

The Future of Educational Administration in Mexico: What path will it take?

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Abstract

This paper is part of an international study of the preparation of school directors. This initial review looks at Mexico in the context of recent policy and the international movement to identify competencies necessary for educational leadership. Special attention is given to the power of the teacher union, funding of education, and the role of the supervisor. We address the following questions: What are the policies of the central government? What are some of the underlying assumptions that appear to be guiding these policies? Whose interests are served by this approach? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Mexican education? What are the critical issues to address in educational administration?

Key terms: <formación de administradores> <administradores de la educación> <tendencias de la política educacional> <México>

Sinopsis

Esta ponencia es parte de una investigación internacional referente a la capacitación de directores de escuela. Esta reseña inicial plantea a México dentro del contexto de una política reciente y del movimiento internacional para identificar las competencias necesarias para el liderazgo en la educación. Se presta atención especial al poder del sindicato de maestros, a los fondos monetarios destinados para la educación, y a la función del supervisor. Se plantean las siguientes preguntas: ¿Cuáles son las políticas del gobierno central? ¿Cuáles son algunas de las presunciones fundamentales que parecen estar guiando estas políticas? ¿Cuáles son los intereses que se benefician de este enfoque? ¿Cuáles son las fortalezas y debilidades de la educación en México? ¿Cuáles son los puntos críticos que se deben de abordar en la administración educativa?

Términos clave: <Administrator education> <educational administrators> <educational development trends> <Mexico>

Introduction

The preparation of educational administrators is carried out within the historical, political, and cultural context of each country around the globe. Some have invested heavily in preparation programs for principals and set up minimum standards and certification requirements. Others have relied on a more informal system where a university degree and classroom experience are the most common qualifications. There is a need to study each context to look at similarities and differences.

To begin this process, researchers from Australia, Canada, England, Jamaica, Mexico, Scotland, South Africa, and the United States have gathered to undertake the International Study of Principal Preparation. This paper will begin with a study of just one of the countries: Mexico. What is the recent approach of the central government? What are some of the underlying assumptions that appear to be guiding these policies?

Whose interests are served by this approach? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Mexican education? What are the critical issues to address in educational administration?

The study is international in scope. For too long educational administration has taken a parochial approach within the confines of one region (Dirnmock & Walker, 2000;

Hallinger, & Leithwood, 1996; Heck, 1996, 1998; Leithwood, & Duke, 1998). This has made sense in so far as education is locally governed and strongly influenced by local culture. However, education is a universal human endeavor and would benefit from the same broad approach that has characterized other disciplines.

Most educational and social science research that has moved beyond national borders is still done within Western, English-speaking nations (Diaz-Loving, 1999).

There is little communication, for example, between English and Spanish speaking countries. The barriers of language, distance, and culture have proved

formidable. Yet there would seem to be great possibilities of learning from one another. How do different countries face the common problems of involvement in decision making, communication, change, and competing values? Alternative models are likely based on different philosophies and assumptions. Examination of other ways of doing things might occasionally lead to wholesale adoption of these practices, but more appropriately, it can lead to re-thinking one's own approaches. Practices can then be modified to fit the context. There is increasing interest in taking an international look at issues in educational administration. Hallinger, Walker, and Bajunid (2005) examined the contrast in values between East and West. East Asia has a collectivistic orientation with extensive collaboration among those of equal status while western societies strive for a democratic community. O'Sullivan (2005) traced the recent history of educational administration in England for an international audience beginning with the Education Reform Act in 1988 that created national curriculum, open enrollment, compulsory assessment, and local management of schools. Since 2000, the National College for School Leadership, a quasi government organization provides leadership development.

Huber (2004) conducted a study of school leadership development in fifteen countries. He chose leading industrial countries from Europe and Asia with a history in research in practice. They were: Sweden, Denmark, England, The Netherlands, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, South Tyrol-Italy, Singapore, Hong Kong, New South Wales-Australia, New Zealand, Ontario-Canada, and Washington, New Jersey, California-USA. The research questions were, "how are (aspiring) school leaders qualified in different countries of the world, what kind of training and development opportunities for school leaders are offered?" (p. 315).

