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When duties are not enough: principal leadership and public or private school management in Chile¹

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The Chilean education system is an emblematic case of school management privatization, with the majority of schools operating under government funding, but private administration. This article addresses the incidence of this dimension on school leadership, showing the differences and continuities established among primary school principals in the subsidized private and municipal sectors. The conclusion is that private school administrators do not recruit principals on a competitive basis, as a result of which these principals do not present a more developed professional profile, and that merely having more duties for executing the principal position – as happens in subsidized private schools – is not enough for an effective development of practices evidencing improved school leadership. These conclusions challenge the statement frequently expressed, but lacking sufficient empirical evidence, that the greater autonomy in school management encompassed by privatization will positively impact on school leadership and, therefore, on educational improvement.

Keywords: principal leadership; school management; privatization

The intermingling of two current issues

The drive to have effective school principals exercising strong instructional leadership and effectively impacting on the quality of the schools they manage is increasingly becoming part of educational policy in contexts characterized by decentralization and accountability (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). It is confidently assumed that, following converging results of research studies (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010) carried out in different contexts and countries, the *leadership factor* will establish a favorable difference and will contribute to school compliance with established standards. Not in vain, it has been claimed that this leadership would be the second most relevant intra-school factor bearing on the quality of a school and that its impact would increase where it is more strongly needed: in the most disadvantaged social contexts (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). The inclusion of this dimension is also supported by its *cost-effectiveness*: By managing to affect a small segment of individuals (principals), a subsequent impact would be attained on a much higher number of individuals (teachers), who, in turn, would make a decisive impact on the final beneficiaries of the system (students). Likewise, the literature states that successful principals enable improvement of student academic achievement *mediated* by teachers (Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009), more precisely through principal influence on teacher motivation and commitment as well as on their work conditions and instructional performance

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(Leithwood et al., 2006). Not surprisingly, many school systems are generating different initiatives to strengthen their capacity to recruit good leaders as well as to provide them with the necessary tools to carry out their functions (Pont et al., 2008).

The information that research may contribute with respect to how this leadership is implemented and developed, especially in the most modifiable policy dimensions, such as organizational dimensions, therefore has high relevance and timeliness.

Concurrently and with increasing strength, initiatives promoting private education management, transferring the responsibility for providing the educational service to stakeholders outside the government bureaucracy – whether groups of educators, churches, specialized foundations, parents, among others (Hill, 2010) – become widespread on an international level. This privatization acquires special significance in developing countries (Walford & Srivastava, 2007). This movement rests on the conviction that these private providers will be able to obtain better results than public ones, overcoming bureaucratization and attaining closer proximity to users (students, families, the communities in which they are inserted). In this way, a *good school management capacity*, enabled by their enhanced flexibility in the use of the different resources and their rejection of numerous bureaucratic standards, would be one of the (purported) strengths of private stakeholders as compared to public ones (Barrera-Osorio, Patrinos, & Wodon, 2009).

This (purported) improved management would be directly associated with the enhanced decision-making capacity granted to school principals. As stated by Gawlik (2008) in relation to the US experience, “perhaps the most distinctive feature of Charter schools compared with traditional public schools is the significant autonomy granted to principals” (p. 704). In theory, these *empowered* principals would manage, among other advances, to recruit better teachers as well as to ensure their improved professional performance, though the evidence in this area is not conclusive.²

The confluence of these two dimensions – leadership and the form of provision of the educational service – is encompassed in the following question: How does school leadership in subsidized private schools compare to that in public schools? Or, more precisely: Are principals recruited by subsidized private schools similar to, or different from, those recruited by municipal schools? What are the duties held by the former and the latter for the performance of their leadership functions? And, what are the practices really applied in schools by principals in both subsectors? The idea is to make a comparison enabling better understanding of the effect from having a private organizational context and, therefore, higher *degrees of freedom* in management, in teacher recruitment, and in the performance of the leadership function itself.

Chile is presently a privileged scenario for the study of this topic. It is not alien to the efforts being undertaken to strengthen leadership, which is regarded to be the axis for improving education quality in schools.³ But, above all, it has a school system where the simultaneous operation of both subsectors for more than 2 decades has already been well established: a public subsector, where municipalities administer schools, and a subsidized private one, where private agents – profit or non-profit – manage educational services with public financing. The former is subject to strict regulation by the State, with clear restrictions with respect to how municipal administrators may manage schools, particularly concerning the use of financial resources, student selection, and teachers’ work conditions, while the latter contemplates a much stronger decision-making capacity for administrators themselves concerning institutional management. It is quite relevant that the preferences of the population have progressively favored the search for subsidized

private schools, which at present represent more than 55% of overall enrollment and capture a large percentage of the students in the middle and middle-low income groups.⁴

As background, consideration must be given to the fact that, under this particular cohabitation of differentiated management models and supported by growing funding, the Chilean educational system has made important achievements, significantly increasing educational attainment and educational opportunities for the population (in particular for the most socially deprived population) and progressively improving student learning (as shown by results from the PISA 2006 and 2009 tests), despite maintaining significant inequality levels (Mourshed, Chijioko, & Barber, 2010; Weinstein & Muñoz, 2009).

What are the characteristics of primary school principals in both systems?

Based on information from a recent survey of primary schools (see methodological detail in Appendix 1), the purpose of this study is to know whether both management systems have similar leaders or leaders with relevant differences from the point of view of demographics, gender, or social characteristics. For a more comprehensive comparison of both subsectors, we have also incorporated in Figure 1 and in the tables information concerning leaders in non-subsidized private schools, where the Chilean elite are educated (approximately 7% of the enrollment).

