



# School administrators' understandings and management of barriers for the school's involvement in the practicum component of initial teacher education in Chile



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## ABSTRACT

Worldwide governments are seeking to transform initial teacher education by increasing the quality of practicum experiences in school settings. This paper analyzes the barriers school administrators from Chile identified for their schools' involvement in the practicum scheme. Data were produced through a survey ( $N=172$ ) and in-depth interviews ( $N=51$ ) with administrators in schools hosting teacher candidates. Few participants (4%) identified barriers implicating a sense of shared school–university responsibility for the success of the practicum. About a third of the barriers identified pertain to within school factors, such as teachers' and parents' reluctance to host candidates. From these administrator's perspectives, a distance with the host school is produced through a number of factors attributed to the universities' curricula and management. Administrators manage this distance to leverage better learning opportunities for their school's pupils, for prospective teachers, and for the school staff. Findings contribute to the discussion of policies and practices to strengthen school–university partnerships, highlighting the importance of including school administrators as key contributors.

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## 1. Introduction

Governments across the world are implementing policies to enhance teacher qualifications, a key factor for raising educational achievement (Musset, 2010). In the context of initial teacher education, policymakers and teacher educators advocate that teacher candidates spend more time learning to teach in schools and less time at the university campus (e.g., in the United States, see Darling-Hammond (2006); in Turkey, see Kavak and Baskan (2009); in South Africa, see Mutemeri and Chetty (2011); in England, see McNamara et al. (2014); in The Netherlands, see Stokking et al. (2003); in China, see Wang and Clarke (2014)). In Chile, the report of the Panel de Expertos para una Educación de Calidad (2010) convened by the government to make recommendations for improving initial teacher education suggested adding accreditation requirements to guarantee university–school partnerships for the practicum component of the curriculum. Provisions to develop policies that support such networks were

not recommended – an aspect deemed essential for successful partnerships (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), 2010).

In Chile initial teacher education (ITE) is located in institutions of higher education. Most programs use a concurrent model by which disciplinary subject matter, educational, and professional contents are studied throughout 8–10 semesters of coursework. The mandatory accreditation framework for teacher education programs requires a sequence of practicum experiences culminating in student teaching during the last semester. Each university develops its own scheme to place teacher candidates and decides on the number of days, hours, and tasks candidates must complete in the school.

Supervisors and cooperating teachers are all certified in the teaching credential the teacher candidate is pursuing. They may receive some preparation offered by each university, but there are no accreditation provisions requiring them to be formally trained. Whereas university practicum instructors are typically selected and hired by the programs, cooperating teachers most often volunteer or are assigned by a school administrator. In either case, teachers rarely receive payment for their work in the practicum. Each program, depending on the practicum course, defines the roles of university-based practicum supervisors and cooperating

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teachers. For example, for student teaching, university supervisors might visit the schools two to three times in the semester, but candidates in an initial field experience will not receive in-school supervision.

Over the last three years, we conducted a research program to understand schoolteachers' and administrators' perspectives on their involvement in the ITE practicum scheme. In the current paper, we draw from data obtained through a survey and in-depth interviews with administrators in Chilean schools hosting teacher candidates. More specifically, this paper examines the main barriers identified for their schools' involvement in the practicum and how administrators manage these barriers. As universities move more of the ITE curriculum to the schools, it is important to understand the extent to which school administrators are interested and committed to adding to their school's workload responsibilities for the practicum.

School administrators' practices have received wide attention in the school improvement literature as educational systems have become decentralized with increased centrally controlled accountability (Hall, 2013). Principals must be mindful of implementing personnel and resource allocation practices that can leverage instructional improvement (Hornig and Loeb, 2010). In the literature on the ITE practicum, however, very few studies have examined how principals manage their schools' involvement in the practicum (Le Cornu, 2012; Varrati et al., 2009). This is somewhat surprising considering that teacher candidates' presence in schools requires allocation of personnel and resources. Taking a close look at how school administrators understand and manage the participation of teacher candidates can provide universities with information to negotiate partnering schemes and feedback for program improvement. Understanding principals' visions for the participation of practicum candidates may inform the design of a practicum curriculum that meets schools' needs as school practitioners share responsibilities for initial teacher preparation.

