

Positive Leadership and its Impact on Improving the Climate in Chilean Schools. A Comparison between Teachers and School Leaders

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Abstract

This article analyzes the opinions of teachers and principals regarding relationships and the presence (or absence) of relational trust and positive leadership in Chilean public schools in the Metropolitan and O'Higgins regions. The development of positive school climates, where respect and relational trust are key factors in promoting improvement strategies, aligns with coexistence, democracy, and equity. Leaders' actions are central to this, making resilience and relational trust key professional competencies, especially in complex and disadvantaged contexts. The study employs a mixed-methods, procedural design, combining a Google Forms questionnaire, validated by experts, to obtain an overview of the topic (with 95 responses), and six in-depth interviews with three principals to contextualize and understand the scope and meaning of the data. The results indicate that relational trust impacts the work climate, emotional well-being, teamwork, and the achievement of institutional goals. This highlights the importance of training in active listening, the development of multilevel relational trust, and democratic decision-making. In turn, leaders and teachers must be competent in interpersonal skills, perceiving the needs of the community. Furthermore, the following emerge: A demand for initial and ongoing teacher training in the development of interpersonal skills; and the importance of interpersonal relationships and trust as professional competencies. At the same time, it concludes that schools must create spaces of care, safety, and interaction as a necessary condition for generating spaces for dialogue and mutual institutional reciprocity. This is relevant for achieving a shared vision and purpose for improving outcomes for all members of the educational community.

Keywords: Leadership, relational trust, school climate, interrelationships, professional learning community

Introduction

This article focuses on the study of the creation of positive school environments that develop confidence as one of the central elements in the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs; De Jong et al., 2021). This requires school leadership (Blanch et al., 2016; Bolívar, 2019; Carrasco & Barraza, 2020; Louis et al., 2016) who demonstrate their concern and care for all members of the community and develop relational trust, which results in improvements in their educational processes and results (Weinstein & Fredes, 2024). Relational trust, in this way, is the backbone of a school community (Hargreaves, 2007; Weinstein, 2022). However, in the public sector, these leadership patterns have been largely ignored (Louis & Murphy, 2019). Given the above, this factor is relevant in the construction of common visions for school improvement (Bender, 2017). Without this horizon, it is almost impossible to achieve the level of communication and collaboration that is required to perform the task.

Due to the current fast-paced and changing way of life, as humans, we often view daily and routine events with distrust, both globally and in the close professional environment. In fact, when comparing Chile and other Latin American countries, the levels of trust between neighbors are very low. When asked about the level of trust in people, Latin America averages 13%, while in Chile it is 9%; percentages that contrast with the reality of Sweden, which reaches 70% confidence as compared with the countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD; Waissbluth, 2010). The pandemic, corruption, and crime and economic development have fostered, in Chile and Latin America, a feeling of frustration, impotence, rebellion, discouragement and distrust in all institutionalities inherited from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, which caused the social explosion of October 2019 in Chile (Jiménez-Yañez, 2020); understanding that the weakening of social and institutional trust can generate the acceptance of corruption as a social norm from the earliest years (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2021).

A big challenge is how to socially replenish our relationships of trust, development, and mutual growth. In this logic, fostering climates of trust in the school is fundamental since it provides the primary interaction conditions, which allow us to develop our lives and professions better. It is in the educational field where climates of trust and mutual reciprocity should be provoked primarily to reach agreements that impact the development of learning. In fact, the level of trust in a school is essential for it to be able to fulfill its mission and its fundamental purposes since it influences up to 75% of the variation in a school's student performance (Tschannen-Moran, 2019). Along with this, relational trust, both within classes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) and at school, as well as with families and intermediate levels of leadership, has been identified as a central factor in school improvement processes (Weinstein, 2022). Although, as several studies warn us (Peña Fredes et al., 2018; Weinstein & Fredes, 2024), trust is easier to destroy than create. The common thing in our system is a loss of trust between teachers and managers, or between schools and intermediate levels. Faced with this, Blanch et al. (2016) propose a positive leadership in the face of complexity that is proactive, relational (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011), caring (Louis et al., 2016; Tomkins & Simpson, 2015), and more horizontal; a collective shared leadership from the middle (Barrero et al., 2020; Rincón-Gallardo, 2018) can be a key element in the development of relational trust.

