

# ara és demà

Debat sobre el futur  
de l'educació a Catalunya

## Report 3

### The Education Center

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## Introduction

This lecture addresses the making of a number of proposals and recommendations for improving the school center's contribution to learning in Catalonia. Arriving at these proposals is based on evidence that research provides in two senses: first, what working methods inside the center result in creating more favorable learning environments and, second, what regulatory conditions enable centers to manage themselves better so that these working methods are encouraged.

The idea may be that the center has the mission of maximizing learning opportunities for each and every student. For the centers in Catalonia to be in a better situation in order to develop this mission, they must have a higher level of autonomy than they currently enjoy. The basic condition so that this professional autonomy leads to more and better learning opportunities is for the center to rely on such pedagogical leadership which, starting with the students' learning evaluations and the effects of the teaching staff's work, contributes to the development of educators' professional skills.

The development of professional autonomy has important implications for the governance of the system as a whole, especially in the case of public schools as they add a greater complexity: it revolves around a multi-level management that fosters a significant implication of the community in decision-taking related to the center, with a new balance of responsibilities between the central authorities, the local authorities and the center.

## The mission of centers is to get each and every student to learn

Historically, the center is an institutional solution to the need for creating economies of scale in the provision of education, addressing a variety of factors that range from location and recruitment areas to other organizational and functional ones which, as a whole, converge in formats and numbers considered optimum for students- per- class distribution. In other words, the concept of "center" is the institutional answer, universal for the time being, to the question of how can we facilitate teaching in accordance with service criteria defined by the community and in an economically viable way in response to the economic effort allocated. According to this perspective, the quality of a center was traditionally conceived as an adjustment to the standard, something that the mechanisms of supervision and inspection took charge of verifying.

But with time this perspective has evolved for varying reasons, which run from a new conception of public services management to pedagogical frameworks that lay emphasis on learning outcomes as a measurement of the quality of the service, more in tune with what society and the knowledge economy expect nowadays from schooling: universal attainment of basic competences for exercising citizenship and duties in all areas (political, economic, communitary and personal) within the framework of shared values (Miller, 2016). And, in this sense, the conviction that regulating and monitoring the conditions of the service were sufficient to guarantee quality education has given way to the certainty that, in this framework, centers are not arriving at identical learning results, not even with students of an equivalent profile. In effect, international research has revealed what are the most effective centers' characteristics and, at the same time, in what policy and regulatory frameworks centers can best develop these characteristics.

## The quality of learning depends on whether centers can operate in optimum conditions to become effective

During the last few years, research on school center efficiency has enabled the accumulation of considerable evidence on what working conditions for students as well as teachers are associated with the best learning outcomes (Cannata, Haynes, & Smith, 2013; Scheerens, 2014). In essence, the characteristics that effective centers share are the following:

- 1.** They have, and put into practice, a quite clear mission and vision. All the actors in an effective center understand where the organization wants to go, why and how they want to do it (Collins, 2001). In countries like ours, this mission and this vision translate into a definition of a specific school project. But the question is if the centers have the real capacity to carry it out.
- 2.** They demonstrate high learning expectations of all students (Langer, 2004). One of the most accredited determinants of learning is the teaching staff's expectations for each student. Having an optimistic view of every student is not enough: the center must have the capacity to make the appropriate decisions to give support to every student, with adequate organizational and pedagogical solutions for each case.
- 3.** The assumption of these responsibilities has made urgent the the transition of the school management concept to the school leadership concept (Elmore, 2000), in which the center must be able to diagnose what needs to be done to improve every student's learning and decide on the organization of teachers' resources and improvement of their skills.
- 4.** They are content with a team that shares objectives and the commitment to achieve them. An effective center is not a cluster of individuals that by chance happen to coincide but rather the result of organizational decisions on human resources (Bryk, 2002). Far from being assigned to a center, the teachers must want to go to a center because they share the vision and, at the same time, are chosen to become part of the staff because they demonstrate that they have the skills and the commitment to engagement.
- 5.** They are independent in curriculum definition and this leads them to internal mechanisms for evaluating how the teaching and learning processes of each staff team could improve in order to achieve better learning activities. The teaching staff of effective centers make use of research and evaluation, in a transparent teaching practices context, in order to better know what needs to be improved and to follow up the impact of these actions undertaken upon the students' learnings. (Fullan, 2005).
- 6.** The constant monitoring of students' progress, and its corollary in the ability to adjust teaching strategies to give better support in each case, explain the success in learning. The teaching teams have to be responsible for doing this and must be able to rely on pedagogical leadership mechanisms which help them grow professionally and improve their skills (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Richardson, Andree, & Orphanos, 2009). This means centers must be able to organize in a way that frees enough quality time to develop this function.
- 7.** They make a priority of professional development and teacher training in whatever is strategically necessary at any time to improve the quality of students' learnings. By default, training takes place at the center and with the aim of directly impacting on learning (McLaughlin, 2006), whereby the effects on students' learnings are evaluated.