## 2. Persistent problems in school–university collaboration for initial teacher preparation

As schools and universities in Chile and elsewhere respond to policymakers' recommendations for the development of partnerships, it is important to consider the complexities such partnerships entail. Insufficient structures and resources to support partnerships, insufficient financial incentives for school-based teacher educators, unclear roles and preparation to enact those roles present important challenges (Bartholomew and Sandholtz, 2009; Brisard et al., 2006; Haciomeroglu, 2013; Mutemeri and Chetty, 2011; Robinson, 2014). Differences in the organizational culture of schools and universities and the types of expertise valued in each setting have fostered tensions between school-based and university-based teacher educators (Zeichner et al., 2012). Successful partnerships overcome these tensions by establishing relationships based on trust and shared goals (Leonard et al., 2004). In these partnerships, school and district level administrators support cooperating teachers' work with university faculty and candidates, coordinating initiatives that promote simultaneous improvement of schools and teacher education programs.

Placing teacher candidates in schools will not by itself create highly qualified teachers (Musset, 2010; Tigchelaar and Korthagen, 2004; Zeichner, 2006). Foster et al. (2010) provide an extensive review of the literature on the practicum, identifying five recurring weaknesses in how this curricular component has been designed and implemented: (a) lack of articulation between campus-based and practicum coursework, (b) wide range of practicum curriculum, with great diversity within universities and among universities, (c) persistent theory-practice gap between the university-

based coursework and the daily work of teachers, (d) inadequate communication and collaboration structures among the various participants, and (e) lack of a clear and coherent supervisory model to guide the mentorship process. These weaknesses have been shown to have detrimental effects on prospective teachers' learning (Akyaempong et al., 2013; Anderson and Stillman, 2013; Chambers and Armour, 2011; LaBoskey and Richert, 2002; Mutemeri and Chetty, 2011; Wang and Clarke, 2014).

From our review of the international literature, we identified an additional recurring problem related to the selection of schools serving as practicum sites. This seems particularly salient in countries that have yet to develop a structure and culture of collaboration to support the joint work of preparing new teachers (Mukeredzi, 2014; Wang and Clarke, 2014). The challenge of finding suitable placements is compounded in countries with an educational system evidencing inequitable access to pedagogical and social opportunities. Robinson (2014) discusses this challenge in the South African context, as candidates felt insecure in unfamiliar locations and resisted placement in schools experiencing challenges associated with pupils' social exclusion. Teacher educators expressed concern with placing student teachers in under performing schools when adequate support was not feasible but recognized that teacher candidates needed to be prepared to work in all contexts.

In Chile there are four types of schools, according to their administrative dependency: public schools administered by municipal governments, private schools receiving an attendance-based per pupil subsidy from the state, private schools fully funded by parents, and public schools administered by corporations also financed with a state subsidy. All schools must follow a national curriculum and must participate on the national assessment system. Only public schools are legally forbidden to select students and to charge tuition.

In the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Chile showed one of the largest opportunity gaps as a function of pupils' social class (cited in Valencia and Taut, 2011) – a trend confirmed in subsequent PISA findings. This gap is associated with a school system segregated by social class. In 2006, 39% of students in public schools were growing up in social vulnerability, compared with only 9% of students in private subsidized schools (70% of which charged additional tuition) and none in private non-subsidized schools (García-Huidobro, 2007). By 2009, 80% of students in public schools were from low-income or middle-low socioeconomic backgrounds, with this percentage reaching 20% in private subsidized schools and 0% in schools fully funded by parents (García-Huidobro, 2010).

Finding appropriate school partners is also challenging in countries that have yet to develop a homogeneous, high quality teaching force across all schools. In Chile the expectation has been that supply and demand market forces will regulate the quality of ITE; however, the evidence shows important quality disparities among universities (Cox et al., 2010; Labra and Fuentealba, 2012). Moreover, teachers coming from low quality teacher preparation programs end up teaching in schools serving low socioeconomic communities (Ortúzar et al., 2009). Low quality teacher preparation programs present a challenge for schools hosting the practicum. Under prepared candidates will more likely be perceived as a burden and as potential risks to the school's achievement on national standardized testing systems (Wang and Clarke, 2014).

### 2.1. School administrators' responses to the practicum

The school improvement literature has highlighted school principals and other senior level administrators as instructional leaders who ensure conditions for high quality instruction and

learning (Stronge et al., 2008). Core practices of instructional leaders defined by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) include defining the school's mission by setting goals and communicating those goals, managing the instructional program by coordinating the curriculum, monitoring instruction and pupils' progress, and promoting a learning climate through professional development, incentives, and protection of instructional time. Principals' instructional leadership has received scant direct attention in studies examining the school-based component of ITE.

Studies that have specifically examined the participation of the school principal or other senior administrators are inconclusive regarding their specific contributions to candidates' in-school experiences. Smith and Lev-Ari (2005), conducting a study in Israel, reported that principals did not see school-based teacher education as part of their leadership responsibilities. School principals had little contact with student teachers, and the school as a whole was not engaged with teacher candidates. AlBasheer et al. (2008) report a similar finding from a survey examining Jordanian student teachers' experiences with the school's principal. Candidates reported that principals exercised an administrative role by controlling their daily attendance but failed to help them develop a sense of belonging to the school. A study examining a multi-layered collaboration for an internship scheme in Northern Cyprus found that principals fulfilled the Ministry's requirements with respect to their duty to place candidates (Kuter and Koç, 2009); however, they were unaware of other roles they could play in the practicum.

