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What Constitutes a ‘Classroom Problem’ for Today's Teacher?: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract: Teachers face situations that are difficult to solve, which affect their practices in the classroom. Teachers' ability to face problematic situations has been related to educators' adaptive and metacognitive capacity. This study aimed to contrast the recent literature on classroom problems with reports from Chilean teachers regarding what they mean today as critical situations in the classroom. The major problems with the highest prevalence were categorized based on a literature review. Subsequently, teachers from three educational levels (pre-school, primary and secondary) were asked to relate situations in which they had experienced a crisis in their profession. After a filtering based on the relevance and textual richness present, the stories (n=145) were subjected to a thematic analysis and contrasted with the categories obtained from the reviewed literature. The results show a low proportion of problems associated with learning management in the classroom and, on the other hand, a high proportion of behavioral problems in students focused on situations of aggression towards the teacher. These conclusions are discussed to reconsider the concept of "classroom problem situations" and, based on this, questioning the role of teacher training in the development of skills for the management of authentic problem situations.

Keywords: *Critical incidents, teacher competencies, teacher education programs, teacher-student relationship.*

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Introduction

During their professional practice, teachers face a wide variety of problematic situations that are not susceptible to automatic resolution (Collie & Martin, 2016; Lin et al., 2005). In line with such situations, research has coined the term "critical incidents" (Contreras & Robles, 2018) to refer to emergent problematic situations that cause destabilization in the teacher.

Authors such as Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) argue that teachers' professional capital consists of the confluence of three types of experience: human capital, social capital and decisional capital. Human capital refers to the individual talent that teachers have and continuously develop. Social capital is associated with the collective experience that arises as a result of the authentic collaboration of teachers. Decisional capital, on the other hand, would be the result of the creation of conditions that allow teachers to exercise their professional judgment in relation to student learning. Thus, professional capital would be a critical component when teachers face unexpected problems in the classroom.

Likewise, according to authors such as Schön (2017), some of the most effective learning experiences for teachers at any level occur when they find "puzzling, problematic, or interesting phenomena" (p. 50). This is congruent with what some authors have identified as the teacher's adaptive or metacognitive capacity (Bohle Carbonell et al., 2014; Collie & Martin, 2017; Lin et al., 2005); that is, the ability to deal effectively with the problems inherent to teaching through the exercise of the teacher's reflective skills (Hayden & Chiu, 2015). In this way, it is possible to think that exposure to problems can produce the generation of adaptations to the teaching process or the planning of future interventions (Hayden & Chiu, 2015).

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Taking into account the psychoeducational impact that different problematic situations can have for both in-service teachers and pre-service teachers, it is assumed that the identification of the so-called critical incidents (hereinafter CIs) could help in the development and implementation of more relevant training support for pre-service and in-service teachers, from situated, reflective and self-care perspectives (Lin et al., 2005). Notwithstanding the potential that CIs may have as a teacher training methodology, it has been observed that, when confronted with them, teachers tend to respond intuitively (Korthagen, 2010), without evidence-based analysis.

In the present study, the purpose was to investigate the extent of agreement between what research refers to as "classroom problems" and the experience of Chilean teachers regarding what they perceive as "real" classroom problems that affect them in their professional practice. Indeed, it is known that teachers usually have a critical judgment regarding research, to the point of denying or rejecting it for considering it far from the reality of the classroom (Cain, 2017). In this sense, knowing in advance the potential sources of conflict in the pedagogical exercise (for example, from the scientific literature), could prepare teachers to face the problem, based on the accumulated evidence. It is possible to think that, in this way, the gap between educational theory and praxis could be narrowed. Our premise at the beginning of this work was that the most relevant problems for teachers will be focused on the management of learning in the classroom.

