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The Shock Absorbers:

School Principals and Their Conflicts in Chile

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify and describe the types, frequency and intensity of conflicts reported by school principals in Chile. This paper is based on a quantitative study collecting conflicts reported by school principals (n=395) though an online survey. Results indicated parents and families are sources of the most intense and frequent conflicts for school principals in Chile. The type of conflicts is not associated with the features of schools or bio-socio data of principals. These conflicts primarily occur due to interpersonal conflicts with other adults (families and teachers) rather than students. School principals in Chile need support and professional development opportunities to nurturing a trusting relationship between schools and families.

Keywords: School principals, Conflicts, Chile, interpersonal relationships

School Principals and Their Conflicts in Chile

Conflicts occur in every school organization as an inevitable phenomenon. This implies for school principals to understand and manage conflicts produced by natural interactions when people work together in the same environment (Saiti, 2015). In most of the cases, school principals are responsible to seek common agreements between different actors or social parties. Mahfouz (2018) stated "school principals are expected to take full responsibility for any conflict, misunderstanding or mistake that takes place in their buildings and to fulfil all of their duties with considerable urgency, which can be emotionally exhausting" (p. 13). This overwhelmed demand increases when principals interpret conflicts as threats to stability and improvement that produce uncontrollable negative consequences (Uline et al., 2003). Principal´s view conflict as a result of multiple negative attitudes, which creates a challenging emotional climate (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). This approach understands conflict as a "pathology" with detrimental emotional effects for principals and their schools (Flessa, 2009). Following this line, conflicts are observed as time-consuming situations in ways that prevent common understandings among members (Henkin et al., 2000) and create negative personal behaviours such as absenteeism, complaints, disagreement, or resistance (Saiti, 2015). Conversely, literature also refers to conflicts as an essential ingredient for organizational and individual learning (Henkin et al., 2000; Tjosvold, 2008), productivity and teamwork (Rahim, 2001), and member's commitment (Henkin & Holliman, 2009). This literature approach shows that through conflict, conventional thinking is challenged, threats and opportunities are identified, and new solutions are forged. It also suggests that by discussing opposing views, teams increase their self-confidence to take calculated risks (Tjosvold, 2008). Similarly, other studies portray conflicts as constructive in nature because they foster common understandings and goals among staff members (Uline et al., 2003).

A considerable volume of research literature connecting principals and school conflicts focuses on principals' conflict management style (Balay, 2006; Boucher, 2013; Johnson, 2003; Karim, 2015; Saiti, 2015; Villalobos et al., 2018), whereas the setting, source and actors of these conflicts receive less attention. Some studies that have brought more attention to these aspects, have focused on cultural phenomena such as violence and ethno-religious difference (Brooks, 2015; Brooks & Brooks, 2013; Pherali, 2016). Learning about the types of conflicts principals face and the sources of those conflicts might enrich our understanding of the relevance of these conflict management styles. Furthermore, these insights might also offers a clearer picture of principals' work, particularly regarding its emotional and relational dimension, a critical aspect of the principalship (Browning, 2014). In turn, new knowledge can illuminate efforts to better support principals. This study focuses on conflicts reported by school principals in Chile. This paper is based on a quantitative study of the frequency and intensity with which Chilean school principals perceive the conflicts they experienced during a school year (2018). More specifically, this paper explores three main research questions:

RQ1: What are the types of conflicts that school principals in Chile report?

RQ2: With whom do school leaders report having more frequent conflicts?

RQ3: With whom do school leaders report having more intense conflicts?

The current paper is structured as follows. First, it describes and discusses research centered on conflicts experienced by school principals. It then provides an overview of international and national evidence regarding these conflicts and the national context of leadership in Chile. Next, methodology and results are presented and discussed, followed by conclusions and research limitations.

Defining Conflicts

The dictionary defines conflict as "an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles" (Conflict, 2020) but research has also indicated that "not

every conflict involves perceived divergence of interests or goals" (Tjosvold, 2006, p. 89).

