



Challenges of a successful first-year principal in Mexico

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Abstract

Purpose – This case study is an attempt to understand the experience of a school principal, Arnulfo. The research question is: what are the challenges of one first-year school director in Baja California, Mexico?

Design/methodology/approach – Arnulfo participated in an interview and five focus groups at the Ensenada State Normal School. He kept a journal of incidents completed during April-July 2006. A team of three researchers helped to write the case study. One researcher collected the data and wrote a summary in Spanish. A second researcher organized the material and translated it into English. The third researcher criticized and reviewed the write-up.

Findings – Arnulfo faced a variety of challenges, but the burden of paperwork was the most serious. It can be understood on a number of levels. Bolman and Deal's four frames to understand organizations and leadership help to explain the complexity in terms of structural, human resource, symbolic, and political. The political frame was Arnulfo's greatest strength. He advocated for the school, formed alliances with parents, and took action to get the support of others.

Practical implications – The analysis, if confirmed by broader studies with larger samples, would lead to several recommendations for educational administration preparation. Principals need to know about the structural tasks of paperwork; maintain relationships with supervisors to assure adequate support; understand the symbolic culture in which they work, and become savvy in the ways of politics.

Originality/value – The International Study of Principal Preparation will compare findings and offer perspective on the extent to which these issues are representative of challenges that directors face in eight other countries.

Keywords Principals, Educational administration, Mexico, Cross-cultural management

Paper type Case study

There has been increasing interest in the international study of the school principal. Day (2005) described the intent of the International Successful School Principals Project in a special issue of the *Journal of Educational Administration*. We have been engaged in a similar multi-country project with a focus on first-year principals, the International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP). The projects have similar objectives and questions. However, they complement one another by including countries from

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different continents with a variety of cultures and traditions. The specific intent of our international study (ISPP) is to relate challenges of first-year principals to preparation programs in educational administration. Here, we will focus on Mexico.

Slater *et al.* (2007) reported challenges faced by ten school directors in their first year in Ensenada, Mexico. This study takes an in-depth look at one of those directors, whom we call Arnulfo. In looking at one case, our intent is to understand the context of the school in which Arnulfo was working and the particular dimensions of the challenges he faced. In this way we may better understand the challenges of the ten school directors in the previous study and lay the ground work to survey broader groups of school directors. The research question is:

RQ. What are the challenges that one first-year school director faced in Baja California, Mexico?

The study of the principalship originated in Anglo-Saxon countries with decentralized educational systems (Oplatka, 2004) and has been part of the educational research agenda of the USA, England, Australia, and Canada for decades. In the USA, research dates from the early 1900s (Cubberley, 1923). Interest spiked in the late 1970s when the school effectiveness movement began to show that principal leadership was crucial to foster achievement in schools. This effort to increase student achievement was followed by an emphasis on school improvement. Promotion of school choice was added to the effort to improve student achievement. Since the 1990s, the two movements have started to come together in a new paradigm: effective school improvement (Muñoz-Repiso *et al.*, 2000).

By the second half of the 1990s, researchers began to show interest in educational administration from an international perspective. *The Handbook of Research on Educational Administration* dedicated a chapter to internationalization of educational administration (Chapman *et al.*, 1999). More recently, Bush and Jackson (2002) and Hallinger (2003) reported international studies of school leadership.

The study of the principalship has spread across cultures and continents (Oplatka, 2004). Spain took the lead in studying the principalship in the early 1980s, a few years after the decentralization of its educational system. Education decentralization that occurred in late 1970s and early 1980s served as a springboard for studying educational administration. Spain was influenced mainly by England, the USA, and France. Currently, Spain shows more progress in the field than any other Ibero-American country. The first books on the principalship were published in Spain in the early 1970s (Baquero, 1971) and continued to grow in the 1990s. Murillo *et al.* (1999) have published perhaps the most complete study of the principalship in Spain.

In Mexico, Rafael Ramirez laid the foundations for the study of school supervision in the 1930s (Garcia, 2004), but this work languished for several decades. Mexico revived its interest in the principalship and supervision in the early 1990s when a National Agreement on the Modernization of Basic Education was negotiated with the National Teachers Union (SNTE). This agreement dealt with the decentralization of basic education. The Federal Government delegated authority to the state to manage and regulate education and still kept some responsibilities like funding and the development of national curriculum.

