

## Carefully exercises the leadership and authority involved in the teaching role

### Principle V

#### Principal's basis

Throughout history, various philosophers have addressed the issue of authority in education. In this paper we will approach some ideas that we consider central: the relevance and need of authority as a possibility for student growth,<sup>1</sup> authority as a dual form of responsibility, and authority linked to the professional and affective competencies of the teacher.

In his *Pedagogy* of 1803, I. Kant states that "man is the only creature that has to be educated" (p.29). In his opinion, what turns animality into humanity is discipline, that is, a kind of coercion. This discipline makes it possible to control man, preventing him from being guided solely by his animal impulses. In this sense, this coercion becomes necessary, but not in order to form "trained" human beings, but with the purpose that this coercion finally leads to freedom. Thus, this coercion or discipline is necessary in a first stage, in order to be able to develop in society in an autonomous way, without entering into conflict with it. These ideas of discipline and coercion, as presented by Kant, allow us to approach a particular way of understanding authority, recognizing that imposition does not constitute its ultimate end, but that coercion is a means to help another to believe.

Towards the middle of the 20th century, H. Arendt (2006) proposes that authority should not be based on coercive means, but on a certain recognition or respect. An authority that requires power or force is precisely a lack of authority, since authority, properly understood, does not need these means to be validated or sustained.

For Arendt, what is central to the teacher's authority is that the teacher must assume a double responsibility: i) responsibility for the world and ii) responsibility for the children. In her opinion, there already exists a world, always older than "the new", whose preservation and teaching corresponds to the old. While such care protects the world from the onslaught of "the new" and their inherent newness, it also allows for the existence of a world into which they can come and into which they can be welcomed. But there is also a novelty inherent to "the new", which has to be cared for (preserved) so that they have their own chance in the world. Hence, the teacher's authority is at stake, therefore, in the way he/she embodies this double responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> The documents developed use the concepts of "educator", "teacher", "professor", "teacher" and their respective plurals indistinctly and inclusively. The same applies to the terms "child", "pupil", "student" and their corresponding plurals.

Now, how is the teacher authority 'embodied' or 'lived'? Teaching authority, as already anticipated, is based on the professional competence of the teacher. A teacher who is not properly trained, who does not study, who does not "[...] strive to be up to his or her task has no moral strength to coordinate the activities of his or her class. [...] Professional incompetence disqualifies the teacher's authority" (Freire, 2015, p.87-88). However, it would seem that even if professional competence is necessary, it is not sufficient. Respect for the teacher's authority also seems to be based on affective components, such as love, affection and internalized authorization on the part of the child (cf. Van Manen, 2010).

In this way, according to this brief and succinct tour, it is possible to highlight different dimensions and ways of approaching the concept of authority. Authority, which is necessary in the early years, is not - as one might think - a mere command or order, but rather a matter of accompanying on a path of growth and responsibility, based on concern, care and love.

The topic of leadership is increasingly in vogue. Broadly speaking, in the field of education, we find definitions such as "leadership is about improving pedagogical practice and school learning, and building organizational conditions within schools that allow for good teaching practices" (Elmore, 2010, p.12) or that school leadership is "[...] the work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieve the shared intentions and goals of the school" (Leithwood, 2009, p.20). From both perspectives, leadership is understood as a practice, as a task, and not as the fulfillment of a list of characteristics or personal attributes, as is commonly believed. According to Elmore, "Americans tend to believe that leadership is a set of personal attributes, attributes that, by definition, are difficult to teach precisely because they are character traits [...]" (p.99).

Moreover, not all leaders necessarily meet this set or list of attributes. In different organizations, we find different types of leaders because we find different types of people. As such, leadership does not seem to respond so much to personal characteristics, but rather to a way of working that, through motivation, trust and a sense of purpose, makes it possible to form and unite teams around common goals.