Traditionally, our understanding of conflicts has confounded conflict with competition

(Tjosvold, 2006). From this perspective, conflicts are negatively connected to unproductive

working relationships because interdependent parties have incompatible goals (Henkin,

Cistone and Dee, 2000). This understanding reinforces the idea of conflicts as win–lose

situations (Tjosvold, 2008). Considerable research has reported that this competitive approach

is not positive for school organizations because it generates detrimental effects for social life

(Barki & Hartwick, 2004; Heemskerk, 2019; Henkin et al., 2000; Kantek & Gezer, 2009;

Rahim & Bonoma, 1979, Rahim, 2001; Tjosvold, 2006; Uline et al., 2003). More recent studies

define conflicts as inevitable, even potentially positive experiences when people work together

to achieve common goals (Tjosvold, 2006; Saiti, 2015). From this perspective, conflict itself is

not negative or destructive but "is often experienced as something that happens to people"

(Tjosvold, 2006, p. 91), as well as, groups or organizations; which foster learning (Kantek &

Gezer, 2009; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Rahim, 2001). Therefore, understanding conflict as a

natural process within schools is key.

Conflicts are part of school life, so the ability of principals not only to manage conflicts

effectively but to use them as a source for organizational learning seems key to fostering school

improvement and effectiveness. This is particularly relevant today given the pressure on

principals to create collaborative organizations that work with a common purpose (Day, 2005;

Leithwood et al., 2019). Current expectations assume that principals should know how to

navigate a wide range of conflicts of interest among stakeholders (Saiti, 2015; Uline et al.,

2003). This requires principals to manage conflict in the workplace in response not only to

professional tasks but also to the interpersonal relationships among diverse educational actors.

Interpersonal relationships are the most common source of conflict for complex organizations

such as schools (Rahim, 2001; Saibo, 2016). Moreover, relationships, along with work and

time, are the most significant stressors affecting principals' job performance and well-being (Mahfouz, 2018).

School Principals and Interpersonal Conflicts: International and National Evidence

Research emphasizes that a school principal´s work is highly sensitive to context (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017; Goldring et al., 2008; Hallinger, 2018). As a logical consequence, the type of conflicts that school principals encounter differs around the world. Some conflicts are influenced by external factors (e.g., political, cultural, religious, etc.) that affect the internal functioning of schools. For example, in South Africa, school conflicts originating from ethnic barriers and social integration put pressure on principals to deal with diversity issues (Snodgrass & Blunt, 2009). Similar conflicts associated with ethno-religious differences were identified in the experiences of school principals working in Thailand (Brooks, 2014), whereas in Colombia, most conflicts arise from school violence and lack of teacher professional development (Ruiz, 2006).

Interpersonal Conflicts

In an international revision of newly appointed principals around the globe, García-Garduño et al. (2011) identified that in non-English-speaking (e.g., Thailand, China, Mexico, Turkey, etc.) as well as English-speaking countries (e.g., Australia, England, USA, Canada, etc), interpersonal conflicts are the most common problem for principals. The authors noted that these problems are less intense after some years of experience and claimed that over time most principals gain the skills to mediate conflict. But, as other authors have found, relationships are without doubt at the core of principals' work, and probably as a result these relationships are a main stressor for school administrators (Mahfouz, 2018). In Greece, principals attributed the main causes of conflicts to both interpersonal and organizational factors (68.1%), which related to the cohesion of the teaching staff and lack of effectiveness of school leadership. This affects mutual trust, collaboration, and communication between Greek

teachers, making the principal's conflict resolution responsibilities more challenging (Saiti, 2015).

A few studies concentrated on exploring how school principals directly engaged in interpersonal conflicts. For example, in the South African context, Msila (2012) concluded that only a minority of principals are adequately prepared to resolve conflicts and that most tend, ineffectively, to minimize the negative effects of school conflicts. Similarly, Greek school principals see conflicts as a negative influence on the school climate because they are considered a "significant problem" (Saiti, 2015). In Australia, Quong (2006), in his own diary as a principal, stated that it was challenging to handle conflicts with staff members. He expressed the following: "(...) the staff rejected my ideas; this caused me some concern – clearly my change management practices were not as good as they might have been, or I had rushed it and they were simply not ready to listen to my ideas" (p. 382). Based on those challenges, the author emphasized the need for reflecting on key questions: (1) When should I intervene? (2) Am I ready to confront? (3) What do I need to learn to deal with this? and (4) What can I learn from this experience? This demonstrates that when principals manage conflicts, they use their own ideas and values as a guide for action (Fierro & Paradise, 2013).