8. They develop and maintain a safe and intellectually stimulating learning for students. Students feel involved in what happens in the classroom and enjoy going to school (Marzano, 2003).

9. They encourage high levels of family and community involvement. Families, far from being seen as passive users of a service, feel fully participant because the center also offers them significant opportunities to join in on education and learning activities (Henderson, 2007).

Reading this list inevitably brings us to two considerations. The first is that a mere superficial analysis of the distance separating the reality of the centers in Catalonia from these conditions would most likely show that some centers have more opportunities than others to develop these characteristics. In general, private centers, state-subsidized private schools and, in a different way, rural schools have available better initial conditions for developing them than urban public school centers and, in particular, much better than those centers working in high-complexity environments.

Nevertheless, despite the obvious differences among centers, there are some that come off better than others. The question is how far would it be possible to go if all the voluntary work and professionalism that exist at centers were found in an environment more favorable to improvement. The second consideration is, therefore, that the most difficult characteristics needing to be developed in the current conditions in Catalonia are related with three elements: curriculum autonomy, the creation of coherent teams and the development of pedagogical leadership. The difficulty does not lie in the lack of capacity in people but rather in the limited possibilities that the current regulatory framework offers. In the end, it deals with a question of professional autonomy.

## **In order to have more effective centers, they must be equipped with more professional autonomy in conditions where pedagogical leadership can be exercised**

Ultimately, in contrast with the daily reality of many centers in Catalonia, it seems that the inexorable condition for an improvement in efficiency in the generation of learning opportunities is professional autonomy. The international comparative analysis of successes, as well as of failures, of educational reforms has also come to that conclusion. It seems clear that the generalized improvement of school systems is based mainly on investment in the professional development for teachers (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). This, in a certain way, reaffirms and expands the logic according to which in order to improve students' learning there is a need to improve teaching competences within the framework of professional autonomy with recognized pedagogical leadership. The promotion of autonomy and teacher training, trusting their professional judgement (Biesta, 2007, 2010) would be then the main lever for improvement of centers and, generalizing, of the system as a whole.

The first summaries of research to identify the conditions most conducive for professional development, consolidation and transformation of education practices date back some ten years. The results suggest that professional development has more influence in improving students' learnings when it is based on mid- and long term work instead of *ad hoc* interventions (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001), and in that professional development activities be directly linked to teaching practices and education contents; when teachers really work actively and participatively (Saxe, Gearhart, & Nasir, 2001), and when the work is based on exchanges within the teaching team as well as individual learning processes, always under a clear pedagogical leadership (Borko, 2004; Little, 2006). There are, however, many questions pending on

the most useful resources for teachers, the nature of the support to be put forward, the place of interaction among education teams and external partners, as well as the sustainability of changes when there are changes in the centers' management (Enthoven, Letor, & Dupriez, 2015).

In the end, research has sufficiently accredited the role of the school management - when it becomes the guiding principle of pedagogical leadership and not only (although it is also needed) management – it is crucial to create effective and constantly motivated teaching teams, as well as to create the adequate school climate and environment. There is therefore a link between the quality of school leadership and that of students' learnings (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Smith, 2008). The legitimacy of educational leadership nowadays appears to be more based on professional authority and leadership capacity than on a mere administrative assignment. And that is why it is not unusual that in decentralized systems good school managers are in great demand and, when the system allows it, well paid.