Huber's study is noteworthy because it attempts to go beyond mere juxtaposition to carefully compare and contrast. The dimensions of comparison included: provider, target group, timing, nature of

participation and professional validity, aims, contents, methods, and pattern. Among the interesting findings was the notion of connecting leader development with school development. School based teams worked together to improve multiple aspects of the school. The content of programs emphasized communication and cooperation over administrative and legal topics. The methods included adult learning principles. In some places programs were structured in multiple stages of qualifications across the professional career. What follows is an examination of the condition of principal preparation in Mexico.

Education in Mexico

According to the Census Bureau, Mexico had population of 97.473 million people in 2000. About 57% of them are under 25 years of age (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática [INEGI], 2005) The population growth is 1.6 % per year. By now, Mexico may have surpassed 101 million people.

The Mexican Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to a free, public education through grade 9. The average number of years of school completed is 7.9; among the indigenous population the average is lower: 3.4 years for women a 4.6 years for men (INEGI, 2005). This difference raises serious concerns of inequality.

In 1989, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari announced the Education Modernization Program This program was intended to improve the quality of basic education, raise the level of schooling in the general population, encourage community participation in educational matters, and decentralize the educational system (Gerschberg, 1999; Tatto, 1999; Schmelkes, 2001). The most important aspect of the modernization program was the transfer of responsibility for education away from the federal government to the states in the belief that local education officials were better able to serve the needs of a diverse population. The transfer of responsibility was formalized in the early 1990's through two pieces of legislation. The National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education (Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización

de la Educación Básica) of 1992 mandated the decentralization of public education, curricular reform of primary and secondary education, and the strengthening of teacher education programs (Gerschberg, 1999; Tatto, 1999, Lozoya, 2004). The General Education Law (La Ley General de Educación) of 1993 established standards for the operation of decentralized schools, promoted community participation in school decision making, redefined basic education, and evinced a renewed interest in the preparation of school principals.

The Education Development Program (Programa de Desarrollo Educativo) of President Ernesto Zedillo continued many of the same objectives. Between 1998 and 2000, educational spending increased by 21 % (UNESCO, 2004).

The National Education Program (Programa Nacional de Educación) of President Vicente Fox continued the emphasis on decentralization and community participation. Flores (2004) lauded the Fox emphasis on equity and quality. Today, spending in education represents 7% of the Gross National Product, which is greater than the spending of many developed countries (INEGI, 2005). However Mexico has one of the lowest rates of tax collection in Latin America. There is a large informal sector (e.g. street vendors) and there are no mechanisms to collect taxes from these groups.

UNESCO (2004) has suggested that per cent of GNP is a good indicator of government commitment to improve the quality of education. Mexico has set the ambitious goal of 8% of Gross National Product to be spent on education. There is some disagreement over how the GNP should be calculated to assess progress toward this goal (Flores, 2004).

The Schools of Quality Project (Programa de Escuelas de Calidad, PEC) has enrolled many schools with the goal of increasing student achievement and involving parents. Funding for equipment and maintenance of schools has been substantial, and funds are provided to families in poor areas to offset the loss of income that results from sending their children to school rather than having them work. Initial World

Bank evaluations indicate that these programs have been successful in keeping children in school, and extreme poverty has been reduced to 20% (Aguilar & Viveros, 2004). In addition, The number of children receiving an education has been on the rise, led by a pre-school increase of 9.3% between 2000 and 2004 (Flores, 2004).

Principal Preparation

Principal preparation in Mexico had its beginnings in the early 1900's when the School of Higher Education of the National University (Escuela de Altos Estudios de la Universidad Nacional) started a principal preparation program, but by the 1920's the program had disappeared. Rafael Ramirez, a rural teacher and later a supervisor, might be considered the founder of educational administration in Mexico. He was the first to use the term supervision as a substitute for inspection (Ramirez, 1963). He visited US rural schools and was impressed with the way they were organized. His books on educational administration were written in the 1930's (although they were published in early 60's).

