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Learning from School Leadership in Chile

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Learning from School Leadership in Chile
Apprendre du Leadership éducationnel au Chili

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Abstract

In many educational jurisdictions across a range of national boundaries policymakers consider the principalship to be a crucial lever for school reform and improvement. Focused attention on school leadership across the globe exists adjacent to and simultaneous with trends towards greater school based accountability, typically measured by test score results. But since different jurisdictions structure the principalship in the different ways a comparison across countries can help provide insight into the ways policymakers use investments in school leadership to promote certain policy goals and not others. In this paper I focus on the experience of Chile, first describing the peculiar structure of school leadership in Chile, namely a de facto co-principalship model that has concentrated instructional leadership responsibilities in the position of a "pedagogical chief" in the school. Next I analyze this administrative model in light of North American attempts to understand and balance "leadership" and "management" in schools. Finally, I conclude by suggesting a comparative research agenda focused on school leadership that could assist policymakers and practitioners alike seeking to make wise decisions about using scarce public resources to promote school improvement.

Résumé

Dans beaucoup de juridictions éducationnelles, à travers une gamme de frontières nationales, les décideurs considèrent le directeur d'école comme étant un levier crucial pour la réforme et l'amélioration scolaires. Une attention soutenue sur le leadership scolaire existe à travers le monde, adjacente à et simultanément avec des tendances vers davantage de responsabilisation des écoles, typiquement mesurée à partir des résultats de tests. Mais étant donné que les juridictions structurent leur chef d'établissement de manières différentes, une comparaison entre pays peut fournir un aperçu sur les façons dont les décideurs utilisent les investissements dans le leadership scolaire afin de promouvoir certaines politiques et non d'autres. Dans ce document, je mets l'accent sur l'expérience du Chili, en décrivant d'abord la structure particulière du leadership éducationnel au Chili, à savoir un modèle de facto de co-directorat qui a concentré les responsabilités de leadership d'instruction dans la fonction de « chef pédagogique » au sein de l'école. Ensuite j'analyse ce model administratif à la lumière des tentatives nord-américaines cherchant à comprendre et à équilibrer "leadership" et "gestion" dans les écoles. Finalement, je conclus en suggérant un programme de recherche comparative axé sur le leadership éducationnel qui pourrait assister, et les décideurs et les praticiens cherchant à prendre de sages décisions concernant l'utilisation des ressources publiques insuffisantes afin de promouvoir l'amélioration scolaire.

Keywords: principals; Chile; instructional leadership in comparative contexts
Mots-clés: Chili; leadership éducationnel; recherche internationale et comparative

In the current educational policy environment, school leadership is perceived as the remedy to a wide range of educational problems; correspondingly, scrutiny of school

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leaders' work is increasing. Because among in-school factors "leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008, p. 7), and because "school leadership sits in the first position," (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton 2010, p. 197), normative and empirical writing on school reform and improvement have both highlighted the role of the principal. Typically a small set of recommendations dominates. Namely, *instructional leadership* and *distributed leadership* are promoted as organizational ideals (see for example Brookhart & Moss, 2013; MacBeath, 2009). Yet principals' work—by design—remains hierarchical and it also encompasses managerial and micropolitical responsibilities (Flessa, 2009), including the effective use of scarce public funds and the skillful management of multiple demands placed on the school by increasingly pluralist communities. In short, the principalship sits at the centre of a complex, competing set of imperatives (Cuban, 1988) that individuals struggle to balance. In a job with a growing list of many day-to-day demands principals routinely report that although instructional leadership might be the most important part of their job, it is rarely the most urgent (Maxwell, 2014).

Given the growing expectations placed on principals' work for school improvement, policymakers have focused on recruitment, selection, and preparation for *new* leaders as well as the use of leadership standards and frameworks to influence the evaluation and support of *current* leaders. A decade ago, a task force on renewing the North American principalship made recommendations for reimagining the structure of school leadership and empowering leadership teams utilizing shared decision-making models (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). However, few examples exist of attempts to change the structure of the job itself, and those pilot approaches that attempt to do so are often short lived (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). To find an alternative school leadership structure in wide scale use, policymakers, researchers, and educators would have to look beyond the boundaries of North America. Because of its unique school site leadership structure, Chile is a useful place for comparative studies.

