

A yellow pencil with a pink eraser and a sharpened lead tip is positioned vertically, acting as the letter 'I' in the word 'CONFRONTING'.

CONFRONTING CHALLENGES

A Casebook on
School Leadership

CASE STUDIES FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS



Dr. Katherine K. Merseeth, Editor

Confronting Challenges: Case Studies for School Principals

A Casebook on School Leadership

Katherine Merseth, Editor

Sponsored by
Ministry of Education, Chile
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**Addressing Challenges: Case Studies for
Principals**

A Casebook on School Leadership

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PRESENTATION

Our schools are complex organizations that are constantly changing. Thus, new challenges continue emerging for school principals, who are now aware of the need to make a definite turn from traditional forms of school management to a new pedagogical approach to teaching, learning, and improving students' academic performance. Nowadays, it is not enough to overcome these challenges by creating one solution for all issues across the board. It is essential to make an ethical commitment to address them alongside stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning processes and the dilemmas that result on a daily basis in our schools.

With this purpose in mind, the Center for Training, Experimentation and Research in Pedagogy (CPEIP¹), in collaboration with Harvard University, invited 15 school principals, recipients of the School Principal Training Program (PFD²) scholarships, to develop case studies about their schools for this book. The chosen school principals had already learned and mastered new leadership skills in 7 schools participating in PFD, which aims to train and empower school principals to confront challenges in their institutions, acknowledging their role as eminently pedagogical. This book seeks to contribute to the training of future educational leaders through a number of cases, one per author, showcasing a series of dilemmas. The main purpose of the cases is to foster reflection on these dilemmas among school leaders and other stakeholders and engage them in dialogue about potential solutions to those issues, giving them tools to confront similar situations at their schools.

Reflecting everyday experiences at schools around the country, this book presents a series of situations to be analyzed, compared, contrasted, studied and discussed by those who want to be part of this new approach to education and school leadership. The book aims to encourage and contribute to the reflection on the situations that school principals, along with their teams, must confront and resolve in their roles as pedagogical leaders.

It is important to mention that this sample of cases, authored by school directors, is registered under the School Principal Training Program, a government initiative promulgated by the Decree No. 44 on January 27th, 2011, with the purpose of providing professional development to school principals to give a significant boost to pedagogical leadership. Therefore, it is intended for future educational leaders to take charge in transforming their schools into institutions of educational excellence, taking

¹ Spanish acronym

² Spanish acronym

into consideration and reflecting on the experiences lived in classrooms. This will contribute positively to student learning and social relationships and interactions found in teaching and learning environments.

In the critical reflection encouraged through this book, the readers should view the dilemmas as learning opportunities, considering that the schools presented in each case are organizations with diverse processes and everyday practices, which when analyzed from different angles can promote continuous learning. Thus, the cases offer multiple opportunities for the readers to practice different leadership approaches, better understand the role of each of the actors in the education system, and reflect on these situations using their own personal experiences as reference.

As evident in the cases, many variables have influence on the role and responsibilities of school principals, such as: leadership protocols, organizational structure and learning, teacher performance, student performance, and interactions among stakeholders and members of the community, among others. Each of the cases presented in this book showcases many of these variables.

We want to thank participating institutions for supporting this initiative and for their motivation in contributing to the process of training current and future school principals.

We also want to acknowledge all of the schools principals who contributed selflessly with their expertise in this publication.

With this initiative, we hope to provide future teachers and school principals with a space for reflection and analysis of the realities that they will encounter once they enter the world of education. Furthermore, we hope that this contributes to their personal and professional development, as the book encourages them to analyze their behavior and better understand their apprehensions and actions, using real and challenging situations present daily in schools as tools. This will enable future teachers and school principals to face complex situations and make decisions in a responsible, reflective, empathetic and assertive way, which will help improve the quality of the education for the boys and girls in our country.

Rodolfo Bonifaz Suárez
Chief of CPEIP
Lo Barnechea, Chile
January, 2015.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals in governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations in Chile worked to support this project. Initial conversations and encouragement from Ms. Violeta Arancibia, who was the Director of the Center for Training, Experimentation and Research in Pedagogy—Centro de Perfeccionamiento, Experimentación e Investigaciones Pedagógicas (CPEIP) and is now Professor of Psychology at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and Visiting Scholar at Stanford’s Center for Latin American Studies, who provided the initial spark that enabled the project to begin. Ms. Arancibia brought the skills of several members of the CPEIP team to help with the planning and implementation of the idea. Others at CPEIP have continued to support the effort and helped bring it to completion including Mr. Rodolfo Bonifaz, the current director of CPEIP and Juan Carlos Rozas the Coordinator of the Area of Directors Management and Leadership.

Of course, no book or collection of cases would be possible without the significant contribution of time and effort from more than 30 principals and school directors from across Chile. These individuals attended a two-day training in the methods of writing cases in Santiago, followed by several months of drafts and rounds of editing. The willingness of these individuals to share their experiences in order to benefit others is a result of their commitment to education.

In addition, the work would not have been possible without tremendous support and assistance provided by the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies Regional Office in the leadership of its former director, Ned Strong. It was through the Regional Office that the project connected to the expert and efficient translation skills of Ms. Alejandra Méndez and Ms. Kristina Cordero who patiently translated several iterations of the cases to arrive at their final form.

Finally the support of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the assistance of my colleague, Professor James Honan, helped make this extraordinary vision a reality.

Katherine K. Merseth
Senior Lecturer, Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, MA, January 2015

FOREWORD

Chile's national agenda revolves around improving education. While there is considerable debate about how the system should be improved, there is no doubt that leadership at the school level is perhaps the most important element in stimulating change. This case book is a fundamental tool to contribute to excellence in school leadership. It is one of the inaugural projects of the Harvard-Chile Innovation Initiative--HCII, a program begun in 2013 when Chile's Ministry of the Economy approached Harvard's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies Regional Office in Santiago with a project to establish a collaborative research fund. The fund was established through the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research--CONICYT later that year. The fund has a mandate to develop collaborative projects reflecting the goals of the Chile-Massachusetts Program in the fields of education, energy, and biotechnology.

Professor Katherine Merseth, the Director of Harvard University's Teacher Education Program and a distinguished expert on school leadership and teacher development, was awarded one of the first grants of the HCII fund. She proposed to assemble teams of school principals and universities to develop a book of cases by school principals themselves to provide real-life case studies to be used for in-service training for school principals and to be distributed among education faculties to develop essential skills for future school leaders using the case methodology, an effective pedagogical tool seldom used outside of business schools in Latin America. She invited Harvard's Professor James Honan, co-Chair of Harvard Graduate School of Education Institute for Educational Management, to assist her in the development of over 30 cases, 15 of which were selected for publication. The David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies is proud to have been part of this effort.

Ned Strong
Executive Director
David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies
Cambridge, MA

INTRODUCTION

The cases in this volume represent a long tradition of pedagogical materials used for the education of professionals in many fields. Education training programs in fields such as business, law, medicine, education and social work often develop and use case materials (Merseth, 1991; 1996). By reading these cases, school leaders will learn to diagnose problems, recognize multiple influences and perspectives on schooling and student learning, and engage in rich and informative conversations with other professionals. Together with colleagues, the cases and their discussions will foster an intellectual and practical investigation of the complexities and dilemmas replete in K-12 Latin American education.

What are cases?

There are many different definitions of a case in higher education and professional contexts. In this volume, cases are best understood as narratives that attempt to describe, as completely as possible, practice in schools and classrooms. They present multiple perspectives, including the views of the school director or principal, the school management board, parents, teachers and in some cases, students and families.

These cases are real and explore vexing dilemmas that the authors have encountered in their school settings. They are real; they are not made-up. These cases are not research case studies as is found frequently in academically oriented work (Yin, 2003). Instead, the cases presented in this project offer a description of an event in a school context and do not offer any form of analysis of the situation. Instead, the analysis is the responsibility of the readers.

How are cases used?

The intention of cases in this volume is to stimulate discussion, either in a university program training school directors and principals or in professional development settings provided within schools. Well written cases should cause participants to reflect not only on the situation described in the case narrative, but also to explore how the ideas and actions described in the case might apply to their own school. After a discussion about the events is presented in the case, most discussion groups first move to consider how the events in the case might apply to their own setting and then further generalize the ideas, concepts and perspectives more broadly to other schools in the region.

Cases often encompass a dilemma—an action or decision forcing situation—in which reasonable readers may disagree about what the case protagonist has said or should do, or even about the basic interpretation of the situation. Because the cases are real, they are compelling, usually asking the

reader to make a recommendation about what should happen next. In addition, cases help the reader learn about multiple school settings and characteristics that may differ from their own experience, thus broadening the professional learning.

Case discussions may have a designated facilitator or they may be leaderless. If the group is without a facilitator, then participants must be mindful to encourage the views of all group members since these are situations that will ring true and familiar to most school personnel. While some participants might be more vocal than others, everyone's opinion is valuable.

How were these cases developed?

School directors, principals and teachers from across Chile came together and donated their time and energy over the course of nearly 2 years to produce the cases in this volume. They first attended a 2-day training at CPEIP where they studied model cases and learned approaches to writing cases. Professors James Honan and Katherine Merseeth from the Harvard Graduate School of Education led these trainings.

After this introduction, the practitioners drafted short descriptions of potential cases and solicited feedback from the project leaders. With additional feedback, full case drafts versions were submitted by over 30 authors. A subset of fifteen cases was selected for this volume because of space and editing limitations. This was an unfortunate reduction as the project received many more viable drafts than could be accommodated. Finally, with the expert assistance of translators, editing and revisions were shared over several months until the final versions were completed.

These cases represent real stories that often caused professional challenges for the writers when they occurred and subsequently when they re-visited the situation and wrote about them. Names and some details have been changed to preserve the anonymity of the participants. The project owes enormous gratitude to the authors and the many others who made the project possible.

CASES

List of Cases

Leadership: Dilemmas Regarding the Purpose of Schools

- Civic (mis)education
- Cultural integration: A challenge inside the classroom
- Two perspectives
- Training for work and training for life
- The role of the school: What are the limits?

Working with Multiple Stakeholders Including Boards

- Conflicting approaches
- The sound of a bell

Leading Teacher Teams and Groups of Teachers

- Quality for all or for some?
- Building a path for improving school climate and culture

Leading Teachers

- Inclusive education: Success for all or success for some?
- A matter of vocation
- Education for all – or almost all?
- The elusive decision
- No way back
- A question of ethics: Student vs. teacher

**Leadership: Dilemmas Regarding
the Purpose of Schools**

CIVIC (MIS)EDUCATION

The school where Ernesto worked as principal was a non-denominational private school with a student population of 1300 boys and girls, ranging from preschool to twelfth grade, most of the students coming from middle to upper-middle class families. The parents were, in large part, professionals in a variety of different fields: many were business owners in the production sector, while others were providers of important services in the province. The school employed 60 teachers, as well as a team of specialists to address specific student needs. An executive committee was in place to assist the principal in making decisions and implementing projects aimed at helping the students to achieve academic excellence. Parents participated in school-organized community activities, especially the monthly assemblies at which the school delivered information on school management and student performance. The Parents' Association participated at these assemblies through a delegate that had a seat on the School Council, proposing and debating alternatives related to the curricular and non-curricular goals proposed by the school.

Everything about the monthly meeting of the Parents' Assembly, the fourth one this year, had gone more or less as planned, with Ernesto delivering a report on the school's results for the previous year's SIMCE, the test by which the Chilean Education Ministry evaluates student performance. Ernesto had been principal at this private school for 15 years and was particularly proud of the school's academic record during his tenure. Solid scores had been maintained in math and language, placing the school above average for its socioeconomic bracket.

At the meeting, Ernesto reminded the parents about how important it was to give their kids consistent, continued support in their studies:

"It is really important for you, as parents, to stress reading and to take advantage of school resources such as the library, and to talk to your kids and listen to their needs."

Just as the meeting was coming to an end, the president of the Parents' Association, Juan Cortés, raised his hand. Turning to the principal, he asked:

"What is the school's position regarding the secondary school students' decision not to attend class during the student protest planned for next Thursday, as they did at the protests last week?"

Ernesto could feel the eyes of every mother and father there staring at him; the atmosphere was silent, expectant. Doing his very best to summon his authority as school principal, Ernesto calmly replied,

“I do not agree with the protest march, and much less with the idea of our students missing class to participate in it, given that they not only miss out on learning opportunities, but they risk their physical safety by doing so. For this reason, when the students asked for our permission to take part in the nationwide protest march, we said no. I want you to know that we considered this matter with great care and it was only after a great deal of reflection that we came to this decision. As school policy, we do not support students’ absence from class. We do however, believe that the students have legitimate reasons for protesting.” He paused and then closed by saying, “I want you all to be assured that we are carefully monitoring this situation.”

As soon as the words came out of his mouth, he flashed back to a recent conversation with his son, Camilo, a university student and alumnus of Ernesto’s school. Camilo had made it very clear to his father that he supported the right of all Chileans to quality public education and, as such, supported the nationwide student protest march that the secondary school and university student associations had organized.

“Dad, I’m going on strike. The student assembly voted in favor of the strike, and I am basically in agreement with the demands...but don’t worry, nothing’s going to happen at your school—as usual.”

This conversation, the recent events at the school, and now the concern raised by the Parents’ Association had left Ernesto feeling increasingly uncomfortable, uneasy. He tried hard to recall other occasions in which his students had taken a stand on other issues, and he had to acknowledge that he had never allowed the students at the school to participate in these types of events. He also thought back to his own university years and his refusal to participate in any type of protest that might jeopardize the efforts his own family had made to put him through college, efforts that had allowed him to become the family’s first college graduate.

With all these thoughts racing through his mind, Ernesto suddenly felt the need to talk things over with his son again. He called Camilo on his cell phone, to find out what time he’d be coming home that weekend. The answer, however, was not what he hoped.

“I can’t come home, Dad, we have student assembly,” he said, and added, “I suppose at your school things are business as usual? Tough luck for those kids, sounds like they’ll have to wait until after graduation to make themselves heard.”

Ernesto could feel the disappointment in his son’s voice, and didn’t know what to say. He answered meekly:

“We’ll see. Hope to see you and talk sometime soon.”

That weekend was a strange one for Ernesto. He was distracted; all he could think about was this dilemma that had him so stumped: he wondered what to do with the students and their constant demands to protest. What would he do if they participated despite his policy? What he would say to the parents if this happened? His wife noticed that something odd was going on with him and, concerned, asked if he was feeling okay.

“I’m fine, don’t worry.” he lied. “I’m just a little tired, that’s all.”

More conversations, more information

First thing Monday morning, Ernesto called in Germán, the school’s history teacher, to talk to him about the dilemma he was facing. Specifically he needed to talk about the question posed by the parents’ association president. Germán, who was the adviser to the Students’ Association, was known for his academic leadership, and Ernesto turned to him because he knew that at the next meeting he would need to give the parents some very emphatic and decisive answers.

Speaking to Germán very deliberately, he said,

“I’m sure you understand that for me, as the person responsible for the entire school, this is a very complex situation, since we cannot risk the school’s reputation, and we have to make sure that the students’ families do not become uncomfortable or angry with us. In addition, if anything happens to our students, I am the one responsible for their safety.”

Germán listened attentively and then offered a description, from his perspective, of how things had come to pass:

“Listen, it was during one of my classes with the 12th grade students that the issue of the student protests came up. You and I both know the impact that those marches had, in the city and all across the country. In that context, I told them that it is our civic obligation to express our opinions. But honestly, Ernesto, it was not my intention to encourage them to boycott coming to class.”

Germán added that he couldn’t take responsibility for a decision the students made, but softened the blow by saying,

“Listen, it’s not such a big deal. After all, the students only boycotted classes, which was a peaceful way of allying themselves with the movement.” Germán looked Ernesto in the eye and then, in a challenging tone of voice, reminded him: “Or do you not agree with one of the objectives that is clearly stated in the school’s educational mission, that it is the school’s role to ‘develop critical

thinking?’ In that sense, Ernesto, neither the students nor I have done anything wrong. Moreover, though this issue did come up at the Students’ Association, I am not sure that those students were the ones urging the others to boycott classes.”

Germán’s position was clear. As advisor to the Students’ Association he believed that the school ought to create spaces for the students to express their opinions with regard to the student movement that was taking place in Chile. But Ernesto just wasn’t sure if that stance was a feasible one for the school.

Protests at the door to the school

Throughout the city, several secondary schools joined the protests and the marches became an almost everyday event. One of the caravans planted itself directly in front of Ernesto’s school while the students were attending classes, which at the time were still functioning normally. The screams from outside, of protesters exhorting the students to join the marches, grew more insistent and intense when the students went outside for recess. Some students in the older grades asked permission to join the march, but Ernesto denied all requests, which created an atmosphere of tension both in and out of the school.

After several days of protests, the head teachers of each grade, along with members of the Students’ Association, met with Ernesto in the hope of reaching a consensus on how the students might protest and express their dissent. As they discussed the issue, they ruled out the idea of occupying the school, but they did demand that Ernesto state publicly his position regarding the Chilean students’ rights to have access to quality higher education that would be free of cost to those unable to afford it.

Ernesto was in a tight spot. He truly believed that one of the most important challenges for students in the 21st century was to develop critical thinking and the ability to express their beliefs. If this wasn’t an opportunity for them to do that, what was? Once more, the words of his son reverberated in his ears: “Don’t worry, nothing’s going to happen at your school—as usual.”

Shortly before his next monthly assembly with the parents, Ernesto brought up the issue at the Executive Committee meeting, where he listened to a number of differing opinions on the previous month’s student protests and the most recent state of affairs. Opinions varied: some people wanted to support the protests with information sessions and gatherings for discussion and reflection, while others wanted to join the students marching and take to the streets the next time a protest was planned. This, they felt, would allow the young people to take part in the popular demand for equity and social justice.

Ernesto still couldn’t decide what position to take. What was he going to do?

Questions for reflection

1. What would you do if you were in Ernesto's position?
2. Do you think this case is a lesson in civic responsibility?
3. As principal, what kind of leadership would you demonstrate with the students?
4. What actions would you have taken as a teacher in response to the students' concerns?
5. What stance would you adopt with the parents in order to position the leadership focus that the school wishes to offer its students?
6. Is Ernesto's attitude toward his students consistent, knowing his son's position?

CULTURAL INTEGRATION: A CHALLENGE INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

In 2012, Juan accepted a job as Academic Coordinator at a vocational-technical school for grades 7 to 12 in the center of Santiago. This experience would be substantially different from all of Juan's previous teaching jobs in that 28% of the students at this school were from Perú.

When Juan arrived at the school, the atmosphere was one of uncertainty: both the matriculation rate and academic results were not optimal, with low scores on the nationwide standardized tests and very disappointing qualifying test scores for college admissions.

A first impression

On his first day at work, Juan focused on observing the various educational processes taking place at the school, in order to reach his own conclusions about what was going on in terms of general administration, curricular management, academic life, and resource allocation, as well as other areas.

One thing that caught his eye was the monthly assembly held to commemorate certain important historical dates on the calendar. To this end, each teacher would prepare a small gesture or reflection for the assembly. In the month of May, however, the celebratory event was the Naval Battle of Iquique, which caused a certain degree of consternation among the students of Peruvian origin. The Battle of Iquique took place on 21 May 1879 in the context of the War of the Pacific between Perú and Chile, in the city of the same name in northern Chile. The battle ended when the Chilean ship Esmeralda sank and its captain, Arturo Prat Chacón, as well as a large number of his crew, died at the hands of the Peruvian forces on board the Huáscar, captained by Admiral Miguel Grau.

The assembly took place as planned, but Juan could see the Peruvian students exchange surprised looks when the teacher in charge read the story of what had happened during the naval battle. At the end of the assembly, one of the students approached Juan and asked,

“Why isn't Miguel Grau described as a master strategist, a hero?”

Juan stared blankly at the student, unable to come up with an answer. The question haunted him for some time after that.

A few weeks later, Juan noticed clusters of the Peruvian students forming in the halls and in a corner of the courtyard, making plans to watch a soccer game the following weekend, a classic South American

showdown: Perú versus Chile. When he realized what this was all about, Juan innocently inquired where the game was to be played, and the students all responded,

“You don’t know?? In Lima, and we’re going to win, 4-nothing!” they cried jubilantly.

They were right: Perú won the game, and the Peruvian students made this abundantly clear the morning after, when they showed up at school proudly wearing their Peruvian team T-shirts. Juan enthusiastically congratulated them, noticing all the while that the other students basically ignored them. He couldn’t help but feel terribly uncomfortable about the situation.

One of Juan’s many responsibilities was coordinating the students’ professional internships. When he began to assign internships to each of his students, he was shocked that some companies refused to accept Peruvians as interns, primarily because of their ethnic origins and their physical appearance, and without any regard for their academic and/or disciplinary merits. Wendy, a Peruvian student at the top of her class, was having a hard time understanding why a company located in one of the city’s wealthier districts had chosen to take on a Chilean student with a comparatively poor academic record. Wendy began to wonder what was the point of all her hard work and efforts. Didn’t she also have the right to an internship in the sales department of a prestigious company?

“Sir, she doesn’t even know how to use a calculator but they took her anyway, just because she’s pretty and Chilean! Life is so unfair here in Chile!” stormed Wendy.

“Don’t worry, we’re going to find you a fine place for your internship,” Juan replied; it was the only thing he could think of to say to her.

