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ECEC teachers' paradoxical views on the new Chilean System for Teacher Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the main findings of a mixed-method study that explored ECEC teachers' views on the recently enacted STPD for Teacher Professional Development (STPD) in Chile. Relying on a mixed-method design, we gathered data from individual and group interviews and an online survey conducted with 268 ECEC teachers. Drawn from both *a priori* and emergent categories, our findings reveal that participants held four paradoxical views on the new System: salary justice versus monetizing of the profession; professional teaching recognition versus counter-pedagogical identity, rigorous evaluation versus inappropriate evaluation instruments, and palpable individual career advancement versus doubtful field development. These paradoxes show that ECEC teachers have a positive global view of the new STPD, despite their perception of its individualistic and counter-ECEC pedagogical nature, suggesting a claim for their right to professional development and decent working conditions, as well as a criticism of the STPD's neoliberal foundation.

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Early childhood education and care (ECEC); early childhood teachers; professional development; Chile; teacher evaluation

A remarkable history of ECEC teachers' professional development in Chile

Chile constitutes an interesting case in the regulation of ECEC teachers' professional development. Since the beginning of the 20th century, when ECEC first began to be promoted by the State, professional development has evolved drastically and has been key in the rapid professionalization of the field in this developing country. In its very beginnings, it consisted of just a 6-month continuing education program, while today it is a comprehensive system that encompasses university undergraduate preparation, in-service preparation, and a professional career, among other components (Peralta *n.d.*). Since its very beginning, the main pedagogical foundations for the professional development of ECEC teachers in Chile have been mainly influenced by the ideas of Froebel, Montessori, and Dewey's New School (Peralta 1996).

Professional development for ECEC teachers in Chile started in 1905, with the creation of a training program for kindergarten teachers, situated within a women's Normal School¹; the purpose of the program was to train primary teacher graduates in methodologies for early childhood education, a concept that subsequently spread, on a small

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scale, to different Normal Schools throughout the country (Peralta 2006; Rojas Flores 2010). In 1944, with the creation of an experimental 2-year program at the University of Chile, ECEC teachers began to be prepared at universities; this program inaugurated tertiary-level ECEC preparation which later came to include both university and non-university tertiary institutions as the norm for ECEC professional development in the country. Today this level of training is provided by approximately 60 institutions located throughout the country (Pardo and Adlerstein 2015). Currently, 99% of in-service ECEC teachers hold a Bachelor's Degree, which entitles them to teach 0–5 year-olds (Pardo and Adlerstein 2016).

At present, the professional development of ECEC teachers in Chile is widely seen from a lifelong learning perspective (Borko, Jacobs, and Koellner 2010; Earley 2010), encompassing initial preparation and continuing education, as well as opportunities and incentives throughout the career that enable teachers to refresh, develop and broaden their teaching knowledge, skills, and practices. Current professional development programs are divided into a range of both undergraduate preparation and continuing education. The latter has been unevenly regulated, a reflection of the institutional fragmentation of the provision² with the most important suppliers of these programs being JUNJI (National Board for Early Childhood Education) and Integra Foundation (both publicly funded organizations providing ECEC for 0–3 year-olds) and the Ministry of Education's Center for Pedagogical Training, Experimentation and Research (CPEIP) (Pardo and Adlerstein 2015).

In a significant shift from past experiences of weak regulations, the recently enacted System for Teacher Professional Development (which we describe in the next section) encompasses the large majority of ECEC teachers in Chile, unifying them in a single system where they all fall under the same regulations and are entitled to identical professional incentives. This milestone was reached within the context of an unprecedented political priority given to ECEC in Chile over the last two decades, evidenced, for instance, by the creation of the post of Undersecretary for Early Childhood Education, as part of the Ministry of Education, among other substantial policy measures (BCN 2018, 2015). However, those enormous achievements have coexisted with the precarious working conditions that ECEC teachers have historically endured. In fact, ECEC teachers' average monthly wages are 735 EUR/811 USD after five years of professional experience, which is 30% lower than other teachers (Orrego and Sánchez 2018). Moreover, the social recognition of ECEC teachers has also been low; according to a recent national survey, 53% of respondents considered that ECEC teachers are not sufficiently prepared to work professionally with young children (Elige Educar 2017).