Chilean schools, like North American ones, work in a context of test-driven accountability. Unlike North American schools, Chilean institutions rely upon a unique administrative structure where leadership is shared between *directores* (principals) and *jefes pedagogicos* (pedagogical heads). Built into the traditional Chilean structure for school administration is the potential for both distributed and instructional leadership. With each role comes a distinct set of responsibilities. *Directores,* for example, are the acknowledged managerial heads of schools and as such must respond to Ministry of Education requirements for implementation of and reporting about a range of policy requirements. In a context where public and publicly-funded private (voucher) schools compete for enrolment (and thus funding) *directores* must also constantly look outside the school and position the school with an entrepreneurial eye for future enrolment. *Jefes pedagogicos* have administrative responsibilities in schools such as supervision of teachers' lessons plans, but they primarily work with teachers within the school on instructional issues. These different sets of responsibilities, with *directores* externally accountable to the Ministry and *jefes pedagogicos* internally accountable to their colleagues, have an impact on the degree to which Chilean school leaders work together on instructional concerns. The unique structure raises a question relevant for North American audiences: Do the individuals in these roles understand their jobs in ways

similar to or different from how principals and vice principals or principals and curricular coaches do in Canadian or US schools? Are there lessons from Chile that could influence how educators in different jurisdictions think about the role of leadership for school reform?

The Chilean example of an alternative approach to school leadership has a long history but has appeared rarely in research literature written in English. When research on Chile does appear studies typically focus on the voucher system and its impact on student achievement and socioeconomic stratification. Furthermore, of the few recent studies published in English on school leadership in Chile most have focused solely on principals, neglecting the role of the *jefe pedagogico* (Anderson, 2008; Cuellar & Giles, 2012). In short, there is useful comparative analysis to conduct, juxtaposing Chilean and Canadian or US models of school leadership (and the role of that leadership in school reform and improvement). Such research would be relevant for both scholars and practitioners of school leadership.

In the pages that follow I will examine the field of school leadership in Chile to respond to the special issue's call for examinations of "the role of the principal, and his/her leadership style(s) across countries." First I describe the Chilean educational system and explain why it is a useful setting for understanding policymakers' embrace of school site leadership as a policy remedy. Next I describe the peculiar structure of school leadership in Chile, namely a de facto co-principalship model that has concentrated instructional leadership responsibilities in the position of a "pedagogical chief" in the school. I analyze this administrative model in light of North American attempts to understand and balance "leadership" and "management" in schools. Finally, I conclude with a set of potential comparative research projects that would, by examining the Chilean experience in conjunction with North American experience, provide insight to policymakers and practitioners alike seeking to make wise decisions about scarce public resources.

Putting Chile in Context

Studies of education in Latin America have noted that the Chilean educational system ranks above the regional average in results (SERCE 2008 cited in Avalos, 2011). A country with average annual income higher than some of its neighbours, Chile has for a generation devoted significant resources to school reform and improvement. As Weinstein, Muñoz, and Raczynski (2011) note:

> The country leads Latin America in access to formal schooling. This is the most tangible result of a national effort to extend opportunities for access and retention in school. Between 1990 and 2009, the public education budget quintupled; legislation was passed in order to ensure the right to 12 years of free and mandatory schooling; massive programs designed to provide nutrition, text books, and access to computers were implemented; the curriculum was updated at all levels; teachers' salaries were improved; and the amount of time spent in school multiplied, moving most students from a double school day (in which some would attend a morning session and others would go to classes in the afternoon) to a single, full day format (p. 297).

Although these educational investments have had demonstrably positive effect on both access to and quality of education, these reforms have also left in place a three-tiered educational system. A fundamental fact of Chilean educational policy is a voucher

system that was introduced by the Pinochet military government in 1980. The voucher system put into practice at a national scale the ideas of Milton Friedman and other economists who argued that publicly funded vouchers and a school choice marketplace would incentivize school improvement through competition. In Chile today there is a public school system run by municipalities; a publicly subsidized sector of private (voucher) schools (called in Spanish *educación subvencionada*); and a much smaller set of elite private schools. Private schools without public funding serve a small and elite population of students from the wealthiest families. Public municipal schools and publicly subsidized private (voucher) schools receive a set amount of government money per enrolled student. The voucher schools can also charge fees to families, thereby supplementing their school budgets. Public municipal schools do not charge fees.