Developing soft skills (Peña Fredes et al., 2018) that allow the creation of bonds and the activation of processes of professional interrelation and mutual help fosters building environments that enhance the development of all people in the community. Creating climates of trust as a professional ability allows generating learning opportunities for all teachers and the community in general, including leaders (Meyers & Hitt, 2019). It is a central dimension to enable the development of an interactive professionalism, with the ability to work together on the same purpose and task, support each other, and learn together. Essential Aspects in a Professional Learning Community (PLC). As Rincón-Gallardo (2018) pointed out, this is crucial for the actors of a network to have the openness to recognize what they do not know, learn in public, and ask others for help, as a key precondition for learning and personal and collective growth.

Research over the past thirty years has shown that human relationships form the basis of student learning and development (Tschannen-Moran, 2019). Learning is deeper if it is collective and relational, because it mobilizes what Fullan (2021) calls social intelligence. In this logic, children and adolescents learn more and are happier at school when they feel that their teachers support their learning. This is especially key in complex socio-educational contexts, since the academic success of students belonging to the most vulnerable households and communities tends to depend more on the development of strong connections with school teachers (Louis & Murphy, 2019, pp. 153-154). Other recent research concludes that, although students are more likely to experience negative relationships that contribute to their disconnection, especially in high-complexity schools, they, in turn, benefit more from positive relationships when they occur (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). For the same reason, these types of relationships are crucial to avoid dropping out, learning loss or not completing their studies.

Given the importance of the above, it is disconcerting that this type of emphasis is almost exclusive of curricular educational policies, or pedagogical knowledge about teaching contents and pedagogical strategies, even socio-emotional learning. But this does not happen in educational practice or in the priorities of principals, who, in many cases, only have the mission of emphasizing the provision of leadership and supervision with a focus on improving those areas. Positive leadership increases the

effectiveness in the development and learning of students, so school leaders should enhance emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996) and professional interrelationships (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), which promote dynamic school environments in which all members of the educational community can thrive. It is therefore a good starting point to create solid relationships of trust with and among teachers. Relationships between adults are the basis for building positive climates in the school and the classroom to promote better teaching, more authentic and meaningful learning, and better outcomes for students (Louis & Murphy, 2019).

The Relevance and Transcendence of Positive Leadership in the School Climate

It is important to emphasize leadership for learning, which implies an integration of academic requirements, attention, and care. On the other hand, it is already evidenced that the well-being and cognitive and socio-emotional development of students requires more than technically adequate teaching. They are affected by several factors inside the school, such as the climate in the classroom, relationships with peers, and academic emphasis. Promoting better learning environments, both for teachers and students, requires creating conducive school conditions. Hargreaves (2007) defined trust as the backbone of a school community. This principle is especially critical in institutions of high socio-educational complexity, where more is needed and expected from the school, since many students come from challenging contexts and vulnerable families (Goddard et al., 2001). Hence, the importance of trust for the development of positive school environments (Price & Moolenaar, 2015) and fairness in the organization (Buluc & Gunes, 2014).

Other research (Erden & Erden, 2009; Price & Moolenaar, 2015) focuses on general perceptions of relationships between teachers and management teams, which are usually described as supportive, trusting, or stimulating. However, there are few studies that have focused on how principals act to develop relationships that link their work with the school climate and the development and learning of students (Louis & Murphy, 2019). Moreover, Lim (2019) argued that the model has not been proven empirically with real school leaders. A parallel line of research has emerged, though, around the care that principals should seek (Blanch et al., 2016; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Lim, 2019; Louis & Murphy, 2019; Louis et al., 2016; Ryu et al., 2022). Positive leadership has become a dominant approach in the study of leadership in organizations (Blanch et al., 2016). Among these leaders, there is an enduring concern to develop practices that promote care within the work teams and the construction of a climate of trust within the framework of the relationships that are established in educational communities. These studies show that school leaders who express concern and care for adults and students are more effective in their impact on processes and results. At the same time, caring principals are more likely to contribute to the school climate and to an education that responds culturally and supports students whose ethnic origin or socioeconomic status has led schools to marginalize them (Wilson, 2016), as happens in highly complex schools.