Most of the interest in the study of the principalship came as an initiative of the federal and state governments. Curiously, the influence for the study of the principalship in Mexico did not come from US but from across the Atlantic. In 1997, the

Federal Government launched a project called *Proyecto Escolar* (school project), inspired by Spain's *Proyecto Educativo de Centro* (Antúnez, 1998). This is a school-based management project that starts by diagnosing problems and needs of the school and continues with mission, goals, priorities and activities to achieve goals. *Proyecto Escolar* expects principals to play a key-role in leading the project and involving faculty, pupils, and community (SEP, 1999). National and state workshops have been carried out to help principals in leading the school to achieve higher goals. In spite of *Proyecto Escolar*, only a few studies of principals have been carried out by Mexican nationals (Pastrana, 1997; Alvarez, 2002). Pastrana (1997) conducted an ethnographic study of a successful Mexican public school principal similar to that of Wolcott (1973).

Recently, a group of scholars from ten countries started the ISPP, a cross-cultural study on how newly appointed principals handle the first year in office. Although there are several differences among first-world and developing countries, the responsibilities of principals have many similarities such as, being the head of the school, supervising teachers to achieve school goals, working with parents and students, and taking care of the school building.

Throughout the world, principals face similar pressures. The principal is a sort of buffer. According to Webster's *New Encyclopedic Dictionary*, a buffer is "a device or material for reducing shock due to contact". Principals act as a buffer in many situations absorbing the pressure and responsibility stemming from problems among teachers, students, parents, supervisors, and community. Most conflicts have to be handled under principal's job functions. What might vary across different cultural settings is relevance, intensity, consequences, and values to handle conflicts. Hobson *et al.* (2003) have identified these issues faced by newly appointed principals in the USA, the UK, and other parts of Europe:

- feelings of professional isolation and loneliness;
- dealing with legacy, practice and style of the previous head teacher;
- dealing with multiple tasks, managing time and priorities;
- managing school budget;
- dealing with (e.g. supporting, warning, and dismissing) ineffective staff;
- implementing new government initiatives, notably new curricula or school improvement projects; and
- problems with school buildings and site management.

This study will extend Hobson *et al.* (2003) to examine the case of one principal in Ensenada, Mexico. It is part of the preliminary results of the ISPP. The main purpose is to examine the challenges of Arnulfo, a first-year principal. How does he face these challenges and how are they resolved?

Methods

Arnulfo participated with nine other first-year school directors in an interview and five focus groups at the Ensenada State Normal School. He kept a journal of incidents completed during April-July 2006. During these sessions, the team of three researchers identified him as one of the best school directors in the study based on his response to interview questions and participation in the focus group. One researcher collected the

data and wrote a summary in Spanish. A second researcher organized the material and translated it into English. The third researcher criticized and reviewed the write-up.

The case study approach has long been used in educational research. A few popular examples include Lightfoot (1983) who coined the term portraiture to describe her descriptions of good high schools. Kidder (1990) highlighted the life of all teachers when he described one fifth grade classroom. Corwin (2000) brought to life the experiences of students in an inner city Los Angeles classroom. Lewis (1961) is well known for his extensive anthropological studies in Mexico.

Schön (1987) is frequently cited in connection with helping practitioners to reflect. He described narrative inquiry that takes into account past, present, and future in which people are constantly changing and uncertainty is a given. He called this research knowing in action.

Coles (1989) grew up in a family that read and discussed stories. In his research he has tried to:

[...] note the manner of presentation; the development of plot, character, the addition of new dramatic sequences; the emphasis accorded to one figure or another in the recital and degree of enthusiasm, of coherence the narrator give to his or her account (p. 123).

Gardner (1995) applied the idea of story to leadership. The leader's story is a self-incarnation, with an audience that can resonate with the leader both personally and with the message.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called this research narrative inquiry and traced it to John Dewey's concept of personal and social experience. Learning is related to others and always in a context. Narrative is not reductionistic; it does not take things apart from context; rather it puts things together to make sense of them.

Nash (2004, p. 41) offered post-modern truth criteria to judge personal narrative: open-endedness, plausibility, vulnerability, narrative creativity, interpretive ingenuity, coherence, generalizability, trustworthiness, caution, and personal honesty. No one of these criteria can stand alone. Quality requires that they go together.

Behar (1996) went one step farther in, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*. She juxtaposed the study of herself next to the study of others and thereby deepened both. "I say that anthropology that doesn't break your heart just isn't worth doing anymore" (p. 177).

Richardson (1994, p. 516) described the way we hope to use writing:

I consider writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of "telling" about the social world, writing is not just a mopping up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of "knowing" – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable.