Literature Review

The Teacher and Classroom Problems

Historically, pedagogical practice has been defined by some as a procedural exercise where it would be sufficient to apply specific techniques to achieve a particular outcome (Brophy & Good, 1986). While certain pedagogical practices are known to work (see, for example, the "Practice Guides" reports of What Works Clearinghouse, 2021), assuming that classroom teaching is limited to the strict application of procedural methods and techniques is extremely reductionist. This criticism is longstanding (Cf. Dewey, 2011), for, in classrooms, there are unpredictable situations that are problematic and whose solution requires more than established procedures. Indeed, there is now a broad consensus to consider the teacher as an agent who, during his or her professional practice, develops a progressive competence to make decisions in the classroom in order to maintain the interest and commitment of students (Li, 2020).

In this regard, it is worth recalling the distinction made by Bransford et al. (2005) between "routine experts" and "adaptive experts". Although both continue to learn throughout life, adaptive experts are much more likely to change their core competencies and expand and restructure their expertise, making them more flexible. This characteristic seems especially relevant for the teaching profession, which is exposed to the significant variability of problem situations (Lin et al., 2005).

A Particular Problem: Critical Incidents

Within the broad category of "classroom problems" we can find a particular type called "critical incidents". These correspond to specific unforeseen situations that become a turning point in a class, destabilizing emotionally and even affecting the teaching identity (Monereo et al., 2013; Richards & Farrell, 2010).

It is essential to consider that a CI corresponds to an interpretation -by the teacher- of a significant episode developed in a particular context rather than a routine or typical event of classroom work (Angelides, 2001; Toom et al., 2019). In this sense, they can be differentiated from a problematic situation or a conflict due to their unexpected nature, becoming an event that breaks into a projected trajectory and causes questioning by the person who experiences it (Monereo et al., 2013). Indeed, the analysis of critical incidents in education involves the documentation and analysis of teaching incidents to learn from them and improve practice (Richards & Farrell, 2010). Moreover, this analysis can have consequences by giving rise to changes in the perception of efficacy or success that one has of oneself as a professional and, in general, cause a destabilization of the teacher (Bruster & Peterson, 2013; Permatasari, 2018).

According to Richards and Farrell (2010), critical incident analysis carries several benefits: For instance, it can serve as a form of reflective inquiry; can help identify and solve problems; can serve to identify good practice, and can give teachers a greater sense of professional awareness. In this sense, exploring complex situations during training could enhance reflective-critical approaches to pedagogical practice (Hall & Townsend, 2017). For example, the use of CIs has proven to be useful as a tool for learning, stimulating the reflection of student teachers (Heikonen et al., 2017); in other words, their use in initial teacher education (ITE) would allow the student teacher to have intersubjective referents that enable him/her to analyze the episode that provoked the crisis, its source of origin, intervening variables and possible ways of solution.

In professional practice, decision-making is part of an ongoing process that some authors have called "interactive decision-making". These are decisions made "in the moment-to-moment progression of a lesson and in the context of competing pressures such as time, students' attention span, curricular demands, exam pressures, etc." (Walsh, 2006, p. 48, as cited in Li, 2020). These reflective processes require a high adaptive metacognition that includes planning and monitoring the situation.

Because of their diverse and heterogeneous nature, it is not possible to think of a limited list of classroom problems, as these will depend on multiple factors, both internal (the teacher) and external (educational context). Likewise, a situation may appear similar to a daily routine and seem simple to solve. The truth is that, at present, we do not know what problems impact teachers. Knowing what constitutes a classroom problem from the teacher's point of view can allow us, on the one hand, to understand the teacher's thinking about those situations that affect his or her classroom performance. In addition, identifying the most recurrent difficulties can provide clues to support teachers in their initial and continuous training.

Aware of the relevance of classroom problems in pedagogical decisions and the teacher's life, we undertook a two-phase study. First, we were interested in investigating the gap between what researchers have identified as the most recurrent classroom problems. Secondly, we aimed to identify from the teachers' point of view those problems that most trouble them today. Based on these two studies, an integrative synthesis was made to contrast whether there is a coincidence between the research on classroom problems and what teachers mean as such.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is framed within a qualitative, exploratory research approach. The study's objectives consisted of identifying, quantifying, and describing those events that, from the experience of in-service teachers, were qualified as problematic in the classroom and fulfilled the characteristics of a "critical incident."