Elmore (2010) advocates for a distributed leadership, involving and engaging all the agents of the educational community. Thus, it is evident that leadership is not so much a personal quality but a way of working with others, influencing people and organizations regarding priorities, the use of time and installed and generated practices, so that leadership becomes a concrete improvement in the organization (cf. Leithwood et al., 2006).

Leithwood (2009) provides some general guidelines about school leadership that may be useful to clarify the concept:

- *Leadership exists within social relationships and serves social purposes.*
- *Leadership implies purpose and direction*
- *Leadership is a process of influence*
- *Leadership is a function*
- *Leadership is contextual and contingent*

In short, there are multiple ways of understanding leadership, and if it is becoming increasingly relevant, it is precisely because it is an ethical practice: leadership is a way of relating to others and a way of influencing others. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that "in effect, school leadership is no longer conceptualized solely in terms of technical efficiency, but as an essentially moral and ethical activity (see Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992; Shapiro and Stefkovich, 2011; Starratt, 2004 in Weinstein José [ed.], 2016).

Carefully exercising the leadership and authority involved in the teaching role, as we have seen, has various aspects, since the teacher is a leader and authority in the classroom, but also shares this leadership and authority with other members of the educational community, such as supervisors, colleagues and parents. From there, perhaps the greatest challenge to be recognized as a leader and authority is related to a double dimension of respect: to respect and to be respected<sup>2</sup>. We pointed out that pedagogical authority is such when it is recognized and not when it is imposed. This implies that both students and other members of the community - of an educational community inserted in a given sociocultural context - value in a positive way and grant legitimacy to the figure of the teacher. This legitimacy is central to the authority, since only in this way can it exert influence on its students and other members of the community. A 2020 study that sought to investigate how student teachers understand the concept of authority concluded as a first relevant point that "education students have internalized these cultural changes and associate authority mainly with caring for others and recognizing the uniqueness of students (cf. Zamora, G et al., 2020). As the research points out, this idea is relevant insofar as it enables an understanding of authority not from the mandate and obedience, but from the recognition and concern for the other. In the same way, pedagogical leadership must seek to influence and mobilize with the purpose of establishing educational improvements. We have said that leadership is a practice, which translates into concrete actions, and therefore requires a deep and situated understanding of the context. Respect and care for other leaders, members of the community, parents and the context itself become fundamental for the leader, as he/she works and influences others. Hence, authors such as Goleman refer to emotional leadership, which focuses on understanding people's emotions (cf. Goleman, 2013). Thus, knowledge, care and respect are central in a leader who responds to a given context and needs. For as Leithwood (2009) points out, "[...] no formula for effective leadership is universally applicable" (p.19).

### Relevance of this principle

The Framework for Good Teaching in Preschool Education (MBE EP) highlights and emphasizes, among its central concepts, teacher leadership. Thus, for example, the document states that:

"[...] special relevance has been given to six central concepts at the level: 'focus on rights, inclusion, play, leadership, collaborative work and pedagogical reflection, which guide the responsibility and ethical actions of all educators in their professional practice'" (p.9).

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<sup>2</sup> In Durkheim's view, teaching authority must imply trust and commitment to one's work, two elements that are also related to respect: respect for the other and respect for myself and for the profession. In his words, "in the first place, he must show that he has character, for authority implies trust, and the child would not give his trust to someone who would be hesitant, who would misrepresent or go back on his or her decisions. However, this first condition is not the most essential. What is important, above all, is that the educator really feels this authority, of which he must give clear proof, in his inner self. It constitutes a force that he can manifest only if he possesses it in fact. But where can this authority come from, from the material power with which he is invested, from the right he has to punish and to reward? But fear of punishment is something very different from respect for authority. The latter only has moral value if the punishment is considered as deserved precisely by the one who suffers it: which implies that the authority that punishes is already recognized as legitimate. Which is what it is all about. It is not from the outside that the teacher must expect his authority to come, it is from himself, it is only an intimate conviction that will give it to him. He must believe, not in himself, of course, nor in the superior qualities of his intelligence or his heart, but in his work and in the transcendental nature of his task" (Durkheim, E. [2003]. *Education and Sociology*, pp.84-85).