In Chile, research on the types of conflicts experienced by school principals is almost non-existent. We found one study based on eight principals leading secondary schools (Villalobos et al., 2018). Findings from this study indicated that conflicts experienced by Chilean school principals are mainly connected with disputes of power over leadership, produced by student and teacher´s strikes, and related to teaching working conditions and student´s behaviour. Principals understood the conflicts with students as resulting from students' sociocultural and economic backgrounds. For example, school principals mentioned conflicts associated with micro-trafficking and drug use in the school as well as student discipline and violence (Villalobos et al., 2018). In contrast, when the conflicts involved adults,

the tone of the conflicts was more political and occurred at the organizational (micro) or systemic level (macro). Another study that indirectly addressed school principal conflicts expressed the need to manage conflicts originating from internal and external threats (i.e., families, teachers, local administrators, etc.) (Montecinos et al., 2015). Galdames et al. (2017) concluded that the ability to reduce conflicts hinges on awareness of school culture, especially with regard to introducing rapid changes of teaching practices that create more resistance to the principal's ideas (Galdames et al., 2017). Chilean principals face enormous pressure and multiple, complex demands that make focusing solely on improving teaching capabilities and student learning outcomes difficult (Montecinos et al., 2015; Authors, 2019). This leads to stress in trying to balance personal life with job performance (Montecinos et al., 2015; Galdames et al., 2017).

The School Leadership Context in Chile

Following trending international recommendations (OECD, 2017), school leadership has been strengthened from national policy and practitioners in Chile during the last decade (Weinstein & Muñoz, 2014). Therefore, the importance and responsibilities of the role of principals in school improvement have increased. Specifically, in terms of conflict-resolution, two recent national policies guide principals' work. First, the Framework of Good School Leadership was developed in 2015 to orient principals' performance. This document comprises five key leadership dimensions, including one dimension related to personal leadership resources: (1) developing and implementing a shared strategic vision, (2) developing professional capacities, (3) leading teaching and learning, (4) managing school climate and the participation of the school community, and (5) developing and managing the school organization. Each dimension integrates a series of specific leadership practices that principals are expected to follow. From those, only one specific practice, concerning school climate management. addresses "conflicts." Such practice points out that principals are expected to

"anticipate conflicts negotiating among actors with the aim of finding solutions effectively and timely" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 27). The second policy document recently revisited has been the National Policy of School Climate (2019). This policy promotes values such as inclusion, democratic participation, collaboration, and peaceful conflict resolution. This document defines conflicts as "disagreements situations produced by daily interactions between diverse school members" (Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 14). Conflicts are understood as an opportunity to build peaceful schools if they are managed effectively. However, the policy does not specify the role of principals in addressing specific conflicts in school; nor does it suggest a means to evaluate principals' performance. In contrast, two organizations that evaluate school overall performance are the Quality Agency of Education and the Superintendency of Education.

The Quality Agency of Education (QAE) has the mission to orient, evaluate, and inform schools about their performance in terms of student learning outcomes. The QAE uses an assessment tool called Performance Indicators for Schools and their Administrators (2014). Out of the 85 indicators that are part of this tool, only two explicitly mention the role of principals in managing conflicts. These indicators are (1) that the school principal and teachers act as mediators in resolving conflicts between their students, explaining that the use of violence is not an acceptable way to settle differences, promoting that students dialogue, seek agreements, recognize those responsible, and repair the faults, among others and (2) that school principals model conflict resolution. Both indicators emphasize the preventive and formative roles of principals. The Superintendency of Education oversees schools' legal regulations and use of resources and investigates legal complaints from families and other members of the school community. This organization can apply sanctions and economic fines to schools that may damage the principal's reputation for resolving conflicts.