The average age of surveyed principals was 55.7 years, similar for both men and women (see Table 1). None of the principals were less than 30 years old, and almost half of them were between 50 and 60 years old. In this sense, Chile is not alien to the world trend in this area: There is a marked aging of school leaders, with a large number of them retiring within the next 5 to 10 years, which presents the challenge of appropriately replacing them (Pont et al., 2008).

The average age of Chilean school principals is higher in the municipal sector than in the subsidized private sector – and it is in turn higher than in the non-subsidized private sector. This results in municipal sector principals less than 50 years old being an exception. Beyond the administrative subsector in which they are hired, the youngest principal segment is found in higher proportion in schools with a middle or high socioeconomic status and in schools of smaller size.

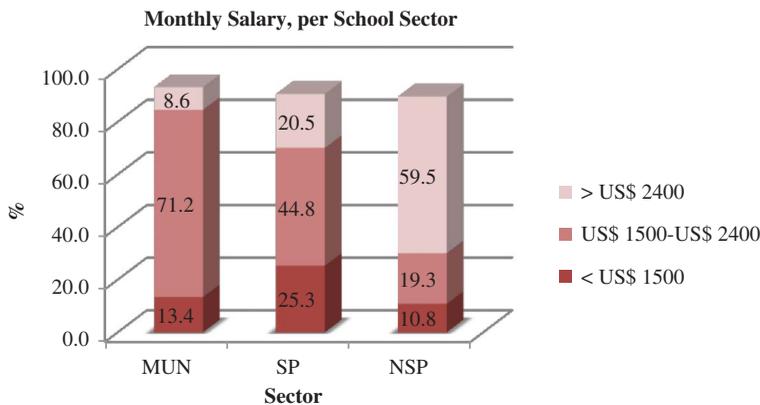


Figure 1. Principal remuneration, per school sector.
Source: Author’s elaboration based on principal survey.

Table 1. Age of principals, per subsector, school size, and school socioeconomic status.

Age Intervals	Total	School subsector			School size (number of students)			School socioeconomic status ¹		
		MUN	SP	NSP	Small	Medium	Large	Low and middle-low	Middle	High and middle-high
30–50 years	26.0	11.0	33.5	41.7	32.8	24.5	20.7	19.0	28.2	31.2
51–60 years	47.6	63.4	39.7	31.7	43.8	45.3	53.9	55.2	45.5	41.7
61–84 years	25.6	24.2	26.4	26.6	22.9	29.7	24.2	24.9	25.6	26.5
Doesn't know/ Doesn't answer	.7	1.4	.3	.0	.5	.5	1.1	.9	.7	.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>N</i>	649	241	338	70	218	215	216	229	204	215

Notes: ¹In Chile, the National Education Quality Assessment System (SIMCE) classifies schools into 5 categories. These categories are defined considering income and education variables of student families as well as some basic student data. Source: Author's elaboration based on principal survey. MUN: Municipal. SP: Subsidized private. NSP: Non-subsidized private. Small school: between 35 and 269 students). Medium school: between 270 and 471 students. Big school: more than 472 students.

From a gender point of view and contrary to many countries where men prevail over women in management positions (Pont et al., 2008), in the Chilean case, the distribution of male and female principals in schools is quite balanced and even shows an advantage in favor of females, especially in the private sector (see Table 2). Consequently, while the overall sample indicates that 57% of primary schools are managed by female principals, when considering the relevant subsector, it is found that the relationship between male principals and female principals is equivalent in the municipal sector (around 50%), whereas female predominance is notorious in the subsidized private sector (65%). In addition, it is observed that there is generally a higher presence of female principals in small schools as well as in schools with a middle or high socioeconomic status, a situation similar to that prevailing on an international level (Pont et al., 2008). Also, female principals have somewhat lower postgraduate education levels than their male colleagues.⁵

Another interesting element is principal social origin. Our survey indicates that, from this standpoint, municipal and subsidized private schools are managed by educational professionals from very similar socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, the educational attainment of both the father and the mother of the principals are relatively equivalent, with a slight bias towards higher educational attainment for parents of principals in subsidized private schools. On the contrary, there is a significant difference with respect to principals in non-subsidized private schools, who do come from families having higher cultural and social capital.⁶

Given these basic characteristics of municipal and subsidized private school principals, it is convenient to ask if there are any characteristics concerning work conditions or the recruitment process itself that may be underlying and impacting on key dimensions – such as the lower age of principals or the higher female presence in subsidized private schools.

Salary is usually a critical attraction and retention factor bearing on leadership positions (Gates, Ringel, Santibañez, Ross, & Chung, 2003). The overall average monthly

Table 2. Principal gender, per subsector, size, education, and school socioeconomic status.

Gender	Subsector			School size			Postgraduate education			School SES			
	Total	MUN	SP	NSP	Small	Medium	Large	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced	Low and middle-low	Middle	High and middle-high
% Fem	57.2	48.7	64.8	49.9	66.9	56.0	48.8	63.4	61.9	52.1	51.4	58.9	61.9
% Mal	42.8	51.3	35.2	50.1	33.1	44.0	51.2	36.6	38.1	47.9	48.6	41.1	38.1
N	649	241	338	70	218	215	216	140	180	328	229	204	215

Source: Author's elaboration based on principal survey.

remuneration for primary school principals is somewhat higher than USD 2000⁷, though there are significant differences in terms of age and professional experience. Concerning differentiation depending on the relevant administrative subsector, this may be observed in Figure 1.