One cold winter morning, Juan entered one of the 12th grade math classrooms to carry out a routine teacher observation. Very quickly he realized that the Peruvian students barely interacted with their Chilean peers. The Peruvians sat on one side of the room and the Chileans on the other. He could see that Wendy was having trouble confronting both her classmates and the teacher. Juan walked over to her and, with concern, quietly asked her what was going on. Her eyes flashing with anger, Wendy blurted out,

“They always treat us so badly, they’ve discriminated against us since the minute we arrived in Chile. It’s all their fault!”

The bitterness and pain Wendy felt were all too evident. The other Peruvian students in the class suddenly fell silent and could only nod their heads in agreement. The Chilean students, on the other hand, seemed unfazed and unaware, and continued writing in their math workbooks. When Juan left the classroom, a deep silence penetrated the atmosphere.

Juan went into his office and poured himself a cup of coffee. He knew that bridging these two worlds, so seemingly different, would not be an easy task. He recalled a story he had heard one day in the teachers' lounge, about a Chilean parent that had taken his daughter out of the school because she had started dating a Peruvian boy. Because his daughter was the best student in her class, the father felt that this relationship would have dire consequences for her. As Juan recalled this situation, he quickly finished his coffee and spent some time responding to emails that had piled up in his inbox. As he did this, he suddenly decided to request a meeting with the principal of the school, Estrella. The meeting was set for the afternoon.

In Estrella's office, after exchanging greetings, Juan brought up the case of the Chilean girl who had left the school. Upon hearing this, the principal remarked, in a cold tone of voice, "You know, Juan, that 80% of the school's top academic results come from the Peruvian kids." She continued:

"We've had these results for the last couple of years now. At the end-of-the-year award ceremonies, if you look closely, you'll see that most of the parents in the audience are Peruvian."

For a long while, Juan mulled over the significance of her words, but he wasn't sure what she meant by them. Did the principal support the presence of Peruvian students in the school? Did she want the Peruvian students there only because of their good academic results?

After winter break, it was time for the July assembly. Carlos, a Chilean student, gave a speech about Flag Day within the context of the War of the Pacific, and he also spoke about Peruvian Independence Day, which was celebrated that same month. To commemorate the date, Juan and a group of Peruvian students organized a surprise for the community. At the end of the assembly, the Peruvian students rose and sang the Peruvian national anthem. They did so solemnly and with dignity, at first softly and then louder and clearer than ever. The Chilean students and teachers listened in silence, astonished.

At the end of the assembly, a Peruvian 12th grader named Jean-Pierre, clearly moved by the gesture, walked up to Juan and said to him:

"Sir, I heard that you were the person who encouraged us to sing our national anthem. It's been four years since I have heard or sung my national anthem. Thank you so much."

After the ceremony, Juan walked down the hall to his office, thinking about what had just happened. Suddenly, he heard loud voices coming from the teachers' lounge. Carlos, an art teacher and one of the most veteran members of the school staff, was making remarks about what he had just seen in assembly.

“What happened at assembly was incredible. I never thought I would see the Peruvian students singing their national anthem and the Chilean students watching them with respect.”

“Live and learn, right?” answered Juan, walking into the lounge. “I thought that was a nice surprise, to see that our students are capable of treating their peers with respect—the kind of respect you don’t always see in the courtyard or in the classroom.”

“They’ve earned that respect in the classroom. This school has had many generations of excellent Peruvian students,” replied Roberto, a biology teacher.

“If this keeps up, the school’s going to fill up with Peruvians,” was an ironic remark made by Marcelo, a math teacher.

“That’s right—you shouldn’t worry, then, it means we’ll have work for a long time,” remarked Pamela, a Spanish teacher.

Her words elicited a round of smiles among the teachers in the room.

And so the year came to a close. Nobody seemed at all surprised to see that the top students in each class were Peruvian. As always at the end-of-the-year ceremonies, there was a big turnout among the Peruvian families, who participated with respect. At the end of the day’s event, Alexis, one of the Peruvian students, approached Juan and said:

“This vacation is going to be long; my friends and I have nowhere to hang out and it’s even going to be hard for us to put food on the table.”

Juan hugged him affectionately, and couldn’t help but reflect on all that had come to pass that year. He decided that the next challenge for the school community would be an act of Chilean-Peruvian integration.

Time for decisions

As the new academic year began, the management team reviewed the calendar, planning the different activities that would take place over the course of the school year. Juan decided to suggest that the school host a community encounter featuring different aspects of Peruvian culture.

“Our school,” Juan said to his colleagues, “ought to make an effort to integrate the students and families from Perú. I’d like to propose the creation of our first Expo Perú, to help disseminate

and celebrate Peruvian culture at our school, as an opportunity to strengthen the educational community in general, and promote cultural integration both in and out of the classroom.”

“Would this just be just a cultural exhibition?” asked Estrella, the principal.

Juan explained that it would be more ambitious than that.

“No, no,” he said, “I’m thinking about something more ambitious than tacking up a few posters. We should try to be serious about this. Learning and integrating cultures should be the goal of our school.”

“What would the students do, exactly?” asked Marcela, the art teacher.

Juan described his plan:

“The Chilean and Peruvian students will have to work together to create, among other things, a display about Peruvian Independence Day, and they’ll have to work as a team to resolve whatever differences they have.”

“Who else do you see participating in the event?” asked the school owner.

“We’ll have to invite different representatives of the Peruvian community in Chile, so that our Peruvian students will feel acknowledged, and then also local media, authorities, and others,” replied Juan.

Marcelo, the math teacher, voiced his skepticism yet again:

“Nice idea Juan, but aren’t we a school about math, science, literature, the arts? This isn’t a cultural integration society! How is this going to improve our test scores? ” Growing more exasperated Marcelo turned to the school head and asked: “We receive Chilean taxpayers’ money. Don’t we have an obligation to be a Chilean school?”

The staff members present turned to Estrella, the principal, to see her reaction. Estrella only smiled, indicating neither approval nor disapproval of Juan’s plan.

There were a great many questions running through Juan’s mind by now, but after so many months of dealing with the sensitive matter of inclusion and exclusion at the school, there was one thing he knew for sure: this activity would be a real learning experience for the entire school. It was an opportunity to bring true cultural integration to this Chilean school and its classrooms. But could he risk causing even more problems in the school—and for himself—by defending a position that was clearly a source of conflict?

Questions for reflection

1. Does it make sense for Juan to press for the Expo Perú?
2. Should the school principal intervene?
3. Should Juan have gotten the Peruvian students organized?
4. Do you think Juan might lose his job?
5. Do you think the Chilean students, parents and legal guardians are capable of rising to the occasion?
6. How might the Peruvian families react to this activity?

TWO PERSPECTIVES

It was the year 2002, and Juan was happy with his work as a teacher at a small public school in an indigenous community. He was lucky to a very positive work environment and parents who were extremely involved with their children's' education. What most impressed him was the school community's interest in reclaiming the local cultural heritage. This interest was made evident through their traditional celebrations, in which the entire community participated: teachers, students, parents and neighbors. For Juan it was very meaningful to see how the community valued and preserved its cultural heritage and instilled this ancestral knowledge in the younger generations.

After five years working at this school, the local authorities transferred Juan to another public school, also within the indigenous community, for students from 1st to 8th grade. Thanks to his excellent professional record, he was appointed principal. 100% of the students were of indigenous ancestry, and many of the children lived with their grandparents or other family members because their parents had had to move to the city for work. The school building was a wooden construction with precarious foundations, and was not fit for the demands of a modern public school, but it was located in a beautiful valley with leafy trees and was surrounded by tall hills. Juan arrived at the school in spring.

Celebrations

Juan's first day as principal at his new school coincided with the most important celebration of the local indigenous culture. Enthused by this important holiday, Juan assumed that the ritual here would be somewhat similar to the celebration held at his previous school.

Juan recalled that Alberto, the previous principal, had told him that if he had any questions about the day-to-day management of the school, he should not hesitate to call. Juan decided to take advantage of this offer and ask about the community's celebration.

"Alberto, how are you?" he spoke into the receiver.

"Fine, thanks. How is everything going?"

"All right so far," he replied. "I'm calling to ask you about the indigenous celebration at school. Who is in charge of organizing these activities?"

“Well, you ought to speak to Roberto about that. He’s a parent and he has helped out with these celebrations in the past. I’m sure he’ll fill you in. Listen, I have to go now, I’m in a meeting. But I’ll send you Roberto’s information. See you soon and good luck,” said Alberto before he hung up.

Juan began to have doubts. The organization of the event seemed rather unclear and with only a few days left until the celebration, he called Roberto as soon as possible. Roberto was a man of medium height, with a broad, robust build and a very helpful spirit. He was always willing to lend a hand and do his part at the school. He was also very proud to be an alumnus.

“Roberto,” Juan said when he had him on the line, “How is this activity organized? I was told that you could get me up to speed.”

Roberto explained that the celebration would take place on Thursday at ten in the morning. The plan was to start out with a public prayer ritual, for which he had contacted a local healer and her assistants. In addition, he and some other parents had organized an activity to share some of the community’s traditional food. Juan was surprised that the teachers at the school were not at all involved in the preparations, but he did not comment on it. Roberto kindly said goodbye, adding:

“I am very pleased that you are in charge of the school.” And with that he left for the fields to work.

Getting the community involved

That same afternoon, Juan called the teachers to a meeting, to generate some suggestions that might help plan the other activities that would take place at the celebration. There were only four days left for the event and Juan thought that they, as teachers, should be involved.

“Listen, everyone, on Thursday we have the indigenous celebration and I wanted to know what activities you have planned for your students after the prayer that Roberto is organizing.”

“Juan, I don’t know a thing about these kinds of celebrations, so I would like to request not to be involved in the planning,” answered Lucy, one of the teachers who had worked the longest at the school.

“But Lucy,” replied Juan, surprised. “You’re part of the staff and though you don’t belong to the indigenous community, you have experience here. You can help out, I’m sure you can pitch in somehow.”

Lucy said nothing for a moment and then replied:

“All right, but I’ll need someone to help me because I can’t do it alone.”

“We’ve never had a lot of support for these events; the parents who help out are always the same ones and the rest just show up when everything’s ready. Besides, over the years, I’ve gotten the feeling that the parents don’t feel very comfortable participating in this celebration,” added Pedro, who also had many years of experience in the school.

This particular bit of input made Juan stop and wonder, but he decided to go on with the meeting. After a pause he said:

“People, we have to change this attitude and encourage students and parents to commit to the kids’ education both in and out of the classroom. This is an excellent opportunity to do just that.”

“Juan, what do you have in mind for commemorating this event?” asked Viviana, the youngest teacher on staff.

Juan stopped to think for a moment and answered:

“Well, since it’s such an important celebration, ideally each grade should organize an activity. It could be a traditional dance, a song, a performance. This is also a good opportunity invite some local authorities, parents, too. What do you think?”

After a few moments of silence, everyone agreed.

“Fine, then, but we still haven’t established what each of us is doing,” said Claudia, a first grade teacher.

“I agree with you, Juan. Each teacher ought to organize something with his or her class,” said Luis, a teacher who had recently arrived at the school.

“I can make some holiday decorations, but I’ll need some help because I don’t know much about it,” responded Daniela, a new teacher and recent college graduate who had lived her entire life in the city.

The big day

The big day arrived. Juan was very anxious for everything to go well with this celebration because it would be his first public event as the school principal. With great anticipation and expectation, he arrived at the school early in the morning to help get things going. When Roberto saw him, he greeted him warmly and said:

“Good morning, Juan! Listen, we have a problem, we have to pick up Rosa, the healer who will be performing the prayer ceremony. We need a car to bring her here.”

“I can go,” said Juan, “But will you come with me? I’m still not familiar with the roads here.”

Together they went to pick her up. Rosa was short, had a small face and was dressed in her culture’s traditional clothing. When they got back, just in time, she began the ceremony with a prayer in her language in an improvised shrine at the schoolyard. A number local authorities were present, and everyone respectfully watched the ceremony. However, Juan noticed that many of the teachers and a number of parents did not actively participate—on the contrary, they watched at a distance, not getting involved. He was surprised because the children’s participation was also less than inspiring.

Juan saw things more clearly now: a number of parents and students seemed uninterested in celebrating their culture’s ancestry. To try to process what was going on, he called María into his office. María was a member of the administrative staff and had been at the school for fifteen years; she seemed to understand the culture of the school very well. When she arrived at his office, he said,

“María, I want to talk to you because I need your opinion on something. The other day, the day of the celebration, I noticed that the community didn’t really participate much. Why do you think this happened?”

“Don Juan, I know the school tries to celebrate and preserve our people’s ancestral culture, but it creates sort of a special problem. Most of us belong to a religion that does not accept adoration of anything that is not our God,” María replied.

Juan was surprised by her answer but felt he was now beginning to grasp the situation. The problem was that now he was very unsure about what to do. On the one hand, the Ministry of Education had passed Decree 280, which ordered schools in areas with significant indigenous populations to work on reclaiming their ancestral culture. On the other hand, most of the parents seemed opposed to this policy.

The next week the principal received a visit from Pedro, the father of one of the students. Shortly into the conversation, Pedro asked:

“Juan, why do you teach our children about the language and customs of our ancestral culture? It isn’t going to do them any good. Wouldn’t it be better to reinforce other subjects that will be more useful to them in the future?”

Juan told Pedro that according to government policy it was mandatory to teach the local language and customs in all schools where more than 20% of the students belonged to a particular ethnic group. Pedro sighed and said,

“Well, it doesn’t make much sense to me.” He then said goodbye and thanked Juan for the meeting.

The meeting made Juan even more uneasy than before, because it was an opinion that came directly from a school parent. This might well become a problem, and he would have to be the one to find a solution. In his effort to learn more about the community’s thoughts on the matter, Juan turned to Trinidad, a parent with a good deal of influence at the school because of her contribution to the school’s activities.

“Trinidad,” he asked her one day, “What do you think about the policy of including ancestral culture in the classroom?”

“Listen,” Trinidad said, “I understand that for some of the parents, especially the older ones, it is very important that their children and grandchildren learn about their cultural background. But this is not as important for the new generations. Honestly, I’d rather the kids learn other subjects that will be more useful to them. You and I both know that more and more people are moving to the cities in search of a better life; here in the country there’s no future for these kids. If we want them to get ahead in life, we have to prepare them well... For a large group of parents and teachers it doesn’t make much sense for the school to teach about cultural heritage because it won’t help their kids’ academic achievement. It might even be an obstacle when the kids try to relate to other people who could discriminate against them.”

Trinidad paused, looked the principal in the eye, and added:

“Another important thing that you should know is that most of us belong to an evangelical church. We don’t believe in worshipping a god other than the one in the Bible. You can understand that, can’t you?”

“Of course I do, María told me. As a school, we are going to have to be careful with this topic, and be open to different ways of thinking, even if it takes us a while.”

The surprise

Two weeks later Juan received a letter from the district authorities indicating that he was to call parents to a special meeting, to inform them about the new government guidelines regarding the inclusion of cultural heritage in the classroom.

He called for the meeting the following week. In attendance were 56 out of 68 parents, a government employee, the school principal and the cultural heritage teacher. The meeting started with a standard greeting from Juan and a presentation from the government authorities. Fernando, a government worker with many years of experience who was well-versed in the matter, informed his audience:

“The purpose of this meeting is to learn what you as parents think about how the school is doing regarding cultural heritage education. We’ll also be distributing a survey on some of the most relevant cultural subjects.”

Fernando launched into his questions:

Do you think it’s important to preserve your cultural heritage? Do you value your cultural heritage? How many of you speak your culture’s original language?

The parents remained silent and Juan encouraged them to respond by saying:

“It is very important for us, as a school, to know your opinion. As parents you are an active part of your kids’ education, and your opinion matters to us.”

After a long pause one of the parents spoke up:

“Nobody speaks our culture’s language at home any more. Our grandparents used to speak it, but that knowledge has gotten lost over time.”

Luisa, a new parent at the school added:

“I respect the work you do at this school, Juan, but I would also like my daughter to learn other subjects that might be more useful to her. I want my daughter to be able to go to Santiago to work at something different. I’d be thrilled if she could learn computers or English—that will be much more helpful to her when she needs to find a job. So, no, I can’t understand why you would want to increase the number of cultural heritage class hours!”

The audience started whispering furiously, and Juan responded:

“Luisa, at the last meeting I informed you that this increase in hours is due to a mandatory government policy based on international treaties regarding indigenous cultures.”

After some more parents commented on the matter, Fernando distributed a survey that they would have to answer and return the next day. All the questions were directly related to the knowledge the parents had of their cultural heritage.

Early the next day, Juan sent an assistant to the classrooms to collect the surveys. To his surprise, of the 56 surveys handed out, only 10 were returned. Of those, only four parents completed the survey, while the remaining six were incomplete. Juan confessed to his assistant that perhaps the survey was not the best way to gather the information they needed. In spite of the principal's insistence, the parents had no interest in participating in this important task.

Questions for reflection

1. How might Juan balance the different points of view in this case?
2. What role should teachers, parents and students have in making decisions in this type of situation?
3. What should Juan do? Why?
4. What role should the educational authorities (municipal and national) play in this kind of situation?
5. How might the school help the families to embrace their own culture?
6. Is it appropriate to encourage a community to cultivate acceptance of their ancestral culture?

TRAINING FOR WORK AND TRAINING FOR LIFE

Sergio was a teacher with fifteen years' experience in vocational-technical schools. When offered the chance to be the principal of a vocational-technical high school specializing in aeronautics and administration, he jumped at the chance. This government-subsidized, non-denominational private school was located in an urban area with a highly disadvantaged local community. The school's student population was roughly 1,000 boys from 1st through 12th grades. Its main objective was to offer students an academic and values-based education that would give them the skills they would need to find jobs and, hopefully, to improve their families' quality of life.

This new challenge was very motivating for Sergio, who did not hesitate to quit his old job and accept this offer. The school year was beginning and Sergio would have to exercise his leadership skills to improve results and get students to make real progress. The school had earned the respect of a wide variety of companies that routinely opted to hire their students as interns over those of other schools, which often put them on their way professionally. The school's prominence had increased in recent years, and it was reflected in the high volume of applicants for spots in the 9th grade. Most students entering the school did so specifically to study aeronautics, the industrial specialty that gave the school its prestige. In this sense, the school offered a very real opportunity for kids to improve the quality of life of the families in the community, most of which were highly disadvantaged, low income families with limited possibilities for professional or cultural improvement.

The conflicts begin

After his first meetings with his staff and teachers, it began to dawn on Sergio that his job was going to be harder than he thought. Military discipline seemed to prevail over educational criteria, and he did not feel completely comfortable with the style of teaching at the school.

Sergio had called the staff to the first meeting of the year to organize their work and to get to know different details about the school's operations. During his first speech, he was interrupted by Carlos, the general inspector, who had been in his position for three years. From Carlos's firm tone of voice and dogmatic attitude, Sergio could tell that he was a man with a strict and authoritarian character.

"Sergio, this school works like a clock. The discipline here is extraordinary thanks to the inspectors, who always know everything that goes on. The teachers, however, are too easy on the students."

We have to be hard on the kids; they need it and so do the teachers, because if you want things to work, you have to take charge and tell your subordinates what to do.”

Carolina, who had been working for several years as the school’s vocational-technical coordinator, added:

“I think that sometimes Carlos exaggerates with the discipline, but the approach does work on the students. Here the teachers work in peace, not like in other places where the students don’t let you get through class. This is how we have managed to improve the school year after year. Besides, the students we have here are very difficult, they come from harsh realities and if we don’t set clear limits with severity and discipline, it’s chaos.”

Sergio clearly saw that discipline was a central force at the school and that, to date, it had been key to its success. In order to graduate as aircraft mechanics in the field of aeronautics, students needed to be reliable, conscientious, disciplined and capable of accomplishing tasks that required a high level of precision and responsibility. The school’s success filled its teachers with pride. But something made Sergio uneasy, and he continued probing his team and their criteria:

“Carolina, do you think that the students’ education is good with this much discipline?”

“Excuse me sir,” interrupted Carlos in an emphatic voice. “I’ve always said that we have to use a firm hand if we want to teach our students to obey. Military discipline has gotten good results that way, and we’ve proven the same here!”

Michelle, the head of the technical pedagogical unit, was also new at the school and agreed with Sergio’s ideas on education. Out of the corner of her eye, she looked at the principal and spoke up:

“Listen, the idea is for us to establish methods that strengthen what you have already done up until now. We think that decisions have to be made through consensus among the different members of the school community. As long as we keep the lines of communication open, without undermining the different decisions made on behalf of the students, we feel we can establish a respectful work environment that will serve as a model for our students.”

As the meeting continued, Sergio saw that the team’s opinions were divided. One group believed in a strict, discipline-oriented approach to education, while the other thought that education should be based on encouraging critical thinking and dialogue between students and teachers.

Sergio knew that this school functioned according to strict discipline, both for students and teachers. Everyone went along with it because this method had allowed the school to accomplish many things and had developed very effective processes. The school’s academic results were within the national

average, and its students enjoyed a calm, organized classroom environment. Overall, the school had become a model, an example for the neighborhood and a real opportunity for the students' work and economic expectations.

Carlos, the general inspector and chief of the aeronautics department, had been key to establishing these aspects of the school, and he felt proud of his achievements. His work had given the school prestige in the municipality, which was very important in order to promote the school and fill the registration quotas. The graduates of the school were well received by companies in the sector and acknowledged for their superb work.

A difficult understanding

Sergio often walked through the halls of the school in the morning, and on one of these routine rounds he encountered Tomás, the history teacher, complaining in a loud voice as he walked by:

“Why doesn’t anyone stop this man? He does whatever he wants with the students and teachers. He thinks he’s still in the military!”