Therefore, there is some consensus that 1) relationships are important, especially for high-complexity schools, and 2) that management teams have a significant impact on the relationships that develop within educational centers (Louis & Murphy, 2019). Even the business literature points out that the quality of social exchange between leaders and followers, characterized by mutual trust, respect, and obligation, is a basis for the effectiveness of the leader. In other words, the simple fact of recognizing the value base of actions between oneself and the other generates bonds that become part of the permanent fabric of school life (Louis & Murphy, 2019).

In schools, all members of the community who are not formal leaders respond to and influence the exchanges between leaders and the rest of the staff. In fact, they are constantly conducting evaluations of leaders while interacting with them, specifically regarding values and ethics (Fraser & Honneth, 2006; Meyers & Hitt, 2019). Within educational centers, the actions of a principal can be perceived as attentive and visionary by some members, but deficient and erroneous by others. These differences in appreciation cause people to behave differently. Because of this, Louis and Murphy (2019) proposed that the most important elements are the filters of reliability, transparency, and fairness.

- **Reliability.** This aspect is relevant because it expands the zone of indifference or the willingness to assume that positive results are achieved by accommodating the preferences of

others. For the same reason, in the exchange between principal, director, and teacher, there is the importance of reciprocity, since “trust in the principal is determined primarily by the behavior of the principal. In other words, the principal controls his or her own destiny” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997, p. 348). Conger et al. (2000) stated that it can be achieved “1) by identifying and articulating a vision; 2) setting an example for followers that is consistent with the values the leader espouses; and 3) promoting group cooperation and acceptance of group goals” (p. 750). In this logic, the basis of positive leadership is trust and care (Tschannen-Moran, 2014); since, unless teachers trust their principals, their ability to act in a transformative way will be limited (Bush & Glover, 2012).

- **Transparency.** In work environments, leaders considered more transparent are more likely to generate engagement. Transparency is one of the fundamental bases for trust, since it requires the follower to perceive the leader as honest or upstanding, as well as “the perception of an honest representation of himself” (Simons, 2002, p. 94). A recurring problem in schools is that leaders may believe they are transparent, but it is unlikely that all teachers have the same perception (Bird et al., 2009). Therefore, school leaders should strive to be as transparent as possible.
- **Fairness.** A third area that affects the overall evaluations of a leader is the opinions of others about their fairness. This helps to create an organizational climate that is considered fair. Individuals and groups, when they consider that the actions within the institution are fair, strive beyond what is required. In fact, Hannah et al. (2005, p. 66) noted when employees feel that they are being treated fairly, they respond through organizational citizenship behaviors, and when “leaders consistently display high levels of moral conduct, they set a positive ethical standard to be followed across the organization” (p. 71). In this way, teachers who perceive the procedures and criteria used to evaluate them as fair tend to support the evaluation and use it for their professional training, while those who consider it arbitrary or unfair do not. On the other hand, there are marked associations between teachers’ perceptions of their school as a fair environment and their affective commitment to it.

From the above, it follows that, as relationships deepen, they become more reliable and transformative (Louis & Murphy, 2019). Value-based social exchanges between management teams and other members of the school community can have multiplier effects when their duo relationships multiply, spread, and change the organizational climate and culture. The reciprocity between the principal and the teacher reinforces the emerging agency and effectiveness of the teacher and the leader. In turn, empowered teachers become more influential leaders when relationships are tinged with care and support. In addition, it was concluded that “when teachers perceive principals’ instructional leadership behaviors to be appropriate, they grow in commitment, professional involvement, and willingness to innovate” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 393). In other words, collective identity has consequences. When collective identity is not based on high-quality relationships with its principal, it can become confrontational and undermine school effectiveness (Louis & Murphy, 2019). In this regard, current studies include concern, loyalty and professional respect along with mutual affection and contribution to common goals. However, we, as a society, must be aware that achieving adaptive, authentic, and daily high-quality relationships in any school is a difficult task, but not impossible.