So, there is no significant difference in the average salary for municipal or subsidized private school leaders, but there is a different distribution.⁸ Accordingly, there is a higher heterogeneity in principal salaries within the subsidized private sector – with a higher number of principals earning lower or higher salaries – as compared to those in the municipal sector – with principal salaries mainly concentrated across an intermediate segment, thus reflecting the fact that they are subject to a common salary regulation.⁹ This greater heterogeneity in remunerations in the private sector is also expressed in that there are larger differences by gender, with these female principals earning a salary lower than that of their male peers, the same as in other school systems (Gates et al., 2003). Anyway, there is a strong difference between the salaries of these two kinds of principals and those of elite school leaders in non-subsidized private schools, who have a clearly higher salary.

Another aspect to be reviewed is the way in which both systems address the principal selection and recruitment issue. The literature recognizes that this issue is a fundamental aspect for improving principal quality (Clifford, 2012), highlighting its potential contribution through appropriate selection of the most highly qualified professionals (Barber & Mourshed, 2007), and, above all, through a system attracting ever more scarce applicants for an increasingly complex and demanded function (MacBeath, 2011; Pont et al., 2008).

In the Chilean case, there is a *break* among subsidized schools, whether municipal or private, in the recruitment methods used (see Table 3). In fact, while in the municipal sector, as dictated by law¹⁰, hiring for the school leader position is generally done through open competitive application (evaluation of applicant qualifications) where a formal staff selection process has been carried out (more than 80% of principals have been hired through these competitive application processes), informal, non-competitive selection prevails in the subsidized private sector (approximately 60% of principals were selected following a direct invitation from school administrators). Even the proportion of non-subsidized private schools which carry out competitive school leader selection processes duplicates the extremely low proportion in subsidized private schools (10%).

Table 3. How did you attain your school leader position? Per subsector.

		Subsector			
		Total	MUN	SP	NSP
Staff selection process or public competitive application	%	38.1	81.8	10.1	22.9
Direct invitation from the school administrator or board	%	41.8	14.2	58.7	54.9
I am the school administrator (or owner) and principal	%	12.5	0.0	21.3	13.3
Other	%	7.4	4.1	9.5	9.0
No answer	%	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.0
Total	Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	N	649	241	338	70

Source: Author's elaboration based on principal survey.

Table 4. Studies subsequent to the initial professional degree for school principals in Chile.

	Total	Municipal	Subsidized private	Non-subsidized private
% With a Diploma or Postgraduate Studies ¹	69.7	89.0	56.8	65.4
% With a Master's Degree	44.2	60.6	31.8	47.9
% With a PhD	4.4	5.0	3.0	8.8

Note: ¹This only considers participation in training activities with a duration of more than 1 year. Source: Author's elaboration based on principal survey.

The existence of these two differentiated school principal position access systems – competitive application and personal invitation – has relevant consequences. Accordingly, the trend in the public sector is for principals to have significantly more advanced postgraduate professional training – a highly regarded requirement in the formal selection process – than principals considered for this position in subsidized private schools (see Table 4). Even this specialized training of public school leaders exceeds that of (the most highly remunerated) elite school leaders.

Likewise, there is a trend towards a progressive professional career path among municipal principals, in which several steps of intermediate responsibility are taken in a school before undertaking a position as principal. Moreover, the viability of a fast track itself, through which a classroom teacher may become, without transition, a school principal, is very low, while this occurs in no less than 43% of subsidized private schools (see Table 5).¹¹

Those elements that are relevant in the more formalized hiring of principals – professional training with a higher level of postgraduate studies and a progressive career path in their positions – require a higher level of experience, which generates an *age barrier* that benefits, in the municipal sector, those applicants that have been longer in the educational system.

The fact that municipal administrators carry out more formal and competitive selection processes does not necessarily ensure that they manage to recruit good applicants, and there may be certain key characteristics for principal performance that are not sufficiently

Table 5. Position immediately prior to the school principal position, per subsector.

Prior position	Total	Administrativesubsector		
		MUN	SP	NSP
Classroom teacher	32.8	20.9	43.3	23.2
Principal	21.9	27.1	19.1	17.4
Deputy principal	9.0	7.9	7.5	19.7
Technical team director or member	17.5	24.4	13.4	12.9
Inspector, counselor, or member of school leadership team	9.6	10.8	8.8	3.7
Other	4.2	3.0	3.0	13.9
NI*	5.0	3.9	5.0	9.2
Weighted $N = 100\%$	(649)	(241)	(338)	(70)

Note: *NI = No information. Source: Author's elaboration based on principal survey.

considered in the process (Clifford, 2012). However, it does provide a sort of *minimum floor* in terms of relevant training and experience for professional performance (Loeb, Kalogrides, & Lai Horng, 2010) and also results in higher homogeneity among principals in the municipal sector. The same may not be stated for the subsidized private sector, where flexibility has led to scarcely formal and non-competitive recruitment processes, as a result of which principals have less training and experience in management tasks¹² and there is higher overall heterogeneity among these schools.

It is convenient to pay attention to a special subsidized private school principal segment: those who are simultaneously the owners and the principals of the schools. On an international level, the presence of institutions and persons starting to manage educational units – many times without previous experience – in the form of federations, networks, or consortiums is increasingly frequent (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2010; Hill, 2010). This type of model usually leads to a close relationship between the administrator and the school, but at the same time, to additional and sometimes different pressures on school leaders, who must multiply their fields of action and are not always able to properly differentiate their different roles (Blitz, 2011). Together with this, some research studies have identified in this type of schools a frequent principal succession problem, in that this responds to projects and efforts related to personal and/or family entrepreneurial interests (Wexler & Huerta, 2000).