Method

Results reported in this paper belong to a larger study; however, we reported the results of the quantitative phase only (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). An online survey and an invitation letter assuring anonymity and confidentiality, accompanied by a broad description of the study, were sent to the convenience sample of school principals working in the public sector in three regions (n = 783). The database was created with data from participants of professional development activities in three regions. It contained three sections. The first section referred to the frequency of conflicts reported by school principals with different actors. The items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The second section identified the actor and the type of conflict principals perceived as the most intense. Respondents were asked to describe briefly the most intense conflict experienced during the year, and a content analysis was used to analyze those responses. The third section included participants' demographic data.

Participants

Participants included 395 school principals who work in municipal K–12 schools in three regions of Chile. Most work in elementary schools (70.2%), 12.2% work in secondary schools, and 11.6% work in secondary vocational schools. The average student enrollment was 341 (SD 298). Most of the school principals work in small schools with fewer than 261 students (53.6%), and only 22.1% are categorized as large schools. Regarding the level of performance, according to the QAE, 10.6% are high performing schools, 43.3% medium performing schools, 24.5% medium-low performing schools, and only 8.6% low performing schools. In terms of professional experience in the principalship, most are experienced (81.8%). Only 19.2% reported having the same or less than 3 years working as a principal, that is, being a novice (García-Garduño et al., 2011). In terms of gender, 54.2% of school principals indicate being female, and 45.8% indicate male.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and correlational analyses were applied to the survey data (Creswell, 2014) using SPSS Statistics Version 25. The narrative descriptions provided by school principals in the survey were assigned two sets of codes. The first set of codes identified which actor was involved directly in the conflict. The codes were as follows: school district, leadership team members, teachers, non-professional staff, students, families, and others. These codes were created to identify the frequency of conflicts with diverse educational actors. The second set of codes identified the type of conflict. Both sets of codes were selected to explore with "whom" and in "which" context principals have conflicts. This was done through an emergent coding process (Creswell, 2014).

Results

The results are organized according to the following focus: frequency and intensity of conflicts according to the educational actor and types of conflicts reported by school principals.

Frequency of conflicts according to educational actors

Principals were asked to select frequency of conflicts with different educational actors. They reported having a higher frequency of conflict (always and almost always) with families (4.56%), students (4.3%) and school district leaders (1.78%). Principals also have frequent conflicts (sometimes) with families (29.87%), students (25.57%), teachers (16.71%), and teacher assistants (15.19%). In contrast, a higher percentage of principals indicated having no conflicts with other school principals (85.57%), with school district leaders (60.51%), and with their school leadership team (58.99%) (See Table 1).

Table 1

Frequency of Conflicts According to Educational Actors

Actor	Never (1)		A few times (2)		Sometimes (3)		Almost always (4)		Always (5)		means
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	
School district leader	239	60.51	119	30.13	26	6.58	7	1.77	4	0.01	1.52
Others school principals	338	85.57	53	13.42	4	1.01	0	0	0	0	1.15
School leadership team	233	58.99	141	35.70	19	4.81	2	0.5	0	0	1.46
Teachers	91	23.04	234	59.24	66	16.71	4	1.01	0	0	1.93
Teacher assistant	111	28.10	218	55.19	60	15.19	5	1.27	1	0.002	1.90
Students	93	23.54	183	46.33	101	25.57	17	4.3	1	0.002	2.11
Families	72	18.23	187	47.34	118	29.87	18	4.56	0	0	2.20

Source: Author's elaboration (2019).

These results report that the frequency of conflicts perceived by principals is greater with actors directly belonging to their school community with whom they have direct and daily interaction (families, students, teachers, and teacher assistants). Similarly, outside actors such as those at the school district level and other school principals appear less frequently in conflict. Only a small group of principals indicated always or almost always having conflicts with these actors (n=11).