Methodology: Analysis of the Climates of Trust of School Leaders and Positive Leadership

The objective of this research was to analyze the opinions that teachers and principals have about the practices of school leaders that foster climates of trust or positive leadership. For this, a mixed and procedural research design was used to favor the understanding of what happens in the schools under study. A questionnaire was employed to obtain an overview of the topic in schools, and in-depth interviews to locate and understand the scope and meaning of the data.

Participants

Nine public schools and one subsidized private school were intentionally selected, all of them belonging to seven communes of the Metropolitan Region and one in the Region of O’Higgins, Chile. All educa-

tional establishments are in highly complex contexts, where the educational range includes early childhood education (4 to 5 years), basic or primary education (6 to 13 years), and humanist–scientific middle or secondary education (hereinafter HC), and vocational technical training, hereinafter TP (14 to 18 years). It should be noted that the disciplines of the teachers were quite varied, from early childhood educators, basic education teachers, teachers of the different specialties of secondary education (language, mathematics, history, science, English, philosophy, religion, citizenship sciences, citizenship training, etc.) in addition to the professional technical specialties (accounting, automotive mechanics, gastronomy, connectivity and networks, administration and early childhood education), allowing a heterogeneity in the opinions of each group. The form was completed by a total of 95 teachers, although one of them did not authorize the use of their answers for the purposes of this study, so a total of 94 results are presented.

Table 1

Summary of Participants by Gender, Years of Service and Type of Establishment

	Genre	Number
Number of participants by gender	Male	65
	Female	29
Average years of service	Male	14.1
	Female	16.9
Type of establishment	Subsidized	3
	Municipal	91

Source: Own elaboration

Tools for Obtaining Information

For the collection of information, an ad-hoc form was designed and validated by a number of participants and experts, which was applied online through the Google Workspace Forms platform between June 22 and July 1, 2023, for teachers. The form consisted of fourteen items that included descriptors related to the identification of the participants, typology, commune of work establishment, gender, and years of teaching service. In addition, development issues related to the perception of teachers about the relevance of positive leadership, as well as the strategies implemented by the teaching and management staff to generate a positive atmosphere in the classroom, were examined. Finally, a multiple-choice question was incorporated, which made it possible to identify which elements the managers have to implement to build a positive atmosphere in the establishment.

Likewise, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted with three directors of educational centers in the Central Station commune between 2023 and 2024. Each director was given an introductory interview, followed by a second in-depth interview about the subjects of the research. These interviews were face-to-face, and the questions were previously sent for authorization by those involved. Once the transcription of the interviews had been made, mapping was used to delve more deeply into issues for the second in-depth interview. These processes were carried out with the expressed authorization of those involved.

Analysis

Three specific computer programs were used to conduct the analysis of the obtained results. In the teaching field, to conduct the analysis of the obtained results, three specific computer support programs were used to manage the information and obtain a better understanding of the data. The strength of the analysis lies in a repeated and thoughtful reading of the content of the interviews.

First, an Excel spreadsheet was used to sort and classify the collected data. Subsequently, to explore the data and perform a descriptive quantitative analysis, the Jamovi software was used. Finally, Atlasti 7 was used to analyze the open responses, where the thematic analysis was included by identifying recurring and emerging patterns. In this way, it was possible to determine the different categories depending on the purpose of the research and the established comparative analysis criteria.

Regarding the directors, the Happyscrib program was used to transcribe the semi-structured interviews, moving on to a mapping based on Paulston (2002) in order to visualize in a graphic way the most relevant aspect of each interview and give way to the next instance of in-depth interviews. Atlasti 7 was used in each interview for the analysis of open answers and deepening of contents, which allowed mapping relationships with their answers.