Far from being a rare phenomenon in Chile, the principal/owner modality represents a relevant proportion in this subsector – 30% – one of the relevant phenomena accounting for the growth of this sector over the last decades.¹³ These principals/owners are frequently different from their subsidized private peers in the following aspects: They are older, they have less postgraduate education, they have more frequently jumped to the position directly from classroom teaching, and they have higher salaries. We will come back to this subgroup later.

The imbalance in principal duties

An extremely relevant management area is related to the decision-making capacity of school principals. In fact, the growing prevalence of *accountability*, where school leaders are held accountable for the results obtained by the schools they manage, is usually counterbalanced with the granting of more duties to them (Pont et al., 2008). However, there is stress between the decisions that are effectively left in the hands of principals themselves and those that are reserved for administrators. And there are also other decisions that, by law, are excluded from this local level, with the mere application of national regulations being pertinent in these cases. Anyhow, there has been a tendency, especially in the private sector, to extend the margin of autonomy provided to principals, trusting that their decision-making capacity will be more timely, informed, and pertinent to the specific situation of their school (Gawlick, 2008).¹⁴

Our study in Chile analyzed the decision-making capacity of school principals on a number of school matters. Table 6 shows the total mean of principals who answered that they have a “very strong” decision-making capacity concerning different matters and their classification in accordance with the administrative subsector to which they report.

The general view, when comparing mean differences by subsector, reflects a recurring pattern: Across all decision-making areas, subsidized private schools are perceived as having a much higher level of autonomy than municipal schools, and the dimension in which the distance is higher is referred to human resource management.¹⁵ Additionally,

Table 6. School principal duties (% who consider that they have a very strong decision-making capacity), per subsector.

Dimension	Decision-Making Area	% Answ. "Very Strong"	MUN	SP	NSP
Human Resources	Hiring teachers	45.3%	4.1% * **	66.9% ** ****	82.9% * ****
	Firing teachers	36.3%	1.7% * **	54.4% **	67.1% *
	Setting teacher remuneration	22.5%	.0% * **	32.5% ** ****	50.7% * ****
	Building the school leadership team	40.9%	13.3% * **	55.8% **	63.4% *
Financial Resources	Defining the annual budget	25.1%	3.3% * **	36.9% **	42.9% *
	Spending approved resources	31.0%	9.2% * **	42.3% **	50.7% *
	Investing in infrastructure and equipment	28.2%	10.0% * **	38.6% **	40.0% *
Curriculum	Defining the school curriculum offer (courses)	35.8%	14.5% * **	46.4% **	58.0% *
	Defining course plans and programs	31.7%	11.3% * **	42.3% **	50.7% *
	Selecting textbooks	45.6%	36.3% * **	48.7% ** ****	62.9% * ****
Student Policy	Defining student admission policies	43.2%	20.4% * **	54.7% **	65.7% *
	Setting discipline and interrelation standards	58.9%	49.4% * **	63.9% **	67.1% *
	Applying external learning achievement tests different from SIMCE	40.0%	28.8% * **	43.3% ** ****	62.0% * ****
Improvement	Hiring external technical assistance	32.2%	15.4% * **	40.4% **	50.0% *
	Designing improvement plans	57.0%	49.6% * **	59.9% **	68.6% *
	Executing improvement plans	53.3%	46.3% * **	55.8% **	65.7% *
	Weighted N	649	241	338	70

Note: Source: Author's elaboration based on weighted principal survey. *, **, **** = significant difference at 0.05.

the dimensions in which principals are more empowered are school improvement processes and student policy.

The first decision-making area is the school's human resource management, particularly concerning teachers reporting to the corresponding principal. It may be observed that

public sector principals have practically no bearing on these matters, with very scarce influence concerning the hiring or firing of teachers or the building of its most direct collaborator team. This is due to the fact that, actually, within the municipal sector, current regulations reserve these decisions to the hiring entity: The municipality (district) itself is the entity in charge of recruiting or firing school teachers as well as hiring the rest of its school leaders. The scarce cases in which municipal principals state that they may resolve these matters most probably correspond to informal arrangements in which the public administrator voluntarily transfers or shares this decision-making capacity. In contrast, in the private sector, these duties are mainly considered to rest with principals as part of their functions. The main limitation established by private administrators seems to concern the transfer of decisions that have economic implications: In fact, the capacity to set teacher remunerations is only allowed to one third of subsidized private school principals. In the Chilean municipal sector, this power is not only beyond principals but also beyond the municipalities themselves.¹⁶

This concern of administrators for maintaining strict control over funding is clearly expressed in the second area. In fact, financial resource management is the area where principal decision-making capacities are weakest. Not only do municipal principals have a marginal capacity to manage financial resources, not having any influence on the definition of the school's budget or investment in infrastructure and equipment¹⁷, but also their colleagues in the private sector are severely limited in this respect. A minority of subsidized private school principals decide on these matters, and the majority of the administrators in this subsector reserve for themselves even the actual spending of the funds that have already been approved.