In order to achieve this objective, two consecutive studies were carried out. In the first study, classroom problems were identified from a literature review. In the second study, these categories of classroom problems were contrasted with Chilean teachers' accounts of what classroom problems and critical situations mean to them today.

Study 1

The objective of the first study was to know the current state of research in the area of classroom problems reported in the literature as the most prevalent. For this purpose, our research team conducted a review of recent literature.

Procedure

A systematic search for research on classroom problems was carried out using the Scopus and Web of Science databases. In the first stage, the search was carried out using the keywords: ["Classroom Problems" OR "Critical Incidents" OR "Disruptive Behavior" OR "Problem Behavior" OR "Problem Solving" OR "Social Problems"], then these concepts were grouped into blocks with their respective Boolean operators and search filters.

In the second stage, a corpus of 439 articles (272 from Scopus and 167 from Web of Science) was used for review, which met the following inclusion criteria: a) having been published in the last five years; b) empirical articles that report their research results considering practicing teachers as participants, c) their results report or identify classroom problems.

In the third stage, duplicate articles were filtered (n=83), and research that sought to establish interventions to address classroom problems was excluded. This procedure allowed us to select 93 articles. Finally, the last stage consisted of reading the selected articles, which allowed us to group them into four major categories according to the type of classroom problem reported (see Table 1).

As can be seen in Table 1, the most reported problems in the literature review correspond to the academic (n=48) and behavioral (n=38) areas. In the academic area, all articles referring to studies on learning management are concentrated, mainly associated with learning difficulties or, specifically, with teaching mathematics and, secondarily, with respect to working with students with special educational needs (SEN). All of the articles that referred to empirical studies associated with 'behavioral problems', mainly with disruptive students and aggression in the classroom, were in the 'behavioral' category. Finally, with a lesser frequency, there are research articles focused on specific problems of the personal sphere, among which stand out those devoted to teacher self-efficacy and the work environment, to situations specific to the educational context and the implementation of the curriculum.

In this context, are the situations indicated as problematic by teachers in the national education system different from those reported in the research articles? In other words, what constitutes a classroom problem for educators today?

Table 1. Distribution of the Articles According to Classroom Problems Addressed

Category	Sub-category (classroom problems)	Nº
Academic (n=48)	Teaching-Learning of Mathematics	26
	Students with SEN	8
	Language Teaching-Learning	4
	Parental commitment	3
	Technology Teaching-Learning	3
Academic (n=48)	Teaching-Learning of Natural Sciences	2
	Geography Teaching-Learning	1
	Artistic Teaching-Learning	1
Behavioral (n=38)	Disruptive Students	31
	Aggression between students	4
	Bullying	2
	Aggression against the teacher	1
Laboral (n=2)	Curriculum	1
	School environment	1
Personal (n=5)	Self-efficacy	5

Note: *n= number of items included in the category

Study 2

The second qualitative study aimed to identify, based on the experience of in-service teachers, those events that qualified as problematic in the classroom and met the characteristics of a *critical incident*.

Participants

A purposive sample of in-service teachers was recruited because we were interested in investigating their experiences with classroom problems based on personal and direct accounts.

A total of 150 teachers participated in this study (women = 82.6%), with an average age of 38.78 (sd= 10.39) and an average of 13.48 years of service in the educational system (sd= 9.69). The teachers worked professionally during the CI at the preschool (44%), primary (27%), and secondary (29%) levels. Their geographical distribution covers a wide area of the country: from the Region of Antofagasta to the Region of Magallanes and Chilean Antarctica.

Instrument

An electronic questionnaire was developed to collect the narratives, called "Narratives of Complex Situations Experienced by Classroom Teachers" (RSCA). The RSCA contained nine closed-ended questions of sociodemographic characterization (age, years of service), plus a central open-ended question that focused on the accounts of complex situations, explicitly defined as "any event that occurred during your classroom work in which you have been overwhelmed, or that has aroused feelings difficult to handle (feeling of instability, crisis with your profession)." The research team formulated the questionnaire based on the canonical definition of *critical incident*. Two external judges reviewed it, both education researchers with experience developing questionnaires and surveys.