This document emphasizes that the teacher "leads the classroom team in the implementation of pedagogical practice in terms of comprehensive wellbeing and learning" (p.17). In line with the above, leadership is understood from the perspective of considering and valuing others. Thus, for example, it is indicated that the teacher "[...] must develop competencies associated with leadership based on valuing the contributions of others, collaboration and team management" (p. 43).

In this sense, being a leader implies recognizing the individual and collective achievements of the team and organizing the pedagogical work considering the skills and competencies of the team to promote the overall wellbeing and learning of children. A leader also promotes instances of reflection that allow the identification of achievements and opportunities for improvement in the team, in order to provide feedback on their performance and thus strengthen their competencies.

On its part, the World Economic Forum (WEF), in its report presented in 2020, "*The Future of Jobs Report 2020*", sets out the 15 highest valued skills by companies by 2025. Among them, what they call *Leadership and social influence* stands out. This skill - the only one among the top 10 that is directly linked to working with people - is related to the ability to have an impact on others and to manage and lead teams, distributing roles and responsibilities, in order to guide and project improvements and challenges. As such, as we have pointed out, it is not a personal characteristic of the leader, but rather a set of practices and actions that can be learned. Now, what does it mean in concrete terms to carefully exercise the leadership and authority implied in the teaching role?

### **How to carefully exercise the leadership and authority involved in the teaching role:**

- **Know your students and their teams very well:** leadership, as we have pointed out above, does not consist of a mere distribution of tasks or responsibilities, but in building relationships and interactions of trust (Harris, 2014), which allow individual and collective work to achieve common goals. It is therefore essential to be able to recognize the skills and abilities of the people with whom one works in order to discern for which areas or fields they are more or better qualified so as to be able to enhance their leadership from those competencies. In this sense, it is important for teachers to know their students and teams very well, recognizing their skills and potential, so that leadership is not only represented in the teacher, but can be intended and enhanced in students and members of the educational community.

- **Safeguard the good of the student and the rights of the child:** as we pointed out, authority is linked to love, concern and responsibility towards others, particularly towards others who are entering a new world and who are beginning to build a path towards their freedom. As such, part of the teaching role as authority is related to guiding and protecting the student on this path. This implies watching over the care and promotion of students and safeguarding their rights. As an authority, the teacher must establish and ensure compliance with principles that guide students in their growth and development process. The norms he/she establishes must offer opportunities for growth and not be reduced to mere impositions. In addition, he/she must watch over and safeguard the unrestricted respect for the rights of the child, promoting them from his/her role and making the pertinent complaints in case of any violation.

- **Communicate carefully, respectfully and assertively:** in his/her role as leader and authority, the teacher must take care of both the content and the manner of what he/she communicates. It is important for students, peers, bosses and parents to receive accurate, certain and truthful information. It is important that the information is communicated with respect and empathy, trying to understand the position of the other and validating the concerns or objections that the other may express. Being assertive in communication implies being able to express oneself adequately and clearly, communicating what we want to express, without affecting or harming others. This is especially relevant in moments of discrepancy or disagreement. Having pedagogical or disciplinary arguments can help to support what we communicate or the decisions we make.

- **Be predisposed to attentive listening and dialogue:** as an authority, the teacher must be in contact with supervisors, peers, parents and students. In their different roles, everyone has to make demands or requirements, more or less acceptable. Listening to others in an attentive and active way, without judging in advance and being receptive to their proposals and ideas, is a virtue that gives value to others. Being open to dialogue and to the possibility of discussing ideas with others, based on respect, is a sign of an authority concerned about others.