Regarding the curriculum, differentiated duties are perceived according to the subsector, again observing that private sector principals have a clearly stronger decision-making capacity. Accordingly, these principals take advantage of the opportunities provided by the Chilean school system enabling schools to have their own individual study programs provided that these are framed within the current curriculum standards or that they choose to use the *official programs* proposed by the Ministry. The trend for principals in the public sector is to consider that the school itself has no bearing on these curriculum definitions, which would be resolved by other entities and levels (administrator, Ministry). In contrast, more than 40% of subsidized private school principals regard themselves as the main stakeholders in these matters – which are an integral part of the educational offer that distinguishes the school and that provides it with a certain particular identity in face of other similarly equivalent *educational offers*. And the proportion increases still more among non-subsidized private sector principals. Some municipal school principals (36%) do perceive that they have a decision-making capacity in a specific teaching matter: the selection of the textbooks that are distributed in schools.

Principals consider that the decisions concerning students are effectively a relevant part of their task. In particular, there is a widespread belief that definitions concerning school interrelations and discipline are one of the responsibilities inherent in school leader functions, and this belief is shared by half of the principals in the municipal sector. However, while this *interrelation management* is claimed by school principals across the board, as regards regulation of student registration, again there is a difference between both sectors: More than half of the principals in the subsidized private sector consider that they may define the requirements for student access to the school, which is considered pertinent by only one fifth of their colleagues in the municipal sector.¹⁸ Finally, school principals are also different in the power they attribute themselves having in the implementation of complementary forms of student learning assessment. Accordingly, while

29% of municipal principals consider that the administration of external tests is a decision-making area that is pertinent to them, more than 40% of their peers in subsidized private schools believe the contrary.

The last dimension analyzed refers to school improvement. Principals perceive to a higher degree that they have duties to participate as the main stakeholders in the task of improving the quality of the results obtained by the school. This trend is still more evident among subsidized private school principals: Close to 60% consider that it is their responsibility to design and execute improvement plans, a proportion that drops by around 10 percentage points in the case of public school principals. However, in the case of the municipal sector, this important responsibility for improvement does not imply that principals consider that they may comprehensively manage this area: Actually, involvement in decisions concerning the hiring of external technical assistance, a relevant point in the implementation of change plans or projects, is regarded as an area beyond the school itself.

When focusing on the duties held by subsidized private school principals, it may be observed that there is a remarkable difference between principals and *principals/owners* concerning certain items. In fact, the latter do acknowledge that they have full duties over matters of financial implications, a criterion that seems to be the determinant on the restriction of those who are principals (only).¹⁹ More precisely, the decision-making areas that the *owners* definitely seem not to be willing to delegate to their school leaders are: teacher remuneration setting, teacher firing, annual budget definition, infrastructure and equipment investment decisions, and hiring of external technical assistance.

School leader practices: independent from regulations?

The possibility for principals to effectively impact on their school's teaching quality, and therefore contribute to improvement of student learning outcomes, is finally dependent on principals developing certain practices that may change institutional and/or instructional management. Following the conceptualization developed by Leithwood et al. (2006), these school leader practices may be classified into four broad categories (see Table 7), which in turn comprise a set of 14 specific practices that would be demonstratively correlated to the quality of the teaching provided by the school, in particular through a change in teacher practices.

Our research looked at the presence of these leader practices based on the opinion of teachers.²⁰ As may be appreciated in Figure 2, in the opinion of teachers, the leader practices²¹ which are most widely deployed in Chilean primary schools are those referred to the dimension "Setting Directions", followed by "Developing People" and "Redesign Organization", with those related to "Instructional Management" being in last place.

To better illustrate this finding, the three more and less developed leader practices may be visualized, based on teacher opinions (see Table 8). The *most highly rated* are: high performance expectations (50% strongly agree), building a collaborative culture (49%), and building a shared vision (48%). In contrast, the *most weakly rated* are: avoidance of staff distraction (26%), provision of instructional support (33%), and intellectual stimulation (35%). The importance of these results resides in the fact that there is evidence that practices related to instructional management (Robinson, 2007) are those having a higher incidence on effective transformation of the teaching-learning role of teachers and, as a consequence, on the potential impact of school leadership on students.²²

While this is a widespread trend concerning principals, when analyzing school leader practices considering the school administrative subsector, the results are as follows.

Table 7. Leithwood school leadership model (2007).

DIMENSION	PRACTICES
Setting Directions Making an effort to motivate others with respect to their own work, establishing a “moral purpose”.	Vision (building a shared vision) Objectives (promoting acceptance of group objectives) High performance expectations
Developing People Building the knowledge and abilities required by the staff to meet the organization goals as well as the commitment and resilience required for ongoing progress in this endeavor.	Individualized attention and support to teachers Intellectual attention and support Modeling (ongoing interaction and visibility with teachers and students)
Organization Redesign Establishing the work conditions enabling the staff to develop their motivation and capacities to the highest possible degree.	Building a collaborative culture Structuring an organization facilitating work Developing a productive relationship with families and the community Connecting the school with its environment (and its opportunities)
Instructional Management Managing classroom practices and supervising what happens inside the classroom	Staffing Provision of technical support to teachers (supervision, evaluation, coordination) Monitoring (of teacher practices and student learning) Avoidance of staff distraction from aspects not at the core of the work

In brief, when leader practices are judged, municipal school principals happen to be rated higher by teachers than their colleagues in subsidized private schools. There is no practice in which subsidized private principals excel municipal principals, and in half of