The publicly subsidized private schools serve the largest proportion of students; more than half of Chilean students attend schools run by the private sector with public money, and this proportion is growing. The public municipal schools are in some regions considered schools of last resort, only for those families unable to pay school fees or too isolated to have access to a publicly funded private school. Raczynski (2012) provides these numbers that illustrate the growth of the voucher system at the expense of the public system (I have translated this direct quote from the Spanish):

> In 1981 publicly-funded private schools represented 15% of total school enrolment; public/municipal was 78%; and private schools were 7%. In 1990 publicly funded private schools were 42%; municipal was 50% and private schools were 8%; in 2008 publicly funded private were 48%, municipal 45%, and private 7%. Information from 2011 indicates that national level of public school enrolment was fallen below 37% (p. 195).

Researchers from a wide range of disciplines debate the impact of these changes. Are publicly funded private schools more efficient or effective than schools in the public system (McEwan & Carnoy, 2000)? Are they contributing to socioeconomic stratification? Are the school leaders working in the publicly-funded voucher system more effective than their municipal public school counterparts (Weinstein & Muñoz, 2012)? For the purposes of this paper, each specific debate matters less than the fact that market forces, including competition for enrolment (and thus funding), shape the day-to-day work of school principals regardless of sector. And principals in the municipal sector, as government employees, face different constraints on their autonomy than principals of privately owned and operated schools (Weinstein & Muñoz, 2012). In Chile, considering "school principals" in the generic is less useful than thinking of the sector-specific ways that they must do their jobs (Flessa & Anderson, 2012).

Schools in Chile, like schools in the US, Canada, and many other jurisdictions, operate under an accountability regime that mandates annual testing. More like the United States than like Ontario, the Chilean system then uses these scores to compare and rank schools, even using a "stoplight" ranking system to show schools that are failing (red) or succeeding (green). During fieldwork for a multiyear study of school improvement in Chile I observed that principals and other school leaders know their school's standardized test (SIMCE) score by heart, they know whether their school's rating is improving or declining, and they usually know how they compare to their competitors in the neighbourhood. When those test score comparisons are positive, they are shown on public bulletin boards and in school newsletters. When they are negative,

they are used to motivate and contextualize professional development workshops for teachers and changes to the instructional program.

For the past decade Chile has undertaken a series of investments in school leadership as a lever for change and reform. As Weinstein and Muñoz (2012) note, thanks to pressures of decentralization/marketization on the one hand, and growing accountability on the other hand, school leaders occupy a role of growing importance in Chile (p. 9), with increasing emphasis on pedagogical (not just managerial) leadership (p. 14). Since 2004 educational policy has redefined the role of principals and of leadership teams within schools to emphasize academics; rewritten the rules for selection into the job (now by open contest/application, no longer by political patronage); and funded scholarships for the preparation of school leaders in certificate, master's degree, and internship programs both at home and abroad. In short, policy has sought to change what the job entails as well as who takes the job, how they are prepared for it, and how they will be assessed. All changes are designed within an overarching emphasis on meeting test-driven accountability goals.

Both the call for improved preparation and selection (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, La Pointe, & Orr, 2010; Levine, 2005) and a call for greater attention to instructional leadership (Brookhart & Moss, 2013; Neumerski, 2012) have their parallels in the US and Canada. That leadership is important is not in doubt. Worth asking, however, is whether there is evidence that leadership in schools ten years ago was in fact weaker and less effective than current school leadership. The logic seems to be that new and better leadership is a solution to a series of educational issues; inherently, mustn't that mean that, from a policymaker's perspective, lack of leadership was the problem? I am aware of no US or Canadian literature that makes this point explicitly, though there is a massive body of normative work from the early part of this century suggesting that a renewed investment in leadership is called for (eg., Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Southern Regional Education Board, 2007). Many of the claims made on behalf of leadership echo much earlier research, particularly the Effective Schools literature that dates to the 1970s and argued that the key difference between successful and unsuccessful schools, especially in challenging circumstances, is the presence of a strong instructional leader (see Carter, 1999; Edmonds, 1979; Leader, 2008).

Exploring the Meaning of "Instructional Leadership"
Some US and Canadian scholarly literature has examined the role of "teacher leaders" and instructional coaches, figures who do not occupy the administrative roles of principal or vice principal (see Firestone & Martinez, 2007; Lieberman, 1987; Little, 2003). The unusual Chilean structure of school site leadership warrants greater examination because of the way it tackles the problem of instructional leadership. With the exception of some alternative models of school leadership that have attempted to break the traditional hierarchical principal/vice principal model (Grubb & Flessa, 2006) there is no close parallel to the Chilean de facto co-principalship model which includes a principal (*director/a*) and a pedagogical chief (*jefe pedagogico* or *jefe tecnico*) working together. Importantly, this co-principalship exists in the vast majority of schools, regardless of sector; there is no similar structure operating at this scale in the US or Canada.