- **To improve oneself, both professionally and personally:** we pointed out earlier that authority is based on recognition and respect. Imposing authority reflects a lack of authority, that is, a lack of recognition. This recognition takes various forms, but in the case of teachers, their authority is important in terms of what they teach and what they are, the model they represent. As a teaching authority, the teacher must be updated in the knowledge of what he/she teaches and in the pedagogical strategies he/she uses. As a model, he/she must be a valid figure for his/her students, peers and parents. This implies working and developing competencies and values linked to honesty and integrity.

- **Recognize and validate other authorities:** the teacher, as an authority, is linked to the managers and to the parents, who in their different roles also constitute an authority. In such cases, it is possible that the authority of one may conflict with the other. Being able to dialogue, validating the authority of the other and focusing on the well-being of the student, is part of the teaching role. As such, it is important that the teacher seeks to generate community by exercising a careful and responsible relationship with parents, authorities and managers, in order to be able to guide and plan actions aimed at enhancing the training and development of students.

- **Training as a leader:** as we pointed out, leadership is not reduced to a series of characteristics or personal attributes, but rather responds to a practice and a way of working. Therefore, a leader needs to be trained, learning to make diagnoses, projecting and planning tasks and work aimed at continuous improvement, distributing roles and responsibilities, making decisions based on evidence, communicating accurately and transmitting trust and support, among others. To be trained as a leader is also to be trained with one's own or distinctive stamp. We have seen that leaders are different from each other, and this distinctive stamp comes from what each one is and from the way he/she is positioned in the institution, so that being trained as a leader is to be able to mark a stamp in the community, distinguishing him/herself from his/her peers.

- **Recognizing himself as part of a group:** the leader knows that, in spite of being an individual, is part of a group and that his or her main function is to improve the work of that group. Recognizing that one is part of a social organization, which functions and advances from a relational work, makes it possible for the leader to understand that -being a leader- does not correspond to a personal purpose, but to a social or group purpose.

• **Pursuing, sharing and building goals together:** leadership implies having a vision capable of guiding all actions. If this vision or purpose is developed by the leader, it is up to him/her to share it, so as to unite the work of the team in pursuit of that goal. The leader can also convene his team to build joint goals that will allow progress to be made towards the fulfillment of a shared purpose. A leader without defined goals would be unable to give guidelines, so having a clear direction to follow makes it possible to socialize and understand the purposes, so that the whole group has a clear direction. This is especially relevant in cases of uncertainty, where the strength or cohesion of the team may be weakened.

• **Value the collaboration and contributions of all team members:** a leader is capable of recognizing the abilities and potential of everyone under his/her charge. Accordingly, he/she assigns roles and tasks and values the contributions of each one.

• **Helping to grow:** a good leader makes his team and the people who participate in it grow. This means that he/she is capable of identifying the potential of each one and of providing the necessary support and resources for their development, which implies understanding, when appropriate, mistakes as opportunities and not as mere faults to be punished. The teacher must also help students to grow, offering guidance and guidelines for their development and promotion.

• **Team building:** a leader builds teams, summons people to work collaboratively, without establishing preferences or granting unjustified benefits to some over others.

• **Generate opportunities for conversation and reflection with the team:** valuing individuality allows the leader to generate opportunities for reflection and conversation in which everyone feels listened to and respected. This makes it possible to move forward together towards the defined goals, since there is a moment to talk, disagree, discuss and reflect on the work done and the projects to come.

• **Building relationships based on respect and trust:** the leader's role implies, in itself, discretion. He/she does not discuss with peers nor subordinates about information that has been communicated to him/her in confidence or that involves any harm or damage to someone in his team. He/she liaises in a respectful manner with all those under his charge, validating their skills and knowledge and not assuming a superior position based on power.

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## Suggested citation for this document

Observatorio de Buenas Prácticas Pedagógicas, Facultad de Educación, Universidad del Desarrollo (2022). "Carefully exercise leadership and authority".

This document has been prepared by Mariana Geras, revised by Fernanda Nuñez and reviewed and approved by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Education, within the framework of the Observatorio de Buenas Prácticas Pedagógicas, Facultad de Educación, Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile.

Translated by María José Galmez, January 2023.

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