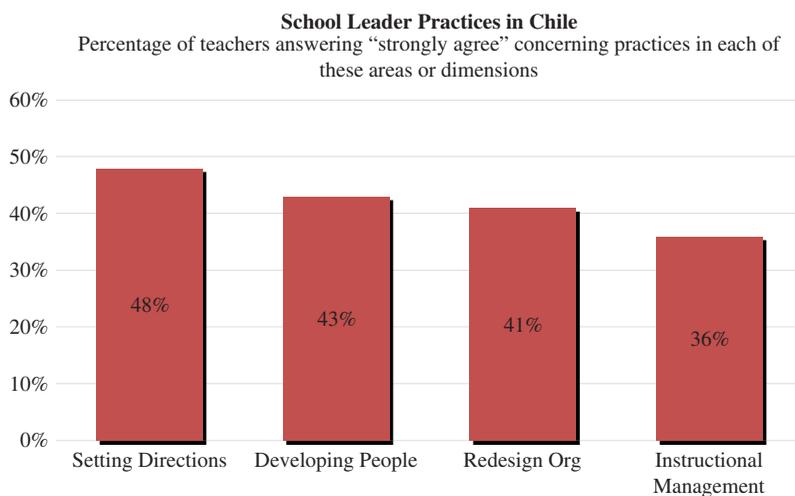


Figure 2. School leader practices in Chile.
Source: Author’s elaboration according to teacher survey.

Table 8. Presence of school leader practices, per subsector.

Dimensions	Principal Practices	Proportion of teachers answering "Strongly" Agree	DS	Sub-sector		
				MUN	SP	NSP
Setting Directions	Building a shared vision	0.48	0.28	0.49	0.48	0.46
	Promoting acceptance of group objectives	0.46	0.27	0.50 (*) (**)	0.44 (*) (***)	0.37 (**) (***)
	High performance expectations	0.50	0.30	0.52	0.49	0.52
Developing	Individualized attention and support to teachers	0.46	0.25	0.48 (*)	0.45	0.41 (*)
	Intellectual stimulation	0.35	0.24	0.37	0.34	0.31
	Provision of an appropriate model	0.48	0.32	0.49	0.48	0.45
Organization Redesign	Building a collaborative culture	0.49	0.31	0.49	0.48	0.47
	Restructuring	0.39	0.26	0.43 (*) (**)	0.38 (*)	0.33 (**)
	Developing a productive relationship with families and the community	0.42	0.26	0.46	0.41	0.38
Instructional Management	Connecting the school with its environment	0.35	0.26	0.41 (*) (**)	0.33 (*)	0.28 (**)
	Staffing	0.41	0.26	0.45 (*) (**)	0.39 (*)	0.34 (**)
	Provision of instructional support	0.33	0.22	0.37 (*) (**)	0.32 (*)	0.23 (**)
Avoidance of staff distraction	Monitoring	0.46	0.26	0.47 (*)	0.46 (**)	0.37 (*) (**)
	Avoidance of staff distraction	0.26	0.26	0.30 (*) (**)	0.25 (*) (***)	0.17 (**)(***)

*, **, ***: indicate significant differences at 0.05%.

Source: Author's elaboration according to teacher survey.

them (7 out of 14) there is a statistically significant difference. The *municipal advantage* occurs mainly in two dimensions: organization redesign and instructional management.

From an organizational standpoint, teachers consider that municipal school principals are able to maintain better relationships between the school and its environment, whether families or the community as a whole. Likewise, these teachers consider that municipal school principals are able to more appropriately organize the operation of the school, a statement that is surprising since clearly public bureaucracy is less flexible and simple to restructure than the less regulated private structure.

In terms of instructional management, according to teachers, principals in the municipal sector provide stronger support to teachers and would also be more efficient in protecting them from frequent distractions in instructional tasks. Paradoxically, these school leaders are rated higher in terms of their staffing abilities, an area in which their hands are much more tied (their extremely scarce duties concerning human resource management must be recalled here), than their colleagues in the subsidized private sector.²³

What is there behind these best school leadership practices that, according to teachers, municipal principals would have? While there is not enough evidence to establish a unique or conclusive cause, we visualize at least three hypotheses – not necessarily alternative – that may be intervening and that should be explored in subsequent studies:

- (1) *A strong principal professional capacity*: As a result of the more competitive selection process and subsequent consequences in terms of characteristics evidencing a higher level of school leadership experience and training for the position, municipal principals would have more competencies to develop these practices.
- (2) *Better conditions for the performance of the school leader position*: Municipal administrators would have stronger capacities than administrators in the subsidized private sector and could provide increased support to their principals, while a lower number of duties – and therefore a more limited definition of the principal function – would have a paradoxical effect of enabling principals to focus on dimensions such as instructional dimensions or those related to families.
- (3) *A particular relationship between the principal and the teachers generating closeness and softening critical judgment*: Municipal principals would have an identity link with teachers and would maintain a close relationship with their employer (the municipality), being primarily “colleagues” and then “heads” – contrary to the subsidized private sector where principals would be the owners’ “trustworthy executives”, being primarily “heads” and only then “colleagues”.

Final discussion

The results of our study concerning primary school principals in Chile based on their pertaining to the public or private sector may be summarized as follows:

- Subsidized private schools recruit younger and mainly female principals, while municipal schools are remarkable for a higher level of principal postgraduate education.
- Both groups receive an equivalent average remuneration, but that for subsidized private school principals displays higher dispersion (with more principals receiving better and worst salaries than their municipal peers).

- There are two parallel principal recruitment systems: a municipal one, characterized by a competitive application process, and a subsidized private one, governed by direct hiring (personal invitation).
- Principals in the subsidized private sector clearly have stronger duties than their colleagues in the municipal sector across all decision-making areas, but particularly concerning human resource management.
- Beyond the subsector to which they report, principals frequently consider that the student policy and school achievement improvement dimensions are their priority decision-making areas while administrators are not likely to delegate decisions having financial implications.
- There is a clearly distinguishable subgroup in the subsidized private sector: those principals who are at the same time the owners of the schools (around 30%), who frequently have distinctive characteristics in terms of age profile, postgraduate education, salaries, and stronger duties.
- According to teachers, municipal school principals more frequently develop effective leader practices than their subsidized private sector colleagues concerning the organization redesign and its connection with its environment as well as instructional management.
- Beyond the subsector to which they report, the area in which principals display their best practices, according to teachers, is “school direction-setting”, and the area in which their practice is weakest is the one that is most decisive for student outcome improvement: instructional management.