Although studies of school leadership until recently neglected to include the *jefe pedagogico* in their analyses, some recent research, trying to understand patterns of

improvement, has looked at the *jefe pedagogico*. For readers outside of Chile, a bit more background may be useful. Unlike the laws that regulate the scope of a principal's responsibilities, there is no specific policy that defines the *jefe pedagogico* (nor any policy that even requires one to exist). But the *jefe pedagogico* figure is such a central component of daily life for educators in Chilean schools that it forms part of what Tyack and Cuban (1995) would call the "grammar of schooling." The *jefe pedagogico* is part of the taken for granted organizational set up of Chilean schools. *Jefes* are not the same as vice-principals in charge of instruction; they are better understood as sitting atop the organizational chart for instructional matters. Few view this post as a stepping stone to the principalship. Although movement between the *jefe* and the *director* positions is not unheard of, it is by no means as typical as the movement from vice-principal to principal, nor is being a *jefe* is considered a prerequisite for the principalship like being a vice-principal would be in Canada or the US.

The jobs of *director* and *jefe pedagogico* have different professional and demographic profiles. For example, although the directorship is roughly evenly divided in terms of gender, about 70% of *jefes pedagogicos* are women. Some recent work (Weinstein & Muñoz, 2012) has examined a range of differences in principals' demographic profiles across the public and private educational sectors, including age, pay, and education levels. (Less is published about the *jefes*.) A full description of these sector differences is beyond the scope of this paper, but if the evidence for *jefes* is the same as for *directores*, principals in public schools have more education (for example, a greater percentage with master's degrees) than their publicly-funded private school counterparts.

Although a parallel might be figures like literacy coaches—individuals recognized for their pedagogical expertise among teaching colleagues and working outside the classroom—coaches do not occupy nearly the same formal and historical location that *jefes pedagogicos* do. This Chilean model is an especially interesting attempt to prioritize instructional leadership among school administrators. Unlike some models in the states that have tried to pull the *administrative* work away from the principal so that s/he can focus on instruction—for example The National School Administration Manager Innovation Project funded by the Wallace Foundation (Schellinger, 2005; Turnbull et al., 2009)—this model directs the *instructional* chores away from the principal. So does that mean that the "instructional leader" in a school need not be the principal?

An examination of the *jefe pedagogico* raises several questions central to the field of "instructional leadership": should research on this topic focus on roles/positions (individuals whose position within an organizational chart indicates that instructional support is their focus?); should research on this topic focus on *what* instructional leadership seems to be entail, depending on one's position in the school; or should research focus on *what difference* it seems to make?

Although my purpose here is to raise questions more than to report empirical findings from a specific research study, I will share some results from a project that I have participated in over the past few years. Considering these results from Chile is one way for readers in other jurisdictions to put their own understanding of instructional leadership in context. From 2009-2011 the *Centro de Estudios de Políticas y Prácticas en Educación* (CEPPE) conducted a mixed-methods study of school leadership in urban

elementary schools in Chile. The quantitative data come from surveys administered to teachers, school site administrators, and district officials of 649 schools. The surveys asked a series of demographic questions (gender, years experience, pay, professional preparation) as well as questions about the day-to-day work of school leadership. The qualitative data derive from 12 fine-grained case studies (carefully selected from the 649 surveyed schools) initiated after the quantitative phase of the study had been completed. These schools showed a range of academic results from improving to static/declining. Overall there were a total of 159 interviews, 60 of which were with *directores* and *jefes pedagogicos*; there were 24 total additional interviews with other members of the leadership teams (about 2 per school). The remainder of interviewees were teachers, support staff, and district officials. Whereas the quantitative survey results provided an understanding of the broad outline of school leadership practices in schools across Chile, the qualitative phase examined in greater detail *how and with what impact* these practices were taken up by particular school leaders in particular school contexts. The specific objectives of the qualitative case study research were:

- To provide detailed description of the leadership practices found in Chilean elementary schools and to draw connections between these practices and student academic results;
- To comprehend how school contexts mediated the exercise of particular leadership practices;
- To explore and specify what principals and teachers mean by "educational leadership";
- To identify the factors that influence the existence (or absence) of practices of educational leadership.