The Most Relevant Results on School Confidence Climates and Positive Leadership

By the Faculty

On the consideration or relevance that climates of trust and positive leadership have in the educational center, 97.9% rated it important, and 2.1% responded negatively. This minority margin had the conception that trust only occurs in spaces of personal life since they do not consider interrelational trust as a professional competence that produces benefits for the institution, or that it deteriorates between teachers and managers. On the contrary, most teachers considered that trust and positive leadership are vital for all kinds of human relationships, especially in educational institutions.

At the same time, in assessing the climate of the educational center, most teachers considered that practices such as: a) generation of trust; b) institutional impact; c) improvement of the work climate and well-being; d) achievement of institutional goals; and e) relationship between leadership and professional teacher development produce impact on the institution and generate confidence for the best educational development of the institution. Undoubtedly, the responses of teachers are oriented in leadership practices of care for school staff and permanent concern for non-teaching or junior staff. In addition, the results in this area show the ideal conditions that every employee of an educational institution should have as ideal practices, and not necessarily practices institutionalized by school leaders. In this sense, the results project which practices are the ideal ones, and which teachers require from their school leaders. Figure 1 evidences their answers. Of the following practices, which do you consider necessary for the managers of your institution to promote in order to create climates of trust or positive leadership?

Figure 1
Practices Desired by Teachers that Principals Should Perform



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1 shows that the practices most mentioned by teachers (between 67 and 78% of the responses) are concern for their staff; acting respectfully towards each other; feeling heard and that their opinion has validity in decision-making, as well as transparency, democratic acting, and tolerance. And, to a lesser extent (already with percentages below 55%), the fairness of decisions and the perception of their managers.

One of the factors to highlight is that, unlike the international literature, the concern for its officials

contrasts profoundly with the Anglophone literature, since it shows that officials who have a good perception of their managers prevail in these investigations; while, at the same time, the practice of making decisions fairly is not relevant for Chilean teachers (Peña Fredes et al., 2018; Weinstein & Fredes, 2024). In addition, if it is broken down by teaching modality, it was observed that at the HC secondary education levels, they differ by a greater perception of having the need for trusted practices by the managers of their institution. However, early childhood education and middle school have similar responses regarding the fairness of decisions, democracy and tolerance, and concern for the institution's officials. Even so, the practices that are repeated with the lowest perception of teachers are the fair decisions of a manager, and, at the same time, officials have a good perception of their managers. On the other hand, when consulting the climates of trust in educational institutions and the managerial role, teachers mention that the most necessary practices are a) to generate climates of trust and support; b) greater articulation and institutional companionship; c) respect and consideration of leaders; d) greater communication and transparency in decisions; e) to generate spaces for reflection and self-care; f) to manage teamwork and mutual collaboration; and g) a shortage of practices that favor climates of trust. The teaching response shows the lack of spaces for dialogue and reflection, coordination, and joint decision-making; that is, there is a lack of shared leadership that allows institutional agreements with clear goals and shared instruments and permanent reflection. A very high percentage of teachers are aware that the participation of all community actors is necessary, be they education assistants, students, or representatives. The practices most valued by teachers at their institution are mutual respect, open and transparent communication, days of reflection and self-care, and consideration in decision-making.

Regarding the strategies that foster climates of trust, the opinion of teachers is channeled by empathy and respect for the educational leader; soft skills such as assertive communication and active listening; considering subordinates and articulating them in teamwork and collaboration; stimulating shared leadership in institutional decision-making; and fostering an affective environment where motivation, transparency and recognition are the cornerstones of human relations in educational centers.

In summary, the following table shows, by teaching modality, the practices that teachers use with their students.