Unfortunately, in Catalonia the current emphasis seems to be on reinforcing school management and not creating the conditions for exercising pedagogical leadership with the capacity for evaluating, accompanying and giving support to teaching teams to make the most of learning opportunities. The concepts of leadership and school management are not necessarily interchangeable (OCDE, 2008). Education center leadership must be understood as a particular way of managing human resources of the center that enables generating work priorities, which are significant for educational improvement and, at the same time, shared by the team; directing the work of the center in accordance with these priorities, taking the appropriate decisions and finally checking the team's progress in these priorities by evaluating, giving support and offering opportunities for additional professional development in the most appropriate way. Therefore, at a school center with a cohesive team there must be leadership, which does not necessarily have to be reflected in one single person, where all the power of decision-making is located. In international forums there is repeatedly talk of distributed leadership or network centered leadership, precisely to indicate that it deals with exercising it by various actors, personal as well as groups, and avoiding personalizing all expectations and responsibilities in the person in charge of center management.

This conceptual change at a glance may seem to be the result of a passing fad, a preference for the term "leadership" to that of "coordination", for instance. But the reference to leadership suggests a change in the paradigm: instead of supervising the center's compliance to external regulations and coordinating internally the actions deriving from this compulsory compliance, leadership includes an important nuance - the capacity to manage, motivate and develop human teams professionally, while at the same time providing the economic conditions and materials required for its proper implementation (Hattie, 2002). Therefore, there has been a shift from a paradigm focused on regulations and standards, and its subsequent application, to another marked by the emphasis on leading groups towards the completion of a project.

Leadership training continues to be an issue open to discussion (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2009). There are two hot questions: the first is determining what should be the initial training itinerary for those who, with or without teaching experience, wish to engage in school management and leadership tasks, and the second is determining the quality criteria for continuous training in education leadership, an area in which the alleged importance does not seem to be accompanied by quality supervision mechanisms since there are few countries where this type of continuous training is duly accredited. Of course, the first question, related to initial training, implicitly suggests abandoning the concept of principal or headmaster for that of a *primum inter pares* teacher.

In terms of appeal and incentives for school leadership professional development, apart from the salary question, international debate centers on how to professionalize the selection process. Although in the

majority of OECD countries school management is by public authority appointment, generally on a local level, the question is how to objectively and transparently determine who is the right candidate to meet the specific needs of each school center. In a context of city government and growing school autonomy, there are hardly any proponents of national teaching corps, whose members are assigned a center according to a career structure, but rather there prevails the capacity of presenting and coordinating projects appropriate to the particular circumstances of each education community. Selection formulas must be coordinated which put the candidate's leadership to the test and do not emphasize either seniority or an interview, so that frequently professional judgement might be entrusted to those already exercising leadership.

That said, without people adequately trained for the management role it would be hard to generate professional and pedagogical leadership at centers, where it is recognized by teaching teams. And this is precisely the problem: school management is submerged in a crisis that can be summed up in two words – few candidates. In some OECD countries, this is the question to be solved with some urgency taking into account the average age of those now occupying management positions and who will shortly be retiring in masse. Notwithstanding, even in others where this demographic component is not the case, there exists a concern about how to attract the best candidates for this professional career and cultivate in them a more distinctive professional identity since what is truly needed is qualified people to lead professional teams. Catalonia should make school management a valued, and at the same time, coveted role.

## **Internal evaluation is an indispensable condition for improvement and significant innovation but it must be evidence-based**

Until recently the predominant support models for teaching improvement have been fundamentally centered on providing continuous training activities and an open offer of education services. It was obviously hoped that this offer, often centralized and based on an approximate and indirect reading of the centers and teachers' needs, would satisfy the demand. All this assumes that the teachers were the ones who diagnosed their professional development needs and took advantage of the existing resource offers to fulfill them. In the last few years, however, we have begun to see clearly that blind universal support is inefficient. In fact, it is necessary to change the perspective on improvement of teacher professionalism.

The point of departure for this change lies in the evaluation of teaching skills on an individual and team scale but not in theoretical terms (based, for instance, on qualifications and degrees or on experience gained) but rather in such a way that they can be seen reflected in practical terms as added value generated in students. Dealing with this evaluation using scientific and professional criteria, based on empirical evidence, opens the door to the identification of good practices and generating corresponding incentives and improvement support mechanisms. And it is clear that these mechanisms need not be offered blindly or universally but rather, in the context of school autonomy, each center should be given credit (also in the financial meaning of the word) to design the type of supports, in terms of training as well as services, that can best respond to the needs for improvement.

The discussion of the evaluation of teaching effectiveness – a more appreciated term than teacher productivity – also underscores a deficit in the definition of other main professional concepts, such as good

practices or teaching innovation, and their relation with improvement in student learnings (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, & Major, 2014). Only an evidence-based evaluation can bring to light insight about which teaching practices can be considered good and under what circumstances, as well as which education innovations really result in better conditions for student learning.