Garcia (2004) argued that Ramirez' reflections are full of wisdom and none of the current books in Mexico has reflected as deeply on educational administration problems since that time. In the late 1950's and early 1960's, institutions of higher education began to offer courses in organization and educational management, supervision and evaluation in Mexico. In 1975, a Master's degree in Administration and Development Programs in Human Resources at the School of Higher Education in Management and Administration (Escuela Superior de Comercio y Administración, ESCA) was established to train administrators for educational systems in Latin America and the Caribbean (Alvarez, 2003). In 1979 the first modern-day undergraduate program in educational administration was implemented at National Pedagogical University (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, UPN).

In 1984, the National Poly- Technical Institute (Instituto Politécnico Nacional, IPN) established the Master's program in Administration of Institutions of

Higher Education. In 1989, ESCA founded the Master's in Administration and Development of Education (MADE, 1989), aimed at the formation of leaders in educational institutions and coordinators of research projects (Alvarez, 2003). At the same time, workshops and bachelor's and Master's programs in educational administration were implemented in private schools across the country. In 1998 the Secretariat of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública) established the first national curriculum for the preparation of school administrators (Alvarez, 2003).

In 1992 and 1993, the National Agreement for Modernization of Elementary Education (Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica) and the General Education Law (La Ley General de Educación) established standards for the decentralization of the operation of schools, promotion of social participation from all stakeholders, redefinition of basic education, a re-examination of the value placed on the teacher's role, and redesign of preparation programs for primary and secondary school directors. These standards led to the Education Development Program (Programa de Desarrollo Educativo 1995-2000, PDE) that created the first courses national courses for elementary and secondary school principals (Alvarez, 2003). The Schools of Quality Project (Programa de Escuelas de Calidad, P EC) had two fundamental ideals: participation of the school with the community and consensus on the way the project should be implemented. Part of the funding was allocated to teacher development and more than 15,000 school directors had access to staff development courses in public and private universities. The quality of the course offerings is open to question since too few professors have a background in educational administration or are familiar with problems in the field.

The Roles of Supervisors in Basic Education

Part of principal on the job training is interaction and support from area supervisors. The SEP considers supervisors and principals as

“promoters and coordinators of the pedagogical work of teachers” (SEP, 2004). As such, their roles are to delegate functions and responsibilities in the development of school projects. The supervisor’s responsibilities are to explain the goals and content of the educational project and to promote an adequate environment for reflection about educational problems that each school faces. The principal is responsible for the elaboration and implementation of the school project, which entails a critical analysis of problems based on identified findings (SEP, 2004).

Calvo, Zorrilla, Tapia and Conde (2002) provide an overview of educational supervision in Mexico. Supervisors play an important role in basic education. They represent the bridge between primary schools and educational authorities. Supervisors report pedagogic practices to improve learning and cooperation and have great influence in decision-making rules. They are responsible for promoting good practices in education, as well as orienting principals, teachers, and staff.

The 1993 General Education Law regulates educational services and emphasizes the importance of supervision and the application of policy. Heads of school sectors and supervisors must have expert knowledge of labor laws, disciplinary actions, and relationships between teachers and supervisors.

In 1996, the GEL devised a new focus on pedagogical work. New rules called for a dynamic, participatory, and collective approach based on horizontal networks of communication between general supervisors (formally known as head of sectors), zone supervisors, school principals, and teachers. Further, with respect to “equity in education,” the law encouraged supervisors to offer preventive and compensatory incentives to disadvantaged communities. There is a mandatory requirement of 4 visits per school year to each school under supervision. The first visit is called the diagnostic visit and the others are called formative visits. Supervisors are required to complete reports before and after each visit based on defined rules and regulations. Supervisors report annually the activities and achievements of the school district.