Adopting a critical perspective on the recent policies for ECEC in Chile, some scholars have contended that, in following dominant conceptions of quality, these policies have intensified standardization and competition. For instance, Falabella (2013) has shown that the professional evaluation policies for ECEC teachers have led to the introduction of primary education content in classes for 4- and 5-year-olds, as a way to ensure their future high performance on standardized national tests. In turn, Barco (2019) has criticized the privatization of ECEC in Chile, as evidenced in the increased percentage of subsidized centers (from 9% to 46% between 2001 and 2016). Other scholars (Assaél, Albornoz, and Caro 2018; Sisto 2012) have discussed the Chilean Teacher Performance Evaluation,

although not specifically in relation to ECEC teachers, arguing that its neoliberal inspiration undermines teachers' working conditions and professional development.

This paper discusses ECEC teachers' views on the newly established System for Teacher Professional Development in Chile (BCN 2016), constituting an exploratory effort to deepen our knowledge of their understanding of this policy for professional development.³

The Chilean System for Teacher Professional Development (STPD)

The System for Teacher Professional Development was established in 2016, with the objective to recognize teaching, support teachers' practice, and increase teacher social appreciation. It applies to all teachers working in classrooms at publicly funded ECEC centers and schools,⁴ and it encompasses every education level (i.e. early childhood, primary, secondary) and the different teaching specialties (e.g. physical, music, technical, special education),⁵ irrespective of the area of the country or the population of children served (BCN 2016).

All ECEC teachers working in publicly funded ECEC centers and schools are to be gradually incorporated into the STPD by 2025. This will correct the discriminatory aspect of the previous Teacher Performance Evaluation, introduced in 2003, which only included those working in municipal schools with 4- and 5- year-olds (approximately 23% of all ECEC teachers). This disadvantaged the large majority ECEC teachers who worked in other provider organizations, as their work was not subjected to national regulations, becoming precarious in comparison to other teachers (BCN 2004).

The new STPD regulates entrance to university undergraduate preparation programs, in-service preparation, time allocated for both classroom and out-of-classroom pedagogical work, the mentorship of novice teachers, and professional conditions, including wages. Regarding the professional career, this system establishes a meritocratic professional development route tiered in five stages, where progression depends on years of professional experience as well as on the results of a two-part professional evaluation: a test of pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge, and a portfolio. The test is a standardized evaluation that addresses pedagogical and disciplinary content knowledge drawn from the national curriculum and the Good Teaching Framework (MINEDUC 2008). The portfolio -which is the same as that previously used for the teacher performance evaluation- presents self-gathered evidence of the teacher's best pedagogical practices, and is made up of three sections:

- (1) Pedagogical section. This describes three classes from a pedagogical unit, considering planning, children's assessment, and a personal reflection.
- (2) Filmed class. This includes a video of approximately 40 minutes recorded from a class, and a brief written description of it.
- (3) Collaborative work. This entails the description of collaborative work with other members of the community at the ECEC center/school and a reflection on it.

A consequence of the results obtained through this evaluation is the classification of teachers in one of the stages of the professional career; these stages are associated with increases in wages and preferential access to roles of pedagogical leadership and

guidance at a national level. A second consequence is the dismissal of teachers rated in the lowest two stages for two consecutive evaluations.

Both standardized instruments and portfolios have been internationally used for teacher evaluation, combining diverse sources of evidence to allow for accuracy and fairness of the process (Santiago and Benavides 2009). Nevertheless, OECD has observed that the assessment of teachers' knowledge through written tests is an exceptional practice among its members, and is only done in Chile and Mexico (Santiago and Benavides 2009). Concerning the portfolio used in Chile, OECD has pointed out that it has substantial shortcomings, arguing that, among other aspects, its instructions are unnecessarily rigid (e.g. 8-hour pedagogical unit, 40 minutes filming) (Santiago et al. 2013). Recently, this organization has argued that Chile still needs to adjust the instruments used for teacher evaluation, in order to better link them to practice standards and strengthen improvement-oriented evaluation practices (OECD 2014).