Years ago it was thought that with a change in organization, processes or technologies and, by extension, the school architecture was by definition an innovation. And that innovation, thus understood, was a synonym of commitment to improvement and quality. Nowadays, however, only a change that properly accredits a contribution to learning improvement is considered real innovation. And to be able to claim this, it has to be based on evidence that exclusively comes from a technically rigorous evaluation.

Fortunately, technology makes this necessary evaluation more feasible as time goes on. The adoption of school platforms that incorporate administrative data with pedagogical features and which record the activity and evaluations are critical tools for evaluating teaching strategies and clearly, in addition, for the results of innovation efforts depending on the objectives the center wishes to achieve.

## **Greater professional autonomy demands a reconsideration of system governance as a whole**

It is a good idea to remember that the center is a technical and organizational solution to a social need and that, as a technical solution, it must be managed by competent professionals. Historical and comparative analysis shows that, generally, the smooth running of these centers depends on the capacity the community has in deciding aims the centers will pursue and the resources they will have to achieve them, as well as how to evaluate the results. In countries where traditionally there are centralized state centers like ours, the concept of community is disappearing and being absorbed by the State (in the broadest sense of the word). When this happens, the State has a tendency to interpret it according to its own logic. In other models in which school systems have been created from the bottom up (as in the USA or England) or where there has been a decentralization process towards local administrations (as in Finland), the voice of the community is clearer and more genuine, also closer to the heart of the school center, with crucial decisions.

The theoretical foundation of school autonomy is relatively simple and combines arguments from modern public management with the theory of organizations, as well as greater economic efficiency expectations. This foundation finds fertile ground to progress inasmuch as the data analyses from international studies such as TIMSS or PISA credit this link between school autonomy and school results (Caldwell, 2014). That said, in practice there are two ways of defining the level of center autonomy: specifying the areas in which decisions are taken directly affecting the centers' day-to-day operations — and to see, then, who takes them— or, alternatively, itemizing the decisions that need to be taken and quantifying those that, regardless of the area, are taken independently by the very same school centers. The first way is shown in the following chart of a selection of OECD countries: the actor who exercises the greatest degree of autonomy in five fundamental areas of the public education service provision and openly excluding from them the organization of teaching and learning activities that all correspond to the respective school centers.

**Dominant Actor in Various Areas of Government and Education Administration in some OECD Countries**

	France	Japan	Luxembourg	Norway	Spain	Mexico	USA	Sweden	England	New Zealand
<b>Concepts of Curriculum</b>	S	S	S	S	S	S	IB	C	C	C
<b>Certification</b>	S	S	S	S	IB	IB	IB	S	S	S
<b>Teacher Contracting</b>	S	IB	S	IB	IB	IB	IB	C	C	C
<b>Definition of Teaching Staff Conditions</b>	S	S	S	IB	S	S	IB	IB	S	S
<b>Definition of Budget</b>	S	IB	S	IB	IB	IB	IB	IB	C	C
<b>Dominant Actor</b>	S	S	S	IB	IB	IB	IB	IB/C	C	C

Source: Drawn up from OCDE data (Aguerrondo & Lugo). S: state/ central government. IB: Intermediary Bodies (regions, provinces, municipalities). C: school centers.

The table shows, in first place, that in some areas the only major player operating completely independently is the State; neither the Intermediary Bodies of the Administration (regions, provinces, municipalities) nor, of course, the school centers are provided with absolute independence in any of the five areas. Without a doubt, in none of these countries, not even in those where the school center is, while exercising its autonomy, the one controlling the greatest number of areas — something which in these countries only happens in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and, to a small extent, Sweden—, neither the definition of teaching staff conditions nor the certification of learnings are the responsibilities of the center. On the other hand, autonomy seems to be identified in countries such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Sweden exclusively in three fundamental aspects: definition of curriculum, teacher contracting and, finally, decisions regarding the operating budget for the center. In other words, school autonomy is, first and foremost, the autonomy of curriculum, teaching staff, as well as budget definition and execution. And this inevitably results in differentiation.