Procedure

The application was individual (self-administered) and took place digitally in October 2019. The questionnaire was designed in electronic format, ensuring the anonymity of the participants. The application procedure involved inviting teachers interested in participating by e-mail and social networks. The digital format of the RSCA offered guarantees for safeguarding personal background without asking for names and ensuring that the data collected would only be known by the researchers and used for research purposes. Once the purpose of the study and the consent to participate were presented, any educator who agreed to participate in the study and proceeded to accept the consent to participate could access the questionnaire response page. Participants had the right to withdraw at any stage, for which they only had to close the online survey page.

The question asked participants to relate testimonies of complex situations experienced by classroom teachers. For this purpose, a "complex situation" was defined as any event that occurred during classroom work in which the teacher was overwhelmed (a feeling such as "this is getting out of hand") or that gave rise to feelings that were difficult to manage (feeling of instability, crisis with their profession). As teachers completed their narratives, their responses were stored on the Google Drive platform.

Table 2. Distribution of Participants According to Career of Origin

Specialty	Frequency
Childhood Educator	66
Primary Education Teacher	24
Science Teacher (Biology, Physics, Chemistry)	22
Secondary Education Teacher (Language)	9
Professor of Secondary Education (History)	6
Secondary Education Teacher (Music)	6
Secondary Education Teacher (Mathematics)	5
Secondary Education Teacher (Phys. Ed.)	5
Secondary Education Teacher (English)	3
Teacher of Secondary Technical Professional Education	1
Orientation Teacher	1
Secondary Education Teacher (Religion and Philosophy)	1
Special Education Teacher	1
Total	150

Data Analysis

The narratives elaborated by the teachers from complex situations experienced in the classroom were subject to thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2015). They were reduced to specific categories of classroom problems. The reduction to categories was established from the literature analysis conducted by the team in the first study. Five specific categories were identified, namely:

Behavioral problems: This category refers to specific behavioral problems of diverse origin (medical or non-medical, situations of verbal or physical violence) that affect the normal development of pedagogical activities. Within this category, five subcategories were identified: "aggression from student to teacher", "aggression among classmates", "disruptive students", "carrying and/or use of drugs or weapons", and "student self-harm". The first and second subcategories referred to situations of physical, verbal, and/or symbolic aggression inside the classroom. The third was associated with problems where the emphasis was placed on actions or episodes where a class was out of control due to student action, the fourth related to episodes where the teacher was present carrying weapons and/or drugs inside the classroom, and finally, situations of student self-aggression, related to moments in which students showed signs of self-aggression.

Academic problems: The teachers' reports related to specific difficulties in learning management involving pedagogical decision-making in the classroom and confronting the teacher with students, peers, and/or parents/guardians were identified as belonging to this category.

Labor problems: Problems arose from an administrative decision that impacted teaching activities. Within this category, three subcategories were identified: "working conditions", "administrative decisions" and "support from the institution". The first refers to actions that originated in the work context, where the conditions of the work environment generated situations that were difficult to face. The second subcategory is associated with problems when directors' decisions call teachers into question in front of the students and/or parents/guardians, causing problematic situations. Finally, the third subcategory is associated with the feeling, on the part of the teacher, of a lack of accompaniment and/or support from managers when facing complex classroom situations.

Teacher self-efficacy: In this category, we identified all those stories in which the teacher is questioned about his or her competencies to solve problems in the educational context, i.e., it is related to the teacher's judgment about his or her ability to address the situations experienced in the classroom successfully.

Interpersonal problems: situations related to relationships with others, whether parents, colleagues, and/or students. Within this category, three subcategories were identified: *parent-teacher*, *student-teacher*, and *teacher-colleagues/school-managers*. As the main characteristic, these classroom problems can arise from situations associated with the four previous categories. In other words, the three subcategories refer to situations that have an impact on the interpersonal sphere and may have their origin in a difference over issues associated with learning management (academic), classroom discipline management situations (behavioral), or questioning of teaching ability (self-efficacy or work).