Concerned, Sergio approached Tomás and asked him why he was so upset.

“It happened again, Sergio. Carlos insists on walking into my classroom unannounced, yells at the students and hands out demerits. Not only does he interrupt my class, he undermines my authority as a teacher and ruins the kids’ concentration.”

Inés, the math teacher, who happened to be walking by, remarked:

“This is very typical behavior for Carlos. But you know, there are teachers who do ask him to intervene in their classes and discipline their kids, and I think they are at least partly responsible for this.”

Tomás had been at the school for several years and was one of the teachers who disagreed with the military discipline that prevailed. He liked to work with the students on creative group activities, which made his classes—in the eyes of the inspector—more disorganized. On a few occasions he had had to resolve some problems that had sprung up between his students. In spite of his friendly nature, Tomás did not hesitate to express his displeasure and sent Sergio a written complaint about Carlos's violent interruption of his class. He expected to receive an explanation because he considered it a serious offense that undermined his authority with the kids. In his complaint, Tomás asked for an explanation and an apology from Carlos.

Sergio decided to act immediately, attack the problem head-on and, hopefully, avoid more conflicts like this in the future. He wanted to resolve things without eliciting an outburst from Carlos, so he called him in to his office to talk one-on-one. After the usual greetings he asked the inspector:

“Carlos, I wanted to know if you have had any problems with anyone this week at school.”

“Just a few minor issues,” the inspector answered tersely.

As usual, Sergio complimented the inspector and mentioned of all his good work. Then, he gently expressed his concern regarding the incident with the history teacher. Carlos, in a firm and sarcastic tone of voice, retorted:

“Once again Tomás is making up stories. Don’t listen to him, it’s nothing, Sergio!”

Sergio, a bit uneasy, read Tomás’ complaint out loud. Before he could finish, the inspector interrupted him:

“Sergio, if you are doubting my word I’ll put an end to this conversation right now. I will not allow you to question me. At this school we have to teach the students to obey and respect their superiors, and until now I have had good results. My kids are always at the top of their class, just ask the bosses and supervisors at the airline; they take my students because they are an example of efficient, professional work.”

“That’s not what this is about, Carlos. I need to know your side of the story and that’s why I called you here,” Sergio answered politely.

“Sergio, I have no other choice right now but to tender my resignation. I quit. It is clear to me that you are questioning my word. I can see that this school is changing, for the worse, and I think it’s an outrage. I have been working here for years, I have achieved a great deal with military rigor and discipline, and now you don’t want to hear of it. I deserve respect,” the inspector concluded.

Shocked, Sergio watched as the inspector grabbed his briefcase and walked out of the school. He could not understand Carlos’s reaction. And Sergio now knew for sure that if he wanted to accomplish the goals the school had set out for him as principal, there would be many obstacles to overcome in the process.

Michelle now entered Sergio’s office, and immediately picked up on his stress. He told her everything that had just happened, to which Michelle answered:

“Excuse me Sergio, but I don’t think that this strict, inflexible discipline is an effective way to educate our students. At this school behavior modification and punishment are very clearly used

strategically, with both students and teachers, and I think it's excessive. Our job is to help the students develop different abilities and that is a long-term job. We've been asked to improve their learning skills and I doubt that discipline is the way."

Sergio completely agreed with Michelle but he also thought that Carlos's job shouldn't be taken lightly, especially considering the background of the students at the school.

Just then, Sergio's secretary alerted him that Mr. Aliaga, the school owner, had arrived. Without saying hello, Mr. Aliaga barged into the office and confronted Sergio:

"Sergio, can you please explain to me why the school inspector quit? I can't believe you let this happen! He is an exemplary professional, he keeps the school in order, just how I like it."

"Mr. Aliaga, it was impossible to talk to Carlos after his argument with the history teacher. He just impulsively stormed out of my office announcing that he quit," Sergio responded.

It was only his first week and Sergio already saw that this job would be a constant struggle. He knew that his decision-making and his beliefs would be put to the test at every turn. He also saw that before he could implement his own ideas and teaching projects, aimed at improving the kids' grades and test scores, he would have to deal with issues of trust and confidence among his staff. He was torn. The words of Michelle, the technical chief, made him feel that they could do more than just deal with everyday difficulties, but the owner's words echoed unpleasantly in his mind:

"Look Sergio, I don't know how you're going to do it, but Carlos has to be at his job tomorrow. The school will never be the same without his kind of discipline," Mr. Aliaga stated categorically.

Suddenly, the bell rang signaling the end of the school day. It had been a very difficult first week for Sergio and he knew that the following weeks would bring him even more dilemmas, as well as some hard decisions.

Questions for reflection

1. What would you do in Sergio's place?
2. What aspects of the students' education should the principal prioritize in order to reach the school's goals?
3. Would it be advisable for the principal to change the school's current disciplinary system for one more open to dialogue and participation, as Michelle suggested?
4. How should the principal resolve the confidence and interpersonal issues that have arisen with the general inspector?
5. After hearing the owner's mandate, what should the principal do about the general inspector? What can he do?
6. Given the mandate from the school's owner about Carlos, how do you think the principal might try to implement some of his ideas about the kind of education imparted at the school?
7. Is it possible to balance discipline with participation? If so, how?

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL: WHAT ARE THE LIMITS?

Iván was a science teacher and technical coordinator at a school run by a Catholic congregation. With students from preschoolers to 12th graders, the school's most important objective was that of helping students develop academically and as human beings, with an emphasis on respect for others, human values and the Catholic doctrine. Iván believed in these principles, but he also felt it was important to improve his students' academic results.

A relatively young man of medium height, Iván was thin with light brown hair and was quite formal in his choice of clothing. That morning, as he left the school chapel after a few long minutes of meditation, he breathed in the salty sea air. The expression on his face was calm, and he walked with a decisive, firm step. It seemed he had found the answer he had so anxiously been searching for.

That morning, he recalled with clarity the events of a few months earlier, while he had been filling out some documents required by the Ministry of Education. He had been analyzing the academic results of the students who had just finished the school year when Nachy, the school secretary, had stuck her head into his office.

"Iván, someone from Santiago is on the phone; she insists that she needs to speak with you," she announced.

After a few seconds' thought, Iván replied:

"Please tell whomever it is that I'm busy right now, but that if she calls back in the afternoon, I can speak."

The offer

As he went home, Iván wondered about the call. Walking into his house, he greeted his wife and daughters, who were waiting for him, and his thoughts moved on to more domestic occupations. He spent the remainder of the day with his family, playing with his daughters until it was time to go to sleep. That night he slept well, and the next day he felt extremely well-rested and energetic.

"See you at lunch," he said to his family as he waved goodbye and headed off to work.

When he got to school, he said good morning to the security guard, the nuns, and the teachers and then went to his office, ready to finish up what he had started the day before. He had barely gotten

comfortable in his chair when Nachy once again alerted him of an incoming call. For some reason he began to feel nervous as he took the call and listened to the voice at the other end of the line.

“Good morning, am I speaking with Iván?”

“Yes, that’s right. How can I help you?” he replied.

“Iván, we’ve been trying to get hold of you for several days now,” a woman’s voice responded.

“We’d like to talk to you...”

Intrigued, Iván continued listening.

“We’d like to make you an important job offer, Iván. But we’d like you to come to Santiago as soon as possible to discuss it in person,” the voice said.

“Well, I have time tomorrow afternoon,” Iván replied, and jotted down the address.

The next day, all day long Iván was fidgety, thinking about the job offer. He wondered if it would be something challenging or innovative, things that always motivated him professionally.

When he arrived at the address he’d been given, he got out of the taxi, walked inside, and was directed to an office. He knocked on the door and a secretary told him that a woman named Cristina would receive him momentarily.

Suddenly, a door opened onto a spacious office, and a middle-aged woman greeted him and ushered him inside.

“Iván, we have excellent references about your work, and we would like to make you an offer,” she said in a warm tone of voice.

He wondered who had given this woman a reference for him. Cristina continued talking.

“Iván, I’m the president of the board of directors of an important educational foundation. I represent one of the wealthiest families in the corporate sector here in Chile. This family has made a commitment to give something back to the community through education. We have two large schools and we want you to run one of them starting next year. We’d like to offer you the job of school principal.”

Iván was surprised and flattered by this very important offer. But he wanted details, as many as possible, about this new challenge, and began asking questions. Only after two hours did the meeting finally come to a close. Before Iván could get up from his chair, however, Cristina said one more thing:

“You know, you’ve asked me about nearly everything, except perhaps the most important thing of all,” she said. “Your salary!” And she began to laugh.

Iván said nothing, for he had yet to process all the information he’d just learned. Finally, as they were saying goodbye, he asked her and Cristina replied:

“It would be double what you are earning now.”

Iván thanked her, said goodbye, and left the office. Only once he was back out on the street did his head begin to pound with many more questions.

The decision

The school that Iván had been invited to run was located in a coastal city some 120 kilometers from where he presently lived. He would have to move; there was no way he could commute that distance every day. What would his wife say? How would the nun who was the head of his present school feel? Would it be hard to find a new house?

Despite all the unanswered questions, he was very intrigued by the idea of such a fascinating professional challenge. He felt he had the technical expertise to do a good job, and of course the salary would significantly alleviate his financial needs and even enable him to treat his family to a few luxuries.

The new school had an impressive infrastructure: high quality constructions, ample classrooms painted in warm colors, school furniture that was practically new, well-tended courtyards and gardens, a spacious and pristine lunchroom...everything in its place. The entire campus was kept spotlessly clean, with cleaning and maintenance crews on duty at all hours.

The educational project was quite clear, too: the school was aimed at addressing the needs of at-risk children who were very disadvantaged socioeconomically. Most of the students were from unstable homes with alcohol and drug problems as well as a high rate of teen pregnancy. There were about 800 kids enrolled in the school, which was located in the outskirts of the city. All told, approximately 70% of the students were deemed to be at-risk.

The school’s academic objectives were focused on turning out graduates with a first-rate vocational-technical high school diploma to facilitate their entry into the job market. The school also identified itself as a Catholic institution, in which the children were to be educated according to the values of faith and the Christian doctrine, encouraging the integration of the family.

Iván was grateful for this opportunity. He took the job. The school combined academic excellence with the cultivation of faith-based values, and was focused on a student population with very acute needs. This coincided with his own belief that if children were given the right educational environment in which to grow, addressing their most basic needs first, they would have the opportunity to learn, make progress, continue on to higher education, gain access to good jobs, and break free from the cycle of poverty in which their families existed.

The first months

In order to ensure that all his students made good progress, Iván knew that his management had to focus on what was happening inside the classroom and deliver a values-based education supported by the Catholic doctrine. Striking the right balance between reason and faith would be his great challenge.

A few months later, he received a call from Cristina, who wanted to know how his work was going. Iván gave her a detailed report about the difficulties he had experienced as well as the progress made, the adaptations implemented, and his successful optimization of certain procedures. He also told her how much he valued the teamwork that he had achieved with the teachers. He had successfully begun to incorporate technology into the classroom, and the students were now participating more actively in the construction of their own learning processes.

Cristina congratulated him on his work, and also told him that she was aware of all that he had done. She then mentioned that the manager of the Technical Education Unit would be visiting him the following week for some on-site supervision of the progress of the 12th grade students in their respective areas of specialization. The other objective of the visit was to establish each student's professional internship plan, which was the final phase that all students had to go through before they could receive their vocational-technical certification.

The next day, the principal noticed that Jeannette, the school general manager, was more careful than usual about her administrative tasks and in ensuring that all the support departments, including the maintenance and cleaning staffs, were functioning perfectly. Jeannette was the person with whom Iván had the most constant contact on a day-to-day basis, and he knew that she was constantly issuing reports on the state of the school for the areas under her supervision. He also knew that her two sons were students at the school and were beneficiaries of the Foundation.

Jeannette was good at her job; she was quite capable of managing the service staff, though she was less agile with the teachers. At times she could be a close confidante, while on other occasions she seemed remote, distant. She had been working at the school since its doors had opened.

A few weeks later, when Aurora, the manager of the Technical Education Unit, arrived at the school, Iván went out to greet her, and together they went into his office to talk. Aurora observed him closely, looked at how well his desk was organized, gazed around the office, and then asked him:

“So, how have you felt here?”

Iván responded that he was quite happy at the school, very enthusiastic about the work that everyone was doing, and that he valued very much what the Foundation did for the kids. He also added that he fully supported the academic and non-academic precepts that guided the school. Aurora smiled; this last remark seemed to please her.

Aurora was a woman with a pleasant, energetic disposition. She was a member of the Foundation’s board of directors, and was very clear about the school’s objectives.

Together she and Iván visited some classrooms, focusing especially on the students who were in their last year at the school. Iván couldn’t help but notice that Aurora paid special attention to the students who stood out as stars among their classmates; she was particularly interested in those who demonstrated they could tackle more advanced academic subjects and who, moreover, often served as tutors to students who were struggling. Among these especially gifted students was Benjamín, one of Jeannette’s sons.

Around midday, Aurora left the school to have lunch with some well-known local businessmen. She would return a few hours later to work with Iván on the students’ internship plans.

Iván felt especially content: he was doing a good job, he liked this new school, he was getting paid well, he worked with kids who needed help, and in general he felt that he truly shared the school’s values.

When Aurora returned, they had a brief meeting in Iván’s office over a cup of coffee and then went out to one of the courtyards. They walked around a bit, and then idly stopped on the esplanade just outside the chapel. There, Aurora turned to Iván, looked him in the eye and said:

“Iván, we’re going to register the students to do their technical internships at some of the local businesses. Many of the businessmen here are people my father knows well, and they would be happy to receive our students as interns. This way, once they graduate, they will be able to get jobs at these places.”

“That’s fine,” said Iván, but there was something else he wanted to discuss with her:

“Aurora,” he said, “A good number of the kids here have demonstrated that they have the grades and the ability to pursue professional degree programs at regular universities. I believe many of them would do quite well, in fact, and I think it’s important for us to support and guide them in that direction. They have what it takes to become successful professionals, to hold executive positions wherever they choose, and to help their families break out of the cycle of poverty—all of which, of course, is because of the opportunities they’ve had as students here in the Foundation’s school.”

Aurora listened closely to what Iván said, but her face grew somber, and she replied,

“Iván, I ought to remind you that our mission here is to educate the children and give them an unparalleled vocational-technical education which will allow them to become successful and productive members of the work force. Our objectives do not include making additional efforts to help them pursue university degrees. I should also remind you that you yourself stated your full and total commitment to and respect for that mission, which we made very clear to you.”

She continued:

“Iván... don’t forget, for these students a technical degree represents real success—and that success is made even more meaningful by the fact that they will be able to get jobs at local companies as soon as they graduate.”

“Aurora,” Iván rebutted, “Our school educates at-risk kids. We give them the chance to receive a quality education—why on earth wouldn’t we support the most capable students so that they can go on to college, to study toward professional degrees that will allow them to have much more interesting and better-paid jobs?”

“Iván, I’ll say it again. You are very familiar by now with our educational principles, and you know how important it is to the Foundation that you uphold this set of values,” replied Aurora.

Iván looked down at the ground for a few seconds, and then he looked up again and gazed directly into Aurora’s green eyes.

“I am convinced,” he said, “that these talented young people deserve a shot at going to college...”

Aurora repeated what she said about the school’s stated mission. Then she said a frosty goodbye to Iván, and turned to leave. The last thing she said to him was:

“I’ll give you a call in a few days.”

Iván thought about what had just been said. It was true, the school gave excellent opportunities to children in extremely disadvantaged situations. He knew that the school's goal was to give these young people a solid technical degree. Yet as an educator and mentor he couldn't help but notice that some of his students were perfectly capable of becoming successful, college-educated professionals. But they could only do so with the school's support and guidance.

Questions for reflection

1. What is the role of the school's mission? Are there limits to this values system?
2. Should the principal's leadership always be beholden to the school's educational plan?
3. Is it wise to encourage talented but disadvantaged students at technical high schools to invest more time in prolonging their education, even if this means placing the financial needs of their families as a second priority?
4. At what moment can the school safely say that its educational mission has been fulfilled?
5. Would you consider 'successful' an educational institution that responds to specific job needs in the surrounding community?

Working with Multiple Stakeholders Including Boards

CONFLICTING APPROACHES

Francisco was chief of the Technical Pedagogical Unit at a coeducational government-subsidized private school in a working-class neighborhood in a city in southern Chile. The school, with over 1,000 students from preschool through 12th grade, had a scientific-humanist orientation and boasted a school wide integration project for students with special education needs and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school's institutional mission was to offer a superior education based on values, civility, and inclusion, and the school made a point of encouraging the development and improvement of each student's potential in the interest of cultivating a balance that would help the student strive for truth and goodness, and feel motivated to achieve goals.

In this context, Francisco worked side by side with the teachers in his role overseeing curricular management and ensuring compliance with the school's educational program.

One morning, Rita, a first grade teacher with a great deal of experience at the school, entered Francisco's office. In the school community she was known for her tremendous professional commitment, responsibility and academic skills. She was also well known for her depth of experience as a teacher, especially in first grade. Her positive interaction with her students had brought her success as a teacher and had also earned her many awards.

The situation in first grade

Anxiously, and with a quivering voice Rita said:

"We are already at the beginning of May, and I have spent a lot of time preparing but I just don't know what to do. I can't make progress in my class, the kids are easily distracted, they have a hard time keeping up, they get bored and lose focus. I spend too much time disciplining them. They have no study habits, and yet the parents complain that they have too much homework. The problem is that whatever work they can't finish in class, they have to do at home. I am completely overwhelmed. These kids don't follow rules, they don't follow instructions, and I have to nag them all the time to do their school work."

Almost crying, Rita added:

"Out of 45 students, I have eight that didn't meet the mandatory age as of March 31st, and I suspect that they lack the cognitive development needed for first grade. Then, I have five students

from the School Integration Project; seven who have been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder and other disorders, which implies a much greater burden than normal for me. Many of the students, though diagnosed, don't receive specific support for their needs because the project has a maximum limit of five students. There is a special ed teacher that comes to the classroom and tries to help, but the quality of the support is mediocre because there are so many needs.

"My greatest problem is that because of this, the other kids in the class are lagging. I know that it's my job to push through and that I shouldn't ask for a teaching assistant, but I need more support in my classroom. Helping the kids form study habits and controlling discipline are essential if they are to learn at all. This is a difficult class, it's so hard to calm them down and create an environment for learning."

Francisco listened to what she said and told her that he would do his best to address her concerns. He urged Rita to continue working, to give her best, and told her that he would ask the special education teacher for more support, to establish some strategies that might help. Regarding the request to have a teaching assistant in the classroom, he said:

"I will speak to the owner of the school; but you know that hiring a teaching assistant is a financial decision. But I understand your situation."

Francisco was very concerned with Rita's situation because other teachers had brought up this issue before. He was convinced that there were many factors that had an impact on a student's learning process, and he knew that a key factor in getting kids to learn in first grade was a certain level of maturity that was needed for the formation and development of reading, writing and math skills. He also knew how important it was for the kids to have mastered certain social skills that would allow them to follow rules, respect taking turns and master other aspects necessary for the successful completion of the requirements at this formative level.

The request

At the school management team meeting the following week, Francisco brought up the issue. He explained that the problem was related to the admissions policies established in the General Education Law, which explicitly stated the requirements for entering first grade. To enter first grade, a child must have completed his or her 6th birthday by March 31st of the corresponding year. The principal at each school has the authority to extend that date to June 30th, though only in justified cases.

Francisco explained the official information to the team and then went into detail about Rita's specific issue. He emphatically raised his concern about having accepted so many students that did not meet the required age by March 31st. He then convincingly conveyed the teacher's request to hire a teaching assistant for the first grade class. To emphasize his request, he observed that many students had not taken a maturity test because the only criterion used for their acceptance was the need to fill the quota for that grade. Francisco pointed out that the principal was aware of this situation. For her it was important to ensure the economic stability of the school's educational project.

The days went by, and the problem didn't go away. The first grade parents requested a meeting with Rita. They reiterated the urgent need to hire a teaching assistant to help their children. The parents were very concerned with the slow progress in class, the amount of homework and the lack of notebook review. Given this new scenario, Rita once again met with Francisco to inform him about the meeting with the parents and the pressure that they were putting on her to solve the problem. He decided to speak directly with the school's owner to inform her of what was going on. After presenting the case he received the following answer:

"Our teachers must be prepared for the diversity of students in the classroom; that's what they studied teaching for, isn't it? The law does not require us to have teaching assistants in first grade and our resources are very limited. Our only option is to look for a student intern. If our academic results were better, we would have more enrolled students and wouldn't need to fill the quota. And finally, we are in accordance with what the law requires. This school has always met the requirements of the law."

It was clear that these were two diametrically opposed views. One had to do with the need to fill the quota in order to receive financing, and the other was related to a teaching aide and a concern for the students to learn appropriately.

Striking a balance

After the meeting, Francisco returned to his office very upset and disappointed. He sat in front of his computer and asked himself how he was going to achieve a balance between these two positions. He was aware that the students needed support in order to meet their academic goals. He was also concerned about the parents and guardians: he needed to respond to their concerns about their children's education. What would happen when the teachers grew tired of trying to support their students' progress?

Francisco also couldn't help but think of the students that possessed the basic skills needed to face new challenges with regard to attitude, cognition and new procedures but were not learning what they needed. He knew that the classroom was not providing the appropriate learning environment and that they were not covering the basic curricular learning standards that the Ministry of Education required. In other words, he felt that his students' educational rights were not being respected.