Studies conducted in Australia and New Zealand have reported that candidates have more positive experiences in schools in which administrators encourage school-wide responsibility for candidates' learning and their inclusion into the community (Le Cornu, 2012; Ussher, 2010). Varrati et al. (2009) interviewed 10 school principals in the United States who indicated their commitment to supporting the practicum but noted they had very limited time. Addressing administrative aspects of placement took priority, thus less attention was paid to instructional aspects of candidates' work.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Overview of the research design and questions

Data for this study come from a larger, three-year research program that used a mixed-method design. In the survey phase, a questionnaire was used to ask participants if they had experienced barriers to their school's participation in the practicum and if so, to write down the main barrier. In the second phase (an interview six months later), participants were asked to elaborate on how they had managed barriers they had encountered. Responses to those questions are reported in this paper.

#### 3.2. Participants

##### 3.2.1. Teacher education programs

The schools involved in the current study were hosting candidates during the 2011 and 2012 academic years from 1 of 13 initial teacher education programs that agreed to participate in the larger study. These 5 elementary and 8 secondary programs were located in five universities from different regions in Chile. These programs followed a concurrent model structured into either 8–10 semesters of full-time coursework, including between 3 and 8 practicum courses.

##### 3.2.2. Schools

From the 204 schools identified by program coordinators, 153 schools were randomly selected. Ninety-two principals of these 153 schools agreed to participate in the survey phase. Fifty-two

percent were public schools funded through a per-pupil attendance-based state voucher, 38% were private-subsidized schools receiving the same voucher, and 9% were private school financed by parents. Thirty-seven of these schools were randomly selected for the interview phase, and 36 administrators agreed to continue their participation (58% public, 36% private-voucher, and 5% private financed by parents).

In both phases, about half of these schools served children in grades K-8 or 1-8; 39% were comprehensive schools, and the remaining were secondary schools (grades 9-12). With respect to the number of candidates each school hosted, 43% reported 5-10 candidates per year, and 26% reported 15 or more. These candidates came from different universities or programs within a university. Each year, 78% of these 92 schools were hosting candidates from two or more universities.

#### 3.2.3. School administrators

3.2.3.1. *Survey.* Completed surveys were obtained from 172 administrators. Among them, 44% were principals (35% women), 52% heads of the technical pedagogical unit (UTP, 61% women), and 4% held other positions (School Counselor or Inspector, 71% women).

3.2.3.2. *In-depth interviews.* From the total of 51 administrators participating in the interviews, women comprised the majority of the sample ( $n=35$ ). Forty-five percent held the position of school principal, 45% the position of UTP, and 10% held other positions in the school's administration team.

### 3.3. Data sources and procedures<sup>1</sup>

#### 3.3.1. Survey

The questionnaire was developed based on an extensive review of the literature. A first draft was subjected to content validity, and the final version was developed based on a pilot with a sample of four principals. Here, we report data from selected demographic questions and responses to an open-ended question about the main barrier, if any, they had encountered when hosting practicum teacher candidates. A researcher went to the school to administer the questionnaire.

#### 3.3.2. In-depth interviews

Twenty-six audiotaped interviews were conducted: 4 focus group interviews ( $n=20$ ), 8 group interviews with two or three members of the school's administration team ( $n=17$ ), and 14 individual interviews with either the principal or the director of the technical-pedagogical unit. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min and were conducted in the schools or at the local university campus.

Using an active-reflexive approach (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995), the protocol was organized around four themes (each with subthemes): (a) tasks, roles, and preparation of school administrators, university-based practicum instructors, and cooperating teachers for involvement in the practicum; (b) the practicum curricula; (c) specific benefits expected from their participation as practicum sites and specific barriers identified in the survey; and (d) coordination and level of formalization of the relationship between the school and the university through which we had located this practicum site.

<sup>1</sup> In each phase, participants signed an informed consent and a \$5 gift card was offered to thank them for their participation.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

#### 3.4.1. Survey

Written responses to the open-ended item were read and coded independently by two researchers to answer three questions:

What organization is identified as the source of the barrier? Within the organization, what person, artifact, or resource is identified? What knowledge, skills, dispositions, or actions are considered to be the barrier? Quantitative demographic and candidate placement data were analyzed with SPSS 19.