The analysis of the stories was carried out in the first phase by two members of the team, who read and codified all the material independently. This first analysis yielded a percentage of agreement of 77% between the two evaluators. In the second phase of analysis, the team members did a joint reading of those stories on which there was no agreement in the coding. Through this procedure, the categories were adjusted, eliminating some stories that, by common agreement, did not offer substantive information for coding (n=11). Likewise, for analytical purposes, it was decided to disaggregate three accounts when the same teacher explicitly alluded to more than one conflict situation (n=6). This

last stage made it possible to agree on categorizing cases. In sum, of the total number of reports received (n= 150), the refined corpus consisted of 145 reports of problematic classroom situations.

Results

Table 3 summarizes the classroom problems identified from the participants' accounts, the category to which they belong, their frequency according to the level of education in which they appeared, and the total results that emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. At a global level, of the total of 145 analyzable reports the most recurrent problems for teachers are located in the categories of behavioral problems (44%) and labor problems (24%), considering all levels of education. In fact, 31.7% of the reports refer to situations of aggression of various kinds, with a special presence of situations of violence among students or from students to teachers. To a lesser extent, problems arising in the work context are mentioned in 24% of the reports, while those related to interpersonal relationships appear in 19.3% of the reports. Finally, strictly academic problems, referring to pedagogical decisions in the classroom or to a questioning of teacher self-efficacy, are present in only 2.7% of the reports.

Table 3. Frequency of Classroom Problems Organized by Category and Educational Level

Classroom problems	Codification	Early E.	Primary E.	Secondary E.	Total
Behavioral	Assault† by student on teacher	4	7	12	23
	Aggression between colleagues	7	8	5	20
	Disruptive student behaviors	3	8	6	17
	Carrying and/or use of drugs or weapons	0	1	3	4
	Student self-aggression	0	1	2	3
Academics	Pedagogical decisions	1	1	0	2
Labor	Working conditions	28	3	0	30
	Administrative decisions	0	1	1	2
	Institutional support	2	1	1	3
Self-efficacy	Teacher self-efficacy	5	5	3	13
Interpersonal Relationships	Proxy-Teacher	13	4	0	17
	Student-Teacher	4	3	2	9
	Teacher-Colleagues/Principals	0	2	0	2
Total		67	45	35	145

On the other hand, in relation to the general structure of the teachers' narratives (see Table 4), the most recurrent pattern refers to a punctual and limited description of the situation experienced, without developing a deep analysis of the situation. In these descriptions there is no deeper reflection on the causes of the problems or on the possible sources of solutions, and in those cases in which they are identified, teachers seek solutions mostly in their previous experience or through collaboration (21.4%) either with colleagues, school managers or professionals from other areas (e.g., psychologists), which allow them to address the problems described as a team. Finally, in some cases (7.6%), the stories lead to a process of reflection on the part of the teachers, where they question their role and the continuity of their professional practice.

The group of parents in general was very critical of the teacher's work and harassed through the board of directors to take measures that were not in accordance with the treatment that should be given to the child. They were constantly questioning decisions of all kinds, requests for materials, celebrations, and lessons given to the children. I remember that year I went through many moods, thinking about taking a break and even quitting my job. (interviewee 118)

On the other hand, when disaggregated by educational level, and in line with the configuration of the sample, it is observed that the greatest number of problems was reported by early childhood educators, followed by elementary school teachers. It is striking that the greatest number of labor problems evoked in the reports are concentrated specifically in early childhood educators. An example of this is the following situation:

Many times, we see our capacities exceeded because the number of infants is high and exceeds the capacity per square meter of surface area, at times like these we only become assistants because it is impossible to educate with that level of overcrowding, in addition without supplies. (interviewee 156)

Similarly, at the behavioral level, the reports are mostly concentrated in secondary education teachers (41.8%) and primary school teachers (37.3%), particularly referring to situations of physical aggression by students against teachers.