There are no specific rules concerning formal training of supervisors or any other requirement of continuous training. Both, formal and continuous training, have been included in the general provisions of teacher’s certification and regular professional development of teachers.

As result of educational decentralization in Mexico, the Mexican Educational System (Sistema Educativo Mexicano, SEM) established the National Program for Permanent Education of Teachers in Basic Education in 1998 (El Programa Nacional para la Actualización Permanente de los Maestros de Educación Básica, PRONA), which led to the creation of Teacher Centers in each state to provide services and organize workshops.

The Role of the Principal

UNESCO (2004) identified factors worldwide to improve education. Although more study is needed, it appears that increased autonomy for schools is necessary for improvement. In addition, a supportive central government, professional support, and accountability with monitoring and achievement data are part of an improvement program. For these strategies to be carried out, effective school principals are critical to create the right management structures.

The selection of principals is a key issue. In the late 1980’s Cuellar studied the promotion system in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico and concluded that it was obsolete. It was based on a ladder system that, “functions in a bureaucratic way which favors those applicants with the greatest seniority and those who follow the bureaucratic procedure with the most detail” (1989, p. 11). Seniority is still an important requirement to become a principal or supervisor. In fact, seniority, in-service training, and union loyalty are the main requirements.

According to the National Education Program (NEP) (2001-2006), effective principal leadership is essential to the achievement of the goals and mission of the school program. The principal’s responsibilities are to promote cooperation among staff and teachers, instill active and responsible participation of parents, encourage dialogue with the community about

purposes of education and means to improve the educational services, and motivate teachers to reach school goals, generate an adequate school environment to promote learning and positive interaction, and respect for diversity and culture and protection of quality and natural resources.

Educational Administration in Latin America and Mexico

Educational authorities in Latin America and Mexico have only recently begun to implement programs for the preparation of educational administrators (Braslavsky & Acosta, 2001). Many of the developers of these programs are not educational administrators themselves but politicians and government officials. As a consequence, educational preparation programs tend to emphasize the nomothetic approach to understanding organizational operations rather than an idiographic approach. These modes of analyzing organizational behavior were developed by Jacob Getzels and Egon Guba (1957). The idiographic mode focuses on the behaviors of the people who inhabit an organization and their uniqueness from one organization to another or over time within the same organization. Nomothetic analysis focuses on the formal structures of the organization, which are typically contained in organizational charts, operating manuals, and organizational roles and regulations and which are assumed to be transferable from one organization to another. Scholars of organizational behavior have tended to explain organizations by focusing either on their structure (the nomothetic approach) or their human side (idiographic approach). Understanding an organization as primarily a structure is more conducive to a managerial approach to leadership. Placing primary emphasis on the human side of an organization is more congenial to a human relations approach to leadership. These terms have been used widely in the study of history, psychology, geography, and other human sciences (Owens, 2004).

In Mexico and in Latin America little new knowledge of educational administration has been produced and practical administrative experience in

not taken into account to address the problems educational administrators face. There are exceptions to this trend. Brazil was the first country to decentralize educational governance in the 1970's. Domestic textbooks on educational administration appeared in the 1980's and there are well-established university departments dedicated to training school administrators. As a result, there is a more general diffusion of knowledge about educational administration and a higher level of professionalism among local educational leaders than in any other Latin American country (Teixeira, 1961).

In Buenos Aires the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP UNESCO) has recently proposed nine inter-related competencies for educational administrators. The competencies are based on research on educational leadership conducted by scholars writing in English, French, and Spanish. The standards specify competencies for educational administrators in strategic planning, leadership, communication, delegation, conflict negotiation, problem solving, teamwork, anticipation, and participation of diverse communities (Pozner, 2000).

In her discussion of the need for such skills in school leaders, Pozner (2000) describes a continually changing world characterized by rapid technological development, the democratization of institutions, and a global environment. School administrators will need the competencies to meet the challenges of a changing environment.