One interesting finding from the quantitative survey data is that 40% of teachers indicated that they consulted with their *jefe pedagogico* when facing problems with teaching; only about 10% indicated that they sought the counsel of the principal (Flessa, Marfán, & Anderson, 2013). This finding raises a question: can a principal be an instructional leader even if s/he is not working directly with teachers on problems of instructional practice? Some of the most important and influential work on leadership for school improvement has emphasized the importance of principals' work with the "instructional core" (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Elmore, 2000). If principals are not the go-to person for instructional questions from teachers, does this mean that they are not instructional leaders? Or could it mean that their instructional leadership is exercised in other ways?

The qualitative case study data from this study provided some insight into this phenomenon. There were three overarching cross-case findings. First, the study confirmed what other research has found, namely that the job of the director is vast and involves a multitude of tasks and responsibilities. Likewise, the second finding, that directors' work is not focused on instruction, echoes findings from other jurisdictions. The CEPPE researchers posit that the challenging contexts in which the case study principals work explains some of this phenomenon since their day-to-day work is often more with parents or students in crisis. The third cross-case finding was that school level stakeholders (teachers, assistants, and principals themselves) did not view the principal's role as accompanying teachers in their work to improve instruction. One of the case

study principals has previously (and atypically, for Chile) been a *jefe pedagogico* and noted the difference in the roles. She said:

> When I was *jefe tecnica* I led the classroom but now it's a mix. We're told that the principal should be focused on academic matters, but there are other priorities that demand my time. I feel more like the *Inspectora General* (disciplinarian) and Financial Administrator of the school.[2]

So should researchers understand "instructional leadership" as belonging to a certain person in an organizational chart, or is it a set of behaviors and actions stretched across different roles? Some combination of both? Understanding how individuals doing this work actually understand the opportunities and constraints of doing instructional leadership might help policymakers better support their stated goal of improved teaching and learning.

Digging into the individual school cases to look at the relationship *between* the *director* and the *jefe pedagogico* revealed some interesting dynamics that further complicate the question of who is an instructional leader and what instructional leadership requires. Spillane's (2006) characterization of different ways of distributing leadership—collaborative, collective, and coordinated—provides one way to think about how these two school leaders might be working together. Is the *jefe pedagogico* the instructional leadership *delegate* at a school, or is s/he one member of a team that a principal is working with collectively to focus adults' work on improved teaching and learning? One of the case study principals raised this question herself in an interview, stating:

> I disagree a bit with what the literature says about the role of the principal. I don't think the principal must necessarily be an instructional leader. The principal *could* be one, but does not have to be. I believe that the director should be a leader in shaping the overall direction of the school. And that the instructional leaders should be the *jefes pedagocicos*.

Other Chilean research, though, has argued that the principal must be directly involved in instruction to promote academic improvement. "The interesting figure of the head teacher, who works with the principal, is called upon to strengthen teaching. However, he or she is only effective when the director is involved in instructional matters…" (Weinstein, Muñoz, & Raczynski, 2011, p. 18). The question that is underexplored is just what "involved in instruction" does (or should) mean. Some principals in the study approached the question of instructional leadership by delegating it all to the *jefe pedagogico*. That is, they viewed their own job as focused on other priorities. Other principals, however, took a more active role in coordinating the *jefe pedagogico's* efforts in the school, and still others worked hand-in-hand with them on instruction.

There is some reason to think, based on a closer examination of the improving case study schools in this project, that in improving schools *both* the principal and the *jefe pedagogico* are working on instructional issues and consider themselves competent to give feedback to teachers on their teaching. In other words, for the work of the *jefe pedagogico* to have impact it is not a *substitute* for principals' instructional leadership, but a supplement to it. If the principal is not an instructional leader, it is unlikely that the

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[2] This quotation and the one the follows come from a May 2012 draft report of qualitative findings produced by the CEPPE research team. The translation from the original Spanish is my own.

jefe pedagogico can make up for that gap on his or her own (Flessa, Marfán, & Anderson, 2013).

