content and skills promoted by in-service training are not coherently aligned with pre-established performance standards or leadership frameworks. Moreover, in most cases, programmes have an academic and theoretical approach to leadership and have little relationship with the actual practices that principals develop in their schools and with education challenges that they face daily.

Table 9. In-service training for principals

System	How offered	Institutions responsible
Argentina	Voluntary in all cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutes linked to the MoE • HE institutions
Ceará/Brazil		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE institutions • MoE
Chile		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE institutions • Foundations • MoE
Colombia		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoE • HE institutions • Foundations
Ecuador		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MoE • HE institutions • Recent creation of the National University of Education
Mexico		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE institutions • Foundations • MoE
Peru		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE institutions
Dominican Republic		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE institutions • Foundations • MoE • Recent creation of school of principals

Source: authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

Note: MoE = Ministry of Education. HE = Higher Education.

Conclusions and discussion

The global discourse of Anglo-Saxon origin regarding the necessary enhancement of school leadership in education policy is verifiable, although incipiently, in the Latin American region. In fact, the review of SL policies in the eight considered school systems, which was conducted on the bases of an exhaustive and comprehensive framework created for the study, highlights a clear movement in this area and an introduction of recent changes on the traditional way of conceiving school leadership. Almost all countries, except Argentina, have recently installed (or are currently undertaking) initiatives for promoting the instructional role of principals, as well as trying to professionalize the principal position, with the expectation that these actions will have a positive impact on education quality of schools and, as a result, in the system as a whole.

It is noteworthy that the emergence of school leadership policies in the systems studied occurs generally in some of its dimensions. Indeed, the introduction of standards or school leadership framework for principals is a majority trend. Furthermore, many school systems have made efforts in installing new, more technical and less discretionary principal recruitment processes, with predefined profiles, public procedures and collective decision-making instances. Additionally, in some cases, performance appraisal procedures have been implemented, while in others, they are currently being discussed and designed. Lastly, almost all the systems have introduced monetary incentives to better reward the position and positively differentiate it from the status of classroom teachers. In sum, certain basic elements in the path of the professionalization of school leaders are being installed.

In contrast, there are certain dimensions of SL policies that have been less modified, if at all. This is what visibly happens with principals' autonomy in respect to teachers, which still remain as an area extremely restricted. Indeed, principals practically do not have influence in recruitment, career development, promotion or dismissal of teachers in the school they lead. The same is true with respect to the school leadership team. Similarly, working conditions of principals are, in many cases, indefinite, so that once they get the position, it remains so for life. Finally, very few strategies are observed in principals' training, which generally lack of pertinence and quality assurance systems, and are not differentiated according to their career stages.

The enhancement of SL policies among the school systems analysed has followed a rhythm of uneven progress, being possible to distinguish them in terms of the level of installation and in terms of the number of dimensions addressed. As Table 10 presents, on the one hand, while Chile and Colombia lead the implementation of SL policies in multiple dimensions, Peru, Dominican Republic and Ceará/Brazil have made efforts in only few ones. On the other hand, Mexico and Ecuador were—at the moment of the study—in process of designing and installing new SL policies, while Argentina represents the country less advanced in the implementation of policies tending to improve the role of principals and their leadership.

Table 10. Classification of school systems

School leadership policies	Variety dimensions (+than 2)	Limited dimensions (-than 2)
Installed	Chile Colombia	Peru Dominican Republic Ceará (Brazil)
Not installed or in the process of implementation	Mexico Ecuador	Argentina

Source: authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

But even in school systems, in which these policies carry a longer stroke and are more comprehensive, several similar difficulties appeared. Indeed, regarding *internal coherence*, the initiatives undertaken by these systems in the diverse dimensions of SL policies have a weak articulation between them, situation that severely limits their potential impact. The case of standards makes it clear: standards are elaborated and then socialized for how the principals' performance should be, but they are sparsely concerted with the hypertrophied functions fixed by the legislation required for principals to be met. However, they are not modified! The same lack of internal consistency can be found in terms of other relevant relationships, such as the existing one between standards and professional training, among others. In this perspective, the pivotal role of standards is not accomplished, and what could be established as a policy, according to our conceptual device, emerges only as partial measures.

On another side, regarding *external coherence*, even if this was not a focus of deepen analysis, it can be visualized that the promotion of SL policies in the region has been inserted within the frame of school systems highly centralized at national or sub-national level, in which there has not been a clear movement towards school autonomy. This element has resulted in the limited autonomy given to principals. So, far away from the aims in which standards are based in terms of instructional leadership to be deployed, in reality, principals have not been empowered with greater autonomy in setting policies for their schools or for the management of teachers. This situation is obstructing the effectively exercise of instructional leadership within schools. More generally, the policies in favour of the professionalization of principal's work seem to be in tension with the broader definition of the teaching profession that predominates in Latin American, characterized by high job security and little professional accountability (OREALC-UNESCO, 2012). Therefore, school leadership policies do not achieve their self-constitution entirely, since the relationships that principals hold up (in respect to the national or sub-national authorities) or down (in respect to the teachers and the school community) have not been sufficiently modified yet.