While each of these conclusions has a value in itself, it may be relevant to formulate a more general consideration with respect to the relationship between autonomy and practices in school leadership. In fact, there has been a tendency to believe that the primary limitation explaining the scarce development of school leadership would be the lack of enough decision-making power – and this is why many policies concerning school leaders have focused on expanding their range of influence on different school matters (Podgursky, 2007; Portin et al., 2003). However, the comparison between leaders in the municipal and the subsidized private sectors in Chile shows that these two dimensions do not necessarily intermingle and that stronger duties are not mechanically conducive to better practices. It is true that the duties analyzed in this study are of a varied nature, but some of them clearly refer to certain leader practices – such as, for example, the stronger duties concerning the curriculum and school improvement with respect to instructional management practices or the stronger duties concerning human resource management with respect to those practices referred to the redesign of the school organization – in which said positive association is also not attained.

In summary, the experience of subsidized private schools in Chile shows that duties are not enough. For these enhanced opportunities of exercising leadership opened by autonomy to really become effective leader practices, other additional and independent conditions that accumulated research has already established as having high relevance seem to be required. Therefore, it is necessary to have principal selection systems that *capture* those applicants having the appropriate behavioral and functional competencies (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Clifford, 2012; Pont et al., 2008); to set prioritized organizational goals based on teaching quality and make a clear definition of school leader responsibilities (with their corresponding incentives) along those lines (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Ingvarson, Anderson, Gronn, & Jackson, 2006); and to deploy principal pre-service training and systematic professional development efforts decisively oriented to improving their performance as instructional

leaders (Darling-Hammond, La Pointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Grison & Harrington, 2010; Pont et al., 2008). It is likely that when schools in the subsidized private sector integrate these other factors, they will in fact be able to attain a leadership, and especially an instructional leadership, equivalent or excelling that in municipal schools, but, for this, they must stop to rely on autonomy as a panacea.

Notes

1. This article is the result of current 3-year research on leadership and student learning outcomes in Chile, sponsored by the Center for Research on Educational Policy and Practice (www.ceppe.cl), CIE01-CONICYT Project.
2. The effective educational achievements of Charter schools with respect to public schools are a cause of heated debate in US educational discussion. This debate is made even more complex by the diversity among Charter schools in different US states (Lawton, 2009; Podgursky, 2007).
3. In fact, a recent law raised the salary of municipal school principals, improved the principal selection mechanism, and expanded their duties with respect to human resource management (e.g., they may fire up to 5% of teachers evaluated as underperforming teachers per year) (Nuñez, Weinstein, & Muñoz, 2010).
4. Beyond the reasons for this *migration*, there is an important academic and political discussion with respect to the effects this has produced in terms of educational and social segmentation (Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006; Valenzuela, Bellei, & De los Ríos, 2008). So, while some claim in favor of the role played by this sector by offering education to students and families who previously had no access (Gallego, 2004), others question that it really “adds value” beyond the cultural capital that the students have and postulate that, due to family co-payment and school selection of students, it has led to higher inequality in the educational system as a whole (Bellei, 2009). In any case, the evidence shows that, controlling for student socioeconomic status, subsidized private schools do not obtain better learning outcomes than municipal schools (Weinstein & Muñoz, 2009).
5. The data shown in the table correspond to an index constructed based on the professional training received by principals after obtaining their teaching degree, categorizing it as basic, intermediate, or advanced.
6. This *endogamic* trend of exclusive elite schools recruiting leaders from the highest possible socioeconomic status, seeking higher cultural proximity to the families they serve, is also verified at the teachers’ level, based on the results of the Longitudinal Teacher Survey 2009 (Universidad de Chile, 2010).
7. This amount is presently equivalent to 5 to 6 times the minimum wage in Chile.
8. This is very similar to what happens in Chile with teachers: On average, municipal teachers earn a little more (5%) than their colleagues in subsidized private schools, but salary dispersion is practically half (Longitudinal Teacher Survey 2009; Universidad de Chile, 2010).
9. The Teacher Statute, enacted in 1991, homogenized teacher and school leader salaries in the public sector, establishing a leadership allowance that complements the base salary (Nuñez et al., 2010). The recently enacted education quality assurance law will increase this allowance, improving the remuneration of municipal school principals, but again based on the setting of common patterns that must be evenly applied by all municipalities.
10. Current legislation dictates that a municipal school principal selection process must be a public process, based on uniform requirements that all successful applicants to the position must meet, and that a selection committee must be formed to define the best candidates, from among which the mayor is to make the final decision. In contrast, the legislation enables private administrators to decide their own method for school leader recruitment, with candidates only having to meet the requirement of being teachers (Nuñez et al., 2010).
11. Among principals who previously worked in another school, the subsector in which the previous school was inserted is similar to that of the school in which they are currently hired as principals. Transfer between subsectors is less frequent, but does occur, and it is more frequent from the municipal sector to the private sector than in the opposite direction.
12. A relevant issue for research is how much the intention to reduce school operational costs by their private owners has influenced this. In the case of many Charter schools, one of their