Francisco knew that holding a position of leadership at a school meant having to play a strategic role in bringing out the teachers' abilities through team work, and in establishing common goals to motivate the school community to continually strive for more. He also felt a personal responsibility to leave his mark, hopefully a positive one, on the school community. He wanted to help make progress in the kids' formative process and establish the bonds of trust needed to move forward together.

For this reason, he asked himself: what decision would a true educational leader make in this situation? What were the obligations of an educational institution? How did the concepts of inclusion, equity and opportunity fit in here? Might it be necessary to look at this from an outsider's perspective in order to understand better all the possible points of view to take into account here?

Questions for reflection

1. How might the school balance its economic goals and remain a worthy educational institution?
2. What is the real problem here?
3. What strategies might Rita introduce in order to solve the problem in the classroom?
4. Would hiring a teaching assistant solve the problems they are facing?

THE SOUND OF A BELL

Los Maitenes was a private, non-denominational school in a small town in the center of Chile, with a coed student population of about 400 from preschool to high school. With one class per grade and about 25 students per class, the school had earned a good reputation over the past 15 years thanks to the students' high scores on nationwide standardized tests. Quite significantly, 100% of the school's graduates went to college. Many teachers had come to live in the area specifically to work at the school, while others traveled weekly to work there. The teachers had achieved a certain degree of autonomy over the years, which they valued and attributed to their students' academic results as well as their own hard work.

The physical space of the school was divided into two distinct areas, with preschoolers and elementary schoolers in one building and high school students in another. The school administration had one staff member working as the coordinator of the preschool and elementary school, because the school administration and the principal's offices were in the high school building. The supervisor's role was to ensure that the everyday operations in her area ran smoothly, and she was also responsible for overseeing the general atmosphere and environment of her area. The teachers in both areas understood the functions of the coordinator, and they also knew that she was supposed to support them in handling complex situations that might arise with students and parents.

The school year was divided into trimesters, and each trimester the principal held a progress evaluation council that all the teachers were required to attend. The purpose of this meeting was to keep tabs on the progress being made in different areas of the school, and to address problems by establishing improvement plans where needed.

Carmen and Antonia

Carmen, the preschool and elementary school coordinator, was in her car, heading for her son's doctor's office. It had taken her a month to secure an appointment, and it would take her close to two hours to get there. She knew the council meeting that afternoon was essential for getting the trimester on track, and she also knew that her presence was truly needed, and so she felt guilty about not being there. As she drove down the highway, she thought about the teachers in her group, about how they had seemed rather distant recently. The meeting that day probably would have been a perfect opportunity to see if this inkling was actually based on anything real. But as soon as she had been told that an appointment

was available for her son, she went to Antonia, the school principal, and asked for permission to take the afternoon off. Antonia, who was very understanding, said yes without hesitation.

Nevertheless Carmen felt uneasy, and she began to think about why she had begun to feel this distance from the teachers in her group. More than once the principal had suggested to her that some of them felt she was authoritarian, but Carmen thought that she had worked on that and improved. Suddenly, in her mind's eye, she saw a picture of the bell she had recently had installed in the teachers' lounge. It had rung for the first time the previous Monday. She had thought it was a good decision because now the teachers would hear the bell and would not have so much trouble getting to class on time.

Carmen was a tall, slender, attractive woman with a no-nonsense, decisive air about her. She had been at the school for ten years, first as a nursery school teacher and then, after Antonia was made principal, as the preschool and elementary school coordinator. She felt a sincere commitment to doing the very best job she could to make sure the school functioned perfectly. An alumna of Los Maitenes, she was proud of having been part of the school's first graduating class. She was totally committed to the school's academic mission, and knew that it was her job to help make sure that the school continued to maintain high standards in terms of student performance. She had great confidence in Antonia, who had seconded and supported Carmen's decisions many times before.

Antonia, the principal at Los Maitenes, was a confident, easygoing woman with a sunny disposition. She had been working at Los Maitenes for thirteen years, first as technical director and for the past three years as principal. The teachers regarded her as competent and committed, and believed in her ability to manage the school; the consensus among most of them was that the organizational aspects of the school had improved since she had taken over as principal, mainly because she made the teachers feel valued as professionals in their respective areas of expertise. As soon as she had taken over as principal, Antonia assembled an executive team that consisted of herself and four additional members: the technical coordinator, the guidance counselor, the preschool and elementary school coordinator, and the coordinator of the head teachers. She was the director, but gave her team freedom to work independently; each member would present his or her ideas and plan to the group and receive feedback and suggestions. They were given ample leeway to do their work without Antonia controlling them, but in general they kept her up to speed on what they were doing and consulted with her before making important decisions.

Several members of the school community had had a hard time transitioning to the new management model implemented by Antonia, because the previous administration had run a very tight ship, making decisions unilaterally, and everyone knew that the administration always had the last word.

Despite this, Antonia was rather concerned because a number of times she had seen Carmen exhibit a very authoritarian attitude with her teachers. She had spoken to Carmen about this more than once. One time, the art teacher had gone to Antonia's office, very annoyed, to complain about Carmen.

“Antonia,” he said, “Carmen treats me like a child, and nags me about doing my job with my kids... last Friday I looked at her and told her that I knew exactly what I was supposed to be doing, that I didn't need her to remind me, and much less with that bossy attitude. I told her that if she had something to say about my job performance, that we should sit down and talk like two adults, not like a parent with a misbehaving child.”

The bell incident

During the council meeting everything occurred normally. The head teachers brought up the priority areas where their students needed to make progress over the following trimester, and requested support from different people in different areas in the school.

As the meeting came to a close, María José, a teacher known for her conscientious, serious work with students and for the excellent academic results she achieved in her subject area, stood up and began to speak.

“A number of teachers in the elementary school—myself included—are extremely upset about something, and I'd like to talk about it here,” she said. “This past Monday, a bell that sounds like a car alarm was installed in the teachers' lounge to alert us when recess ends. The other teachers and I are very bothered by this, because we believe that the purpose of this horrendous noise is to make us go to our classrooms. None of us feels that we need a warning bell to remind us of our obligations. This is offensive to us.”

“Who gave instructions to install the bell?” another teacher asked.

Antonia, surprised, said she had no idea about the bell, and asked the other teachers their opinion. Constanza, a veteran at the school, said,

“I have been working at this school for 25 years and I have always done my job. Now, I am the first to admit that in the teachers' lounge sometimes you can't hear the courtyard bell, but we are all professionals here and we know that it's our responsibility to arrive on time to class. The school asks its students to learn to be autonomous, yet treats us with no autonomy at all.”

A few more comments in this vein were enough to convince Antonia that most of the teachers were bothered by this bell. After discussing it with the council, it was decided that the bell would be removed. Before announcing the decision, she reminded everyone present about the importance of starting class on time.

The next morning, Antonia informed Carmen of the decision she had made, and Carmen fell silent. In the afternoon when they reconvened for a meeting to review some administrative matters, it was clear that Carmen was upset.

“What’s wrong, Carmen? Something’s bothering you, I can tell,” Antonia said, concerned.

Carmen made no bones about her disagreement with Antonia’s decision to remove the bell:

“I made the decision to install the bell because the teachers were getting to class almost fifteen minutes late. Antonia, my position was absolutely ignored here. You completely undermined my authority with the teachers.”

“Carmen, I understand you’re bothered by this. But you have to know that I was just looking for a solution to an issue that the teachers raised. I didn’t intend to undermine your authority—but I do think that that kind of decision was something you should have shared with me before following through.”

“Well, then, how far does my autonomy extend for doing what I think is right? Do I have to consult you on everything?” Carmen rebutted, clearly irritated. “Please, don’t undermine me like that again,” she said. At that, she got up and walked out the door.

Questions for reflection

1. How should Antonia establish limits to autonomy to avoid situations like this? With what justification?
2. How would you characterize Antonia’s leadership style?
3. Who do you think is right, Carmen or Antonia? Why?
4. How should the autonomy of a school’s teaching staff be managed?
5. What does autonomy mean? How much autonomy do this school’s teachers and management team really have?

**Leading Teacher Teams and
Groups of Teachers**

QUALITY FOR ALL OR FOR SOME?

Maria was the principal at a coeducational, government-subsidized private school with an openly Catholic creed. With a population of 405 students from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade, the school was located in a very disadvantaged sector of southern Santiago that was known for its high volume of drugs and weapons trafficking. 92% of the students were from this neighborhood and most of them had little motivation and a very low level of cultural and social capital. Maria had been the principal there for eight years and although at first it had been difficult, she and her teachers had managed, each year, to improve the students' results in the nationwide tests administered each year by the Ministry of Education to measure the school's success in achieving its pedagogical objectives and curriculum goals.

On this particular Thursday afternoon, Maria grabbed her bag, hunted impatiently for her car keys, closed the door to her office and left. She wanted to get home fast, for it had been a trying day; it was already seven in the evening. As she walked out of the building she felt the cold May air on her face, but it did little to banish the uneasiness she felt. Lost in her concerns, she headed toward her car.

Almost inevitably her mind drifted back to what had happened that afternoon at the weekly Teachers' Council meeting, which the school's 36 teachers had attended. María had delivered a report regarding the fourth graders' scores on the nationwide standardized tests in the areas of language, math and science, and related the reported scores to the students' socioeconomic context. Over the previous several years, Maria's school had enjoyed a trend of sustained, solid improvement in scores, which was the result of the teachers' deep commitment to teaching well and the students' diligent schoolwork. This year, however, the school's language scores had gone down a significant nineteen points.

All the teachers knew the question that would be asked of them because at the start of each school year, María worked with them to establish yearly academic goals. As expected, Maria had coolly looked around the meeting room and asked:

“What do you think explains our drop in test scores this year?”

The teachers' opinions

Juan Pablo, a young English teacher who had been at the school for seven years and was known for his critical vision of school processes, spoke up:

“These results aren’t low. They are good results if we consider the objective reality of the 34 students in the fourth grade group. We aren’t miracle workers.”

In general Juan Pablo got good results with his students, but he also knew that he had to work extremely hard if he wanted all of them to make progress. Sometimes he wasn’t able to meet his goals for all of them, though his students always showed some level of progress. His comment was followed by a long, uncomfortable silence among the teachers. The atmosphere was tense. Everyone knew that the principal’s priority was to ensure that all students were able to achieve and excel, despite the extremely disadvantaged context from which they came. Moreover, there was no selection mechanism at the school; all applicants were accepted until the vacancies were filled. Equal access was a tenet of the school’s educational policy, as was excellence. The school’s mission was to offer quality education to all its students. On many occasions the teaching staff had heard Maria speak to this effect:

“A good teacher,” she said, “always makes a difference and can turn poverty around. Education is the only opportunity these students have to overcome poverty and start lives with more and better opportunities. Their futures depend on us.”

The teachers believed in what María said, but they also knew that in adverse circumstances, it was sometimes difficult to ensure that everyone made progress.

A hand went up in the audience. It was Valentina, the head teacher of the fourth grade—the grade with the disappointing scores. She had been at the school for six years. Leaning in toward the group, Valentina remarked:

“I think the kids got good results. They made a lot of progress from where they were at the beginning of the school year. We needed more time to get better scores. I should remind you that of the 34 kids in the fourth grade, 11 were new this year and arrived here with very low grades. Five of these kids have behavior problems but nothing was done about them. I believe that disciplinary measures should have been taken with two of those five students, and that they should have been expelled because they constantly disrupted class, never paid attention and never worked. In the end, their disruptions kept the other kids from learning.”

This comment made Maria feel extremely frustrated because she was aware that the school’s mission was to offer quality education for all: no discrimination, no selectivity. In fact, when she recruited teachers her greatest concern was to hire educators with high expectations and who also shared the conviction that all children can learn if they are given the same opportunities. It was for this reason that she found Valentina’s remarks troubling. Maria knew that the school and its teachers were the only hope that many students had for forging better lives.

Francisca, the history teacher, raised her hand and asked to speak:

“Listen, we’re all here because we’re convinced that all kids can learn. ‘Quality education for all, no exceptions.’ We know the reality these kids live with. We can be the force to help them live with more dignity. This school operates in an area of extreme poverty and we believe that all the kids in the neighborhood have a right to quality education. We have opted for equality as well as quality. Maybe we need to broaden our scope somehow and make a more exhaustive analysis of the students’ progress in order to design better and more effective strategies of pedagogical intervention. I think this sharp drop in scores is an opportunity for us to study more carefully how we are designing the learning process in the classroom.”

Maria started up her car. She waited for the engine to warm up and began making her way home. A few blocks later she found herself at a red light and waited for it to change to green. Once again she found her thoughts drifting back to the meeting that afternoon. Alejandra, the math teacher’s words now echoed in her head:

“All of us are aware of the reality our students are dealing with. Now, I also believe that all of us here are committed to equality and excellence. However, working with kids who have severe behavior and emotional issues, who lack motivation and whose parents are so uninvolved in their education, is a huge emotional drain for us. I have to ask myself if the principal is at all concerned with the teachers’ mental health or if she only cares about the kids’ progress, about making sure that none of them get left behind. As teachers, we are affected by the school’s open admissions policy, and we are under a great deal of stress to achieve high scores with all of them equally.”

To this Maria responded:

“I agree; our well-being as teachers is important, and we have to work on that. But we can’t neglect our more disadvantaged students; we have to face that reality.”

The truth was, Maria really hadn’t been aware of this aspect of the teachers’ experience. She had never stopped to think about the toll it took on them. All she had cared about was making improvements, making sure her staff had the skills they needed both for discipline and teaching. She had learned a serious lesson that afternoon, and as she drove home she was overcome by a wave of guilt.

The light changed and she continued on, her mind racing from one thought to another. She was suddenly reminded of the conversation she’d had that week with the mother of Maria Jose, a sixth grader with an excellent academic record. Her mother had come to school concerned about the atmosphere in her daughter’s classroom.

“I am very happy with the education my daughter is receiving,” the mother had said to María. “But I’m concerned about the five new kids that arrived this year. They seem out of control and use really vulgar language in class. My husband and I are thinking of transferring María José to another school next year.”

Maria remembered what she said to María José’s mother:

“I understand your concern, but at this school we don’t turn our backs on anyone.”

Maria was very concerned because at her school, all students were welcome. She knew that the students didn’t always get along, so keeping the parents happy wasn’t easy. She was also unsettled about the conversation she had recently had with Juan Ignacio, a new eighth grade student from a very large and poor family. She had called him into her office because she was concerned about his low grades and his behavior in the classroom. When she asked him how he felt at the school he told her:

“I like it here. I have friends, the teachers are smart, but I don’t understand the things they say and I have a hard time keeping up in class. I study but I never get good grades. Nobody at home can help be because my parents never got past third grade.”

In fact, Maria knew that many of the students who were new to the school were performing under grade level, and when they didn’t understand what was being taught in class, they showed their frustration by acting out. However, she believed that this was where the school had to support its students in order for them to learn and build relationships that might facilitate the learning process.

Maria continued driving toward her house; by now the streets were almost empty. Suddenly her cell phone rang. It was Cecilia, the head ninth grade teacher:

“Listen, María, I’m sorry for calling so late, but today a couple of students came up to me asking to speak with you because three of their classmates won’t let the teacher conduct the class normally. Can you see them first thing in the morning?”

“Of course Cecilia, tell them that tomorrow at 10:30 I have office hours, and I’ll meet them at their classroom. Thanks for calling.”

Maria thought that by giving equal opportunities, changes were possible. She saw education as a force of change, and she worked hard for it. Nevertheless, it was hard to combine equality and excellence in education. Sometimes equality made excellence and quality harder to attain. She thought to herself about how everyone wants equal opportunities and access, but nobody wants to pay the price. Without realizing it, she had arrived home. She had never felt so glad to be there.

Questions for reflection:

1. Do you agree with the way María responded to the student's mother?
2. How should disciplinary issues be handled in the classroom, bearing in mind the school's objective to deliver quality education to all its students?
3. What suggestions would you give María for improving the teachers' well-being?
4. Do you think it is reasonable to pursue both equity and excellence in a school like this?

BUILDING A PATH FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Maria Soledad Luna had been school principal for only six months, but she was determined to push through with the internal improvement project she had decided to take on as her first big initiative. She walked impassively through the halls, and knew that she had to be on time for the coordination meeting. She had managed, with great effort, to schedule this meeting with the teachers on Saturday, outside of regular working hours, in the hopes of making progress with the changes to the school rules and regulations. She believed this work was necessary if they were to accomplish the highly anticipated improvement project. But she knew this would be no easy task.

María Soledad was, without a doubt, an eternal optimist, always looking at the bright side of things. When she studied education in college, she learned that it was essential to invest time, resources and everything else imaginable in the interest of her students' education. Her teaching years had been positive ones, marked by her students' academic achievements, which was very satisfying for her. Over time, she had begun to feel the need to move out of the classroom and work as a principal, convinced that she could contribute more in improving the quality of education through school administration.

She was somewhat concerned about her extreme idealism, for it was a sensibility that could at times be a weakness. The level of detail she dedicated to planning was often something that her colleagues did not understand, though one of her strengths was her very strong conviction that the students always came first when any decision had to be made. And so, that Saturday morning, she stood in front of the entire school community that was debating between a more ideal way of doing things and a more 'real life' approach to things.

When Maria Soledad started working at the school, it had just celebrated 30 years of existence. She would never forget the day she became a part of the school, which was something like a huge family, with over a thousand students ranging from prekindergarten to 12th grade. The school's 80 employees were known for being sociable, dynamic, supportive and full of great ideas gleaned from experience and put into practice over the years. The school was beautiful, painted in shades of white and blue, with wood detailing that jibed with the architectural history and style of the city. Several generations had studied here, and many of its alumni had gone on to do quite well in life.

Every school goes through different stages and cycles. At this particular moment, the region in which the school was located had been hit by a financial crisis. Times had changed, and so had the reality of the school. Once an elite academic institution, the school was now facing problems such as lack of discipline and poor academic achievement that were affecting its image. Nevertheless, Maria Soledad

thought it was necessary to strengthen the efforts to go on with the improvement plan because of the tradition and hard work that had always characterized the school.

Reinventing the school

The principal knew that the teachers had a stake in rewriting the school rules and regulations, and that this would be a great challenge that would affect many things about the school's culture. This was why she had decided to call a special meeting on Saturday morning.

And so, that Saturday she entered the meeting room and greeted everyone with a smile on her face:

“Good morning everyone!”

Before she could even sit down, an avalanche of questions came upon her.

The first came from Constanza, the school inspector, who asked in a high-pitched voice:

“How many changes will be made to the school rules and regulations? Discipline in this school is terrible, the students do whatever they want and we never give punishments that can set examples.”

Candela, the science teacher, chimed in:

“She’s right! The students never show any respect. Maria Soledad, you have to do something.”

Comments poured forth so rapidly that Maria Soledad barely had the chance to respond to any of them.

Juan, the history and geography teacher, a much-respected figure at the school, said:

“The changes have to be dramatic enough to get rid of the undisciplined students.”

Dulce del Carmen, an elementary school teacher who had recently graduated from college, rebutted:

“But people, this is not a reformatory.”

No one seemed to hear her.

Maria Soledad listened to what the teachers had to say and thought about the postgraduate classes she was planning to implement. She wondered how the teachers could make changes to the rules and regulations so that they would actually be helpful in supporting a new kind of relationship with students and not just revolve around establishing new and harsher punishments. The teachers' remarks were nothing new to her; she had heard them all before in previous meetings with the teachers. How could

she find a way to reflect, in the rules and regulations, changes that would enable the school to function effectively? After carefully listening to all of her colleagues' opinions, Maria Soledad spoke:

"Thank you all for coming to this coordination meeting. I am aware that each one of you represents an important part of this school community. Our school has always been a point of reference in this municipality. The changes we want to make to the rules and regulations in the area of discipline and school life should reflect our willingness to examine our actions and procedures to ensure that they reflect our educational objectives."

"That's what you say! It's been years since anything has changed. Some of our students have excellent grades but are vulgar, rude and don't respect any rules. Others are rude and have awful grades," stated Pedro, the biology teacher.

"I can't help but repeat what I said before: this is not a reformatory!" repeated Dulce del Carmen.

Daniela, the language teacher whose students always got excellent grades, pleaded,

"We can't leave everything in the hands of the students' families. What is our role as professionals?"

"Wait," Ernesto, a math teacher, interjected, "Are we to be held responsible for the attitude of these spoiled kids? I wasn't hired for that!"

Tension filled the room; María Soledad realized she was going to have to cut off all the comments, because they were sparking too many conflicting points of view that threatened to turn the meeting into chaos. She knew that she could not show weakness and needed to firmly move forward with the meeting. Trying to lighten the mood she said:

"I hear and understand all your points of view, but it's important that we continue with this meeting. Let's work on the real challenge of this improvement. To start, I've brought you a motivational video called The Butterfly Circus. Why don't we watch it? I think you'll find it interesting."

The video showed the skills of the owner and director of the Butterfly Circus, who with great conviction had managed to transform the physical and personal disadvantages of each circus member into a transcendent artistic proposal that portrayed each player with true humanity. The director had turned individual weaknesses into opportunities. Maria Soledad felt that this video perfectly represented the work of every teacher: the job of discovering and cultivating each student's talents, even in classes where there was a wide range of capabilities.

After the video was over the principal asked:

"What do you think of this story? How can we relate to it? How can we not relate?"

Daniela ignoring the principal's questions, abruptly interrupted:

"We're not here to analyze a video, we're here to review and modify the rules and regulations. We need to improve the students' discipline, and we can't keep turning a blind eye to this culture of disrespect for the rules."

"She's right," said Constanza. "We're teachers, not social workers."