Intensity of Conflicts by Educational Actor

Participants were asked to indicate the actor with whom they experienced the most intense conflict during last year (See table II). Data illustrates four main findings. First, facing intense conflicts seems to be natural for school principals. Only a small number of participants (n= 15) reported not having experienced an intense conflict during the school year, leaving most participants (96.2%) having experienced intense conflict. Second, for school principals

in this study (n= 395), conflicts with adults are more intense (83.8%) than conflicts with students (16.2%). Third, principals report that among the adult actors, conflicts with families of students are the most intense (41.5%). Considerably lower in percentage are intense conflicts with teachers (18.7%) and students (16.2%). Parties categorized in the "Other" category include police, city councils, another school principal, and people from outside the school, such as thieves or looters (1.3%). Fourth, it is not possible to affirm that certain characteristics of principals or school types are correlated with certain types of conflict or actor. This is because the descriptive statistical analysis carried out in SPSS indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between the actor with whom the principals have the conflict and the school size (chi-square = 7.993, p = .092), the years of experience in the position (chi-square = 3,901, p = .142), the principal's gender (chi-square = 2,246, p = .325), or with categories defined by QAE (chi-square = 2,133, p = .212).

Table 2

Intensity of Conflict by Actor

Actor	*N*	*%*
Families	164	41.5
Teachers	74	18.7
Students	64	16.2
Teacher assistant	31	7.8
School district leader	23	5.8
School leadership team	19	4.8
No conflict	15	3.8
Others	5	1.3
Total	395	100

Source: Author's elaboration (2019).

Type of Conflicts Reported by School Principals

Table 3 shows the categorization of the types of conflicts according to the events the school principals described. It shows a variety of situations that affect principals' work. However, there is also a clear distribution of the types of conflicts, suggesting that most of the more intense conflicts relate to interpersonal relationships, whereas a small percentage refers to conflicts that link to more structural or external issues that indirectly affect principals' work (Table 3).

Table 3

Types of Conflict

Category	**n**	**%**	**Examples**
Interpersonal relationships	82	20.75	Conflicts with parents because they use social media to say things that are wrong about me and my leadership style.
Resistance to school norms and agreements	68	17.2	Dealing with a mother who did not accept our procedure and protocol when a student (her son) was caught with a gun.
Verbal and/or physical Aggression	63	15.94	The conflict was with a mother, being rude in her dealings...she did not understand reasons, verbally and physically aggressive, trying to hit me while I was in my office.
Legal complaints from schools toward families and from families toward schools	48	12.15	Complaint to the Superintendence of Education due to a case of a student who constantly hits his classmates. His mother accused that the school was not doing anything to help her son.
Roles and tasks	41	10.37	A low-performing teacher, who does not want to work, [is] lazy, and never follows the rules.
Discipline	18	4.55	Students´ misbehaviour, bad words, and disrespect towards their teachers.
Without conflicts	15	3.79	

Principal's autonomy	12	3.03	My conflict was with the school district leader who did not accept my proposal to hire two members for my leadership team.
Family's lack of commitment	12	3.03	The lack of parent's commitment regarding the behaviour of their children, which implies little support for their learning.
Negligence from school	10	2.53	A seventh-grade student had a blow to his head. We decided not to inform the family because there was no sign of any problems during the day. Later, the day, he started to feel dizzy and he was taken to the Emergency Department by his mother. He was left for further observation a couple of days. The mother was angry with us.
Contractual relationships	9	2.27	In October, I informed a teacher who was not going to be considered part of the team in 2019. This decision was not accepted by the teacher. She began to collect signatures from both teachers and assistants in support of her continuance in the school. She also sought support from the Teachers' Union. The latter asked for a meeting regarding the case of the "teacher." I attended this meeting, just as a gesture. They wanted my decision revoked.
Drugs	7	1.77	Female students from the 8th grade were discovered smoking weed in the bathrooms.
Attention to diversity	6	1.51	Dealing with teachers that do not understand that activities, tasks, and lessons must be inclusive.
Strikes	4	1.11	Teacher assistants' strike in which they were demanding benefits that are not within the current law.
Total	**395**	**100**	

Source: Author's elaboration (2019).

Given that the higher percentage of conflicts correspond to interpersonal relationship conflicts, a more detailed description of them is offered in this paper. These included resistance against school norms and agreements, verbal and/or physical aggressions, legal complaints from schools toward families and from families toward schools, and conflicts associated with roles and tasks.