**Table 1**

Coding scheme and frequencies for the main barriers identified in the survey with excerpts from the survey and interviews exemplifying these barriers.

Organization	Barrier	Frequency	Examples interview and survey excerpts
School	Pupils/Parents		
	Potential negative impact on learning or criticism from parents	8	I know candidates complain a lot that cooperating teachers will not let them teach a lesson. I think sometimes they do not trust candidates will teach well a whole unit. If the content was not clearly explained, then parents may come and complain . . . I think teachers should let candidates teach the whole unit, trust that they will do a good job . . . that there will be no problems with parents. (Group Interview, School 9)
	Cooperating teachers		
	Insufficient time to support candidates	12	Greater workload for cooperating teachers, who without a payment must be attentive to candidates' preparation (Survey comment)
	Extra, unpaid work, unwilling to host candidates	10	
Management			
	Insufficient spaces to accommodate too many candidates in the school	14	When too many candidates arrive, we have problems with space and in keeping track of what they are doing (Survey comment)
	Total School	44 (34%)	
University	Teacher Education Curricula		
	Content not well-aligned with K-12 schools' demands to teachers	23	One thing is the curriculum delivered by the university and another is the curriculum we are asked to implement [national curricular framework] and the skills we must develop in our pupils . . . What we ask is that the university up-dates the competencies developed [in teacher candidates]. (Group Interview, School 14)
			I think the instruction they get is too theoretical . . . and the practicum is decontextualized . . . I get the impression that, initially, classroom management is very hard for candidates (Individual Interview, School 26)
	Practicum tasks and schedules not relevant to the school's needs	31	What is needed? We need more action from these teacher candidates, not passive entities coming only to observe. So that is my point, the tasks defined by the university for the teacher candidates must be pertinent. (Individual Interview, School 17)
			We are reticent to hosting the initial practicum because it disorganizes our work. Too many candidates walk around the school, pupils see someone come in and then leave. The next time a new person comes in. (Individual Interview, School 23)
	Management		
	Insufficient information about the practicum requirements	5	Preparation for cooperating teachers is needed. They should receive compensation or incentives for their work with candidates. (Survey Comment)
	Infrequent visits by the university supervisor to support candidates	8	Once in a while we may get a phone call [from the university], but that's it. I think the university is not fulfilling its supervisory functions (Group Interview, School 20)
	Insufficient vocation for teaching, not knowledgeable of professional norms	12	At times, I see candidates lacking commitment to the practicum. They stay required hours and do not spend time getting to know our school and our pupils (Survey comment)
			We have norms for our employees. From the moment candidates start the practicum, they are considered a colleague within the school . . . In that sense, the university must ensure that candidates adjust to what is required in each school. (Focus Group A)
	Total University	79 (62%)	
Mutual			
	Insufficient opportunities for exchanging information, coordination, and mutual support	5 (4%)	I believe we should be exchanging information for mutual feedback. Supervisors should come here to tell us what kinds of practice opportunities they want our school to offer candidates . . . At the same time, ask us about their candidates: what is missing, what else should they know? (Group Interview, School 20)

### 3.4.2. In-depth interviews

Audiotapes were transcribed and analyzed through a thematic content analysis procedure, which uses some of the principles and techniques of grounded theory (Vázquez, 1994). The textual corpus was parceled to distinguish segments of content that made explicit references to a characteristic of the barriers identified in the survey phase. Once a segment was identified, it was labeled using a code that synthesized its content. The coding scheme emerged from the analysis and was revised through repeated readings of the transcripts. All segments were first, independently coded by two researchers, followed by a discussion to reach agreement on discrepancies. In the final synthesis stage, emerging themes were elaborated to respond to the guiding research questions. Data coding was managed through the use of QSR NVIVO7 software.

## 4. Results

Results are presented in two sections. The first addresses barriers, linked to universities, schools, or both identified through the survey phase of the study and discussed in the interview phase. The second section focuses on approaches for managing these barriers reported during the interview phase: redefining the practicum curriculum, restricting access to the school, and expecting the university to address problems.

### 4.1. Barriers

Among the 172 participants, 16 did not respond to the open-ended survey item, and 22% indicated that they had not experience barriers when hosting practicum candidates. Among the 116 participants identifying barriers, 12 offered multiple answers, such that 128 responses were coded. Table 1 summarizes the coding of responses. Examples of excerpts<sup>2</sup> from interview transcripts and from questionnaire responses are included to illustrate concerns associated with each type of barrier. Words, such as university, teacher candidates, and university supervisors, tended to be used as synonyms by our participants, and we use them in a similar manner.