† Physical, verbal and/or symbolic

Table 4. Classroom Problems Reported by Teachers at Different Educational Levels

Problems in the classroom	Codification	Extracts of data records
Behavioral	Assault by student on teacher	"Threat from a student saying, 'watch out, we're all the same outside.'" [p19, primary education].
	Aggression between colleagues	Two students begin to attack each other, first verbally, and then they get up from their posts and physically attack each other, harming their nearby classmates. " [p84, secondary education].
	Disruptive students	"When students don't want to work, their attention is called and they answer haughtily " [p15, primary education]
Academics	Pedagogical decisions	"When I did my internship, the guidance educator had certain rules set with the children, of course I followed them and the same for everyone, one child wanted to have a certain benefit and I didn't agree because I was being fair. After his tantrum, the educator disavowed me in front of everyone, which made me feel very embarrassed." [p125, early education]
	Self-efficacy	"When I think I don't have the way to motivate my students and they, even if I vary my methodologies, are not attracted to my class." [p48, secondary education]
Working	Working conditions	"Generally the situation occurs at times when the rest of the levels are in the playground, being a place with very limited space, the children get desperate so there is a lack of control, in which you cannot do anything with them, it is very difficult to calm them and it is recurrent that they escape from the room to go play, I am overwhelmed to be alone in the classroom, there are 20 kindergartners. There are times when frustration gets to me." [p107, primary education]
	Administrative decisions	"Lately I have felt violated in the fact that we were required to retain cell phones during classes in a box and there is one course in particular where a group of students become violent when it is demanded of them." [p70, secondary education]
	Institutional support	"The worst part of it was not the situation, but the attitude of my superiors within the school, who saw this issue almost as an obligation for my work, they never gave me effective support, and finally I was the one who sought external help, managing the implementation of expert support." [p17, primary education]
Personal	Teacher self-efficacy	"A critical situation experienced is the lack of knowledge of strategies to be used to work with children with educational needs." [p103, early education]
Interpersonal	Proxy-teacher relationship	"A parent accused me of assaulting his son before the superintendent's office, pointing out that he had been informed of this by other parents and that the treatment of his son was different from the rest. He took it upon himself to inform several classes that I assaulted his son. This provoked a panic crisis, questioning myself as a teacher. I felt professionally denigrated, nobody helped me at school. Many times I had to lock myself in the bathroom to cry." [p14, primary education]
	Student-teacher relationship	"...the strongest situation in my opinion was that of a kindergarten student (6 years old) who was immersed in depression due to the abandonment of his parents. Several times we had to control him among several adults because he was looking for dangerous practical situations to end his life. I felt overwhelmed, as I had 33 other children to care for and support. My emotions went between anger, sorrow, anguish and sometimes hatred for those inexperienced and insensitive parents. I still remember him and sometimes wonder what happened to him." [P145, early education]
	Teacher-colleague/management relations	"With several years of experience, I suffered harassment at work from a colleague. She is a person with very bad intentions; she hurt me so much that I got sick and was on psychiatric leave for three months." [p127, early education]

I was a few minutes away from finishing my lesson in a third-grade class when suddenly at the back of the room there was a disturbance of about eight young people. When I approached I realized how serious it was because there were two students physically assaulting each other in a very violent way. When I tried to separate them, one of the youths pushed me in a very rough way, hurting my right hand. (interviewee 85)

Another category where problems are prevalently observed is in the area of interpersonal relationships. Once again, it is in early childhood education where we observed reports mainly associated with problems in the relationship with parents/guardians (n=13/17).

In the second year of my professional career. The grandmother of a student suddenly entered the room, interrupted the class, shouting at my assistant and me in an uncontrolled manner, because her granddaughter had fallen off the swing the day before during recess, causing a cut on her forehead that required emergency treatment at the hospital. (interviewee 126)

Table 4 presents in detail the categories and subcategories identified in this study. A representative example, extracted from the narratives, is also presented.