María Soledad noticed that other teachers had in fact been moved by the video. Sensitivity was running high; it was the right time to start with the next activity. Firmly she continued:

"The difficulties experienced by the characters in this video remind me that there are some students we don't trust because of their bad behavior in certain situations. But if we can change our perspective and approach, maybe we can discover hidden talents, see the positive, and from there start working toward improvement. What do you think?"

Touched by the video, Rosa commented:

"It's true, we need to stop and take notice, and become real teachers to discover the talent and virtues that our students have. We can't just punish negative behavior. The circus director succeeded. We can, too."

María Soledad then made a strategic move: she stopped talking about the video and decided to openly discuss the matter at hand:

"Okay then, let's get to work on the rules and regulations."

The rules and regulations were read aloud, and a detailed list was made of inappropriate behavior, along with brief descriptions of the infractions and their respective punishments. Patricio, an administrative worker at the school, felt that the punishments needed to be revised:

"How can we punish the students by making them stay home; it seems more like a reward than a punishment, a day off... what's the punishment there?"

The other teachers' eyes opened wide. Constanza added:

"Maybe it would be better if we made the students sweep the schoolyard and clean up the school."

"Clean up...is that what we call punishment?" asked Candela. "Does that mean that the people who clean up the school are punished for life? Don't you think this might give them the wrong idea? Although...if we conceive of it as community service maybe it wouldn't be so bad. We would turn punishment into something constructive."

The debate started up once again. This time, however, it was different. There were a wide variety of reactions. As a result of the video, some people in the room were now more open to analyzing, while others remained aloof—perhaps even more than before—to the idea of finding a more humane way to deal with punishment. María Soledad weighed in again:

“I think it’s appropriate to punish students for wrongdoing, but it would be good to avoid expulsions and suspensions. I like the idea of establishing reparation punishments through community service activities that invite the kids to reflect on what they did wrong.”

The teachers discussed this proposal energetically:

“So, helping others is a punishment? Is that what we want to communicate to the kids?” asked Pedro.

“Well, it depends on what are we aiming for: do we just want to punish or do we want to generate something positive through the punishment?”

“We have to be careful. If we decide that cleaning or doing community work is punishment, then we are going to send a real mixed message about the values we’re trying to instill.”

“But lying around at home and watching TV...that’s definitely a reward,” Patricio interjected. “Suspensions never work, as far as I’m concerned; they’re a vacation.”

“Don’t you get what is going on? These punishments will throw into question all their values. It would imply that those kids who already clean up or perform volunteer community service are somehow being punished,” Pedro insisted.

María Soledad started to feel the onset of a migraine; altering the systems already in place at the school was going to be harder than expected. The school rules and regulations clearly needed changes. They had to do something to modify the unacceptable behavior of some students, but they also need to take a look at the school’s stated values, and from there think about how to effectively instill them among the school community. But, how could she take control of this conversation, which was getting wildly out of control? An idealist vision had literally become a headache and María Soledad now felt that the meeting had lost its focus.

A few hours later, the discussion was as heated as ever. María Soledad’s headache got worse and she began to wonder if it was worth spending more time on this. Her husband and kids were waiting for her, to enjoy what was left of the weekend. All she wanted right now was to get home.

Questions for reflection:

1. What do you think of María Soledad's approach to change the organizational culture of this school?
2. How would you guide a meeting like this in the interest of bridging the gap between two opposing sides?
3. How might the team work collaboratively to change the school rules and regulations to add compassion to the students' education?
4. Is it possible to address the diversity of needs among an entire student population in one set of rules and regulations?
5. How can regulations favor the construction of positive relations between teachers and students?
6. What is the meaning of punishment for students?

Leading Teachers

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: SUCCESS FOR ALL OR SUCCESS FOR SOME?

Located in a small, semi-rural village in Chile's central region, the local public preschool and elementary school employed 28 teachers, two head administrators and three specialists to take care of the needs of 300 boys and girls, 60% of whom came from disadvantaged families with low incomes and little formal education. The parents' association was very concerned about the school's scores on the nationwide standardized tests that their children were obliged to take and had been active in supporting the school with extracurricular activities and resources for acquiring materials. This was very important to them, given that once their children finished elementary school, they would continue their studies elsewhere, and their parents wanted to get them into good schools in the larger cities close to the town.

Eugenia, who was the school principal, was 44 years old and had served as principal for three years. She had been selected for the principal's job following a public call for applications run by the local education department. Previously she had been a teacher at the school.

One day, during an extra session of the Parents' Association, the third grade parents' delegate agreed to request a formal meeting with the principal to express the parents' concern about the lack of attention they felt their children were receiving in class. In their opinion, the teacher of one class in particular was disregarding the needs of their children because she was overly concerned about the special-needs kids, who had been placed in the class as part of the school's Integration Program. The meeting was requested by the president of the Parents' Association, Humberto, a small-scale local farmer who had three children at the school.

The parents' concern

As the meeting began, Humberto spoke on behalf of the Parents' Association executive committee and other parents in the class. His directed his concerns to Eugenia.

“Eugenia, we are here because we would like to request that you speak with Silvia the 3-B teacher, because we feel that our children are not progressing as well as the children in 3-A. We believe Silvia spends too much time with the special-needs kids and is not looking after the needs of the children without learning difficulties. Our children have also told us that for some time now, they have been instructed to help the kids in the Integration Program with assignments that Silvia gives them in different subject areas.”

Eugenia was surprised, because she had never received a complaint like this before. She personally believed that the full and total inclusion of all the students was essential to the school's mission, and personally had observed her teachers working toward this goal. The school's mission statement, moreover, explicitly stated this same objective.

"Humberto, please be assured that I am listening very carefully to what you say and am noting your concern so that I can bring it up with Silvia," the principal responded amiably.

After the meeting, Eugenia decided to first take up the issue with Ismael Ortiz, her technical coordinator, a 27 year-old with two years' experience in the position. Previously a university professor, Ismael possessed more than one advanced degree; his opinions were well regarded and respected by his colleagues. Eugenia asked him to take a look at how the other teachers resolved this situation in their classrooms. And on her own, she called Silvia in for a talk the next day.

Gathering the facts

Silvia, a 50 year-old teacher with a vast amount of classroom experience, was the kind of person who constantly sought to improve herself professionally. For years she had been an elementary school teacher in urban schools in Santiago, where she had been recognized for her very effective teaching methods. For the past ten years, however, she had been living in the countryside because she felt it offered a better quality of life and she also hoped that she might use her teaching experience to the benefit of the local children.

Eugenia called Silvia in to talk about the complaint made by the Parents' Association. After exchanging the usual greetings, Eugenia began speaking.

"Silvia, yesterday I received a visit from a group of parents from your class. They are very concerned that their children are being held back by the special-needs children, and they are bothered that their children are being asked to assist them."

Eugenia paused for a moment and added: "The parents are worried that their children are not learning, and I wanted to ask you if you could shed some light on what's going on."

Silvia, somewhat irritated and bewildered, said in response:

"Eugenia, I am very proud to be able to work at a school that looks after the needs of children from disadvantaged areas, and where you, as principal, have always encouraged us to support an inclusive form of education. So in that regard, yes, I am especially concerned about making

sure the kids with the most difficulties are able to learn. I give them special activities and I sit with them as they tackle these assignments, to make sure that they understand them and are able to finish them. For the other students, now, I prepare and distribute workbooks, I give them both written and oral instructions. I motivate and push them to work effectively and autonomously, and from what I have observed they are doing very well.”

Eugenia, seeing how upset Silvia was, tried to soften her voice, make it seem more understanding:

“Silvia, the parents don’t feel it’s appropriate that you leave the more advanced kids alone and that you make them help the slower kids. From their point of view, this is holding back their learning process, and they feel that their kids are learning less than the kids in 3-B.”

Silvia, showing little patience for the parents’ objection, firmly held her ground:

“Eugenia, for me, the collaboration with the children who are doing better is absolutely valid, it’s an integral part of the kids-helping-kids approach. The very best way for our top students to prove what they have learned is by teaching it to others. And the other students who learn from them do so with greater confidence, since they are learning from their peers.”

Her face red with rage, Silvia got up to leave. Before doing so, she looked Eugenia straight in the eye and said,

“Everyone knows that in order to truly understand a topic, the best thing you can do is teach it to someone else.”

Almost out the door, she added, *“And another thing: this is the best way for them to experience, from early childhood, the true meaning of respect and collaboration with their peers, especially those who need them the most.”*

In the meantime, the technical coordinator, Ismael, had spoken to the other teachers, and identified two points of view on the matter of handling inclusion in the classroom. Most of the teachers he consulted felt that in order to improve learning, the most critical factor was that of guaranteeing the curricular coverage of all study plans and programs. Sergio, the 4-A teacher known for his students’ consistently good results felt that,

“In both internal and external measurements, students should demonstrate solid performance; we also want to see that they are building upon the lessons we have given them. This is how a school like ours earns its reputation, for successfully teaching the curriculum stipulated by the school system. We are here to strengthen public education, and the way to prove that we have done this is with good comparative results.”

Sergio went on to add:

“The learning process of the kids with special needs ought to be overseen by the Integration Program’s team of specialists, who work with these boys and girls in spaces outside the classroom, to help get them up to grade level in a way that will allow them, in the foreseeable future, to acquire the baseline skills they need to reach acceptable reading, writing and math levels. This shouldn’t be a regular classroom teacher’s responsibility. That’s why we have specialists!”

For this reason, Sergio and several other teachers felt that the regular teachers shouldn’t worry about providing reinforcement for these kids, because they had a solid support network of specialists who could help them move forward and learn what the school expected them to. This support would be delivered outside the regular classroom.

The second-grade teachers, however, saw things differently. They felt that the parents were too overbearing and anxious in their quest to control the work of the teachers in the classroom. When asked his opinion on the matter, Rodrigo, the head teacher of the second grade, brought up a totally different concern:

“Has anyone asked the opinion of the parents of the special-needs kids? What about them? Don’t they have the right for their children to be educated and served by our teachers, as well?”

Angélica Inostroza, the other second grade teacher, chimed in:

“We want all of our students to progress within their own capabilities, and the families need to respect what we do. We work with the entire class, offering special activities for the kids that are advancing more slowly. We hope that with this kind of differentiated attention, everyone will be able to learn and master the basic abilities they will need to move forward in life. This should be what our school is known for, beyond any external evaluations. We all know that the external evaluations only encourage segregation in classrooms and schools.”

After talking to Ismael, Eugenia decided to schedule a meeting with teachers from both grades, to clear the air of the tensions generated by these two approaches toward special-needs education, and which were brought to the fore by the Parents’ Association and their recent complaint.

Questions for reflection

1. How might the principal approach this and future meetings with her teachers. Is it necessary to choose one approach over the other?
2. What is the path that Eugenia should take?
3. Is one point of view more correct than the other? Why?
4. What kind of collaboration from the children's families might the principal and the teachers propose in order to improve the inclusive education program, encourage an appreciation for diversity, and stimulate learning for all the students at the school?
5. As an expert in the area of learning and evaluation, what might Ismael, the technical coordinator, do to integrate and create some harmony out of the differences in opinion among the teachers?
6. What actions might Silvia take with the families of the children in question, in order to learn and share the achievements and experiences they have observed among the children?

A MATTER OF VOCATION

Sitting in front of her computer, Amanda rapidly responded to the emails she had received over the course of the morning. Having been the school's principal for eight years now, she felt it was very much "her" school and devoted far more time and energy to it than what her contract required. "Her school" was a government-subsidized private educational establishment that enrolled boys and girls with special educational needs, at no cost to the parents. The diagnoses of the students, who ranged in age from 6 to 26, were mental retardation, autism, brain damage and Down Syndrome. Their conditions, upon entering the school, were exacerbated by the effects of poverty and lack of stimulation at home. Because these students lived in communities that were extremely poor and stigmatized socially, their family histories were marked by the kind of pain and detachment that often led the children to exhibit serious behavior problems.

Amanda spent a few more minutes reviewing the documents that she had on her desktop, and began to sign the reports that she had to give to her teachers.

All of a sudden, just minutes before the bell rang to signal the end of first period, Amanda heard the sound of loud cries, accompanied by a thunderous noise of tables and chairs crashing to the floor. Hoping she was wrong about who might be the culprit of such a disruption, she wasted no time and dropped what she was doing. Quickly she left her office in the direction of the fracas.

As she entered the classroom, Amanda saw Susana, her newest teacher, attempting to break up a violent fight between two students. After clearing her throat to make her presence known, she spoke to the students in a categorical and authoritarian manner:

"Nicolás and Sebastián, what is going on here?"

Susana, very nervous and agitated, tried to explain what had happened in fits and starts:

"They started to argue...to hit each other, I don't know why. We had to separate them."

The two boys, nine and ten years old respectively, were still extremely angry and excitable. With the help of a few students, the teaching aide separated them.

Sebastián stared at Nicolás in fright as Nicolás attempted to break free from his classmates who were holding him back as best they could. Gripped by rage and bile, Nicolás continued to threaten his classmate with half-formed, practically unintelligible insults. Sebastián, on the other hand, was visibly panicked and terrified by the prospect of another attack.

Susana, the teacher, was stressed and upset to the point of tears. Without much success, she tried to offer an explanation for what had happened. She rubbed her hands nervously and bit her lower lip in an effort to contain the tears that threatened to confirm the insecurity she felt regarding her failure to handle the incident that had just occurred in her classroom.

Amanda now stepped in to try and change the mood in the room. In a gentle but decisive tone of voice, she turned to the classroom aide and said:

“Andrea, please take Sebastián to the bathroom so that he may collect himself. When he’s calmer, I’d like you to bring him to my office so that we can talk.”

With the very same serenity, she asked Susana to go to the teachers’ lounge and take some time to calm down. Then she turned to another aide and asked her to stay with the students until Susana returned to the classroom. Finally, she addressed the students and instructed them to continue braiding the necklaces they had been working on before the incident. Once order was restored in the room, Amanda turned to Nicolás, who had remained in the clutches of the school aide, and said to him:

“All right, you and I are going to step out for a few minutes so that you can calm down and we can talk a little.”

Her efforts were pointless, however, because Nicolás was still so incensed that he could only babble a few incoherent threats at both Sebastián and the principal herself. Realizing that her approach was not working, and hoping to calm Nicolás down, Amanda turned to another school aide and said:

“Manuel, please go to Nicolás’ grandmother’s house. They live just a few blocks away, and they don’t have a phone. Please tell her to come for Nicolás, he has to go home.”

Upon hearing this, Nicolás began shouting again, and begged the principal not to call his grandmother, saying that she wouldn’t understand anything and that she would hit him when she found out what he had done. Amanda urged him to calm down, saying that she would explain the situation to his grandmother and wouldn’t allow her to hit him.

Meanwhile, as she waited for Nicolás’s grandmother to arrive, Amanda returned to the classroom and asked Sebastián for his version of what had happened. Sebastián explained that while they were working in art class, Nicolás had gone up to him, teasing him and telling him that his work looked awful, and then threw his beads onto the floor and pushed him as if to start a fight. Sebastián reported him to Susana, his teacher, who reprimanded Nicolás, but Nicolás nonetheless continued to bully Sebastián, who finally felt he had no other choice but to challenge Nicolás. And that was how the violent fight had broken out.

Amanda's conversation with Sebastián was interrupted by the arrival of Manuel, the aide, who had come to alert her that Nicolás's grandmother Olga was now waiting for her. As Amanda went out to the vestibule to greet Olga, it became clear to her that the elderly woman was annoyed about having her daily routine interrupted. Amanda invited Olga into her office, and as they walked inside, Olga caught a glimpse of her grandson and took the opportunity to chastise him:

“So what’s your problem? Don’t you know that school is for studying? When you get home we’re going to have it out, you and me. I’m going to hide your sneakers so you can’t go outside.”

A family history to take into account

It had been a year since Nicolás's maternal grandmother had been named his legal guardian. His mother had lost custody of Nicolás and his two brothers because of her drug habit. Despite Olga's advanced age, she had been appointed the legal guardian of the three young children, and was now responsible for their care and well-being. Olga was a hard-working woman who had toiled her entire life to raise her children, and now had to do the same with her grandchildren. She had very little formal education, social skills or emotional intelligence, and because of this she was quite unprepared to understand or own up to the many challenges facing her family. Her oldest daughter, Nicolás's mother, was a rebellious young woman who had always refused to heed the admonishments and advice of her mother, and she eventually turned her family's life into a complex saga filled with mistakes and problems, especially for her children.

Nicolás had arrived at the school on a referral from a program run by the Servicio Nacional de Menores (Sernam), the National Children's Service, because at his early age he already had a record of truancy, severe behavior problems and “street” habits. A diagnostic evaluation by a psychologist from the Sernam program determined that Nicolás had a learning disability resulting from an oppositionist and defiant emotional disorder. Since he had already been expelled from other schools and was in danger of dropping out entirely from the regular school system, it was recommended that he be placed permanently in a school for girls and boys with special educational needs.

Some surprises at school

Shortly after Nicolás arrived at the school, Susana and the other teachers began to realize that he did not exhibit the learning difficulties that the initial diagnosis had asserted. Quite the contrary: Nicolás was

quite talented in the area of math and mental calculations, and in reading comprehension as well. He just needed a bit of dedication and time to learn. The teachers also discovered that he had gotten used to getting kicked out of class every time he misbehaved, which had led him to assume that he would never learn anything, that he just couldn't do it. He had very low self-esteem and so every time he failed at some new academic challenge, he would get frustrated, abandon his efforts, and then blame his failure on others, lashing out at everyone and everything within arms' reach.

Amanda knew about all this, and observing Señora Olga's attitude confirmed her suspicions that the child did not have the support he needed at home. As Amanda explained what had happened, Señora Olga listened patiently but Nicolás, just a bit calmer, continued to protest. Amanda stepped in:

"I'm going to bring this situation to the attention of the Teacher's Committee tomorrow. We'll talk about what happened and make a decision about how Nicolás will be punished. For the time being, I have to ask you not to bring him to school tomorrow. We'll call you to let you know our decision," Amanda explained, drawing the conversation to a close.

Once the meeting was over, Amanda went to the teachers' lounge to see Susana.

"How are you feeling?" she asked Susana, concerned.

"A little better," replied Susana. *"What did Nicolás' grandmother say? Was she furious with him? Did she punish him?"*

"No," responded Amanda, *"She listened patiently when I told her what had happened, although she was clearly angry with him. She said she'd punish him as soon as they got home, that she was going to hide his sneakers so he couldn't go out to the street and play."*

"What's going to happen to Nicolás now?" asked Susana.

"We'll talk it over at the Teachers' Committee tomorrow, but for the meantime he won't be coming to school until we've reached a decision."

In a quavering voice, gazing at Amanda with red-rimmed eyes, Susana confessed,

"Amanda, I just don't know if I am prepared to work with these kinds of kids. I have always taught children with learning disabilities, but with kids who are much easier, never with kids like this. You are used to these kinds of kids, but I'm not...I'm really sorry but I think I'm going to have to look for another job."

For the first time, Amanda didn't know what to say.

Questions for reflection

1. This situation was difficult for Susana. What might Amanda do to keep Susana from quitting? Or should she let her go?
2. Nicolás was not angry at Sebastián, but nonetheless directed his rage at him through inappropriate behavior. What do you think would be an appropriate punishment for him?
3. A fast, direct response to unpleasant incidents is the quickest and perhaps easiest path that the principal might take to resolve the problem at hand. Should she take into consideration Nicolás' record and family history or not?
4. What can be done to help Nicolás reflect on the situation in such a way that he learns from it?
5. Self-fulfilling prophecies swing in both directions of the emotional pendulum: they can cause positive reinforcement of certain behavior patterns and a healthy expectation of success in some cases, but also a fear of failure and an unsustainable resistance to a seemingly pointless future. How might Amanda and Susana bridge the divide between these two extremes?

EDUCATION FOR ALL – OR ALMOST ALL?

Emma was the principal of a small government-subsidized private preschool for children with special needs. With a student population of 50 boys and girls, the school's mission was to help children overcome social and emotional difficulties as well as trouble with comprehension and expression in their native language, and to help them eventually transition into the regular school system. In addition to Emma, the school's professional team was comprised of an academic coordinator and four special education teachers. Most of the children came from single-parent families, with absentee fathers and mothers with relatively little education who worked as seasonal farm laborers or in factories. When the children were not in school they were usually cared for by a grandmother, older siblings, or neighbors.

Emma had just begun her sixth year as principal of the school, and she was proud of all that she had accomplished: the school functioned well and she always met her matriculation goal which, she knew, made the school's owner very happy. In addition, the students' parents always spoke well of the school, describing it as a welcoming, warm, non-threatening place.

Emma knew that the students' parents felt that they could count on her, and this, in turn, gave her a great sense of security. Her parents felt valued and listened to. They, in turn, acknowledged the excellent academic work of the school's teachers. She knew this was true because the mothers who came to the school in the hopes of registering their children there would tell her things like

"I'd really like to register my son at this school. I'm Miguel Solís's aunt, and I'm also María Vargas's neighbor—all her grandchildren have studied here and she's told me what a wonderful place it is. She recommended it to me because she said that here, the teachers really care about the children's progress."

Despite all this, as Emma sat down and booted up her computer, she sighed deeply, closed her eyes and thought, *Another day of this!* She felt overwhelmed and frazzled. She knew that the situation with Leonor, one of her teachers, was a time bomb, but there was little she felt she could do. Leonor was a relative of the school's owner, and had little incentive to improve her performance.