#### 4.1.1. Barriers attributed to the school

Out of the 128 responses coded, 44 (34%) identified barriers located within the schools. These related to concerns about potential complaints from parents if candidates failed to teach well or a concern that pupils' learning could be negatively impacted. Administrators also noted that teachers were not always willing to serve as cooperating teachers; in most schools, this was a consideration when placing candidates. Although administrators recognized that too many candidates could burden teachers and could become a distraction for pupils, several practicum candidates from different universities were simultaneously accepted.

#### 4.1.2. Barriers attributed to the university

Out of the 128 responses coded, 79 (62%) barriers identified were attributed to the university. These clustered around four topics: (a) gaps between the university-based coursework and the daily demands of teaching, (b) misalignments between the practicum curriculum and school's needs and operations, (c) the university's management of the practicum, and (d) teacher candidates' dispositions. Administrators

recognized variability among universities (and individual teacher candidates) in the extent to which each of these issues was a barrier.

Participants claimed that university-based teacher educators were often unaware of the social realities of classroom teaching and of the national K-12 curriculum requirements. Administrators wondered what was happening on campus, what teacher candidates were taught, and if that content was relevant to classroom teaching. It became evident that few instances were available for joint discussions about the ITE curriculum.

*The university sends us candidates, but there are no connections among universities and schools. The university is far from schools . . . It is essential that curricular changes go hand in hand. Are these [K-12 national curricular] changes known? University professors are up-to-date? Is this taught to candidates? (Focus Group A)*

Criticisms toward the campus-based preparation often reflected a belief that the practicum involved applying knowledge previously acquired on campus. The expectation of candidates as work-ready employees clashed with the level of competence exhibited:

*Candidates come here to do their student teaching, therefore they should be prepared, but what happens? . . . Too often we have to start with them from zero. (Focus Group A)*

Other administrators understood that learning to teach entailed practice, so they did not express this type of concern. Teacher candidates' dispositions to learn, however, was paramount, and universities were expected to develop these dispositions.

*They come here to learn . . . Candidates want to learn, show up on time, bring their materials . . . are eager to learn. And they learn by practicing with the cooperating teacher . . . It is really difficult. They first need to observe, and it's a learning process. (Group Interview, Administrator School 14)*

Two main concerns were raised regarding the practicum curriculum. First, required tasks did not always align with administrators' key motivations for agreeing that their schools serve as a practicum site. School personnel expected that, in coordination with the school and teachers' instructional plan, candidates' active involvement would provide support for pupils and teachers. Participants were critical of initial field experience courses that most often required observation. Second, they expressed concerns for the practicum schedule. Candidates' sporadic short visits to the school were a burden on teachers' and administrators' time and a distraction to pupils.

Administrators noted differences in how universities managed the practicum. They valued working with practicum supervisors who met with them to discuss placement vis-à-vis the school's needs. The expectation was that a university supervisor would follow a formal protocol for placing candidates, for informing administrators and cooperating teachers about practicum requirements, and would come on a weekly schedule to supervise candidates. Administrators were critical of universities that failed to follow this protocol, particularly when the university did not provide sufficient on-site supervision to its candidates.

#### 4.1.3. Mutual responsibility for these barriers

Few ( $n = 5$  or 4%) responses recognized that the school and the university needed to take joint ownership for barriers such as those discussed above. In some cases, working together was framed as an ideal, but no one took the initiative to make that work. In other cases, the supervisor and administrator set aside time to meet and discuss candidates' progress and coordinate actions.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from interview transcripts and survey comments have been translated from Spanish to English. The translation involved some editing for clarity. In the excerpts we use ellipses for omitted words and brackets for additional information.

## 4.2. Managing Barriers

### 4.2.1. Redefining the practicum curriculum

At several schools, measures were taken to change practicum requirements to better serve pupils and teachers. Administrators met with candidates to explain what tasks they were expected to perform, irrespective of what the university had previously informed candidates. In these meetings there was little room for negotiation or for the involvement of the university supervisor:

Interviewer: Does the university define these tasks?

Administrator: *When students come to do their initial field experience, generally the university tells them they should go into a classroom and observe. We tell them, No . . . . The cooperating teacher introduces content for about 15 minutes, and later practicum students must review pupils' work. We demand that practicum students support pupils . . . . As we can have as many as 40 pupils per class, this collaboration makes teachers' work easier. (Individual Interview, Administrator School 21).*

The main thing is that candidates support teachers. [It's] okay if they spend one class period observing, but candidates must support the teacher in everything. [Help with] classroom management, preparing learning resources, whole class instruction, and [provide] individualized attention to a pupil . . . . We need teacher candidates, even in their initial practicum, who are motivated, who help the teacher – not candidates who sit through a whole class period . . . . I make this very clear from the start. (Individual Interview, Administrator School 15).