Regarding ECEC teachers, representatives from the Under Secretary for early Childhood Education expect that the evaluation under the STPD will be fairer, as the instruments to be used will be based on the ECEC Good Teaching Framework, which was enacted in 2019 (Ministerio de Educación 2016). Previously, these instruments relied on the generic Good Teaching Framework (MINEDUC 2008), which was widely deemed inadequate due to the fact that it was derived from the practices of primary teachers. On the other hand, the new STPD significantly improves ECEC teachers' average wages, particularly in the case of those working in ECEC centers, which may increase by an average of 30% (Orrego and Sánchez 2018). Moreover, the new STPD entitles ECEC teachers to transfer from one provider institution to another, preserving the wages and other incentives already earned (BCN 2016).

It is not easy to locate the Chilean System for Teacher Professional Development within the international context, because State regulations vary significantly among other countries (Oberhuemer 2013). For instance, in Cuba ECEC teachers are mandated to participate in professional development activities of both the school and the municipality, addressing issues selected at the local level. Those activities are not tied to wage increases, as wages primarily depend on the results obtained by each ECEC teacher at the performance evaluation (Heredia 2014). In turn, Finland has no legally binding regulations for ECEC teachers' professional development, despite the fact that municipalities are required to ensure that these kinds of activities are provided. Nevertheless, participation in professional development activities does not automatically lead to recognition in terms of career advancement (Onnismaa 2017). Another difficulty in making a comparative analysis of the Chilean case is that the scholarly literature has seldom focused on ECEC teachers' perspectives on policies for professional development, tending to emphasize issues of delivery models, funding mechanisms, and pedagogical impact (Zaslow et al. 2010; Oberhuemer 2013).

Beyond the heterogenous international policy landscape, there is a shared acknowledgement of the value of ECEC teacher professional development (Urban et al. 2011; Oberhuemer 2013), as a right of all teachers (Shaeffer 2015), and a source of social recognition and professional status (Pardo and Adlerstein 2016). Also, it is widely understood that ECEC teacher professional development is a catalyst for quality policies (Bown and Sumsion 2016b; Shirley et al. 2013) used for accountability purposes (Bassok, Dee, and Latham 2019).

Methodology

Our study relied on an exploratory mixed-method design (Creswell 2007; Lewis 2015). The participants were 268 female ECEC teachers⁶ with at least 4 years of tertiary undergraduate preparation and working either in ECEC centers or schools. They were distributed as follows: 102 practitioners working in ECEC centers, 98 practitioners working in schools, 6 ECEC teachers from a national network of outstanding teachers (RMM),⁷ 25 principals of ECEC centers, 27 national leaders in the field, and 10 chairs of ECEC undergraduate programs. Thirty-one of the participants had already been incorporated into the new STPD, 90 had participated in the previous system (teacher performance evaluation), while 147 had not been part of any of those systems. To collect data, we conducted semi-structured individual and group interviews (Kvale 2011; Gaskell 2000) (58 and 103 participants, respectively). From the results yielded in these interviews, we applied an online survey composed of 8 open-ended questions (107 participants). To integrate the data gathered from these three sources, we aligned them around equivalent questions (Yin 2006), which inquired into how appropriate the new STPD was for ECEC teachers.

We analyzed the data collected with the support of N-Vivo, applying content analysis (Schwandt 1996; Bauer 2000) through which we coded for both *a priori* and emergent categories. As *a priori* categories, we defined the features of the new STPD (e. g. structure of the professional career, instruments applied for the professional evaluation). As emergent categories, we defined the most densely quoted codes drawn from the remarks offered by participants, present in at least three groups. With each group of ECEC teachers as a unit of analysis (i.e. not individual ECEC teachers), the codification process had three recursive cycles, where we triangulated the data gathered from the two sources (Saldaña 2014; Ridder et al. 2014).

Concerning ethical issues, we asked each participant to sign an informed consent form which summarized the project, assured voluntary participation, and established the right to anonymity and confidentiality during and after the process. These consents were revised and approved within the regulations of the University of Chile and the Singapore Declaration on Integrity in Research (compulsory for all Chilean research activities).

Results

After three analytical phases of coding, our main findings showed that ECEC teachers' views about the System for Teacher Professional Development can be synthesized as four paradoxes, meaning that they demonstrate apparently contradictory ideas. Briefly, they understood the new STPD as good news, tightly coupled with significant pedagogical and political concerns. Interestingly, these findings were present in each group of participants (practitioners, principals, national leaders, outstanding ECEC teachers, undergraduate program chairs), expressing a total consensus, with no dissents, illustrating professional tensions within the field that occasionally were expressed as individual dilemmas. We describe these paradoxical views by quoting the interviewed participants⁸ and referring to the quantitative data from the online questionnaire (Flick 2004).