Additionally, emerging SL policies in Latin America have other restrictions: they are limited to principals working in the public sector; they scarcely distinguish between different contexts in which the SL must be displayed (urban–rural, primary–secondary, etc.) and they do not have enough accumulated knowledge about the situation of the principals, their needs and expectations. Besides, institutions responsible for designing and implementing these different measures generally lack professional expertise, being one more addendum (also weak) of the institutions commissioned to education policies in general.

Only recently specialized literature around SL has begun to study the situation and effects of the school leadership discourse in realities different from those of most advanced countries (Hallinger & Huber, 2012; Litz, 2011; Oduro et al., 2007). In fact, there has been a progressive interest within comparative research to explore the particular processes by which global discourses in this area are recontextualized in different countries and education systems, under the agreement that, according to Ball,

'policy ideas are also received and interpreted differently within different political architectures, national infrastructures and national ideologies' (Ball, 1998).

The study of the emergence of SL policies in Latin America highlights the complexities embedded in their installation, in terms of their internal and external coherence with the most comprehensive educational policies—making up what we metaphorically called *birth pains*. The problems and tensions underlined by this article maintain similarities with those revealed by the incipient literature on this topic in developing countries (Oplanka 2004). Indeed, in general, Anglo-Saxon-oriented SL policies, which claim for an instructional role of school leaders,³ are in conflict with key aspects of the social-educational and political contexts of these countries, usually marked by a high centralization of the Ministry of Education and a limited school autonomy, the assignation of an administrative and social-educational role to the principals, the additional tasks arising from other educational programmes, and the absence of exclusivity of the lead role for those who exercise it (Brown & Conrad, 2007; Oplanka, 2004). In the Latin American case, this particular reality is manifested exemplary in the difficulty of introducing transparent and competency-based principal recruitment processes. These new screening procedures have not been easy to install, since beyond its novelty or the involved technical difficulties, they entail removing decision power historically assigned to local authorities, political parties or teachers' union, modifying, then, a frame of influences, which may even lead to favouritism, practice that has been in exercise for decades. In this sense, the context transforms a seemingly technical decision over SL into one with a strong political content, harming interests of stakeholders and requiring mobilizing broader social-political capacities from policy-makers.

To move forward in their efforts to enhance SL, education policies should take note of these Latin American characteristics. It is true, as the studied systems show, that to reach a first stage in the simple professionalization of the school leaders role and task is something unavoidable and essential. But in order to go further and build school leadership capacities, challenges are greater and require robust and integrated policies, in which strategic dimensions, like training, cannot be absent. Either way, initiatives in this area should not forget the particularities of the prevailing educational context. This means that is not advisable to seek to introduce *recipes* from other socio-educational realities, mechanically, because the risk is to stay on the surface, with partial measures, sparsely articulated and of low impact. Moreover, the failure to consider the history and school context may lead to wasting great opportunities to exercise leadership, as it happens, for example, with the role of community leader (Fuller & Clarke, 1994) and the social-educational role that school principals usually have in the Latin American school culture. Without forgetting the internationally accumulated knowledge, the reinvention of the principal position should properly read its own realities, in its potentials and difficulties, and should be learning from its own institutional experience, beginning with its own birth pains...

Notes

1. Following the order of the school systems, researchers in charge were: Claudia Romero, Sofia Lerche/Eloísa Vidal, Macarena Hernández, María Victoria Angulo, Eduardo Fabara, Sylvia Ortega, Ancell Scheker and Ricardo Cuenca.
2. Teachers training also presents, as new research shows (OREALC-UNESCO, 2012), weaknesses and a low regulation of its quality.
3. There are also opinions who question this restricted version of instructional leadership in developed countries (Hornig & Loeb, 2010).

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Appendix 1

Table A.1. Characteristics of the educational systems selected

	Number of schools	Enrolment	Public enrolment (%)	Urban primary enrolment (%)	Levels with main responsibilities
Mexico	151,368	25,410,432	91.6	–	Central levels and states
Argentina	34,411	8,416,967	74	–	Provincial
Peru	51,167	6,005,956	76	74.5	Central level
Ecuador	27,389	3,362,907	74.2	66.3	Central level
Colombia	22,937	9,645,918	86	69.5	Central level and territorial entities
Chile	13,091	3,006,752	42.3	88.8	Central and municipal level
Dominican Republic	11,594	2,208,889	76	70.3	Central level
Ceará/Brazil	8,281	1,835,632	82.7	75.4	State and municipal

Source: Authors elaboration using information of each school system.

Table A.2. Principals in selected countries

	Argentina	Ceará/ Brasil	Chile	Colombia	Ecuador	México	Perú	Dominican republic
Number of school principals in primary and secondary education	27.863	2,723	8.431	8.447	29.857	159.032	34.484	10.052
Average age	47.5	41	52,1	53	49.6	–	–	–
Women	83%	76%	55%	35%	55.2%	43%	38.5%	60%*
Men	17%	24%	45%	65%	44.8%	57%	61.5%	40%*

Source: Authors' elaboration using information of each school system.

Note: for Ceará/Brazil and Colombia, information only corresponds to public education.