Table 2

Summary of Practices that Teachers use with their Students by Teaching Modality

Early Childhood and Basic Education	Secondary Education TP	Secondary Education HC
Respect and empathy	Respect and empathy	Collaborative and teamwork
Dialogue and active communication	Dialogue and active listening	Mutual respect and recognition of each other
Teamwork	Collaborative and consensual work	Dialogue and constant communication
Acting transparently	Democracy and participation	Emotional restraint and concern for the student
Participation and joint decision-making	Transparency and acting transparently	Learning through error
Active listening and attention to emotional needs	Good pedagogical work	Closeness and dynamism in the classes
Creating a safe and confident environment	Closeness and permanent dialogue	Democracy and student participation
Recognition and assessment of achievements and talents	Promotion of coexistence and mutual respect	Generation of instances of good treatment and coexistence

Source: Own elaboration.

The most used practices by teachers with their students are mutual respect and empathy; transparent

and permanent dialogue; closeness and democracy in decision-making; generation of climates of good treatment and coexistence; and safe and reliable environments.

Comparatively, teachers in all their modalities (pre-basic, basic, middle HC, and middle TP) considered it relevant for teaching managers to foster climates of trust in their institutions and, in turn, in the daily relationship with their students. But the pre-basic and basic institutions are more aware of the importance of trust climates in educational institutions, because they are small schools and have a certain family atmosphere. The secondary high schools HC and TP have twice the student population and, therefore, twice the human resources. This volume generates friction and discrepancies between the educational actors and permeates the relational trust, not allowing a good relationship between the different people of the institution. In these types of cases, teachers in charge must generate greater instances of dialogue, but they spend a lot of time resolving conflicts instead of using that time to promote a positive climate in their schools and high schools.

Technically, teachers, in their opinions, do not differentiate between the strategies they want educational leaders to have and the understanding of teaching behavior in front of students, considering that both relationships have hierarchical characteristics and vertical power. Even so, a more horizontal relationship is required of directors, encouraging fluid dialogue and more fraternal relationships. In addition, teachers understand the vertical relationship (Bolman & Deal, 1991), but they intend for these actors to interact in a contemporary way by distributing more autonomy and power (Bulter & Fraser, 2000; UNESCO, 2021).

At the Level of Management Teams

The interviews with the directors yielded relevant information about their perception and training in soft skills. In the analysis of the first exploratory interviews, it is observed that relational distrust is installed throughout the educational community of the three schools. This difficulty hinders the creation of trust climates and the development of PLCs. This condition that exists in the centers does not allow the establishment of strategies tending to leadership styles that decent managers consider necessary for school improvement. These are positive and caring leadership; although distrust permeates other areas of educational work, such as undergraduate training, where directors believe that training in soft skills, leading to institutional trust, is practically nil. This distrust is also visible in other areas such as continuing education and directive teaching, considering that the latter, by law in Chile, are explicitly positions of exclusive trust, which, for administrative reasons, are not fulfilled. In coherence with other Chilean studies (Peña Fredes et al., 2018; Weinstein & Fredes, 2024), they point out the relationship of distrust with both academic and practical areas in educational centers.

One of the most recurring variants among managers is that they emphasize love and vocation. In this logic, there are three opinion columns regarding these values: a) a dream and desire of the managers is the formation of soft skills and the determination to educate in highly complex circumstances such as these centers; b) these values should articulate a good number of leadership styles for school improvement, whether leadership for social justice, shared care and positive and c) there is a need for continuous training of teachers. This need requires a permanent evaluation of the educational processes, the diversification of the curriculum, and the connection with the community. All this thinking about students with greater complexities (special educational needs or student population with socio-affective deficiencies).

However, one of the reflections that has more relations is the challenges of public education. Although they have vertical relationships, it is understood that they are the basis for the creation of a new educational space. Regarding this, educational centers have not yet achieved the long-awaited horizontal relationships that allow for shared leadership to be generated. The directors mentioned three main blocks as challenges to public education.