Li (2002) recounted the Tao of life stories and spliced multiple stories together like a Chinese knot work. She applied this method to educational leaders in ethnography of an urban principal (Li and Lal, 2006). In narrative inquiry, people tell stories of each age of their life and then determine which stories are most important and why.

In the following section, we can only begin to approach the levels of detail and insight of the above writers. However, we believe that it is important to tell the story of school director to give voice to the challenges that many directors face so that we might

draw attention to the need for administrator formation and the kinds of preparation that would be immediately valuable in the field.

The story

The school

Cruise ships dock in the harbor of Ensenada and tourists disembark for a day of visiting shops, dining in restaurants, and drinking in bars. Others enter driving along the coast road where the cliffs drop hundreds of feet to the ocean below. They pass three major research institutions on the way into town: La Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, La Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico-Ensenada, and el Centro de Investigacion Cientifica y de Educacion Superior de Ensenada. Beyond the universities and the tourist sites is a city of 400,000.

We drove south and east along busy streets to a new Wal-Mart and Costco in a shopping mall. There we met Arnulfo and followed his jeep to a *colonia* where the paved streets end, and a coating of dust covers old cars and make-shift houses. Jesús López Gastélum is an elementary school painted white with blue trim that rises substantially above the other dwellings. The nearby secondary school is also two stories and painted the same colors.

Arnulfo has a beard with tinges of gray. He is stocky and was dressed in a work shirt and jeans. His smile reveals just two teeth. He has a slight limp from a broken leg he suffered in an accident last year. In conversation, he strokes his bald head with an open hand when he tries to remember something. Arnulfo lives in the neighborhood near the school.

On the day of our visit, Arnulfo learned that the school was named after the father of one of the researchers, Gema López Gorosave. Her father came to Baja California as a professor when the state was still a territory and helped found the public schools. Arnulfo led us into the school and introduced us to his counterpart, the new director of the afternoon shift who is also named Arnulfo. They have less experience in public schools than a typical director, just 15 years and seven years. Directors are appointed and become *efectivo* through a process called *escalafon*, in which a commission of government and union officials ranks candidates by evaluations, education, and years of experience. Arnulfo and Arnulfo are not *efectivos* because they did not go through this process. Rather, they were *comisionados* or appointed outside of the process and have less job security.

We encountered two parents sitting in his office. Martha had left Mexico to go to the USA at the age of 16. She moved from place to place and after retirement, she entered a second marriage to a man with four children and moved back to Ensenada where her parents lived. She is the Treasurer of the Parent Teacher Organization. The president has lived all her life in Ensenada. She has polio and walks on crutches.

Arnulfo and these parents had recently had their picture in the newspaper and on television when they walked in a protest march. They were seeking funds for adequate bathrooms for the school. There are just two bathrooms for 450 students. Arnulfo is soft-spoken, but Martha called him a revolutionary like Emiliano Zapata. He might be like Collins' (2001) Level 5 leader who combines humility with persistent will.

He is concerned that he currently has three teachers who are not being paid. The government wants him to close these classes and combine them with others, which would bring class size close to 60. He said the government does not want the school

to grow. The area has grown rapidly with families coming from other parts of Mexico and other countries in Latin America. Some of them failed to cross the border into the USA and turned back in retreat south to Ensenada.

The parents are also raising money for the school. If the school raises 10,000 pesos, the government will match the amount. Arnulfo appears to work closely with parents, but there is less evidence that he takes a hand with instruction and guides teachers. There is a high turnover of teachers who get their first position in this school on the edges of the city and then move to a more desirable school nearer the center.

He shared a school report showing high-student grades, maybe too high, 9.8/10.0 in the first grade. An outside evaluation rated one of the classes as highest in the state. The content was impressive but the report also contained orthographic errors.

Jesús López Gastélum was established by the state in 2000 with three teachers and 65 students in Grades 1-6. In the beginning, teachers had to look for furniture in other schools and construct chairs out of wood posts and canvas. By 2001, there were six grades and a director. The community participated in the construction of classrooms. In 2002, the state provided materials to construct three more classrooms and started an afternoon shift. Thus, there was one school in the morning and another in the afternoon. Both schools continued to grow and by 2003 there were six grades in the morning shift and six in the afternoon. Arnulfo was appointed director of the morning shift in 2005 and continued as a teacher in the afternoon shift. Recently, there are 450 students in the morning shift.