As she thought about Leonor and her students, Emma kept coming back to the same dilemma: what was more important for the teachers to be doing at her school? Were they to provide the kind of education that would only allow certain children to excel, and possibly leave other kids behind? Or was it their goal to achieve a certain homogeneity among all the kids, even if that meant that some wouldn't reach their full potential?

Getting things ready at the preschool

Emma had always taken care of every last detail in the school—from making payments to overseeing lesson plans. But now she was truly at a loss. She had spent the entire morning assigning teachers to the different grades and classes in the school for the upcoming year, and she could not shake that feeling of anxiety and confusion. She was trying to figure out where to place Leonor, who was her very best teacher. Leonor's students always learned a great deal but she was very unaffectionate with them and not particularly cordial with their parents, either.

Emma knew that the moment would come when she would be forced to explain her decision to the parents. And every time she thought of that moment, she felt like grabbing her car keys and just getting out of there.

For an instant she hoped against hope that Leonor would understand this problem that they had spoken about so many times before. She hoped against hope that Leonor would realize the effect that her approach could have on the small children in her care, that she would see how it might hinder their learning process.

Emma stared intently at her computer screen, searching for the answer, but it did not materialize. She was as unsure as ever. She tried reasoning with herself: if she gave Leonor the newest children, the three year-olds, some of them would cry nonstop and eventually their parents would withdraw them from her class, and Leonor would not attempt any kind of friendly strategies for convincing the parents to stay. The parents would take their kids out of the school and speak poorly of her, as well.

“On the other hand,” she reasoned with herself, “if I put her with the four year-olds, some of the parents will come to me to tell me that they don’t like her because she is so unfriendly and only cares about teaching what she has to teach.”

Emma finally decided to give Leonor the older students. Her plan was to pair Leonor with Ana, an assistant teacher who was very committed but also very warm with both students and parents. The principal looked up and, as if to confirm her decision, actually said to herself out loud: *“Maybe it will work; they could make a great pair: Ana is sweet and kind, and Leonor produces results.”*

As she said it she felt a bit guilty, because she knew how important affection is for children, especially those with language difficulties and limited psychosocial abilities. But in truth, there was not much she could do. She had already spoken with Jorge, the owner of the school, and his response had been clear and categorical:

“I am sure,” Jorge replied, “That my sister-in-law is an excellent teacher. We have never received a formal complaint about her teaching style or her results. People can be very sensitive sometimes, you know, but they forget after a while. And you have done an incredible job here, we have a full roster of students again this year. The Leonor issue really isn’t important, and if something happens I don’t doubt that you will know how to handle it. After all, you’ve been the principal here for six years...”

The situation was deeply troubling to Ema. She was concerned that Jorge was protecting Leonor and was not able to be objective regarding her job performance. But she also felt uncomfortable with how implicitly and fully he trusted her to resolve any and all problems.

The conflicts continue...

“I don’t care what your mother said. In the classroom, she’s not the boss—I am. So please sit down right now and get back to work. Otherwise you’re staying in at recess.”

Ema felt a shiver run down her spine as she heard Leonor. She stared at the TV monitor that showed what was going on in class, and observed how all the kids were working in silence, following the teacher’s instructions. Those who did not were called out by the teacher unceremoniously. Clearly, time was not wasted in Leonor’s classroom; her students worked very diligently.

This did not help answer any of Ema’s questions; yet again she couldn’t help but wonder... the kids at this school had many emotional needs that were not being met at home, and they came here to overcome their language difficulties. So how could they not be concerned about their emotional experience?

Ema knew that, once again, she was headed for trouble. Suddenly, as if to confirm her suspicions, that very day at the first recess she saw something that bothered her. Javier, one of Leonor’s students, fell while he was playing in the school courtyard. Leonor walked over to him, talking into her cell phone all the while, but the child ignored her and ran to Ana, the assistant teacher, who gave him a hug and tended to his bruises.

Despite all this, Ema truly believed that Leonor was an excellent teacher; her results proved this beyond a doubt. Leonor had superb academic credentials and was, in fact, the only teacher in the school who was capable of achieving progress with students who had fallen behind. Students clearly advanced and learned. Her most impressive results were always with students whose families were committed to the school and supported their kids. Yet, as principal, Ema wanted to be convinced of something else:

that not most but all of Leonor's students felt the same kind of security and trust when it came to their teacher.

At the end of the day, Ema decided to ask Leonor in for a talk—again.

“Ema, you can't imagine how overprotective his mother is! It was just a scrape on his knee. Ana cleaned it and I sent a message to the mother saying, ‘Your son fell and his knee was cleaned. Sincerely, Leonor’

Ema felt the urge to yell at Leonor and hug her at the same time. Instead, she just gritted her teeth and thought of all the times they had gone over this before. In a warm tone of voice, she said,

“All right, so you sent a message home, but you didn't explain what happened at all. Our parents need to feel that you are concerned about their children. That is the attitude we are known for here.”

Leonor refused to budge:

“All right, but the most important thing for these families is to support their children so that they learn with me. Other people, like Ana, can worry about other situations. My main responsibility is to ensure that the kids learn. The parents should be as concerned as their kids are about their homework, but most of the time I am the only one educating these kids—the parents couldn't care less!”

Ema knew that the sociocultural environment in the neighborhood close to the school made teaching even harder. Many of the parents had little education and worked as seasonal farm laborers, which meant that they didn't have time to come to the school, and much less worry about their kids' homework.

“Leonor,” Ema said, “Of course I value your hard work, but there are other things that are important, too. This is a special-needs school, our students come here with challenges and it we have to help them develop their social skills. They need to feel that you love them.”

Leonor rebutted. “But that's exactly it! They have problems, and I have to prepare them to overcome those problems so that they can get up to speed and eventually get into a regular school. That's what I worry about, and that is why I am paid and evaluated—to teach them, not to love them.”

“Leonor, one part of your job is about teaching curriculum content. The other part is about helping the kids to develop life skills. Showing your concern and affection for them might actually help you do your job.”

Leonor got up to leave. She looked at Ema straight in the eye, said a curt goodbye and closed the door behind her.

Good results

Each year, at the end of the first month of classes, the school opened its doors to the parents, to show them how their children were progressing. This time, as always, the presentations by Leonor's students were outstanding, demonstrating clearly that they had learned far more than what was required by their curriculum plans. It was impossible not to notice that her group had far outperformed the other class. Elisa, the teacher of the other class, gave Leonor a congratulatory hug and said:

"Amazing, Leonor! You're such a hard worker, tell me your secret, will you?"

"Thank you, Elisa. It's my job, my responsibility. My only secret is to focus on the important things. That's why we went to college."

Leonor was extremely proud of and happy about her good work, and as she received the accolades of her colleagues, she thought to herself, *Well... it seems I'm not doing as bad a job as some people say. The children have learned more than we thought they would. I am just going to keep on doing what I've been doing, because the most important thing here is that the kids learn everything in the curriculum.*

"Oh, yes! Congratulations, Leonor, excellent presentation," said Ema, greeting Leonor.

"Thank you, Ema. I knew you'd be glad to see how well my class has done."

After the brief interchange with Leonor, Ema approached Camila, a student of Leonor's with serious learning disabilities. Her mother, a farm worker, was unable to spend much time with her daughter, especially during the blueberry-picking season.

"Hi, Camila. Oh, you did such a great job! Congratulations!"

"I didn't do such a good job. I didn't speak very much, because I haven't learned everything I was supposed to."

"But I loved what you did! You were just like a real artist!"

"But Miss Leonor said that I don't know anything because I didn't study. That's why she only let me show my drawings."

Ema didn't know what to say. All she could do was give the child a hug.

Better off at home

“Ema, one of the parents from Leonor’s class is waiting to speak with you outside. It’s Camila’s mother,” announced Clarita, the principal’s secretary. “She is insisting that she talk to you and only you. If you want my opinion, she does not look very happy. She looks upset and angry.”

Ema looked up, surprised. Camila’s mother, at school at this hour of the day? She worked all day picking blueberries. Ema took a deep breath and told Clarita to let Camila’s mother in. As she opened the door, she caught a glimpse of a couple of teachers exchanging reproving glances.

“Tell me, Maria, how can I help you?” Ema asked, welcoming her in. “What brings you here? Aren’t you usually working at this time of day?”

“Miss Ema, I got special permission to take the time off. I’ve come to take Camila out of the school.”

“But why, María? Maybe there is something I can do to help you change your mind.”

“My daughter tells me that Leonor doesn’t care for her, and I believe her. That woman is always complaining to me that Camila doesn’t learn. She tells me that it’s because I don’t support her, but I can’t do more than I already do—I work very long hours; I have no other choice. If I don’t, I won’t be able to put food on the table. And you understand the situation with my husband. It’s been weeks since I’ve seen him, and this time I don’t know if he’ll be coming back...”

Ema felt frozen as she listened to Maria. What could she do for Camila? She knew that Leonor couldn’t understand or empathize with a situation like this.

“Miss Ema, the worst thing of all is that Camila doesn’t want to come to school anymore. She refuses to let me dress her in the morning. She says that she likes the school, but not her teacher.”

“All right, María, but then what will you do with Camila? What school will you put her in? There isn’t any other school that can take care of her needs like we can here.”

“No school at all...she’s better off at home. She’ll just stay with my mother. I can’t let my daughter stay here if it means she’s going to suffer like this.”

Ema felt awful. Guilty and awful, because part of her felt that this situation could have been avoided. But then again, she recalled the many times she had tried talking to Leonor, and the many times Leonor had communicated her own equally strong convictions.

Questions for reflection

1. What would you do if you were Ema?
2. Is Leonor's position legitimate?
3. What aspects of learning should Ema prioritize so that all the children in her school are able to learn?
4. What actions should Ema take to resolve the conflicts caused by Leonor's beliefs about teaching and learning?
5. Do you think that Leonor is, in fact, giving her students a good learning experience?
6. What leadership qualities should Ema think about developing in order to achieve the school's objectives?

THE ELUSIVE DECISION

For six years, Marcos had been principal of a small public elementary school serving some 300 students. Most of the children were from low-income families and were considered at-risk, though their performance on regional and nationwide standardized tests was outstanding.

Every day Marcos would walk down the street and watch all the students, everybody hurrying... fathers, mothers, sometimes grandfathers or grandmothers, holding their children by the hand, making sure they felt secure and loved. Marcos was happy that he lived near the school, and he enjoyed developing projects that would benefit the institution and the students in it. He had a good relationship with the teachers, the students, and the educational community in general. Despite the inevitable difficulties he faced, Marcos felt that he was in a good place: he had stability in his position, pride in his school, and motivation to do as much as he could for his students.

Nevertheless, he knew that the morning ahead of him would be complicated; he had a difficult meeting to run, and he'd thought over and over about what would be the best decision to make. He was usually quite a decisive person, very good at quickly adding up the elements for and against a situation, asking for technical input from his colleagues, and always trying to focus his decisions on what was best for the school and the students. But this situation had really thrown him for a loop. He was only hours away from having to make a decision and he still had no idea what to do. He felt an irresistible urge to smoke but knew that he couldn't. Anxiety took hold of him...

Two paths, two perspectives

Arnoldo and Josefina were in the reception area, not saying a word to each other. They were waiting to learn the decision that they would soon hear from their principal. They'd graduated from the same university and were only a few years apart in age, but their career paths had been completely different.

Arnoldo was about 45 years old, although he looked much younger. He had enjoyed a long and prestigious career as an elementary school math teacher, and now as a school counselor. He was known as a very warm person with excellent interpersonal skills. Marcos very grateful to him because when he'd arrived there was something of a movement against any new principal because, according to some teachers, the previous principal had been unfairly dismissed. At this very crucial juncture, Arnoldo had played a key role in encouraging the teachers, students and parents accept Marcos. This acceptance paved the way for him to implement a series of changes at the school. Arnoldo was a wonderful colleague and a

great supporter; he was a consistent source of help to Marcos in his work managing the school. How couldn't Marcos feel very grateful to such a sincere and loyal colleague?

"I won't forget this, Arnaldo. One day I'll repay you for your loyalty," Marcos used to say, smiling with satisfaction.

It was in this spirit that they went about putting together an excellent working team with the other young professionals who'd joined the school. The school was located in a small city, and Arnaldo fit into both the city and the school's culture without much problem. He had so many wonderful qualities: as a work colleague he was loyal; he did everything asked of him; he was responsible and well organized. However, it was clear that he didn't have much initiative to undertake new challenges. In the last two years Marcos had noticed that he was slacking off a bit. He didn't take the same care with his work, his attitude had become less engaged, and sometimes Marcos even felt that Arnaldo subtly took advantage of his loyalty and gratitude. Now, more frequently, Arnaldo failed to fulfill his obligations on time and was not actively contributing to the challenges of the school. He seemed to stand back, not getting involved in projects and activities aimed at improving the school.

Arnaldo always said the same thing:

"Relax, Marcos. The school's running itself at this point. Don't take on so much responsibility. Nobody will ever thank you for it; we're already doing all we can and nobody will pay you for more for it."

In some ways Arnaldo was right. It seemed that the education department was making more and more demands on the school all the time. Yet, at the same time, Marcos still believed that his work was important; it was something he felt, and the results were right there before his eyes, in the relationships he observed between teachers and students. At Marcos' school, there was most definitely a spirit to do more, to keep improving.

Josefina, for her part, was a couple of years older. She was a decisive woman who, with great sacrifice, had managed to get her degree, was constantly taking courses and seminars, and even published a few articles in education journals. Her family life was complicated: she had two children in college, many expenses, and her husband had left her a few years earlier, which meant that she alone was responsible for supporting her family. Despite all this, she was a proactive, hardworking teacher who, in a short amount of time, had managed to get a number of activities up and running, had applied for projects and was very motivated to take on projects. Marcos worked very well with her. Recently, moreover, she had completed a master's degree in management of school environment and student life.

“Marcos, we could do such great things. You know, I was just thinking...” was a typical phrase of hers, and it filled him with enthusiasm because she’d always follow up with a multitude of creative and practical ideas that they would start working on. Marcos and Josefina had a real synergy that allowed them to carry out projects that they initiated together.

In personal terms, both Arnoldo and Josefina had particularly valuable qualities but they definitely had two different ways of seeing things, two very different ways...

The start of the conflict

In September, just as spring was beginning, Marcos received a call from the department of education: he had to appoint a coordinator of student life by the first week of October. The education department wanted to draw attention to the issue and they wanted Marcos’s school to be a model for this new initiative. The school would receive a significant amount of money that would benefit the entire educational community, but the person in charge would be monitored very closely. A lot was on the line.

Marcos was also informed that since the law against school violence had recently passed, the school needed someone with expertise in that area, as well, to evaluate the school atmosphere and propose different psychosocial interventions and projects for the educational community. It was a very challenging position that would be highly meaningful in terms of professional advancement. There were resources to really do things, and the salary for the position was quite attractive. There was also the possibility of undertaking an internship abroad, and in general the education department had high hopes for the initiative. The education department stipulated that the person selected for this position had to already be employed at the school and had to have a good understanding of the context. Beyond that requirement, the decision was up to Marcos and his management team.

The meetings with the management team began, and together the group drew up a job description for the position that included both academic and work experience. They decided that the person who would occupy the position had to have, in addition to experience, certain personal qualities such as warmth, good interpersonal relations and proactivity. They knew that the education department would support Marcos’s decision. So it was left to the principal and his team to decide who best fulfilled the requirements for this very attractive job.

Within a week the management team began to circulate the news of this new opening and the job description. Marcos expected to receive several applications given that the job was very attractive,

the pay was excellent, and the hours flexible. He was surprised, to say the least, to learn that only two people were interested.

“Marcos, there are only two people interested in the position: Josefina and Arnaldo,” his secretary told him. That, he knew, was the beginning of his problems.

Conversations in the corridors

After he’d received their CVs, the team interviewed each applicant separately. Both Arnaldo and Josefina had two meetings each, in which the head of the technical pedagogical unit and the Vice Principal really went after them with questions. It was complicated because both had a similar grasp of legal issues, management and analysis.

Meanwhile, every time they saw him, Arnaldo and Josefina would ask Marcos for his support.

“Marcos, I hope that you take my record into account, but in addition I hope you think of my loyalty over the years. That’s what’s really important here, isn’t it? This job means a lot to me,” Arnaldo said to Marcos, subtly but firmly. Marcos barely managed a smile.

Josefina, for her part, said to Marcos,

“I hope you know how motivated I am to get this job. You and I both know that my work is my best calling card. I know that you’ll support me.”

Marcos felt a huge amount of pressure, and the date for the decision was approaching. At the same time, the education department continued to pressure him, saying that the choice had to be made as soon as possible.

One Friday afternoon, while it was raining—strange for that time of year when it should have been hot and sunny—the Vice Principal approached him and handed him some documents.

“Marcos, we have a big problem. On Monday we have to hand in the name of the person we want to appoint as head of student life in our school. The management team met with the head of the Technical Pedagogical Unit and we feel that this is a decision you have to make. The two candidates are both suitable. I think that Josefina would bring more to the role because she is excellent in designing and implementing projects, but the head of the Technical Pedagogical Unit, who knows the school inside and out, and is supported by the teachers, feels that we should

reward Arnaldo for his track record. We've talked this over and over, and we feel that you, as principal, have to make the decision. We'll support you no matter what your choice."

As he listened to the Vice Principal, Marcos began to feel strangely hot, his hands began to sweat and he felt overwhelmed with anxiety.

"But this is a team decision," he replied.

"Yes, but the team is divided and we don't want to get dragged down into endless discussions. We need you to make the choice."

Those words were what made Marcos fully realize that the weight of the decision would be on his shoulders. There was no way around it: he had to make a decision and communicate it to everyone involved.

All weekend long, Marcos analyzed the matter, looking at the situation from every angle possible, but it was just so difficult to decide, for he knew that no matter which candidate he chose there would be consequences. He scarcely slept, was irritable, and ate far too much, as though food could help assuage his anxiety.

When Monday arrived, Marcos walked with a firm step into his office. When he arrived, both Josefina and Arnaldo stood up and said hello. Marcos offered them coffee, to try to buy a little more time, and as they all sipped from their cups, Josefina turned to Marcos and said:

"Well, Marcos, we're all ears." The moment had arrived and Marcos had to tell them.

Questions for reflection

1. What criteria should the principal use in order to make his decision?
2. What should he do?
3. What are the implications of his decision?
4. How should he communicate his decision to the two candidates and to the educational community, which includes teachers, students, parents and guardians?
5. What strategies should the principal use to properly manage the frustration of the teacher (or teachers) not selected for the new position?

NO WAY BACK

In a suburban area there was a coed, non-religious public school that provided education for children from kindergarten through high school. The school was called El Ninos. Most of the families living in this school district fell into a low socioeconomic bracket, and lived in highly disadvantaged conditions. The overwhelming majority of the families regularly received aid from state-run programs aimed at eradicating poverty. The population at the school, close to 420 students, had been steadily decreasing over the past five years.

On the way to school

Pedro, a philosophy teacher and head teacher of the 11th grade, sat on the public bus headed for school. On this particular morning he was feeling a tremendous sense of satisfaction because he felt that his students were finally beginning to understand the meaning of 'living and acting according to the value of the truth.' He had lost track of how many times he had said to them, "Kids, a liar is far more easily caught than a thief." For good reason these kids had been his top concern this semester.

The return to teaching

Pedro often asked himself how these kids had come to be so special to him. Why, he wondered, did he care so much about them? Then he thought back to how he had arrived at El Ninos in the first place. It was simple, really: the country had been hit by an economic crisis, he had suddenly gotten laid off and had had to look for work. His friend Julio was the person who motivated him to go back to teaching. "I know you like teaching," Julio had said to him. "We all know there's no money in it, but it's a stable income at least." Julio had been very straightforward about El Ninos, describing it exactly as it was: a place with very disadvantaged kids, a number of unresolved internal conflicts, high turnover of both teachers and students, and a not-always-enjoyable working environment. Despite this, Pedro made up his mind and accepted the offer to return to work as a teacher.

The 11th grade class was very small, due to the dramatic decrease in registration that had occurred over the past five years in schools throughout the district. His class had only seven students, two girls and five boys. This meant that Pedro was able to quickly establish a solid, personal relationship with each of his students.

From the start it was clear that this group of students was especially perceptive, astute, imaginative and ingenious, qualities that came through in every one of their opinions and comments, some of which were innocent and some of which were fraught with double meaning. It was a heterogeneous group, too: four of the boys had gotten in trouble before for behavior problems, vulgar language, and attempting to instigate fights, conflicts and thefts in the school. Two of them had police records, as well. The only exception was Miguel, who stood out for his exemplary behavior. His goal was to enter the army, for which a good school recommendation was essential. The girls, Rosita and Camila, had good grades and behavior reports both in and out of school, and they were very active members of the local evangelical church.

For the more troubled students with police records, a certificate that confirmed their status as full-time students was a mitigating factor in the eyes of the judges who reviewed their cases; in practical terms it could mean a reduction in sentencing. Regular attendance at school might even allow them to avoid being sentenced entirely. For students like Rosa, Camila and Miguel, however, the school represented the very distinct possibility of breaking out of the cycle of poverty and marginality into which they had been born. They believed firmly that education, knowledge, cultural capital, respect and responsibility would open the doors to a brighter future for them.

The driver of the bus slammed on the brakes, yanking Pedro out of his reflections momentarily, but he quickly returned to his thoughts, this time pondering the personal motivations that prompted him to go to work every day. These included a teaching approach based on true concern for his students, building spaces for mutual trust, and strengthening such basic values as truth, respect and responsibility. This had become something of a leitmotif for him: he felt that the psychology and philosophy that he taught needed to have a practical, transformative effect on his students' lives. He recalled the many good moments they had shared already, and of how they had established bonds of trust, celebrated birthdays, ate breakfast together every Monday, and received accolades for a play they had performed. Nevertheless, his face grew cloudy as he recalled an unpleasant, disturbing incident that had occurred the previous day, and he glumly returned to reality.