Emphasis is often placed on the need to increase school center autonomy and there is a tendency to underestimate the fact that, because greater autonomy contributes decisively to improving student outcomes, it is imperative to accompany it with the appropriate external standard evaluation mechanisms of these learnings. Only through the transparency the school system gains by means of this evaluation can we guarantee that the exercise of school autonomy becomes an appropriate medium for improving student outcomes, and not an end in itself.

Progressing in the centers' autonomy/evaluation duality requires a redefinition of the relationships between government, school curriculum and education provision. No matter how hard it is, this duality demands an exercise of trust in the centers and education communities, which ultimately is what it is in civil society. And likewise it requires ending the regulating obsession that governments with a centralized administration model have had with the curriculum. The role of governments must consist of setting which competences students have to achieve at each level or education category; generating the external and standardized evaluation mechanisms for student outcomes and added-value for each center, and giving support to improvement processes. This means, as a last resort, confirming the system objectives and

putting the means for evaluating their achievement and continuous improvement. And leaving in the hands of school centers and education communities on which they depend, all the decisions related with pedagogy and curriculum, as well as on institutional and organizational aspects that must lend support. Teacher professionalism, framed within the center education project, has to respond to the question of how to improve students' learnings, but it is society, through the government, that has to express expectations in terms of the competences students must achieve.

The evolution of government and administration education models in western European countries during the last thirty years effectively shows a landscape in motion (Pedró, 2009). Traditionally one needed to talk about countries with centralized models such as France and Spain, but also Sweden; decentralized such as England, where the power fundamentally resided in the local education authorities and federal education authorities such as Germany, where education systems were practically exclusively the responsibility of each of the federated states. In none of these three models were school centers the epicenter of relevant decisions on education. As the comparative research into the outcome determinants of education systems have revealed the relevance of curriculum autonomy, the panorama has become more confused (see chart) and has led to the emergence of multilevel models, characterized by a triple motion:

- Government is seeing their competences in school administration and curriculum development reduced but they are seeing an enormous increase in all that has to do with the definition of educational objectives that students must achieve or the competences they must display at the end of each cycle or education level. As a consequence, school center evaluation mechanisms are multiplying, from students' competences evaluation (without implications for them) to accreditation tests at different ages.
- Centers are seeing a rise in their curriculum autonomy, in the broadest sense of the term, from contents and teaching methods to the timetabling of every curricular area or student groups. In fact, it deals with a deregulation project for the center's daily operations, which therefore increases autonomy. It is much less frequent that this autonomy include aspects related to teachers' salaries, but does include the center's budget management.
- Finally, intermediary administrative bodies become the real system managers regarding selection and assignment of teacher resources, distribution of economic resources among the corresponding centers or the coordination of school policies with the rest of policies attending people and community services. In a growing number of OECD countries, municipalities are the owners of school centers and employers of teachers, although salary scales continue to be negotiated nationally between teachers' unions and municipal associations.

In Catalonia it would be desirable to recover the local voice of day-to-day public center management in a truly significant and not just a purely formal way. Seen from a longitudinal perspective, it seems obvious that the unstoppable trend towards greater autonomy for centers runs the risk of granting responsibility, and by extension property, of centers to teaching teams or, even exclusively to school managers. This trend will sooner or later collide with the public servant nature of the teaching profession, an inheritance from statism. Actually, it would be advisable to find again a sense of community that should be present at the center and to generate multilevel government mechanisms in which the local community has responsibility for determinant aspects of center management, notably about contracting school management and teachers, for local public employees as well as external evaluation of center outcomes and their resulting consequences. The autonomy of professionals should be, literally, professional which means they must be guaranteed the capacity for deciding, from a professional base, the strategies to be followed

in order to maximize learning opportunities for each and every student, and this community capacity for decision cannot be substituted. Likewise, school management team autonomy must be equally oriented towards improving the center's capacities, which inevitably involves offering support, assessment and professional development opportunities for teachers, as demonstrated by research on effective centers.

The discussion of center autonomy also emphasized the need to overcome the dichotomy between public and private school. In the majority of developed countries this dichotomy has practically disappeared because private schools, strictly speaking (those which do not receive public financing and do not observe public system regulations) have become a minority. On the other hand, what is becoming more prevalent is, in first place, the differentiation among public schools - by virtue of school autonomy - they propose very different pedagogical projects and strategies. In second place, the incorporation of private schools with public funding, within the school network on equal footing with public schools, which fundamentally equates with municipal schools in the majority of developed countries. This implicitly means, in the end, that to optimize the benefits of school autonomy for the system as a whole, it would be appropriate to guarantee that the distinction public/private does not translate into different treatment in terms of financing or cost for families. It is a question of equity.