The first column shows the need for the creation of professional competencies, such as responsibility, motivation, respect, and consensus, as the basis for generating positive leadership. But to achieve that, it is necessary to have academic excellence and professional responsibility as a horizon. The second is the issue of teacher training. In contrast to the opinions of teachers who show that teaching managers should have training in these areas, the interviewed principals report the need for permanent training of the teaching profession and the low quality of teachers in their undergraduate degrees. Due to this, the institutional hierarchy is also weakened; that is, teachers, managers, and cycle coordinators, making educational processes more bureaucratic, hindering relationships of trust or care with the community,

and therefore the link with it. And as a third line, there is the vocative theme that is predominant in the opinions. It is interesting to realize that the area of vocation and dreams is above the professionalization of positions. Undoubtedly, they are fundamental in the educational area, but professional requirements are the mainstay by which teaching managers can demand evidence-based parameters that influence educational improvement. The value aspects are often only intertwined from a subjective point of view, where empirical evidence is necessary for an institutional reflection that leads to the strategic goals and objectives of each school.

As mentioned, another relevant factor is the relevance of greater teacher training in different areas of academic life. On the one hand, they advocate for greater preparation in areas specific to the academy, that is, improving the curricular alignment of undergraduate training; at the same time, they also emphasize the motivation of the so-called “educational value issues,” such as soft skills training, responsibility, continuous training, and professional respect in the training of future teachers.

If a parallel is made with the teachers’ opinions, can see that both segments question professional training in the same areas, which could imply that there are no days of reflection on positive leadership, training, or initial training and development of professional skills to generate PLCs within schools, as well as a clear intention of professional training from the academy.

In the second round of in-depth interviews with the directors of the centers, it was found that they have the conception that trust generates a positive school climate in varied areas of the community. In addition, trust is associated with a positive school climate, and this is the cause of multiple factors that intervene in a community (teacher professional development, professional training, professional reflection, teacher commitment, responsibility, shared leadership, for social justice, pedagogical, and managerial). At the same time, they emphasize that professional ethics is vital for the development of confidence over time, and allows professional training at the same time. In this area, the directors mention that confidence is associated with different skills and competencies that strengthen it, and that it is necessary to develop and train them in the actors of the educational community. The development of these competencies and skills allows for optimal conditions for participation and decision-making in the community. At the same time, it would allow the exercise of shared leadership in the centers for PLC training. In fact, one of the main concerns of the principals resides in the challenges of current public education, giving positive climates a fundamental value for the creation of institutional trust as a professional competence.

It should be mentioned that, in the interviews, principals often declared that it is necessary to train their staff in soft skills for non-professionals, and soft skills and professional training for teachers and the management team. Unlike the opinion of teachers who declare that principals must be trained in all the aforementioned aspects to generate climates of relational and positive trust, principals themselves emphasized the need to educate staff in soft skills. At the same time, the dichotomy that exists between one opinion and another (directors vs teachers) is relevant, demarcating the line that each one should follow in creating trust as a professional competence.

Discussion and Conclusions

As stated above, positive leadership or the creation of institutional trust climates can be a valuable professional competence for advancing in the community (as a Professional Learning Community) and achieving educational equity, inclusion, and social justice. At the same time, “weakened societal and institutional trust can dampen confidence in education’s value and integrity, and more significantly, can breed acceptance of corruption as a social norm from one’s earliest years” (UNESCO, 2021, p. 25), and the weakening of the possibilities of transformation of the school (Weinstein, 2022). No one disputes that provoking and generating climates of trust is in the interest of an institution; however, it is observed as if our relational DNA maintains it as a *sine qua non* pre-established pattern, as a pre-existing condition of every human relationship. Although Lim (2019) stated that the model has not been empirically tested with real school leaders, the evidence recorded here says the opposite (Carrasco & Barraza, 2020; Peña Fredes et al., 2018; Weinstein & Fredes, 2024). The theory has been used in the different teaching modalities of formal education, from school leaders and teachers to students, which makes it evident that educational change and improvement require focusing on the development of professional capital in people, professionals, and institutions (Bolívar, 2019; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Considering that the research accounts for reinforcing the idea that generating climates of trust inside the school and that in

the organization they produce professional capital and conditions of educational equity, they are aware of its importance, which coincides with an important corpus of research (Bolívar, 2019; Çoban et al., 2023; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Hopkins, 2019; Louis et al., 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tomkins & Simpson, 2015; Weinstein, 2022; Weinstein & Fredes, 2024) that claims these factors as the main assets to transform teaching.