- problems in providing higher quality has been the predominant application of an economic rationale based on benefit maximization (Frumkin, 2003).
13. A characteristic trait of the subsidized private sector is its low concentration. The average number of schools per administrator is 1.7. Many of these administrators are teachers who have opted for implementing, on their own, with their families, or with other colleagues, their own school – or *micro-entrepreneurship*. Professor Stephen Anderson (personal communication, May 26, 2010) of the University of Toronto, points out the fact that this multiplication of small private providers contrasts with the recent generation of extended private management complexes in the US (Education Management Organizations, EMOs) or in England (Education Trusts).
 14. Autonomy conceptualization has distinguished among its different sources the delegation of duties from a higher hierarchical level, the promotion of internal organization management, and consumer empowerment, with school leader duty expansion corresponding to the two former ones (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995).
 15. This result generally coincides with studies comparing Charter schools with public schools (Portin, Schneider, De Armond, & Gundlach, 2003), although the degree of variation among Charter schools themselves tends to be very high.
 16. The remuneration of teachers in the municipal sector is regulated by the Teacher Statute (1991). Salary adjustments occur based on negotiations between the Ministry of Education and the Teachers' Union, and once approved by Congress, these bilateral agreements become laws of the Republic with which the municipalities must comply.
 17. Again, legislation holds municipal administrators accountable for this management dimension. However, there is a regulation concerning delegated management of resources enabling principals to directly manage certain budgetary items, after the municipalities voluntarily transfer this power to them; however, this has seldom happened.
 18. It is convenient to note that the possibility for schools to select students on academic – or other – grounds has been a recurring reason for debate in Chilean education, with two opposing positions, one in favor of non-selection (or *random allocation*, if there are more applicants than open slots) and another one that has advocated the freedom of schools to choose the students and families that more adequately match their educational project. Finally, the recent General Education Law (2009) stated that no selection process may be applied in subsidized schools, whether municipal or private, until Grade 6 of primary education. So, the subsidized private school principals included in this survey are still claiming for themselves a decision-making area that is formally increasingly more restricted to them.
 19. Conceptually, school autonomy – contrary to self-government – must be always framed within certain limits, which are the conditions to be met by education provision in the specific education system (e.g., the curriculum framework) (Wohlstetter et al., 1995).
 20. In each of the 649 schools, five randomly chosen teachers answered the items (more than 50) referring to each one of the 14 practices using a scale from *Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree*.
 21. It should be noted that our study also considers the evaluation by teachers of another key school leader: the director of the Technical-Instructional Unit. This professional, existing in Chilean schools since the late 1970s, must support the principal on inherently instructional matters, complementing the principal role. While no space is available in this article to address this topic in depth, it is important to state that the director of the Technical-Instructional Unit does not replace the principal in the technical-instructional area, but complements principal functions and is judged by teachers along the same line (positive or negative).
 22. Finnigan and Stewart (2009) recently analyzed the way in which these four dimensions of principal leadership are articulated into real school improvement processes, verifying their interdependence and the indispensable nature of the instructional dimension to materialize transformations in the classroom.
 23. It should be noted that principals/owners display no significant differences from principals (only) in the subsidized private sector concerning their leader practices.

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Appendix 1. Survey on “School Leadership and Education Quality in Chile”

This article is based on data from a survey administered in Chile in 2009. This survey enabled a characterization of school leaders, the collection of information concerning the frequency with which these leaders exercise certain practices (from the teachers’ standpoint), the identification of some factors that may bear on these practices, and finally, the establishment of a relationship between what school leaders “do” and some outcome variables.

Four surveys were administered to administrators, principals, technical directors, and teachers, obtaining information – differentiated by stakeholder – of what happens in the school itself. In this way, leader *practices* were essentially reported by teachers, although some aspects related to them, such as the use of time, were asked to the school principals, technical directors, and administrators themselves.

The surveys were constructed complementing two core criteria: international comparability and consideration of the specific characteristics of the national context. The comparability criterion was applied especially with practice variables, mediating variables, and some context variables such as those referring to principal duties. Also reviewed were the categories used by the OECD to study the degree of autonomy in school decision-making in different countries, and these categories were used to ask about school and school principal duties.

The survey was applied to a sample of 649 primary schools representative of the national situation in urban areas. This representativity considered the different types of administrative subsectors. Schools in which the evaluated principals had at least 2 years' seniority as principals were selected. The final sample comprised 269 schools in the municipal sector, 290 schools in the subsidized private sector, and 90 schools in the non-subsidized private sector. Table 1.1 presents the final sample used in the study.

Table 1.1. Final study sample.

	Sample Composition, per Stakeholder			
	Principal	Teachers	Technical Directors	Administrators
Municipal	269	1270	260	44
Subsidized Private	290	1436	273	193
Non-Subsidized Private	90	442	84	40
Total	649	3148	617	277
Author's elaboration.				

Based on the above, the study sample enabled statistical inferences for the schools in the universe in each type of subsector with a maximum error of 4.9% to 8.3%, depending on the corresponding subsector.

Prior to the data analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out enabling validation of how robust each of the school leader practice dimensions was, a central aspect of the study. The analysis phase – basically descriptive – from which the results of this article are derived reviews the behavior of the study variables based on data surveyed through different questions contained in principal and teacher surveys. Descriptive statistical methods, mainly means, standard deviations, and variable crossing tables, were used to enable observation of differences in the opinions of teachers from different types of schools concerning their principals or observation of how teacher opinions concerning principals vary depending on different principal characteristics (gender, experience in the position, professional training level, etc.).