Defining instructional leadership as direct contact between principals and teachers on problems of practice has the potential to highlight the personal but neglect the organizational aspects of school site leadership. So, then, what are the aspects of instructional leadership that might not be captured by a survey question asking teachers to identify to whom they turn with questions of professional practice? Decisions about use of professional development time during the school day; the hiring of new staff or the transferring/firing of veteran staff; establishing a tone of high expectations for both educators and students; or managing interruptions to the instructional day; establishing policies for peer-to-peer feedback; or selecting the right outside organization to provide technical assistance for school improvement: these are resources for instructional improvement that come from a principal's decisions. They may be complex or abstract resources, but that does not mean that they are less important than direct work with teachers (Grubb & Tredway, 2010). One recent economic analysis of principals' influence concludes that "improvement in the stock of teacher quality provides an important channel through which principals can raise the quality of education" (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012, p. 28). From this view, instructional leadership might be best understood as how the teaching team is formed, not how the teaching team is coached.

In her outstanding and comprehensive review of the literature, Neumerski (2013) argues quite persuasively that most considerations of instructional leadership have been limited by their narrow examination of the phenomenon of instructional leadership, viewing it as the technical interventions of one or two individuals in a school. A more nuanced examination of schools as organizations, however, reveals that instructional leadership in fact most likely emerges in complex ways stretched across multiple school actors and roles. She writes:

> Although some studies have examined multiple leaders simultaneously, we have largely failed to uncover the interactions (as opposed actions or behaviors) among leaders and their followers. We also need to consider these interactions with context, moving beyond lists of decontextualized leadership behaviors, which appear prominently in the principal literature and are emerging in the teacher leader and coach literatures. Such an approach will involve viewing context as more than a backdrop, but as integral to instructional leadership. We know almost nothing about how instructional leadership varies within the different instructional systems throughout the United States (p. 336).

There is little to disagree with in Neumerski's conclusion and it points a useful way forward. However, to her conclusion I would add that there is very little work that examines how instructional leadership varies in systems *outside* of the United States or Canada, and next to none taking seriously the experience of any country in Latin America.

Areas for Future Inquiry
One benefit of juxtaposing two jurisdictions' educational leadership practices is that at the same time as it highlights points of commonality it is also drawing attention to the taken for granted structures and theories of action organizing educators' work in schools. There are a number of interesting empirical projects that are suggested by linking the US and Canadian and Chilean policies supporting school leadership. Consistent with this

special issue's goal to put forward ideas of "some studies that can be developed" I broadly sketch four possible projects below.

1. How is "instructional leadership" gendered?

There is a need for empirical descriptive data about gender and school leadership in both Chile and Canada, and those data could form the baseline for a critical examination of the ways that opportunity has been opened up or constrained by policymakers' stated affinity for "instructional leadership" at the school site level. Whereas in Chile the school principalship is close to about 50/50 split by gender, the *jefe pedagogico* position is far more likely to be occupied by a woman than a man. About 70% of *jefes pedagogicos* in Chile are women. On the one hand this makes a great deal of sense—more women are teachers than men so the proportion is not terribly skewed from that. On the other hand it raises questions about the job pipelines as well as how individuals charged with *instructional* influence and *organizational* influence might be differentially recruited, selected, and rewarded.

2. How do school micropolitics support and constrain instructional leadership efforts of principals and others working outside the classroom to support teaching?

Any real attempt to understand how principals and *jefes pedagogicos* work together will require careful study of a school's micropolitics. How do they distribute authority between them? Are they mutually supportive, working together, or is it more like parallel play? Do staff members trust both leaders equally? What are typical points of contention between leaders and how are they resolved? Whose vision of school improvement or school change is more likely to be shared among the teachers, and where does that vision come from (district/ministry/owner)? Is the person charged with communicating this vision to the families the same person who is working with the teachers and staff? Are the skill sets of the two different jobs complementary or in tension? Studying micropolitics requires examining conflict: conflicts over status, mission, vision, leadership styles, or any number of things that matter to educators in their daily work. When two people in one school both have a mandate (from policy or common custom) to work with teachers on instruction, what ensures that they will work together or work effectively? And when, as is inevitable, one has strengths that the other does not, how will these differences be bridged?

3. What are the fairest expectations to have of school leaders in a transparently inequitable system?

Educational leaders in both North America and Chile work in an accountability environment with stated goals of raising achievement and closing gaps. Just how reasonable it is to expect schools to do either given the persistence of home-based advantages that predict success for some and failure for others is an open question, but it is rarely treated as such (Thrupp, 1999). Instead, concerns about where education might fit in a complex portfolio of other necessary social investments to raise the chances of educational opportunity for students from low income families are typically rebutted with simple exhortations to have "no excuses" (see Delbanco, 2013). How do school leaders work within unfair systems to create greater fairness, and where do they find their points

of greatest influence? Is this big question even on the table for principals or other instructional leaders?