He stepped down from the bus with a dark look in his eyes, and watched on indifferently as the bus trundled away without him. He crossed the street to the school, unenthusiastically greeted the kids in the courtyard, and went inside to the school library. As he sat down, he began to review his class material for the day but once again, more intensely now, the memory of that terrible moment of silence in his classroom came rushing back. He tried to push the thought away, but the memory persisted, resisting his efforts

The Incident

Pedro recalled the stony silence in the classroom. The students had looked at each other, their faces reflecting different degrees of emotion, concern, and attitude: in some students he saw feigned innocence, while in others he found unacknowledged guilt.

He couldn't erase a single detail of the previous day's events. He had entered the classroom and cheerily greeted his students, as always. Then he moved to his desk and put the class log as well as his briefcase, which contained his personal papers and other things, on the desk. Suddenly he realized that he needed to make some photocopies for that day's class, so he left the classroom for a few minutes. Before leaving, he told the students that he would be about five minutes. He recalled saying hello to a colleague in the hallway on his way to the photocopier, and while he waited for his material to be copied, Rebecca, the language teacher, came by. In an ironic tone of voice, she said:

"So how are your little angels behaving themselves?"

"Fine, better and better in fact. You just have to have patience with them, that's all."

"Well, if you want my opinion I think they're the most insufferable class. You see them three times a week—I have them every single day. Can you even imagine what that's like? Class with them is a three-ring circus, I practically have to use military discipline to get them to calm down."

"Don't you think that maybe you're being a bit hard on them?" Pedro asked.

"Listen, it's the only way. How else will they understand that this is a school? Those kids need rules and discipline! That's what I think, anyway, and you know what the principal thinks..."

The first question

Pedro fell silent after that last comment, gathered up his photocopies and returned to the classroom. The instant he walked in, however, he sensed something was amiss: there was an almost palpable sensation of nervousness among the students, as if they knew something was about to happen. He looked at his desk and saw that the class log, his folder and his briefcase had been moved slightly. In a calm, collected voice, he asked:

"What's been going on here, kids?"

“Well...we were looking at the class log, to see if the history teacher had put our grades in, that’s all,” answered Felipe, one of the more troublesome boys, both in and out of class.

“That’s it?” Pedro asked. “Why is my briefcase half open, then? Who opened it?”

“No, no...you left it like that,” said Carlos, another student that the teachers had long since identified as a troublemaker.

Pedro took a very deep breath, exhaled a long *“Hmmm...”* and proceeded to call attendance and jot a few things down in the class log. He noticed Miguel had his head down and was staring intently at the floor. Rosita and Camila seemed anxious for the class to get started. The room was unusually quiet, the atmosphere heavy, as the students darted nervous glances at one other. Pedro knew that something had happened, and he also knew that something was going to have to happen. The students themselves were anticipating it.

Pedro taught his class that day, and a few minutes before the bell rang, he decided to look through his briefcase. Instantly he realized that his things were not in their place. He saw his calculator, his date book, his logic book, his keys and his wallet. Though he hesitated for a second, he decided to go ahead and look inside the little pocket where he kept his money, and saw that there was no money there.

The sound of the bell once again pulled him out of his thoughts and recollections. As he lifted his head, he saw the school principal walking down the hall toward him to say hello.

“How are you doing, Pedro?” the principal asked. Before Pedro could respond, the principal added, “If you’re okay, then we’re great! Let’s keep doing what we’re doing,” and kept on walking.

By the principal’s tone of voice and the swiftness of his response, Pedro sensed that he knew that something was up. A flood of questions came to mind: How had he found out? Had Miguel, Rosita or Camila spoken to another teacher? Was he exaggerating? The principal had said *“Let’s keep doing what we’re doing.”* What could that mean? Was it a message implying that he should just accept the status quo at the school, or was he trying to encourage him to be bold, make his opinion known and propose some changes?

The teaching experience

Pedro walked down the hallway and remembered that other teachers had told stories of being robbed. Typically, the teachers chose to overlook these types of situations when they arose. He also remembered what one teacher had once said to him:

“We all know about the kids’ negative habits and behaviors. It’s our responsibility to not bring anything of value to the classroom.”

Pedro had always refused to buy into this kind of reasoning, but the incident had changed everything—this time he’d been the victim and his aggressors were the very students with whom he had established bonds of trust and affection. He knew he would have to take some kind of action but he didn’t know what. Silent, with his head down, he continued on his way.

Confused and saddened, Pedro decided to go to the cafeteria for a break. As he left the school building he breathed in a large gulp of fresh air, and revisited the moment that he had opened his wallet. His heart had started racing, and little beads of perspiration appeared on the back of his neck as he struggled to think of what to say to the kids. The first thing that came to mind was to tell them off—to say that it had been pointless to treat them with kindness, understanding and concern, as if they were educated people. He thought of telling them point blank the number of times he’d stuck up for them, about the many times he had defended them in front of other teachers. How could he possibly express the frustration and disappointment he felt?

As he relived the moment internally, he once again felt filled with impotence and shivers raced down his spine. How could this have happened? What did I do wrong? Why wasn’t I able to earn their trust and respect? Where did I go wrong? Was I out of touch with the reality of this kind of school? Should I give up trying to be a person who instills values in kids? Am I going to have to be like the other teachers and spend my time reprimanding and punishing them? Or should I pretend this never happened? Will I ultimately have to give up my personal mission, which I feel is an innovative approach to these kinds of kids?

Despite these troubling reflections, Pedro had somehow managed to calm down. Without revealing even a twinge of emotion, in a calm but categorical voice, he returned to his classroom and stood in front of his students. He said, in a calm voice:

“Alright. You have 15 minutes to discuss this amongst yourselves and, anonymously, return the money you took from my wallet.”

The students were not expecting this. In fact, they were so shocked they didn’t even utter a “Whaaaat?” in protest. None of the students claimed innocence. They all just looked at each other, perhaps gathering their courage. Only Beto, who spoke infrequently in the class, dared to stammer after a few long seconds,

“Are you sure that you had money in your wallet?”

The atmosphere in the room was thick, and Beto's attitude revealed how accustomed he was to being treated as a suspect. The boldest kids in the class looked at him as if he were presenting a new game, a trick, moving into new territory in this teacher-student relationship. Pedro's response, however, was swift:

"There was money in my wallet."

Beto egged him on:

"But are you sure, like really, really sure?"

Pedro ignored this, swallowed hard and turned to leave the classroom. Before closing the door he said:

"I'll be back in 10 minutes. I hope you return the money."

As he closed the door behind him, Pedro felt as though time had suddenly come to a halt. He walked away and wondered what on earth he would do if the money wasn't returned.

Questions for reflection

1. Considering the characteristics of the school and the students in Pedro's class, did it make sense to use a pedagogical approach based on affection and the creation of spaces for establishing trust? Why?
2. Do you believe that the normative, disciplinarian approach that Rebecca advocates is appropriate and pertinent in this context? Why?
3. What do you think of Pedro's decision to wait until the end of class to address the situation with his missing money?
4. What are the ways one might interpret the principal's remark of "If you're okay, then we're great! Let's keep doing what we're doing?"
5. What would you advise Pedro to do when he realized his money was missing?
6. After this incident with the students, what do you think Pedro next steps should be?

A QUESTION OF ETHICS: STUDENT VS. TEACHER

In a rural municipality in Chile's central region there was a school that served students from prekindergarten to 8th grade, with 700 enrolled students, 40 teachers and 35 teaching assistants. 80% of the students were highly disadvantaged, and according to the Ministry of Education, the school had a medium-low socio-economic ranking. One of the common denominators among the students was their very low level of cultural capital, which represented a constant challenge to the teachers.

Most of the students' parents were agricultural laborers who worked during the harvest and production seasons, which meant they lacked a stable income. 50% of the parents had not finished elementary school, and fewer than 3% of the parents held professional degrees.

The school principal, Ignacio, stared into the coffee cup he drank from every morning, searching for an answer to the problem he had to resolve that day. He thought back to all the conversations and events that had conspired to transform a seemingly typical problem into an extremely complex situation with potentially an even more complex solution, as different people began weighing in with their opinions and perspectives.

It all started one April morning as Ignacio returned from the schoolyard, as he did every day after overseeing the students' return to class following the bell that signaled the end of the morning recess. As he arrived at his office he found three 7th grade students, Isidora, Patricia and Pablo, impatiently waiting for him. As he approached them, Pablo stepped forward and spoke up, in a nervous voice:

"We've come here because we've just handed in a complaint against Ricardo, the art teacher."

Surprised, Ignacio asked why, and the students answered:

"During his class, he's always telling us stories that seem to have double meanings, he tells us things about his private life, saying he wants to set an example for us, so we learn certain things about how to behave. He doesn't take care of his personal appearance and some kids have seen him with his zipper down. We feel that he hints at situations that are inappropriate."

Upon hearing this claim, Ignacio ushered the students inside his office and asked them point blank:

"What do you mean by 'double meanings?'"

"Well, he tells us things about his marriage, he talks about his life and his personal family issues and how he has overcome them," Patricia answered, staring at the floor.

Alarmed, Ignacio pressed on:

“What do you mean when you say he had his zipper undone?”

“He had his pants zipper undone and you could see everything, some pubic hair...and some kids say they saw something more,” Isidora replied.

“Men wear underwear,” Ignacio replied.

“It seems like he doesn’t. You could see everything,” Pablo answered, looking Ignacio in the eye.

With over 30 years’ experience as an educator, Ignacio had served as principal at a number of different schools, and he had been principal of this school for seven years. Never, in his entire career, had he been witness to an accusation such as this. He was shocked and anxious as he pondered all the doubts and questions the students’ accusation had prompted. At this very moment, Chile was at an especially sensitive juncture with regard to this matter, due to a wave of accusations alleging sexual abuse on the part of teachers and people who worked in schools. Every day, the media brought new sex abuse cases to light, both in Chile and around the world. Ignacio knew that many of these allegations were false, but he also knew that some were likely true. He didn’t know whether to believe the students or confront the teacher directly.

In need of a solution

Taken aback by the students’ story, Ignacio held an emergency meeting with Pedro, the school’s general inspector, who was on very good terms with both the students and staff. Pedro and the inspector were responsible for monitoring and enforcing the school’s Rules and Regulations Handbook, which meant that they were also in constant contact with parents. For this meeting Ignacio also called in the school psychologist, the social worker and the head of the Technical Pedagogical Unit (TPU), the school’s curriculum expert.

Once everyone was assembled, the principal explained the case in detail and asked for suggestions that might help him determine the right course of action to take. He also asked for discretion. After listening carefully to what Ignacio described, the general inspector said:

“This is a very troubling, delicate situation. Students will invent absolutely any excuse to get out of class. It’s all too easy to tarnish a teacher’s reputation; you can’t believe everything these kids say. These types of students should be punished--severely,” he declared, and angrily added, “We should be more selective with the students who enter this school.”

Marysol, the school guidance counselor, spoke up in a concerned voice:

“Our school is an inclusive school. It welcomes diversity and, to a certain degree, this type of problem is inevitable. If we have selective admissions, we will be taking away opportunities for many students whose only chance for getting ahead is this school.”

Ignacio looked at everyone present, took a deep breath, and in a grave voice said:

“This is indeed a very delicate situation, not only with regard to Ricardo and the implications for him professionally. We might be facing a possible violation of rights or abuse, and that could be from the teacher to the students or from the students to the teacher.”

Diego, the head of the Technical Pedagogical Unit, was a man with many years of experience in the school. Clearly concerned about the situation, he said:

“Ricardo is irreproachable professionally, he does everything that is asked of him on the job, and throughout his career he has received nothing but praise. There are many students who can vouch for him in that vein. On a personal note, I’d like to add that when I’ve visited him in class I have seen great quality in his work; he knows how to manage the kids.”

Marysol began to look uncomfortable, and spoke up again:

“But these students—they may be a little challenging, but they are good students. They don’t have learning problems. They have no reason to make this story up!”

The psychologist, who had been silent up to this point, now joined in the conversation:

“I think this is a very tricky situation. It’s our duty to investigate so that we can determine whether the students’ accusations are true, either fully or partly. We must also be fair to the teacher and learn his side of the story. Would it be possible to have an interview with him? We need to be very clear about his version of the events and attempt a mediation that will give us a full picture of the behavior of both parties.”

Pedro, visibly angered by this, replied:

“Fine, but we can’t just ignore the kind of families we have in this school and the background they come from. Many, many times I’ve seen students make up stories to avoid going to class or to damage a teacher’s reputation. We must be careful with this investigation. You never know—some students and/or parents might present false accusations in the hope of some kind of financial gain.”

Looking for answers

Ignacio pondered the idea of starting an investigation. He honestly didn't know if he believed the students' story. Ricardo had always been an excellent teacher; moreover, he had been at the school for many years. Ignacio had never heard an accusation of this type against him. Ignacio wondered if what had happened had simply been a careless mistake, or if in fact, the students had concocted the story to obtain some sort of financial gain. Was it really possible that Ricardo had done something so unethical?

After thinking about and considering the case from all the perspectives raised at the meeting, Ignacio decided to start an investigation, to be supervised by the general inspector and the psychologist. It would involve, quite simply, asking other students and teachers, in private, about what had happened. He asked Ricardo not to come to school the next day in order to shield him from any comments from students and parents.

The investigation begins

Ignacio called Ricardo to his office to discuss the allegations. After hearing what the students had said, Ricardo responded, with anger in his voice:

“All right, I think we have to get some things straight here. It's true that I had my zipper undone, but it was just a careless mistake and there was no inappropriate intention on my part. As soon as I realized, I turned around and zipped up my pants. A few kids made some jokes, which I just ignored. And I'd like to add that it is not true that I talk to the students about my private life in class. I was only trying to give them examples about respecting others.”

Finally he said:

“Look, I am a teacher with over 30 years of excellent professional performance. The students involved are negative ringleaders; they are doing this to harm me and my professional reputation. I think that they have ulterior motives, as well.” Looking the principal in the eye he added: “I absolutely deny all the accusations.”

Ignacio drew in his breath and trying to sound calm, responded:

“Ricardo, I hear what you are saying but we must investigate this matter. You are not to come in tomorrow to teach class. We will take measures based on the information that the general inspector and the psychologist gather. I suggest that you don't speak about this with anyone, and

I urge you to remain willing to give us the information we ask of you. It may be necessary for you to have a talk with the students, in some kind of mediation situation.” Ricardo agreed to not come to school the next day.

People start to get involved

The next day, Claudia, Patricia’s mother, appeared at the principal’s office to discuss her concerns regarding what her daughter had told her about Ricardo. She told the principal that she was certain her daughter was telling the truth because her daughter never made up stories about things that went on at school.

“I think Ricardo should not be allowed to continue teaching. He will obviously take revenge on my daughter, and that will affect her grades.”

Ignacio responded, “Please, Claudia, I want you to trust me here. We’re investigating the situation and we are prepared to take whatever actions are necessary depending on what we find.”

“I certainly hope so, Ignacio. Nobody, including you, ever moves a finger at this school. And if you don’t investigate, I will take the matter to the police.”

News about the accusation spread quickly to several of the teachers at the school. The next morning, a group of them appeared at the principal’s office to show their support for Ricardo and to demand punishment for the students who made the accusation. Diego, the technical pedagogical chief, led them into the office abruptly and angrily:

“Ignacio, you have to expel Isidora, Patricia and Pablo. You have to protect us from this kind of arbitrary and malicious accusation.”

Still Ignacio held firm and told them that the investigation needed to be fair and needed to be completed before any action would be taken.

The next day, Ignacio received another visit: it was Bruna, Ricardo’s wife. She had come to drop off a medical disability certificate for her husband, signed by a psychiatrist. She informed the principal that Ricardo had decided to opt for an early retirement because of a psychiatric disability. This new and sudden information made the principal wonder even more about what had really happened, and what was really going on.

In Chile, teachers' retirements are very meager and do not allow retirees a decent living. Those who retire with a psychiatric disability can receive a slightly better retirement payment. With this in mind, a whole host of new questions now raced through the Ignacio's mind: Was it possible that all of this had been planned to establish a precedent for early retirement? Or was it possible that the alleged depression was real, and had been brought on by the pressure experienced by teachers who work in vulnerable contexts?

As he mulled over the different angles of this very complex situation, Ignacio found himself in a real quandary. There were so many people demanding a response from him, and each of them had his or her own particular stake in the matter. On one hand, he felt it was his duty to protect his teachers. On the other hand, he believed it was important to defend and respect the position of the students and the parents. Ignacio knew that the parents felt that the school needed to respond to the students' accusations. He was also aware that the children felt uneasy. He just couldn't decide what steps to take. According to the general inspector, it was not unheard of for parents and students to try to tarnish the school or the teacher's name in the hope of securing financial gain in the form of compensation.

Questions for reflection

1. What would you do in this situation?
2. Would it be enough to make a thorough investigation of the alleged behavior reported by the students and take the most drastic measures possible to put an end to this type of situation? How would you direct the investigation?
3. Should Ignacio try to regain Ricardo's trust? If so, how would you do it?
4. Is it advisable for the principal's office to inform the entire staff about these kinds of situations, to avoid misinterpretations and to allow the entire school to reflect on the matter as a group?
5. How would you address the parents, the students, Ricardo and the other teachers in the school?

TEACHING NOTES

TEACHING NOTES INTRODUCTION

Curriculum Materials to Enhance the Education of K-12 School Directors Who Aspire to Become Elementary and Secondary School Directors

In Chile, literacy rates are high and the pace of change in schools must accelerate to match the increasing demands of the global economy of today's society. Nowadays, students need not only to be literate, but also must learn to work collaboratively, to solve complex problems, to think critically, and to communicate with different kinds of people.

In January 2010, Chile became the 31st country to join the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). As a member, Chile has committed to the OECD mission of improved economic policy making and providing the highest health, education, and employment opportunities to its citizens. This means new investments in education at all levels. Chile has made progress in this regard so that its spending on education as a proportion of GDP is 6.9% as compared to the OECD average of 6.1% (OECD, 2011, p. 232).

Major reforms will be necessary to improve the conditions that influence student learning. Ultimately, true reform will be won in classrooms and in local schools by individual teachers and directors who have access to exemplary professional development programs. These programs must offer practitioners a deep and thorough understanding of leadership, organizational structure, assessment systems and strategic planning to open windows on their educational practice and take schools towards continuous improvement.

The School Director

The school director is perhaps the most important individual positioned to lead this change for children. Previous roles for directors as managers of the administrative area of buildings needs revision in order to meet the new demands that face education and students in today's world. The new directors for the 21st century must not only manage administrative tasks and hold high expectations for children, teachers, and the community; they also must support and lead teams of teachers to teach new skills in innovative and effective ways.

In order to be successful and thrive in this era, school directors need outstanding training and support. The Chilean Ministry of Education has emphasized the need to focus these resources toward school director development.

The Book

This book of 15 cases represents a unique and compelling project cosponsored by the Ministry of Education in Chile and the Harvard University David Rockefeller Center of Latin American Studies to provide exemplary materials for study programs, intended for those preparing to be directors and for experienced school directors.

Our work involved training school directors in the development of these materials and the subsequent delivery of 30 drafts that were submitted to an extensive editing process that ultimately resulted in having 15 cases produced both in English and Spanish.

This book is for those vested with the responsibility to educate and support school principals. Each one of its cases represents a “trainer of trainers” model. To increase the impact of these materials, Professors Katherine K. Merseeth and James Honan of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA intend to help higher education faculty to implement these materials in effective ways.

The Contents and Use of the Book

The specific teaching materials included in this book are called teaching cases. When combined with a particular pedagogical approach called the “case method of instruction”, these materials offer the potential to enliven the education of directors and other practitioners in multiple sectors of education. Building upon the historical success these materials and methods have enjoyed in the United States, in professional fields as diverse as business, law, medicine, and social work, there is great promise for the use of these materials and pedagogy in the education of directors (Merseeth, 1991, 1996, 2013; Shulman, 1992; Sykes, 1989).

The situations described in these cases represent actual experiences of school directors in Chile. This is an important and unique advantage of these materials because they depict the reality of both rural and urban schools in Chile. Each case is bounded—it is specific, often delineating a particular

dilemma or tension that demands exploration and resolution by the director. The cases include issues of school structure, government policies, human resources, finances, and philosophical beliefs that require delicate and wise decision making in order to lead schools effectively. Because these issues are complex and often intertwined, the printed representation of the cases enables school professionals to examine these influences and issues more deeply and carefully than is usually the case in the course of everyday practice.

In the view of researchers, cases and case-based instruction stand to help participants develop important problem-solving, leadership, decision-making and implementation skills. Case readers learn to diagnose problems, recognize multiple influences and perspectives, and engage in the exercise of suggesting and analyzing possible solutions and courses of action. Cases also offer an opportunity for inquiry in which participants can discuss various courses of reform and practice analysis in a safe environment before moving out into the “real” world. In this way, directors can “try out” ideas and approaches, often building new understandings by listening to the interpretations and suggestions of others in the discussion.

What Are Cases and Case Methods?

What is a case, exactly? Though definitions differ, and sometimes widely, the cases in this volume are narratives that attempt to describe as completely as possible, practice in actual schools and communities across Chile. Cases seek to present multiple perspectives of the school and may include specific comments and observations from the point of view of teachers, students, administrators and community members. Good cases bring a “chunk of reality” into the higher education classroom to be examined, explored and utilized as a window on practice that case discussants can use to learn, study and practice thoughts on leadership. The cases in this volume do not offer a critique or analysis of the situation—that is the responsibility of the reader.