Interpersonal Relationships

Results indicate that most conflicts principals describe refer to interpersonal relationship difficulties (20.75%). These include three types of interpersonal relationships: between adults (n=68), between students (n=8), and between students' guardians and their students (n=5). In these situations, principals may have an active or passive role; that is, they may be part of the conflict or, rather, participate indirectly in it, depending on their role, such as in the case of a conflict between students where the principal must intercede in his authoritative role. Second, half of interpersonal conflicts between adults are divided between situations where principals are not a source of the conflict but have the role of mediating between parties (n = 35): for example, mediating between teachers, between teachers and families, between teachers and students, between students, or among educational assistants. The other half of interpersonal conflicts corresponds to incidents where principals have an active role in the conflict situation (n= 33). These data suggest that principals have a strong role as mediators of conflicts within schools, and the expectation is that they are the ones who sanction or resolve conflicts with other actors.

Resistance Against School Norms and Agreements

Most conflicts in this category refer to situations where principals have to manage students' families' resistance to school norms and agreements regarding student behaviour and learning. The resistance from families includes directly disobeying requests from principals or teachers and ignoring established school procedures and rules. For example, principals described resistance from parents when the institutional behavioural norms were applied to their children or from families who did not respond to agreements established between the family and a teacher to support student behaviour and peer relationships in the classroom. It should be mentioned here that principals also included examples of situations in which families demanded immediate action from the school to resolve their needs. This assertive approach on the part of the family aims to create more tension and distance between them and the school.

School principals identified such families' resistance to school rules as the main cause for these types of conflicts.

Twelve school principals also commented about conflicts caused by teachers' resistance either to the principal's leadership approach, school norms, or agreements focused on improving teaching and relationships with students. Four described conflicts resulting from student resistance to school norms.

Verbal and Physical Aggressions

The third category corresponds to aggressive behaviours that members of the educational community exercise on students, teachers, and principals themselves. Of the 63 conflicts linked to aggression, 31 involved parents and families and included aggressions between parents or parental aggression toward teachers or principals. Eighteen involved students and included physical and verbal attacks on teachers, principals, and other classmates. Twelve referred to aggressions involving teachers. Of these 12, all were related to attacks from teachers on students or, in some cases, on other teachers.

Legal Complaints from Families Toward Schools and from Schools Toward Families

Most legal complaints come from students' families (n=43) who, since the national agency's creation, can file a legal claim against the school if they feel their rights were violated. Examples of such legal claims are those made against teachers or accusations against the school for bullying. A small number of legal complaints (n= 8) were, in fact, made by the school against families. In these cases, for example, the school staff might argue that the family of chronically absent student is not protecting the student's right to education. Five school principals described conflicts caused by legal complaints against teachers for lack of professional behaviour or workplace harassment against principals.

Lack of Response to Professional Roles and Tasks

This category concentrates on conflicts caused by a lack of response to professional roles and tasks. Most were related to school staff and referred to the non-compliance of teacher and other school staff duties. Examples are conflicts with teachers resulting from their lack of response to administrative requirements such as attendance or lesson planning or inappropriate use of time for collaboration at school. A small number of these conflicts (n=9) described difficulties with the district and referred mainly to the administration and delivery of economic resources needed for the school's operation. Some also mentioned conflicts related to hiring processes that the district oversees.

Discussion and Conclusion

Conflicts in schools are inevitable (Henkin & Holliman, 2009; Uline et al., 2003; Saiti, 2015) and principals must manage conflicts whether or not they are prepared to do so. Results described here report on the setting, source, and actors involved in conflicts involving school principals in Chile.

Principals: The Shock Absorbers of conflicts with Families

Findings indicate that school principals in Chile perceive that conflicts with adults were far more intense and frequent than with students. This result is in line with Villalobos et al.'s (2018) study. Moreover, this study reinforces what other have suggested: that principals must serve as a sort of buffer in many situations, absorbing the pressure and responsibility stemming from interpersonal conflicts with community actors such as teachers, students, parents, and other members of the community (García-Garduño et al., 2011).