4.   How does school leadership—a very local phenomenon—relate to larger national narratives?

Every time I have presented any research about Chilean educational leadership to an audience outside of Chile one of the first, tentative questions from the audience is some version of "How important do you think Chileans' experience of military rule is in shaping how they think about a principal's job?" The implication is that relatively innocuous claims in North America or Europe of the benefits of "strong leadership" sound different to people who listened to a dictator characterize himself that way. I do not have any quick answers to how visions of local school leadership relate to national identity, and that suggests to me that it is worth its own full consideration.

Part of learning to be an effective school leader is learning to pay attention to what conflict is telling us. Some conflicts among adults in schools are not only inevitable, they are necessary, particularly if the changes that need to happen at the school level are breaks with past practice. But in a country where, during the last presidential election, the two major candidates were from opposing sides of a civil war, one being the daughter of a military officer tortured to death and the other the daughter of a military officer who supported the dictatorship, assertions about productive value of political conflict take on a different resonance. I am not suggesting that Chilean democratic traditions are any more fragile than those in other nations or that all conflicts within schools link directly to national histories. I am suggesting instead that there might be "Chilean" ways of doing school leadership that are distinct from "Canadian" or "American" ways of doing school leadership because the consequences of working with or against government institutions have been very different in these countries. When school leadership literature is imported or exported into different jurisdictions and applied without a consideration of local context, one risk is that important local phenomena shaping the ways educators, students, and families understand their schools will be ignored. It may be more useful to ask, at every turn, "How well does this fit?"

Chile has in the past few years witnessed what could reasonably be called a student revolution with enormous popular support. High school students shut down the school system for most of the 2012 academic year protesting the scarcity of slots in Chile's top universities for students from anything other than elite backgrounds. Students also protested the rising cost and diminished quality of postsecondary education, which students blamed on *lucro* (profit) in education and an underregulated market of postsecondary education suppliers. The work of school principals over the past couple of years has included, especially but not exclusively at the secondary level, negotiating with student groups and their community supporters who closed schools in massive nationwide strikes. When moments of such enormous student democratic participation prevent a school from conducting its routine work, what should school leaders be doing? Is there any contemporary Canadian or US comparison to the Chilean experience? Idle No More, characterized by one sociologist as "the largest, most unified, and potentially most transformative Indigenous movement at least since the Oka resistance in 1990" (Denis, 2012), captured public and mainstream media attention in Canada. But most secondary schools continued with little consistent interruption. As a society changes,

schools become locations of conflict that shape the boundaries of principals' work and influence.

Conclusions and Reflection

As a scholar of urban education, where researchers and practitioners regularly argue for particular policy interventions to combat the racial and socioeconomic stratification of educational opportunity in cities, I am attuned to the ways that educational leadership scholarship has sometimes prioritized *generic* system-level recommendations over *context specific* ones. This tension, between the general and the particular, has generated significant debate regarding the most effective, most scaleable, and most urgently needed approaches to reform and improvement for some of our society's most marginalized students (see for example the debate between Noguera, 2006 and Fullan, 2006).

International and comparative research on leadership is another example where the tension between the particular and the general is foregrounded. Is the work of a principal in Newmarket, Ontario mostly similar to or mostly different from the work of a principal in Antofagasta, Chile? On the one hand, research that examines and directly speaks to local experience is likely be taken more seriously by educators on the ground. On the other hand, to be relevant to a particular country or educational context, research need not necessarily originate from that context. In fact, international benchmarking of best practices is considered a basic tool for policymakers seeking to understand why some jurisdictions seem to accomplish better educational outcomes than we do here at home (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Levin, Flessa, Huang, & Read, 2013; Sahlberg, 2011; Stoll, Robertson, Butler-Kisber, Sklar, & Whittingham, 2007).

Although not technically a benchmarking exercise, in this paper I have tried to highlight the little-examined (at least in English) experience of educational leaders working in a uniquely structured school site leadership arrangement. Because educators and leaders both here and in Chile are struggling with the notion of how leaders can and should influence teachers' work, the comparison can suggest both the potential and pitfalls of alternative approaches.

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