The first competency is strategic educational management (*gestión educativa estratégica*). *Gestión* is translated as management, but in the Latin America it means much more and comes closer to the English word, leadership, because it promotes the centrality of pedagogy, teamwork, innovation, a professional orientation, vision, and Senge's (1990) ideas about systems thinking, and organizational learning.

The second competency is leadership, which emphasizes transformation. In addition to vision and teamwork, the leader brings spirit to work (Kouzes & Posner, 1995), consolidates advances, and brings about new learning.

The third competency is communication that moves beyond bureaucratic style. Communication in a bureaucracy is uni-directional; such communication creates a torrent of messages that convey little meaning; it assumes understanding and compliance. Rumors rush in to fill the need for information. Communication in a strategic management model emphasizes vision and commitment of participants. The system includes a network of exchanges and encourages diverse types of communication.

The fourth competency is delegation. Pozner (2000) includes decentralization of decision making as part of the philosophy of delegation. The rationale is to empower and revitalize in order to make the organization flexible and responsive by leveling the organizational pyramid. The fifth competency is negotiation of conflict. Often conflict is hidden and must be confronted if the organization is to advance. Pozner suggests that negotiation and confrontation of conflict can build a culture of consensus that includes tolerance, recognition, information, learning commitment, participation, and feedback. The school administrator needs the skills of negotiation to manage both internal and external organizational conflict.

The sixth competency is problem solving. Pozner (2000) suggests seven stages: identify the problem, explain it, identify alternative strategies of intervention, decide on a strategy, design and implement the intervention, and evaluate the achievement.

The seventh competency is anticipation, which is looking at the environment to predict future possibilities. In a stable setting, linear projections can be accurate; in changing times, predictions are more difficult and must encompass a variety of additional factors.

The eighth competency is teamwork. Educational administrators need to transform the work culture to create networks of collaboration, define work in terms of projects, value team meetings, and encourage continual formation of teams.

The ninth competency is participation of diverse constituencies. There is complex interaction between school and society and the school must

respond to ever changing demands. The school administrator must understand the educational environment through careful attention to data and develop strategies to orchestrate the involvement of parents and community.

In Mexico, work in the field of educational administration is increasing. For example, Garcia (1999) reviewed the literature to identify the most effective leadership, practices of elementary school principals. He concluded that good principals are persuasive and organized, lead by example, have moral values, and are leaders in the community.

Slater et. al. (2003) examined the attitudes of educational administration graduate students in the US and Mexico toward their preparation programs. They found that Mexican graduate students spoke favorably of their formal preparation, the rigors of their research, and had a more management oriented approach to their profession. Students in the US emphasized the application of theory to, practice, acquiring skills on the job, and orientation toward people. Mexican students were also candid in speaking about the deficiencies of their program.

Adequacy of Standards and Competencies

The IPE-UNESCO standards are also being reviewed for their application to educational administration preparation in Mexico. Caution must be taken in applying the standards without modification because Latin America is diverse area with differences in economic, social, and political history, culture and geography. Nonetheless, the proposed competencies present a starting point for dialog about the professionalization of educational administration in Mexico.

The IPE-UNESCO competencies can guide preparation programs in educational administration and their adequacy can be judged by how well they relate to problems of practice in the field. The IPE-UNESCO standards are quite similar to the Educational Constituent leadership Council (ELCC) Standards developed in the US (Wilmore, 2002).