Modifying the practicum curriculum also purported to help candidates develop the competencies they would need as classroom teachers. Aware of the emotional work of student teaching, administrators would modify the practicum curriculum in developmentally appropriate ways. In School 17, this involved creating opportunities to learn how to work with parents, an aspect not properly addressed by the university. In School 14, the university requested that two candidates be placed with each cooperating teacher. The school obliged for a while but later changed the practice believing that this was not conducive to candidates' learning:

They are not prepared to conduct parent meetings . . . . That is hard for them, and they have stage fright . . . . We give them the possibility. We invite them to do it, slowly. (Group Interview, Administrator School 17).

They come with many fears . . . . expecting something terrible because it's a public school with 40 pupils [in a classroom], and they will be unable to deal with 40. If candidates want to be placed two per classroom, we say, OK. . . . We later separate them because they have to live the experience of being a classroom teacher. (Group Interview, Administrator School 14).

Some administrators explicitly stated that practicum candidates were required to adopt the school's instructional model. As exemplified in the next excerpt, in some schools a formal induction program was offered to socialize candidates into the school practices. Later, candidates' performance was closely monitored to ensure that pupils' academic progress was not hampered when being taught by candidates:

In one of the induction sessions I explain, This is the model we use for planning each class session. This is what you have to do.. I revise their lesson plans to ensure alignment with what we ask. Later, in another session we go over our institutional assessment model . . . the type of test they must develop. (Individual Interview, Administrator School 22).

### 4.2.2. Controlling access to the school

Some administrators accepted all candidates, those who came following the established placement procedure and those who came on their own. Administrators were reluctant to accept candidates who knocked at their door looking for a placement, but empathy for candidates' need to find a practicum site would prevail. In two elementary public schools, administrators accepted any candidate willing to work with low-income pupils. Both were concerned with the need to prepare teachers to work with children and families facing social exclusion – a need they believed not all universities were fulfilling.

We come from a public school, and we have included in our management plan the participation of practicum university students. Why? We are interested in having teacher candidates develop the skills that are relevant for teaching children in this reality. I need a teacher prepared to serve in this reality. We think it is very valuable that a young person . . . who, for whatever reason, wants to come here knowing that it is a hard place to teach. (Focus Group C).

I have seen new teachers who after two years do not want to work with students who have these problems [associated with social exclusion]. I say to them, But for many years now students in public schools have these characteristics. You should have come prepared by your university. . . . They come under prepared. (Individual Interview, Administrator School 2).

In other schools, administrators controlled access to ensure benefits for teachers and pupils. In some schools, only candidates from universities that had signed a formal practicum agreement with the public government or the school principal were admitted. In these cases, often the agreement spelled out some form of compensation: The municipal government signed an agreement with the universities and the . . . universities agreed to provide professional development for teachers in the district. (Group Interview, Administrator School 20).

When schools were dissatisfied with the supervisory processes or the level of candidates' preparedness to teach, a frequent response was to stop accepting practicum candidates from these universities.

We had a conflict with [a] supervisor. The university did not manage [the practicum] well and some of the students they were sending to us had bad manners. So we cut them off, and looked for other universities [to send teacher candidates]. (Group Interview, Administrator School 12).

The practicum course and the candidates' disciplinary major or minor were important admission criteria. Priority was given to subject areas included in the national educational testing program. Initial practicum experiences were a problem when candidates' work was limited to observing in the classroom for the whole semester, thus their placement was rejected:

We only accept candidates in their student teaching, not . . . in the initial phase. When someone external comes here, kids start asking who are they, what will they do? . . . . That is distracting, so teachers decided that if we are going to host a candidate, that person must be here all week, in all class sessions with that group of students. . . . Candidates in the pre-practicum just come one day a week. (Individual Interview, Administrator School 4).

We prioritize candidates who will teach in those subjects key to our school's achievement . . . . These are Spanish language arts, mathematic, history, and English. . . . We have pupils not achieving well in those areas, and the candidates, with the cooperating teacher . . . can provide more individualized attention to under performing kids. (Individual Interview, Administrator School 23).

#### 4.2.3. Universities are expected to address these barriers

A group of administrators did not actively manage barriers they had identified for the practicum. In some of these cases, the belief was that candidates were the university's responsibility; therefore, candidates should complain when the university failed to provide adequate supervision or information to the cooperating teacher. Other administrators recognized that they could take the initiative to address some of the problems they had identified as evidencing poor management on the part of a university. When practicum candidates were not positioned within the school's instructional program, however, other administrative and leadership demands were prioritized.

If you ask me why [the school does not take the initiative to address this problem]... I think that schools do not see candidates with a focus on learning. We see them as someone to whom we do a favor [by hosting them]. (Group Interview, Administrator School 9).