The fear that school autonomy and its consequent differentiation bring losses into the territory of equity is unfounded. Autonomy necessarily implies the emergence of alternative and diverse education projects that, compared with the relative uniformity imposed by centralization, must result in outcome disparities. The line that separates a government education model centered on the school autonomy concept and one of a marketplace is frequently faint, uniquely in cities and large metropolitan areas. And this is where we see three important elements that can reduce the risk of gross injustice (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The first is the role of the government as the system rector, prescribing and evaluating students' achievements, from the perspective of quality and equity. In second place, the impossibility of publicly funded centers choosing students, a much more determining aspect with regard to equity than recognizing the right of families to choose among various alternatives. And finally, the role local administrations must have in this matter. In effect, where they are responsible by law for guaranteeing equal education opportunities, as happens in Nordic countries, differences in outcomes continue to exist but they manage to reduce the effects to such an extent that international research, once again with PISA data (Pedró, 2009), attests that outcome disparities among students are greater, firstly, in federal systems that have no type of school autonomy and, secondly, in centralized systems. On a whole, the number of countries is fewer in which there is an active participation of the local administrations in education administration and management.

In order to be really effective, the lesson is that school autonomy, and equity, must operate in a political and administrative context characterized by co-responsibility. This is why it is not unusual that most recent international research reveals autonomy works well in contexts in which the actors have enough capacity to understand and make the most of opportunities but can be disastrous when it is not valued or desired (Hanushek, Link, & Woessmann, 2013).

## **External evaluation is not only a condition of transparency but also a social regulation mechanism of quality and equity**

Although pedagogical discourse usually highlights the elusive nature of the concept of quality education, international political discussion has assumed that external evaluation of student learnings is the best available measurement (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002). And within a context where as much as possible there is an attempt to advance towards public policies based on evidence (Slavin, 2008), quality measurement is the

key. This obviously brings numerous technical as well as conceptualization problems. In this sense there is a universal tendency to equate learning outcomes with students' competence levels, which are much harder to measure than knowledge. Intuitively, though, afterwards we see that a center's absolute student outcomes do not directly give the measurement of quality but rather that of the students. It is well known that on the scale of class groups and schools, the most important indicator of student outcomes is their socio-economic status, individually as well as a group.

Therefore the school where students get the best results on standardized tests is not necessarily better but rather the one that, compared with other schools with students of equivalent socio-economic characteristics, achieves better results. That is why it is important to insist that the measurement of a center's education quality give added -value to these students when compared with equivalent school populations and means. Consequently, a good evaluation system is that which allows measuring progress that the centers make with relation to their capacity to bestow added -value on the students (Braun, 2005). Strangely enough, on a national level it is surprising to see the disconnection that still exists between the long tradition of research on school effectiveness, which for decades has shown linked factors in the context of classroom and center with education quality, on the one hand, and with student outcomes evaluations, on the other (Brint, 2006; MacBeath, 2007).

In this context, it is evidently hard to imagine that a policy of hidden data could be justifiable in a democratic framework. Members of the education community must have free access to these data and their longitudinal evolution as well as their meaning within the framework of comparing equivalent centers, in benefit of an improvement of a center's education provision. Educational professionals must find in these results an incalculable source of significant data for professional improvement. Families must see in them an opportunity to assess not only the return for their taxes but, above all, the true education quality of the center.

## **Conclusion: the responsibility of promoting the improvement of centers**

Never before have centers been the subject of such pressure for expectations as well as evaluation. The transformation of our societies and economies has made it inevitable, all indications show this pressure will mount in the future. The question is if the very same society that demands more of centers is in a condition to give more support and trust to the professionals who work there.

Now is a good time to reconsider, when demanding more of centers, if we really do everything possible so that they run in the optimum conditions to maximize student learning opportunities. This lecture has attempted to demonstrate, based on research evidence, that these conditions involve greater professional autonomy, in a work environment that allows pedagogical leadership action centered precisely on helping teachers to grow in what they need as professionals, for each and every student to learn and develop in order to realize their potential. That said, we must not forget that autonomy has to be seen as a means, in this sense, and also as a condition that is necessary but never enough (Suggett, 2015) to improve the quality of student learning.

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