Table 1.
ELCC standards with IPE-UNESCO standards

ELCC	IPE-UNESCO
Educational Constituent Leadership Council Standards in <i>Principal Leadership: Applying the New ELCC Standards</i> , Elaine Wilmore.	Instituto Internacional de Planeamiento de la Educación www.iipe-buenosaires.org.ar
1. Vision	1. Educational challenges
2. A learning culture	2. Strategic leadership
3. Management	3. Leadership for innovation
4. Families and community	4. Communication
5. Ethical	5. Delegation
6. Political context	6. Negotiation
7. Role of university	7. Problem solving
	8. Anticipation
	9. Teamwork
	10. Participation and educational demands

The IPE and the ELCC standards are open to criticism. Both take a nomothetic rather than an idiographic approach to understanding organizations. Both owe their origins to the school effectiveness movement. Neither set of standards is grounded in empirical research nor do they reflect practitioner craft knowledge. Neither address actual educational administration problems—that is they are not validated in practice. While both represent seminal work in the field and provide a framework for further discussion of educational leadership, neither represents the final word.

Issues in Mexican Education

Teacher Unions

The National Teachers Union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE) continues to play a dominant role in education. Martin and Solórzano (2003) identify a number of issues that

confront public education in Mexico and unions top the list. Education authorities, including the teacher's union, are seen as rife with cronyism and unable, or unwilling, to react to the nation's educational problems in creative ways.

The teacher union defends teachers from any legal challenges and assures that they have permanent job security. Although salaries are low, especially in rural areas, compared to industrialized nations, Mexican teachers are the best paid in Latin America.

The Carrera Magisterial (merit pay ladder) has increased the pay of most teachers in the last 15 years.

School directors earn only about \$100 a month more than a teacher. Garcia (1999) sees the issue of school hours as one of the hardest to resolve. The excessive load that is given to school administrators and the shortened school day are not sufficient. Four and half hour school days may not allow enough time for learning. Teachers often teach a

double shift (doble turno), one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Funding

Lack of adequate funding continues to hinder the system's ability to serve users effectively and efficiently. Consequently, public education no longer commands the respect it once did as one of the symbols of Mexico's revolutionary past and the source of national political leadership. Increasing numbers of middle and upper class parents are opting for private education, particularly at the primary and university levels. The nation continues to struggle with school failure and huge drop out numbers, especially among rural and indigenous populations. And the exodus of young people crossing the Mexico - United States border for better educational opportunities and jobs represents a loss of valuable human resources (Martin and Solórzano, 2003).

Supervisors

The World Bank (2002) found that supervisors did not provide adequate support to principals, teachers, and schools. The gap was due to high turnover of supervisory staff and the need to train new employees in multi-grade pedagogical techniques suitable for rural schools. Visits to remote schools were fewer than needed.

The individual style, personal interests, and position of power have kept them away from their main role of promoting pedagogic work. Instead, they are distinguished for their administrative function of control and inspection, and, sometimes, they have been used for union purposes (Calvo et al., 2002). Garcia (1999) concurs that there is insufficient support from the supervisor who assumes the role of inspection and vigilance rather than support and assistance.

Centralized Management

Garcia (2004) maintains that despite plans for decentralization and advancement of educational administration, decision-making is still concentrated within the Secretariat of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP). Alvarez (2003) characterized educational management in Mexico as centralized, bureaucratic, authoritarian, with short term goals, and significant isolation between government sectors and society. The system tends to prefer centralized changes rather than initiatives emerging from teacher at the local level. Legislation, rules and regulations are overwhelming and extremely rigid. They prevent the accomplishment of educational goals and objectives of schools programs. The centralized system yields little space for innovation, creativity, and innovation.

Leadership Challenges and Preparation of School Principals

Alvarez (2003) examined to the extent to which participants in educational administration preparation felt they had gained UNESCO competencies. He used a mixed method approach to investigate the preparation of directors, supervisors, and heads of sector (n=267) in educational administration programs in several areas of Mexico.

The directors gave positive ratings to national courses and other professional development courses. They found benefit from programs that addressed human relations, communication, motivation for team work, social and educational participation, and innovation in education, but they also said that they were not well prepared and needed more practical experience.

Although Alvarez (2003) reported positive views of school directors above, he went on to cite more general problems such as a lack of connection between theory and practice; professors of higher education who do not apply theories to the real world. He called for flexible models in educational administration to take advantage of new information systems and technology. Conventional educational programs do not incorporate or take into consideration real experiences of principals and students.