Parents of students at the school are mostly lower middle class workers in *maquiladoras* (US companies located along the border to take advantage of lower wage workers in Mexico) or brick layers, domestic workers, welders or carpenters. Families have four to five children. There are government programs to aid families who lack adequate finances to go to the doctor or meet other basic necessities.

Arnulfo's father was an architect for major construction projects throughout Mexico. His family moved with him until he retired in the state of Baja California. Arnulfo earned his college degree in Elementary Education and focused on educational administration. In his thesis, he studied school directors and concluded that a leader cannot be a conformist. He started as a special education teacher. Now at 50 years of age, he has 21 years of service in public and private education. During this time, he had various experiences, working in departments of education carrying out administrative tasks. He completed his Master's degree and did a study of teaching in primary schools. He wanted to dedicate himself to management and policies necessary to run a school.

As part of this study he completed the Leadership Practices Inventory and scored himself highly on all five practices of leadership: challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, model the way, empower others to act, and encourage the heart (Kouzes and Posner, 2002). He also gave himself the highest score on aspects of spirituality: prayer and meditation, relationship with the transcendent, humility, honesty, and service to others.

During his studies, he became concerned that directors were appointed through a career ladder process (*el escalafón*) and did not necessarily have experience in leadership and management. The circumstances around his appointment were quite different. The previous school director left the school to take a post with the union. There was no immediate replacement. As time went on, teachers insisted that a

director be appointed. They rallied around the choice of one of their teachers, Arnulfo. He was selected by the will of the teachers.

During this time, Arnulfo promoted the school to become a member of el Proyecto Escuelas de Calidad (Schools of Quality Project) to gain economic resources to construct and maintain school buildings. He also wanted to provide more services to students and their families as well as promote his own political standing against political authorities who did not want the school to grow.

He sought support from the *Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia*, to offer free courses for students and parents at the school, such as *Escuela para Padres* (School for Parents) and *Educación para Adultos* (literacy courses to help adults complete primary and secondary school). He also obtained support from the *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social*, (a federal office that provides health care, retirement benefits, and support to workers and their families) to convene a group of senior women who put on a ballet folkloric for the Mother's Day festivities at the school. He had several purposes in mind to benefit students, the senior women, and teachers. The senior women would not only present the event to children but also take workshops at the school. Their work would relieve teachers of the burden of planning the event.

Arnulfo worked with private schools where he used to teach to obtain chairs and tables for students. He contacted a religious organization to offer daily breakfast for students at the school.

The school has an open area for sports and ceremonies, but no green areas. The director now has a small office with a copier and a few files. Arnulfo hopes to build a library, teachers room and administrative office. He wants to advance the reading and writing program for adults with the support of el Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos.

The management of resources was an enormous task because the population of the school was increasing. However, he reported that he was able to obtain resources. He knocked on doors when necessary, spoke with those he had to, and followed through on what he proposed. He organized parents, especially mothers who frequently attended school meetings. He was politically active in the promotion of the interests of the community and the development of common projects.

Despite Arnulfo's demonstrated capacity to gain the support and recognition of teachers, parents and supervisors to improve conditions in the school and despite the clarity that he expressed in his role as academic leader, he complained of multiple problems related to administrative work, especially at the conclusion of his first year (2005-2006). These problems limited his success as school director. He felt that too much time was consumed by filling out forms and completing documents with little support from supervisors.

His administrative tasks included reports, account statements, project descriptions, registrations, certifications, statistics, and minutes of meetings. Arnulfo did not know how to complete all of the forms that were required nor did he have sufficient time to complete them during the workday. Nonetheless, he wanted to complete all that was expected of him. Thus, he experienced administrative duties as a source of stress and worry. He felt a lack of assistance from supervisors to facilitate the completion of forms that he did not understand. This is part of the problem he confronted. He commented that supervisors forget to assist directors with this aspect and the lack of support was incomprehensible. With a feeling of powerlessness, he commented:

The task of administration is a problem without a solution. Supervisors want everything tomorrow. They are not interested in anything. They do not tell us how to do things and it takes a lot of work.

With agitation, he added that between the date of receiving the forms and the date for returning them, he was given just two days. His worry was compounded by the robbery of official documents for which he was held responsible. This consumed part of the scarce time that he had to hand in the work in good form on time. Investigations are slow, bureaucratic, and inefficient.

This problem is difficult for a new director who wants to complete paper work efficiently. He feared that his supervisors would see him as a person who was not responsible, and he had little time to meet the remaining deadlines. To comply, he followed two strategies: he took work home and met with teachers on Sunday.