## 5. Discussion

The current study addresses if and how school administrators extend instructional leadership responsibilities to the ITE practicum experiences taking place at their schools (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). Addressing this issue is important, as previous studies have shown that school administrators expect practicum candidates to provide additional human resources to support teachers' and pupils' work, but it is unclear how they seek to fulfill this expectation (Militello et al., 2009). Our findings provide evidence of how administrators manage the practicum to leverage better learning opportunities for their school's pupils. In particular, participants perceive opportunities in the practicum for capacity building for prospective teachers and for the school staff. Controlling access of practicum candidates and redesigning the practicum tasks are two key practices administrators employ for ensuring the school benefits from hosting practicum candidates. Prior research has shown how cooperating teachers shape the pedagogical work of candidates (Bullough and Draper, 2004), but evidence of how principals shape candidates' instructional tasks could not be identified in the literature reviewed.

All of our participants are willing to host practicum candidates, but not all candidates. Specifically, some administrators will not host candidates in practicum courses that limit them to observe in schools or candidates from ITE programs considered to be of low quality or poorly managed. All believe practicum experiences are crucial for the preparation of prospective teachers and that schools should contribute to the development of better-qualified teachers. Beyond placement, however, not all of our participants actively manage the practicum to maximize benefits for all stakeholders. Future research exploring factors accounting for differences in how administrators manage the practicum is warranted to identify more suitable partners. For example, do principals who exercise greater levels of instructional leadership spend more time managing the practicum as compared to their peers who pay more attention to administrative tasks?

Administrators' attention to instructional aspects of candidates' work aligns with studies showing that school administrators' management of the instructional program is key for enhancing pupils' learning (Barber et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2010). Increasingly in Chile, principals working in public schools are facing greater accountability demands related to results on standardized testing, enrollment, and parents' satisfaction. These demands are included as evaluation targets in the performance-agreement contract the principal signs when accepting the position (Montecinos et al., 2015). Ensuring the practicum serves to meet these indicators pertains to administrators in Chile's

private educational sector as well. Private schools must compete to attract pupils, and school rankings on those indicators are key marketing tools.

#### 5.1. Implications for enhancing the practicum component of initial teacher preparation

A gap between the university curriculum and what classroom teachers need to know and be able to do largely accounts for policymakers' mandates and professional associations' recommendations to move a larger portion of initial teacher preparation to the schools (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), 2010). This distance, also identified by Chilean administrators, corresponds with results from a voluntary national test for ITE graduates implemented by Chile's Ministry of Education's Program for the Promotion of the Quality in Initial Teacher Education (INICIA). Lopez Stewart (2012) reports that 50% of the elementary teachers assessed in 2011 were deemed as having an adequate level of pedagogical knowledge. In the test measuring knowledge of Spanish language arts, mathematics, social sciences and natural sciences, over half of the test takers performed at the insufficient level.

The gap perceived by administrators as well as INICIA test results suggest that some ITE programs might not be teaching the content measured by the test or developing the professional competencies deemed relevant. Differences among programs reflect that higher education in Chile is deregulated, allowing university teacher education programs to enjoy high levels of academic autonomy. On the other hand, as explained by our participants, teachers work under a tightly controlled, regulated curriculum; a mandatory high stake testing system for pupils and teachers; and monitoring practices designed for quality assurance of their lesson plans. Chilean administrators expect a closer alignment between the ITE curriculum and teachers' workplace demands. Educational law, however, gives Ministry of Education authorities very few tools to regulate the content of ITE. This disjunction creates tension, as highly deregulated ITE programs must prepare teachers to work in a highly regulated work environment.

Findings from the current study extend our understanding of the several pathways through which a gap between the school workplace demands and the university's curriculum is produced. For these Chilean administrators, the gap evidenced that university-based teacher educators were too far from the schools and were largely unaware of the requirements set forth by the national, mandatory K-12 curriculum. However, they were unsure of what was taught at the university campus, so it is possible that some of this perceived gap reflects their lack of information. Other administrators attributed this gap to the specificities of their school's instructional program. In these cases, practicum candidates were provided with induction to ensure pupils' seamless transition from being taught by a cooperating teacher to being taught by a teacher candidate.

Either through lack of information or through genuine instructional differences, there is a risk of placing candidates in schools in which what they learn from cooperating teachers does not agree with what is taught in campus-based coursework. Lack of instructional coherence undermines candidates' learning (Anderson and Stillman, 2013). To achieve greater coherence, university-based teacher educators may benefit from taking a close look at the instructional program offered in each practicum school and from making the ITE curriculum more transparent to school administrators. This entails creating structures to foster conversations between school-based and university-based partners that move beyond exchanging information about the specifics of school-based component of ITE.