The term ‘case method’ refers to the way in which cases are used; a variety of approaches may be employed. Methods may include individual reading of cases for reflection to deepen one’s awareness of different strategies, or opportunities to engage with others in an active and lively analyses of practice. Case methods may include case discussions led by facilitators or debates with no specified discussion leader. Whatever the approach, it is important to stress that “cases” and “case methods” are closely related.

Types and purposes of cases can differ, sometimes significantly. Case purpose in professional education tends to fall into three general categories: as exemplars to portray, study, and emulate best practices; as dilemmas or conundrums to practice skills of analysis and action-taking; and as reflective pieces

intended to deepen personal thought and insight (Merseeth, 1996). This particular volume includes cases intended to engage the participants in the second category: as opportunities to practice analysis and decision making skills. As such, these materials attempt to portray a balanced point of view, offering multiple perspectives and experiences of the various participants, helping the reader understand different points of view and tensions that the protagonist in the case must confront. Because of this representation, cases ideally foster active discussion about difficult, complex, dilemma-ridden situations. Specific answers and solutions are not presumed.

A Guide to Case Discussion Participants

Case-based discussion classes and those of more traditional lecture or seminar format differ in significant ways. For example, in case-based classrooms it is essential that participants take an active role. They are not passive, waiting for the answer from the professor. For effective learning to occur, case discussants must complete any pre-case exercises and read the case thoroughly before the beginning of the discussion. Individuals should come to the discussion with a thorough familiarity of the story line, the actors, the issues, and the dilemmas presented in the case. Learning through case discussions is facilitated by voicing ideas and understandings of the case and by through listening to the interpretations of others. Thus, participants must not only be familiar with the material, they must be ready to offer their ideas, reflections, assumptions and suggestions for action. However, listening is as important as speaking in a case discussion. A productive learning community is one in which participants build on the contributions of one another to create deeper and more robust understandings of the situation. During the entire process, participants must try to be reflective and internalize ideas, as well as being conscious of what is happening around them. Learning by the case method can be an extremely powerful and enjoyable way to gain new knowledge and to grow as a professional.

A Guide to Case Discussion Facilitators

The skills required to effectively lead case discussions are multiple and complicated. First and foremost, facilitators must adopt the mindset that recognizes that the case discussion facilitator is not the 'sage on the stage' but rather a 'guide on the side.' The participants lead the discussion and it is the facilitator who only gently steers the conversation with occasional clarifying questions or suggestions. It is not the role of the facilitator to hold the "right answer." Instead, it is the responsibility of the discussants to argue and debate various courses of action and evaluate each with respect to possible outcomes. Such a role for

the discussion leader suggests a change in many of the traditional assumptions about the role of faculty and students in higher education.

In case discussion, the facilitator must be extremely familiar with the details of the case—the facts—about characters, context, issues and dilemmas. This is important because it is the role of the facilitator to keep the discussion grounded in the case itself in order to optimize learning. In addition, the facilitator must manage the discussion process to ensure that all voices are heard and that the discussion carefully considers multiple ideas and points of view. Often a facilitator will keep track of comments and discussion by making notes on the board where all participants can be reminded of the discussion process.

It is exciting to bring actual cases from Chilean classrooms into the higher education programs that seek to educate current and future educators who perform the critical role of school director. We trust that those who use these materials will find them as satisfying and helpful as we have in developing them.

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Cambridge, MA USA
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TEACHING NOTES AGENDA

TEACHING NOTES BY TOPICS

Leadership: Dilemmas Regarding the Purpose of Schools

- Civic (mis)education
- Cultural integration: A challenge inside the classroom
- Two perspectives
- Training for work and training for life
- The role of the school: What are the limits?

Working with Multiple Stakeholders Including Boards

- Conflicting approaches
- The sound of a bell

Leading Teacher Teams and Groups of Teachers

- Quality for all or for some?
- Building a path for improving school climate and culture

Leading Teachers

- Inclusive education: Success for all or success for some?
- A matter of vocation
- Education for all – or almost all?
- The elusive decision
- No way back
- A question of ethics: Student vs. teacher

Leadership: Dilemmas Regarding the Purpose of Schools

TEACHING NOTE: CIVIC (MIS)EDUCATION

Case Synopsis

Ernesto Díaz worked as principal in a non-denominational private school, grades k-12 for approximately 1300 students. Most of the students came from middle to upper-middle class families. Ernesto employed 60 teachers and had an executive committee that assisted him in making decisions and implementing projects aimed at helping the students to achieve academic excellence. At the monthly meeting of the Parents' Assembly, Ernesto was asked by a parent, "What is the school's position regarding the secondary school students' decision not to attend class during the student protest planned for next week? Ernesto replied that when the students asked for permission to take part in the nationwide protest march, the school said no because they did not want the students to miss instructional time. However, he felt conflicted with his answer and wondered what he would do if they participated despite his injunction and what he would say to the parents if this happened. He was in a tight spot because he truly believed that one of the most important challenges for students in the 21st century was to develop critical thinking and the ability to express those thoughts.

Overview

This case presents a difficult dilemma for the principal who must weigh student safety and in class learning with participation in a country-wide protest about which some students and parents may not agree.

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. Given the personal nature of this dilemma, ask participants to reflect on their own leadership experiences and whether they had ever needed to institute a policy with which they did not agree.
2. Role playing would be effective approach to surface the arguments and the dilemma presented in this case. Ask participants to play the roles of Ernesto, Germain and Ernesto's son. Is there any middle ground to be established between protesting and not protesting?
3. A leader's role often requires negotiation skills. How would you as the school leader negotiate with the students? And what would you say to the parents?

TEACHING NOTE: CULTURAL INTEGRATION: A CHALLENGE INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Case Synopsis

This case focuses on the experience of an academic coordinator at a technical-professional school enrolling students from 7th to 12th grades. The academic coordinator is attempting to improve the relationships between students from Chile and students from Perú (28% of the overall student body). Following a few small initial steps/strategies, the academic coordinator proposes to the school principal that an Expo Perú be created – as part of this proposed initiative, Chilean and Peruvian students would work together on projects to disseminate information about and celebrate Peruvian culture at the school.

Overview

This case centralizes on a potentially controversial initiative proposed by an academic coordinator to improve the relationships between Chilean and Peruvian students in a school with a high proportion of Peruvian students. The fundamental question is to what degree should schools reflect the culture, ethnicities and/or nationalities of their students? Is it the role of schools to remain neutral or should they work to acknowledge and emphasize diversity?

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. Cultural sensitivities are important in leading a school. How can a leader work to respect all cultural values without alienating one group's values? If you were the principal of this school, what would you do? Why? How do you develop a culture of mutual respect in a school?
2. Launching a public initiative like Expo Peru will be labor intensive and challenging. Is it worth it? What would success for the Expo Peru initiative look like?
3. How important is the support of the principal in the Expo Peru project? Should the academic coordinator pursue the idea without the approval of the principal?

TEACHING NOTE: TWO PERSPECTIVES

Case Synopsis

Juan is the new principal of a local public school serving students from the 1st to 8th grade; 100% of the students were of indigenous ancestry. Despite the existence of a Ministry of Education decree requiring cultural celebrations and related activities, parents and teachers at the school were reluctant to engage actively in such initiatives, preferring instead to focus on subjects and issues that were seen to be more useful and relevant to the current context and concerns of students. Juan reached out to teachers and parents at the school to attempt to better understand these conflicting perspectives.

Overview

This case illustrates the challenges associated with clarifying roles and responsibilities in important curricular and co-curricular decisions in schools. The dilemma facing the principal in this case is how to balance sharply different perspectives and points of view regarding the issue of cultural inclusion and ancestral culture.

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. What should Juan do? Why?
2. What specific role should educational authorities (municipal and national), the school principal, teachers, parents and students play in making decisions in this type of situation?
3. Is it appropriate to ask a community to cultivate acceptance of their ancestral culture as part of a school's curricular and co-curricular activities?
4. How should Juan handle the suggestion by certain families that the inclusion of ancestral rituals was the equivalent to worshipping 'false gods'?

TEACHING NOTE: TRAINING FOR WORK AND TRAINING FOR LIFE

Case Synopsis

Sergio, an experienced teacher, recently became the principal of a government-subsidized private secular school located in an urban municipality that was highly disadvantaged. The school, with a population of 1,000 boys from 1st to 12th grade, had as its purpose to provide an academic education with values that would enable the students to acquire the necessary skills to find jobs and contribute to their families' quality of life. As a new principal, Sergio faces resistance from the staff around issues of discipline.

Overview

The role of the school head is the major topic in this case, especially for a new school head. To what degree should changes be made and how important is discipline in this school? The case offers a good opportunity to discuss the culture of a school and how, if necessary, it might be changed.

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. Entering a new school, what steps should a school leader take initially? How soon should a school leader contemplate change?
2. Should a new school leader directly confront those who challenge him/her? How?
3. What should a new principal do to address prior tensions among staff? Ignore them, engage staff individually, or collectively?

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL: WHAT ARE THE LIMITS?

Case Synopsis

Iván is a science teacher and technical head of a preschool to 12th grade school run by a Catholic congregation. Because of his reputation and good work, Ivan is contacted by a family foundation and offered a director's position in another, much larger vocational-technical education school in another city. This new school educates at-risk students. As a new leader, Ivan runs into a conflict with the board about whether some students should enter university instead of vocational positions upon graduation.

Overview

This case opens up the question of the purpose of schooling. With a special population, is it appropriate to direct them into a vocational track rather than a university track? Also who should have the power to decide? The school director, the individual students and their families, or the board?

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. Ivan finds himself in conflict with his board about the purpose of schooling for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. How should one decide what is best for students?
2. What is the role of a school director to uphold the mission of a school, even if he does not agree with it?
3. At what age should students enter a technical-vocational school vs a college preparatory school?
4. What is the role of schooling in society?

Working with Multiple Stakeholders Including Boards

TEACHING NOTE: CONFLICTING APPROACHES

Case Synopsis

Francisco is chief academic officer of a government-subsidized private school located in a working-class neighborhood in a southern city in Chile. The school focuses on providing an excellent education based on values, inclusion and teaching respect. Many special education students are included at the school.

Rita, a first grade teacher with much experience and success at the school is having a particularly difficult time with her class because there are so many students with special needs in the class. She also observed that out of 45 students, 8 did not meet the mandatory age requirement for first grade. She was requesting an aide so that other children in the class weren't held back.

Francisco took the request to the leadership and the owner denied the request for financial reasons.

Overview

This case reflects the tension that a public school administrator faces trying to balance the needs of students and teachers. While it is important to accept all students and to teach them in different ways depending on their needs, can this approach reach a natural limit and exhaust the capabilities of even the most talented teacher?

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. If there is no money for an extra teacher, what should Francisco ask for?
2. If you are a manager in the middle between teachers and owners, what is your role?
3. To whom does Francisco owe his allegiance: the teacher, the parents, the students, the owner?

TEACHING NOTE: THE SOUND OF A BELL

Case Synopsis

100% of the graduates of the Los Maitenes School, located in a small town in the center of Chile, attend higher education institutions upon graduation. Test scores for the 400 coed students are exemplary. Each member of the school's executive team has enjoyed a high level of autonomy in making decisions about their unit until the head found it necessary to overrule a decision made by the elementary coordinator. Questions are raised about the degree of autonomy for teachers and the smooth running of the entire school.

Overview

This case explores the dilemma of accountability and autonomy. To what degree is conformity necessary for a smooth functioning school and what role should a school head play in achieving coherence in a school, particularly one that has been functioning well. Is a change necessary?

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. School directors often espouse and attempt to enact faith and trust in their subordinates. However, when a subordinate makes a decision that goes against the culture of the school, the school head must intervene. What is the best way to do this?
2. When you disagree with the decision of a staff member who is your subordinate, what do you do?
3. When is it important to handle such issues privately. Is it ever appropriate to discuss decisions in public?
4. If a staff member is openly defiant to you, what do you do?

**Leading Teacher Teams
and Groups of Teachers**

TEACHING NOTE: QUALITY FOR ALL OR FOR SOME?Case Synopsis

Maria was the principal at a large pre-K-12 coeducational, government-subsidized private school located in a very disadvantaged neighborhood of southern Santiago that was known for its high volume of drugs and weapons trafficking. Despite these challenges the school had been improving in its national exam results until the current year when the scores fell. Maria led a conversation with her teachers exploring the question of why the scores fell.

Overview

School directors must set a tone of accountability without being overly critical of teachers, if the teachers appear to be working hard. How can a principal support teachers and still demand high results? Teachers also must understand their role in the overall well-being of the school and that both individual classroom results matter as well as overall school results. The case offers a nice opportunity to talk about the culture of a school.

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. What is the impact of poverty on learning? Must one solve the conditions of poverty before one can address academic learning goals?
2. Should students, who have severe behavior and emotional issues and who lack motivation and uninvolved parents, be allowed to stay in school and disrupt the learning of others? What is the school's obligation to these children?
3. How should a principal balance the demands made by difficult students on teachers with the teachers' well-being? Should difficult students be removed?
4. Does excellence need to be sacrificed for equity and a commitment to serve all students, regardless of background?

TEACHING NOTE: BUILDING A PATH FOR IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE AND CULTURE

Case Synopsis

This case highlights the challenges involved in improving school culture through the modification of rules and regulations. A school principal who has been in her role for six months convenes a special meeting of the school's teachers to discuss possible changes/improvements to policies and procedures regarding student discipline. The principal and teachers engage in a contentious discussion of possible punishments for student discipline infractions. A specific proposal is offered to ask students who break existing rules and regulations to sweep the schoolyard and clean up the school as a punishment. Several teachers were concerned that this approach to punishment might not be an optimal strategy to encourage students to embody the school's core values and desired behaviors. The deliberations continue with no obvious resolution.

Overview

This case highlights the challenges faced by a schools director and teachers in setting the rules and discipline policies that reflect the values and culture of the school. Deciding upon the nature of the discipline offers opportunities to decide whether rule infractions are to be punished or used as an opportunity to teach about community values and respect. If a school wishes to teach respect, is a punitive punishment the appropriate action?

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. Leading discussions of challenging issues is an important role for school leaders. How would you evaluate the performance of the principal as a leader in this case? Do you think convening a special meeting of teachers to discuss the issue of student discipline a good idea? Why or why not?
2. Rules and Regulations convey a great deal about a school's culture and climate. Changing cultures of school can be a slow and challenging process.
3. What should the principal do to move the conversation of student discipline forward? And how does the principal respect the views of the teachers?

Leading Teachers

TEACHING NOTE: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: SUCCESS FOR ALL OR SUCCESS FOR SOME?Case Synopsis

This case focuses on the issue of inclusive education and the role parents and teachers play in how students with special needs are best supported. A group of parents at an elementary school in a small, semi-rural village requested a meeting with the school's principal to discuss concerns that one of the school's teachers was disregarding the needs of their children by being overly concerned about special-needs students. When the principal of the school communicated these concerns to the teacher in question, the teacher expressed strong disagreement with both the diagnosis of the problem and the proposed modifications in classroom practice.

Overview

This case focuses on the issue of inclusive education and the role parents and teachers play in how students with special needs are best supported inside the classroom. It raises the challenge of how trying to meet the needs of all children can sometimes result in no children's needs are met. What is realistic to expect of a teacher with 30 students in a class?

Case Discussion Suggestions

Inclusive Education presents a significant challenge for teachers. Finding an approach to support teachers is very important.

What are the most effective ways for a school leadership team and its teachers to develop and execute an effective inclusive education strategy?

Parents also have an important role to play in determining the best approach to support their children. How can a school best communicate with parents about inclusive education?

With students, teachers and parents, data use can be powerful. Assessment and Evaluation.

How best can data be used? Is the use of data always helpful? When might it not be helpful?

How might this data be used to foster collaboration among teachers, parents, and students?

Taking action is an important role for the school leader. What should the principal and the teachers in this case do next? Why?

TEACHING NOTE: A MATTER OF VOCATION

Case Synopsis

Amanda had been the principal of a government-subsidized private school that enrolled students, ages 6-26 who were diagnosed with mental retardation, autism, brain damage and Down syndrome. Many of the students come from poverty and have suffered from detachment that led the children to manifest serious behavior problems. Breaking up a fight between two students, the principal needed to decide how to handle the academically gifted but emotionally disturbed perpetrator. The homeroom teacher of the students was new and unable to control the class

Overview

This case explores the delicate balance a school director must strike between supporting a new teacher and ensuring that learning is occurring in every classroom. The emotional state of the teacher must be taken into consideration. The case illustrates the delicate balance often facing effective school leaders.

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. This case presents the dilemma of caring for the individual student and the collective well-being of a class. At what point must one sacrifice one for the other?
2. How can a principal best support a new teacher who is having trouble with discipline in the classroom? Should the principal always remove difficult students?
3. How can a principal determine during the hiring process whether a new teacher will successfully manage a class? What kinds of questions should be included in the interview?
4. Is it possible that some students are so emotionally disturbed that they should not be educated in a school?

TEACHING NOTE: EDUCATION FOR ALL – OR ALMOST ALL?

Case Synopsis

Emma is the principal of a small government-subsidized private preschool for children with social and emotional difficulties who also have trouble with comprehension and expression in their native language. One of her teachers, Lucero, is extremely successful in helping students with academic skills, but she does not address the students' social and emotional needs. Some parents feel she is cold and uncaring. Emma wonders whether Lucero, who is the sister-in-law of the owner, should continue teaching at the school.

Overview

This case presents some of the interpersonal challenges of being a school leader. How do you assess a teacher who achieves high results in one aspect of the teaching job, but fails in another area. The principal must assess which is more important and how to change a teacher's behavior.

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. Despite several conversations about the emotional needs of children, Lucero insists that it is not the teacher's role to "love" the children. Do you agree?
2. Is academic achievement more important than meeting the socioemotional needs of special education students?
3. How should Emma handle the complaints of the parents? Should she report them to the school owner? How?

TEACHING NOTE: THE ELUSIVE DECISION

Case Synopsis

Marcos was principal of a small public elementary school serving some 300 students up to grade six. Most of the students were from low-income families and were considered at-risk children, though their performance on regional and nationwide standardized tests was outstanding. Marcos faced a difficult choice between two staff members for a new important position of coordinator of student life.

Overview

The case highlights the personnel issues that a school director must manage. How to decide between two internal candidates each of whom have special skills and strengths. Personnel decisions are some of the most important decisions school head can make and this case allows a healthy debate to occur with regard to this decision.

Case Discussion Suggestions

This is a case about making personnel decisions within a small closely knit community. While the decision was supposed to be made by a committee, all of the committee members looked to the principal for the final say.

1. What is the best way for a school leader to engage other staff members in an important school decision? Should he talk to individuals privately or hold a public meeting?
2. What does shared decision making look like in a healthy school? Are shared decisions always possible and best?
3. What can a school leader do to ensure that all voices are heard?

TEACHING NOTE: NO WAY BACK

Case Synopsis

This case is based on the experience of an 11th grade philosophy teacher/head teacher in a K-12 public school enrolling 420 students. The teacher is challenged and quite troubled by an incident where he noticed that his briefcase had been opened and that money had been taken from his wallet (which he had left in the briefcase). The teacher had worked very hard to establish a trustworthy relationship with his students – as a result, this incident was especially disturbing to him. He decided to confront the students directly and invited them to discuss the issue among themselves and to return the money anonymously. He told the students that he would leave the classroom and return shortly.

Overview

This case considers the teacher-student bond of trust and respect. What action should a teacher take when this bond is broken? Anger and discipline, or understanding and compassion? Can trust be restored?

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. The emotional and pedagogical bond between teachers and students is very important to successful learning. What does this case teach us about ways to establish trustworthy relationships between teachers and students?
2. Was the approach taken by the teacher in this case effective? Why or why not?
3. Teaching is an endeavor that engages and relies on the personal values of the teachers. How can the teacher in this case balance his own personal values regarding trust, respect, ethics, etc. with his actual practice as an educator?
4. What should the teacher do/say when he returns to the classroom? Why? What should the teacher do next if the money he thinks is missing is not returned?

TEACHING NOTE: A QUESTION OF ETHICS: STUDENTS VS. TEACHER

Case Synopsis

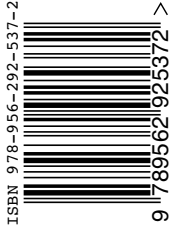
This case highlights the dilemmas faced by the principal of a school that serves 700 students from prekindergarten to 8th grade about a complaint filed by three 7th grade students about the personal conduct of the school's art teacher. The principal has met with members of the school's leadership team concerning the accusations and was seeking advice as to how to proceed. He decided to launch an investigation into the situation. However, in the middle of the investigation process, the art teacher informs the principal that he has decided to opt for an early retirement due to a psychiatric disability.

Overview

This case explores the action of a school director in response to student complaints. How seriously should the school director consider such allegations? Should the principal share these allegations with the teacher before launching an inquiry? The case exposes the balance that a school director must strike among sometime competing stakeholders—in this instance the students and faculty.

Case Discussion Suggestions

1. A school leader sometimes must deal with highly sensitive and difficult situation concerning a teacher's reputation and well-being. How can a principal respect both the teacher's well bring and the concerns of students and parents?
2. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the principal's approach to this problem?
3. What might you have done differently in this case? Why?
4. What types of information should be shared with whom in difficult situations like the one describe in this case? When does confidentiality become essential?



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