Normally, handing in final documents takes place in the second week of July; in his first year supervisors advanced the due date for fear of union conflicts encountered during this period. Labor stoppages in some schools whose teachers fought for independent recognition of the union continued to block the conclusion of the school year.

Arnulfo concentrated his efforts on school statistics which he called *papeleo* (paperwork). He did not want to commit errors, he feared that he would not live up to expectations, he had little confidence that all would go well in the first year of his administration as he observed in the following comment:

I turned in documentation [...] the truth is I was fearful that the number of children enrolled would not square with the number of children registered in the official report [...] I thought that there were going to be problems, but in the end, it went well.

School statistics are collected at three points: at the beginning of the school year, the registration of children is reported; in the middle of the year, the number of children who drop out and the number who come in are reported, and at the end of the year the new increases and decreases are factored to determine the real number for each class and the total for the school. The worry that the final number does not correspond with reports at other points in time weighs heavily. He was not the director at the time of the original count. The *colonia* (neighborhood) where the school is located is growing rapidly.

Arnulfo is convinced that the function of the director must focus on the conditions that favor learning. He criticizes the educational dynamics of the system that consume his time in these ways:

The issues of paperwork are very hard. The director is submerged in administration rather than pedagogy. For supervisors, the best director is the one who runs the school well, that is, completes things on time in the right form.

Discussion

Arnulfo said that his main problem was how to handle the burden of paper work, which consumed most of his working time. At first, the issue may seem simple enough and perhaps not even relevant to broader issues of education and leadership. However, there are several levels upon which the issue can be analyzed. Each level has its own conflicts and reveals more than at first meets the eye.

Bolman and Deal (2003) proposed four frames to understand organizations and leadership: structural, human resource, symbolic, and political. These frames can be useful to understand the issue of paperwork from different perspectives.

The structural frame is like a factory in which rules, roles, goals, policies and technology are most important. The leader's job is to structure the task. The human resource frame is like a family. Needs and relationships are important. The leader aligns the organization with human needs. The political frame is like a jungle defined by power and conflict. The political leader advocates and develops a power base. The symbolic frame is like a temple. Culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, stories, and heroes are the central concepts. The leader inspires and creates faith.

We will use each of the frames to explore the challenges that Arnulfo faced. With each frame is a conflict that serves to highlight the dimensions of the challenge.

Structural: the conflict of where to spend time

The problem of paperwork can be understood from a structural perspective. Bureaucracies are formed as hierarchies to manage and control the flow of information. Each level collects information below and reports above. The smooth running of the organization requires defined roles and limited parts.

Although paper work is not directly related to learning, it may require more time and attention than any other duty. If first-year principals do not manage it well, they will never be able to address student learning. Arnulfo wanted to spend time managing resources, orienting faculty, conducting workshops, and socializing with parents at school breakfasts. He considered this type of leadership to be the key to school improvement, and it bothered him to the point of anger that paper work would get in the way and take up so much time. He was working to develop habits to systematize and organize files.

By the second year, Arnulfo had already learned to complete forms. Nonetheless, paperwork continued to be a problem during certain periods of the year. Supervisors wanted forms to be completed immediately. Arnulfo joked, "They want me turn in the forms yesterday." He considered the number of forms, official letters, and documents to be excessive.

The burden of paper work is aggravated when a director does not start with the skills necessary to systematize information rapidly or write clear and concise letters, documents, and forms. Nor does the new director necessarily have experience in developing stable budgets or directing an agenda for effective work.

The problem of paper work is relevant to the broader goals of administration and schooling because it can become a wall that the director has to leap daily. The time to examine how well children are learning is on the other side of the wall. Only those directors who can trampoline themselves over the barriers of paper work will find the time and energy to be an effective director. The problem is intense in the first year. It is not only bothersome and annoying, but it can prevent the director from addressing the questions of school improvement.

Human resource: conflicts between people

The problem of paperwork can also be understood from the human resource frame and conflicts between people. The central conflict for paperwork was between the principal and the supervisor. As a beginning principal with no support and direction to cope

with his duties, Arnulfo felt insecure in his performance. He experienced a high level of pressure and stress in trying to complete paperwork. It was the first time that he faced the challenge of completing many documents without sufficient instructions, and he could not count on help.