Discussion

The objective of the present study was to identify and contrast recent literature on classroom problems with Chilean teachers' accounts of what they understand today as critical classroom problems and situations. Our premise at the beginning of this study was that the most prevalent problems would be associated with learning management. The review of recent literature shows us, in fact, a prevalence of studies associated with learning management in different disciplines of the curriculum both in neurotypical population and associated with students with special educational needs.

However, contrary to expectations, a low prevalence of specific classroom learning management problems was observed in the teachers' reports collected in this study, but a high prevalence of behavioral problems, particularly centered on situations of aggression toward the teacher; this includes threats and intimidation by students or parents/guardians. It is interesting, and let it be said, worrying, that these situations are already described at the early education level.

Studies reveal that teachers are deprived of tools to deal with these situations, and can choose between two paths: avoiding interaction with problem children or engaging in the search for solutions, through readings, courses or attending conferences and even not even taking action to intervene. This last situation, according to (Roskam, 2015), can divert teachers from their real pedagogical work, as they impose themselves as a therapist or tutor, for which they have not been prepared. This not only affects their professional identities, but also the attention deserved by their students in the classroom.

These possible derivatives not only represent a problem to be investigated, but also require an appropriate intervention in schools, based on interdisciplinary teams. Similarly, it is necessary to insist on the risks that this multiplicity of tasks entails for the professional performance and mental health of teachers, as well as the ambiguous roles and responsibilities in the workplace (Johari et al., 2018).

Along the same lines, if we consider that the center of pedagogical work is the promotion of learning in the classroom, it is worrying that fewer of the reports are centered on learning management and that, on the other hand, problems associated with the work context appear as a relevant dimension. This is especially high in the case of early childhood educators. Studies on insertion and persistence in the teaching profession have identified labor precariousness as a dimension that affects professional identity and exposes, especially novice teachers, to conditions that make their performance in the field impossible (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016; Nuñez Moscoso et al., 2018).

Regarding academic issues, we observed that teachers attribute classroom problems to external causes, particularly to the student. This is the case of students' lack of motivation for learning. The truth is that the interpersonal dimension is seen as a relevant factor for the emergence of problems. According to the literature, interaction with students, as well as student engagement with academic work is a usual source of dilemmas for teachers (Koffeman & Snoek, 2019; Nuñez Moscoso et al., 2018).

On the other hand, in their accounts, participants do not always report the use of strategies to solve the problem. Only in some cases is it explicitly stated that the solution consisted of leaving the school. However, it is not possible to assume from the accounts that this was a solution favored by the participants and, given the instruction received by our participants, it seems that the teachers focused their accounts on the problem, without considering the ways they had to face it or the process of reflection that it provoked in them to find solutions.

While one explanation for this phenomenon may be associated with the instruction received, it is not excluded that the omission of solutions in the narratives is due to an absence of adaptive metacognition; that is, the adaptation of oneself and one's environment in response to the wide variability of the classroom (Lin et al., 2005). As the authors point out, there is no concrete formula for achieving an optimal solution. Instead, teachers often need to reflect on their values

and the consistency between their values and those of other community members (parents, students, principals) to guide them toward an acceptable solution. This involves high degrees of adaptive metacognition.

Indeed, the teaching task involves the consideration of multiple factors that often cannot be decomposed and treated independently. The teaching task involves a dynamic and interactive process of classroom decision-making that takes into account exogenous variables of the context (curriculum, syllabus, teacher roles and functions) and the micro-contexts related to classroom dynamics and the teacher's interaction with students and what they bring to the teaching-learning process (Li, 2020).

A positive aspect that constitutes, in our opinion, a strength is the questionnaire used for the study. The fact of being able to give the teachers space to refer to their real problems, based on a slogan formulated in broad terms, instead of an inventory of closed problems, was intended to elicit stories in which emphasis was placed on the feelings that such situations aroused (such as "this is getting out of hand") and which had generated feelings that were difficult to manage (feelings of instability, crisis with their profession, uncertainty, etc.). This allowed, in our opinion, the teachers to feel free to relate situations that concerned them effectively, without feeling the pressure to respond in a biased way (e.g., social desirability).