There is a lack of diagnostic studies, investigation, and evaluation of educational administration programs. Principals have not been able to develop leadership competencies to coordinate work in groups and involve a variety of constituencies.

García (2004) reported that less than thirty percent of the courses taught at the National Pedagogical University (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, UPN) were directly related to the knowledge base of educational management, and teachers were often not trained in their field. Future administrators did not participate in field experience prior to beginning their principalship.

Slater, Boone, Alvarez, Topete, Iturbe, Munoz, Base, Romero-Grimaldo, Korth, Andrews, & Bustamante (2005) used focus groups to determine the challenges faced by school directors in Mexico City. They spoke most often about lack of dedication of teachers, staff, and administrators, and their frustration of not being able to motivate them. UNESCO (2004) mentioned motivation of teachers as a world-wide problem in developing countries.

Cisneros-Coehour and Merchant (2005) bring to light the lives of four high school principals in Mexico. Each of them is working a second job that appears to require an equal commitment of time and energy. Teachers are employed on an hourly basis, and principals complained that the education department foisted a teacher candidate upon them. But perhaps most interesting is that principals say that conflicts with teachers are one of the biggest challenges of their jobs.

Several directors also thought that their supervisors lacked the motivation to do their jobs or change traditions and routines in school to more directly affect the mission. Other challenges were the difficulty of communicating with both parents and teachers when there was a conflict and concern about parents who were unable to support either the school or the teachers. They wanted preparation to meet these challenges and named the experience they learned on the job and the advice they received from others as being important.

Slater, Esparza, Peña, Topete, Alvarez, Cerecedo, & García (2005) also examined challenges faced by rural school directors who worked in isolated, poor communities. They had no preparation before becoming directors. Their stories expressed frustration with teachers who did not come to school on time and were not committed to education.

Yet the directors threw themselves into their work and persisted over the years. They asked for training in how to work with teachers, and they brought qualities of idealism and persistence to their work.

Alternative Approaches

A traditional approach to address the needs of school directors would be to provide formal coursework before they assumed a leadership position. School directors could take courses toward a degree, continuing education workshops, including teacher training, curriculum planning, leadership courses, and certifications. This is the approach taken in Canada and the US. One of the marks of a profession is an identified body of knowledge and skills that must be attained to enter the field.

It might appear that professionalization of educational administration should be a goal in Mexico. However, it should be pursued with caution. Professionalization of educational administration could have adverse effects on women and minorities. Any time that additional requirements are imposed, some groups may be excluded, particularly the poor, those without access to higher education, or those who suffer discrimination. Blount (1998, 1999) examined the history of educational administration in the US and found systematic exclusion of women. Professionalization of educational administration in Mexico might lead to similar discrimination of women.

Many areas for school director preparation have been mentioned throughout this review: teamwork, listening to the needs of the community, building unity, being inclusive, understanding the social role of educators, understanding social and political aspects of the local and global environment, seeking to

improve others, planning, and service. Some have recommended training in negotiation, which is the ability to deal with difficult people and situations effectively as well as handle conflict and build a culture of consensus. These skills might be developed through formal coursework. However, some goals seem to be so broad that they might not lend themselves to accomplishment in the classroom.

Social participation refers to involvement and participation of students, teachers, educational administrators, and members of the community within the life and culture of the school. More broadly, it involves equity and inclusion of all students within the educational system of the country. Providing education for all within the society guarantees the ongoing social and political participation throughout society. Social participation is an attitude and a philosophy that needs to be grounded in the context where the work will take place. One approach would be practical experience to link theory and practice. School directors could have the opportunity to observe others in action and to be observed during their own practice. The idea is to have education "on location." In other words, training in administration should be in the environment where it will be practiced.