Our findings show that relationships with parents are the most frequent and intense source of conflicts for school principals, as corroborated by Mahfouz (2018), who focuses her analysis on principals' main stressors. Interpersonal conflicts with parents must be understood not only from an interrelational dimension (principal–families) but especially from an organizational and systemic perspective. We know that school–family relationships are

affected by tensions influenced by race and social class. This means that the capacity and efficacy of schools in establishing links with families is highly modulated by such aspects, which are increasingly more challenging with families who experience poverty and migration and lack the cultural capital provided by school (Crozier, 1999; Lareau, 2003; Author, 2016). Therefore, the relationships between schools and families are controversial, and the data presented here shows that Chile is no exception and confirms the results of previous studies (Montecinos et al., 2010; López et al., 2012).

School principals need support and professional development opportunities to reflect on rebuilding a trusting relationship between schools and their communities and fostering interpersonal skills needed to engage parents effectively (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). This certainly goes beyond principals and involves the whole school staff. Knowing with whom principals perceive having more or more intense conflicts is important to deepen our understanding of principals' work and of the skills they need not only to create a "conflict-positive" setting in their organizations but particularly to develop a problem-finding approach, one where principals are able to "look for and anticipate issues that are not yet highly visible and addressing them before they become impediments" (Murphy & Louis, 2018, p. 133).

This study shows that most of the intense conflicts reported by school principals are not conflicts in which they were involved directly. Principals seem to be the people who address families' issues from the perspectives of teachers and school staff. Data show that principals not only participate actively in conflicts but that teachers require them to mediate conflicts with different actors such as families. Thus, the idea of school "headship" still clearly prevails in Chile rather than a distributed leadership capacity amongst members of the staff (Bush & Yoon Mooi Ng, 2019). More pragmatically, findings show that school principals in Chile still must perform a specific role as "shock absorbers" in conflicts. These situations only add to the pre-existing view that being a school principal in Chile is highly demanding, stressful, and

challenging (Author, 2018; Galdames et al., 2017; Montecinos et al., 2015; Montecinos et al., 2018; Villalobos et al., 2017).

Finally, based on the findings reported by participants, the types of conflicts are not associated with features of schools or with principals' biosocial data. Again, conflicts seem to appear in schools as a natural ingredient (Rahim, 2001). However, from a broader perspective, the type of conflicts that principals in Chile experience result, in most cases, from difficulties in interpersonal relationships among adults. As interpersonal conflicts are a constant in school organizations, principals must search for common interests among diverse educational actors (Saiti, 2015; Tjosvold, 2006). Principals require both managerial and interpersonal skills to be effective (Uline et al., 2003). Leadership practices such as establishing a shared vision and building strong commitment around goals are powerful for understanding conflict productively (Rahim, 2001; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008).

Study Limitations

This study's findings contribute to understanding conflicts reported by school principals in Chile. However, it had three main limitations. First, participants are a convenience sample. This limited the possibility of generalizing the data. Second, the data came from three regions (the most populous in Chile), and including school principals working in the northern and southern parts of Chile may have varied the findings identified in this sample. Third, conflicts are dynamic through time. As the data were produced in 2018, the type of school conflict may vary according to the times; for example, this year (2019), because of the teacher's strike, the frequency or intensity of principal-teacher might be increased.

Implications and Further Research

Based on the conflicts reported by school principals, it is clear that emotional intelligence is integral to their daily work. In their work, principals are challenged not only by

having to manage the emotions of teachers, parents, and students, but also their own emotions,

which might affect their ability to manage the conflicts that emerge from social interactions

(Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). School conflicts stemming from leadership itself are made up of

emotions; thus, exploring principals' emotions is relevant to understand what is behind some

conflicts perceived as critical for principals as well as acknowledging that management of

emotions is crucial for school leaders (Kelchtermans et al., 2011). Furthermore, Blackmore

(2009) argues that emotions must be recognized as "manifestations of the cultural relations and

political economy in specific historical contexts" (p. 109) and not necessarily as individual

matter. In this sense, types of conflicts perceived by principals might reflect how well or poorly

prepared they are to handle the contextual challenges imposed on them (Berkovich & Ori Eyal,

2015).

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