The teachers' opinions in the results are strong. That is, they consider that climates of trust or positive leadership have an impact on the pedagogical task and on the results of students; comparing with international evidence, some results are disparate. One of the practices most evidenced by Louis and Murphy (2019, p. 178) argued that: The ability of people who hold positions of formal authority to influence professional environments such as schools, depends on the way they are perceived by other members of the organization. And precisely in the results of teachers, this is one of the practices that has the least consideration. These perceptions will be based fundamentally on accumulated observations and personal experiences that induce trust, respect, identification, and a sense of ownership (Louis & Murphy, 2019).

Interestingly, the perception of managers towards their officials and justice in their decisions is the least valued by teachers, in circumstances where international research says the opposite. Where respect, care, and active listening have the highest rating percentage. And this, according to other studies, is fundamental (De Jong et al., 2021; Erden & Erden, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weinstein, 2022). This point is disconcerting; this opinion is held because there is no awareness on the part of school administrators or leaders of the importance of creating climates of interrelational trust between them, or they have not had training in these aspects. An aspect that has been widely studied in the Chilean context (Weinstein & Fredes, 2024) and that contrasts with other international studies in this regard.

These studies highlight that in schools where there are positive relationships between adults also experience positive relationships between adults and students, especially important to strengthen the commitment of the most vulnerable students to school (Louis & Murphy, 2019, p. 178).

At this point there is agreement between what is stated by the teachers and the international evidence. There is consensus on the positive relationship between adults and their transfer to students, as well as their impact and incidence on better learning outcomes. The caring and safe environments allow a better development, both of the pedagogy in the classroom and in the integration of learning on the part of the students.

The study highlights the need to substantially increase the levels of relational trust within the school, between teachers and managers, emphasizing the proper dimensions of positive and caring leadership (Louis et al., 2016; Tomkins & Simpson, 2015). In addition, school leaders will discover that the easiest way to induce positive responses is by paying attention to interpersonal exchanges during routine management activities (Louis & Murphy, 2019, p. 178). That is, the concern for active listening and concern for the well-being of officials play a fundamental role in creating climates of job confidence, professional teacher development, and student learning outcomes.

For their part, the principals attach great importance to trust and the relationships that are generated from it, but they consider that the preparation of young teachers is very academic and does not give space for the development of these competencies. At the same time, distrust is a practice installed in advance of any educational process and is a strong resistance to any generation of changes (Peña Fredes et al., 2018). They share the idea that the development of a positive school climate is a fundamental tool in the future of the institution, where their contribution is in active listening and participation, considering lifelong learning a good tool to change the distrustful gaze installed *a priori*. They recognize that they do not know of formal training institutions in these areas, and, as in many others, the financing is always their own.

The lesson derived from the study is that climates of trust impact the work climate and the learning outcomes of students. However, it is also necessary that school leaders and the entire community are trained in soft skills that enable them to be attentive to the needs of their colleagues and the community at large. Universities in their undergraduate and postgraduate training plans should include in their curriculum some modules where these skills are developed to promote a more comprehensive training for teachers and future school leaders. Currently, it is considered that these practices fall to the teaching managers and teachers, even though many do not have preparation in the field or have not lived situations and experiences that incorporate them into practice. In the same way, there must be an intentional

action from the academy in its training plans. In the Ministry of Education (2011) “Directors Training Plan for Chile,” it is considered important: to have healthy work environments and there is investment in the generation of spaces for dialogue and mutual reciprocity between managers and teachers, to provoke climates of trust that lead the community to act together to achieve institutional goals and the achievement of learning outcomes for all students. In addition, it is necessary to incorporate spaces of care into the academic routine and create positive environments that foster trust among staff, promoting open and respectful dialogue about the daily circumstances involved in human relations.

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