Cordero, Contreras, Garcia, Gonzalez, Dipipo, AIsop, Duran, Tove, Sanchez, & Ames (in press) worked to establish a program to develop teachers in rural Peru. It follows the principles of social participation in a setting similar to that of rural Mexico. University professors visited the sites rather than having school teachers make frequent trips to distant universities. They worked in teams to develop action research projects that addressed the needs of the schools.

Conclusion

We have attempted to address these questions: What is the recent approach of the central government? What are some of the underlying assumptions that appear to be guiding these policies? Whose interests are served by this approach? What are the strengths and weaknesses of Mexican education?

In the conclusion we will briefly address the last question: what are the critical issues to address in educational administration?

Thus far, we have relied for answers on national and international statistical reports and a smattering of research. Yet we are given pause from two sources. Alfredo Cuéllar wrote in 1989 what could have been written today, "The last several years of Mexico's history have been characterized by critical conditions affecting its population. Economic and political issues have eclipsed discussion of other topics such as education." (Cuellar, 1989).

And it was more unsettling when we contacted a practicing administrator in central Mexico to comment on our questions. She is a director of a private pre-school and involved in educational meetings. Yet she was unaware of the national educational initiatives of the last three presidents. She expressed concern that teachers were more concerned about their place on the career ladder than the form of their classes and more focused on union activities than on what is important for children.

She went on to speak of broader problems of corruption, suspect election results, and drug traffic.

«A great insecurity exists in the country, an enormous mistrust of the government there is no confidence in the police, the system of justice, the Federal Election Office... The drug traffic, its connection with the government, with high level business people, the impunity, and nothing is resolved.. . .I am only a kindergarten teacher, very apolitical, but I love Mexico and I am very; worried» (Muciño, 2005).

These problems are not far from the US. The author Charles Bowden spoke with NPR reporter, Scott Carrier, one moonless night on the Arizona-Mexico border (National Public Radio, 2005). He said there were perhaps a thousand Mexicans unseen, nearby, making the crossing. Some would die and never be found; others would make it to send money back to family, more money than all the oil that Mexico exports.

Mexico is similar to other developing countries that face enormous political, social and economic

problems. It shares some of the characteristics of developing countries that are profiled in the UNESCO (2004) report. Many schools, especially those in rural areas are poorly equipped, teachers have little preparation, and directors complain about lack of teacher motivation and parent support. The UNESCO recommendations bear repeating: increased autonomy for schools, a supportive central government that dedicates 8% of GNP to education, professional support, and accountability with monitoring and achievement data.

Oplatka (2004) reviewed literature on the principal ship in developing countries published in English and concluded that there are multiple conceptions of the principal ship. He emphasized that before there is any transferability of practices from other countries, there will have to be more autonomy for principals.

Mexico is also an industrialized country that shares many characteristics with highly developed nations that have a history of research and education of school administrators. Huber's (2004) study of developed nations is suggestive. One idea is to connect leader development with school development. School based teams can work together to improve multiple aspects of the school. The content of programs should emphasize communication and cooperation over administrative and legal topics. The methods should include adult learning principles and be structured in multiple stages of across the professional career.

Cuellar (2005) expanded big list of recommendations for educational administration in Mexico. He would like to see a bibliography of information on educational administration, profiles of qualities needed by school directors, a diagnostic study of current skills compared to needed skills, research on school directors and the change process, comparison of school management with management in other professions, a new system for selection of school directors, enhancement of professional associations, and development of professional preparation.

Mexico must pay primary attention to its own unique context to build on a rich history dating to Mayan civilization, a culture that combines indigenous, Spanish, and modern ideas, extensive natural resources, and a growing economy. Inside the country, the teacher union exerts a powerful influence. Outside and to the north is the US. Imports and exports are not limited to goods and services. People, culture, and problems cross the border as well. The future of each country is entwined with the other. School principals have a key role to play in the improvement of schools and consequently in the development of the country. The unique position of Mexico at the crossroads between North and South America and between developing and industrialized nations makes it a potential source for new ideas that have global implications.

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