A key aspect that school administrators sought to manage was the wide range of tasks associated with the practicum. They were asked to find placements for candidates who just needed to gather data, for others who needed to conduct extended observations, for some asking to assist teachers as needed, and for others asking for opportunities for full-time teaching responsibilities (Musset, 2010). These different practicum-related tasks demand different levels of resources and involvement from school personnel and different contributions from teacher candidates toward advancing the school's goals. Findings show that when the university-designed curriculum positions teacher candidates more as students than as teachers in training, administrators create new tasks to reposition candidates' roles in the schools so they work as teachers or teacher assistants. This move is in agreement with sociocultural perspectives on teacher learning, which favors a curriculum focused on teachers' everyday tasks and not on tasks that would be required from a university student (Childs et al., 2014). Understanding the extent to which changes to the practicum tasks introduced by school administrators impact on candidates' learning needs to be researched to inform the redesign of the practicum curriculum and partnering negotiations.

Findings from the current study suggest, however, a deeper issue associated with the wide range of tasks design for the practicum curriculum and gaps between the university-based coursework and the daily work of teachers. As instructional leaders, administrators have developed a theory-of-action on how teachers learn, and it is through that theory that they may make judgments about the quality of ITE programs. Diversity in administrators' critiques to the practicum reflects differences in understandings with respect to how teachers learn and develop. Some administrators expect that university-based coursework prior to student teaching should prepare candidates to address the complexities of the classroom. The fact that candidates are not work-ready may be interpreted as evidence of weak ITE programs. This perspective aligns with designing a practicum curriculum sequence that places initial practicum candidates in schools with the sole purpose of observing. Expecting candidates to be ready to work and limiting participation to observation share the assumption that the theoretical domain precedes the practical domain of the knowledge base for teaching. In contrast, other administrators thought that learning to teach requires school-based practice. In these cases, candidates' preparedness was linked to the quality of the practicum and the role of school staff as teacher educators. This latter perspective is closer to a sociocultural perspective, which posits that growing complexity-autonomy in the tasks assigned to candidates entails participating in the social/pedagogical practices of schools (Childs et al., 2014; Korthagen, 2010).

Differences in theories-of-action, such as the ones just exemplified, suggest the need of attending to administrators' theoretical perspectives about their demands on candidates' work. School-university agreements need to explicitly address what teacher candidates should be learning in school-based and campus-based courses as well as the links among the competencies developed in these courses. Conversations for school-university partnering also need to make explicit the theory of teacher learning that underpins the curriculum, aligning candidates' activities, and teacher educators' (campus-based and school-based) activities to that theory.

Although findings from the current study cannot be generalized to the broader population of Chilean school administrators, they offer insights on how school administrators may actively change the practicum curriculum. Their concerns and actions suggest that in planning the practicum curriculum universities need to consider administrators' contributions beyond placing, meeting, and greeting candidates. Establishing formalized school-university agreements may prompt administrators to develop a greater level

of ownership for shaping solutions to the practicum problems identified (Le Cornu, 2012). In the absence of such agreements, problems will more likely be micromanaged with the teacher candidates than with program faculty or will remain unaddressed. In these latter cases, the risk of lack of coherence between campus-based coursework and the practicum increases. It generates potential arbitrariness in the opportunities to learn afforded to candidates placed in different schools.

## 6. Conclusions

Situating teacher candidates' learning in schools requires coordination among university faculty and school practitioners. The research literature reviewed for the current paper shows this is a complex task. This complexity is increased in Chile due to important discontinuities in policies deregulating how teachers are prepared and policies regulating teachers' workplace demands. School principals' instructional leadership, as a potential contribution to address this complexity, has remained largely untapped by research and practice in initial teacher education. The current study has evidenced the importance of attending to this school resource.

Without due attention to the support and mediation school-based teacher educators need to provide, schools under intense scrutiny to produce high scores on national examinations risk instrumentalizing ITE candidates for increasing test scores. Teacher educators' attention to the involvement of school administrators in the practicum seems crucial for ensuring adequate support. Universities under pressure to place large numbers of candidates cannot instrumentalize schools by neglecting to focus on the impact that teacher candidates have on pupil's learning. School administrators may be more likely to devote school resources when they see how the practicum leverages improvement on key indicators. Akyeampong et al. (2013) propose enhancing teacher education programs in Africa by improving the practicum through greater involvement of qualified cooperating teachers. Findings from the current study suggest that including the school leadership team in the planning and delivery of the practicum will likely strengthen the learning to teach opportunities made available to teacher candidates.

## Authors Contribution

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