Conclusion

Contrary to our team's expectations, learning problems are not the most frequently mentioned by teachers in their reports. Instead, behavioral problems are the ones that most worry and destabilize them.

Secondly, we can observe that there is a correlation between the problems reported by the specialized literature and the teachers' accounts, mainly in the relevance assigned to behavioral problems. This coincidence is both interesting and worrying, since research and intervention on school coexistence is an area of extensive study in the country. It is worth asking why teachers seem to lack concrete tools for the management of these types of conflicts. This aspect should alert initial and continuous teacher training programs.

Thirdly, the results of this study allow us to observe other problems not directly associated with learning that are affecting teaching. This is the case with work-related or interpersonal problems, which are also an impediment to efficient teaching.

In this sense, these accounts allow us to affirm that teachers require conditions to perform their main task which is to teach (Johari et al., 2018). These conditions are reflected in the sustained support that can be provided by both the management team and the psychosocial teams in the school. The evident loneliness of the teaching job that some of our respondents reflect in their accounts has been described in previous literature (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016) and shows the structural difficulties imposed on teachers' collegial work.

In fact, these teachers' accounts reveal a certain precariousness in their work that not only impedes their professional development, but also threatens their commitment to teaching. If, as is often argued, the quality of the education system lies in the quality of its teachers, we must not forget the dimension of well-being necessary for good performance. Likewise, we need to establish training projects that prepare teachers for a job that requires high levels of metacognitive reflection.

In these cases, the teacher's adaptive metacognition would make it possible to recognize that, under the appearance of familiarity, a situation is hidden that requires a different approach. According to authors such as Lin et al. (2005), our tendency to create action schemes for routine situations predisposes us to "read the world" and act according to certain pre-established scripts. For a teacher, this could lead to ignoring and eventually failing to handle certain situations. The latter could explain why the problems associated with learning management in the classroom were not reported as disruptive in their teaching routines.

Due to the demanding and changing nature of the teaching profession, it is relevant to ask ourselves what the incidents are that destabilize teachers today and how this can be transformed into an input to improve teachers' adaptive metacognition skills and their effectiveness in the classroom.

Recommendations

This research leaves a series of questions open. For instance, which kind of labour tasks are indeed an "illegitimate task" (see Faupel et al., 2016). According to these authors, an "illegitimate task" provokes negative feelings or a devaluation of teachers' professional role. It would be relevant to consider this conceptual approach in future investigations to evaluate in what way in which critical incidents affect teacher's identity role.

The problems we observed in our study may only represent some of the teaching population. For this reason, it is recommended that teachers' principals diagnose the problems afflicting their community to seek solutions to these problems together. We know teachers' adaptive capacity allows them to deal effectively with the problems inherent to teaching through the exercise of their reflective skills. It is recommended that principals and teachers have the time and

space to discuss and find solutions to their difficulties in the school context in order to improve the conditions for teaching and learning.

It is suggested that faculties of education implement simulation devices that allow their students to reflect on these problematic situations and, based on evidence, seek appropriate solutions. Although critical incidents are characterized by their emergent nature, simulation exercises could help in the search for criteria for pedagogical discernment and reflection, which are necessary for good teaching performance.

Limitations

A limitation is that this study was implemented before the health crisis resulting from COVID-19. It is possible to state that some concerns have shifted towards the management of the teaching-learning process in digital format, and the division between work space versus home space, among others considerations (Jandrić et al., 2020). This obviously requires new studies to complement these findings. In turn, the fact that this was an anonymous questionnaire did not allow access to the participants on a second occasion to delve deeper into the narratives and their problem-solving processes.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Sepúlveda-Vallejos: Data acquisition, conceptualization, deep analysis, writing and reviewing. Muñoz: Design, conceptualization, data acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data, writing, edition, and final approval. Contreras: Conceptualization, design, analysis, writing. Monzalve-Macaya: Translation.

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