We noted that Arnulfo was not appointed through an official competition as is typically done with other directors. Thus, he could lose his position at the discretion of the supervisor if he was thought to be a poor director. Arnulfo knew that in the eyes of supervisors, a good director was one who handed in documents on time and without errors. They cared more about form than content. This is the most important indicator that supervisors use to evaluate the performance of the director. Although Arnulfo did not share this view, he feared being perceived as a poor director. These factors combined to make an otherwise competent leader feel intense stress about handing in documents.

He had good relations with parents and when he had to decide with whom to cast his lot, he decided to work with the parents. He risked alienating his supervisor, but he went ahead to engage in public protest with parents.

Symbolic: conflicts in the culture

Arnulfo's challenge of paperwork can also be examined from a cultural frame. The culture presents one view that may conflict with other cultures or with subcultures in the country. Mexico has been described as high in power-distance and avoidance of uncertainty (Hofstede, 1980). High power distance means that reverence is given to authority, and there are formal relations between supervisor and supervisee. The poor relationship with the supervisor described above is probably more a result of the norms in the larger system than personality differences. An authority might require reports as a sign of deference. The school director is expected to look up the organizational hierarchy rather than laterally to colleagues or down to teachers, parents and students. Arnulfo was nervous about how his supervisor would view his performance on paperwork.

Mexico ranked high in avoidance of uncertainty. Predictability and routine fit with the detail required in paperwork. Arnulfo attended to these areas but at the same time, he seemed to be more of a risk taker than would be expected of others in this type of culture. He was eager to create new instructional programs, improve school buildings, and advocate to retain teachers.

Political: conflicts in the broader system

The last frame is political and represents Arnulfo's greatest strength. He advocated for the school, formed alliances with parents, and took action to get the support of others. These efforts are especially noteworthy because they originated in an educational system characterized by a high degree of centralization and inefficiency.

Walker and Qian (2006) suggest that beginning principals get the message not to "make waves." Arnulfo heard the message from his supervisor but instead of following it, he chose to be a "wave maker." He is a good example of Walker and Qian's most important recommendation that principals know and articulate their values.

The Mexican educational system could be described as an industrial work environment. It is autocratic, bureaucratic and centralized. However, Arnulfo has the

values of the post-industrial work environment (Crow, 2006). He is independent and takes risks to advocate for the needs of students and parents.

The poor economic condition of the *colonia* can be understood in a national and international context. In Mexican politics the school is not likely to get much attention or resources without advocacy. Rural schools are notoriously under funded and lacking in human and physical resources.

The school is not far from the border and some of the students come from families who have attempted but not succeeded in crossing into the USA. The migration of men of all ages has resulted from the lack of work in Mexico and the tremendous economic opportunities in the USA. These factors would seem to be beyond Arnulfo's control, but he has taken an advocacy role to confront state officials and has been able to get some attention for his school through public action.

Recommendations

Programs dedicated to prepare first year principals are scarce in Mexico. Most education programs are focused on experienced principals. A preparation program could address the needs of first-year principals to handle paper work and school data in all four frames: structural, human resource, symbolic, and political.

In the structural frame, the prospective principal could learn about specific forms and details and even work in schools to practice the art of form completion. The director needs help to develop the skills necessary to prioritize, manage time, and write clearly, as well as to use technology to save time and promote accuracy.

The human resource frame implies that principals can foster student and parent communication. The perspective would first require the principal to develop an attitude that student learning, teacher development, and parent support are the defining mission of the school and prime indication of good leadership.

Considering the symbolic frame leads to intriguing cross cultural research questions. In the other countries of the ISPP (Australia, Canada, England, Scotland, South Africa, Turkey and the USA) what is the extent of the burden of paperwork? Does it divert the principal from essential tasks? What kind of paper work are principals asked to perform? Future cross cultural comparisons can shed light on the nature of the problem and suggest solutions.

The political frame can be addressed in academic programs that discuss the philosophy of power and political systems, but rarely are political skills like those of Arnulfo, taught in schools. They are learned on the job, if they are learned at all. And yet, good will and bright ideas are not enough to carry the day. The principal needs to learn political skills to unite people behind ideas, take action when the time is right, and act strategically.

Each principal will bring a combination of skills that belong to each of the above frames. Not all combinations will be effective in all schools. A school with a young faculty looking for inspiration and direction might do well with a director with a strong symbolic orientation. A school that lacked clear management procedures would need a director with a structural approach. One could conceive different combinations that would create a matrix of types of leadership skills and contextual factors inside an outside of the school. The last step after a good preparation program would be a good match and a careful introduction to a first administrative placement.

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