Salary justice versus monetizing the profession

All participants expressed a positive global opinion about the new STPD. Specifically, they appreciated that the new System establishes a national regulation for ECEC teachers' professional development, irrespective of the provider organization where they work, surpassing the historical disparity among them. As stated: *'now, all public ECEC teachers are equally valuable; no more first and second-class paid educators'* (Individual interview-Undergraduate Program Chair UT). Besides this, the positive appreciation was related to the short-term wage increase associated with career advancement, which they understood to be a matter of justice for the field and not only a monetary upgrading. Fundamentally, they appreciated that the wage increase, being associated with the professional evaluation, is a commitment to meritocracy and a recognition of gained experience, and they deemed it *'undeniably fairer'* (Individual interview-National Leader SS) than the precedented Teacher Performance Evaluation with *'uncertain salary bonuses'* (Individual interview-National Leader EJ). Therefore, they openly declared enthusiasm for the salary justice the new System produces, *'because now we know how much more we can earn if the job is done well'* (Group interview-Practitioners JAS).

Also, all participants valued that the new STPD establishes a common professional evaluation for all ECEC teachers, leaving behind the previous model, where each organization established its own evaluation system: *'that until now depended on unequal performance standards of the different ECEC providers'* (Individual interview-Principal JBM). In particular, they appreciated that the wage increase in the new STPD can be maintained, even if ECEC teachers move to other provider organizations: *'we are free to change our working organization from one public provider to another, without losing the money improvements'* (Group interview-Practitioner JCA), or *'not having to prove professional abilities in each new job'* (Group interview – Practitioners JLP).

Nevertheless, participants recognized a pang of open guilt about the wage increase, explaining that the quality of professional performance should not be conditioned by money *'we shouldn't do a good job just for the money, but it's the way it is'* (Group interview-Practitioners JAS). ECEC teachers felt that the joyful acceptance of the financial incentive monetizes the profession, undermining their vocational disposition towards ECEC pedagogy and early childhood advocacy, which they explained *'for children's right to education and their integral development'* (Individual interview-Undergraduate Program Chair UAB). Moreover, participants were emphatic about separating professional responsibilities from the monetary incentive, always highlighting that they approved the introduction of fair salaries but that this would never be the core driver for professional development. As stated, the monetary incentive *'does not decay their all-time vocational and pedagogical enthusiasm for early learning'* (Group interview-ECEC teachers JP).

Professional teaching recognition versus counter-pedagogical identity

All participants positively appreciated that the new STPD recognizes ECEC teachers professionally, leaving behind their diminished professional status. *'It is good to go into the national System like primary teachers, to be seriously recognized as teaching professionals'* (Group interview-Practitioners JRS). Also, they expressed a positive expectation for better social recognition of the ECEC profession and, therefore, *'at least the same*

professional status and complex understandings that other teachers have' (Individual interview-Principal JAG). Thus, they envisioned *'more social recognition, because the evaluation will show how difficult it is to be a good ECEC teacher'* (Group interview-ECEC teachers JAB), and *'families and society will recognize and value it [ECEC teaching] more'* (Individual interview- National Leader SR).

However, those expectations were tangled with the perception that the new STPD undermines the pedagogical identity of Chilean ECEC, by ignoring the pedagogical principles of the field -such as play, holistic teaching practices, family participation, and self-determined curricular approaches. As stated, *'the complexity and specificities of the profession are unseen'* (Individual interview-Principal SC), because *'the new policy misunderstands the pedagogical identity of ECEC'* (Group interview-Practitioners CC). Hence, participants expressed their concern that the new STPD implies giving up the pedagogical principles of ECEC in Chile; as posited, *'accepting this policy also means dumping many ECEC beliefs'* (Individual interview-National Leader DLM).

In participants' views there is a *'given counter-professional logic in evaluation instruments and the whole career advancement process'* (Individual interview-National Leader AC), which *'does not reflect the ECEC pedagogical culture'* (Individual interview- National leader DLM). However, all participants perceived this contradiction as less relevant than the wage increase and the gain of professional recognition, accepting that the STPD can *'in any case strengthen the profession'* (Individual interview-Undergraduate Program Chair UA), or that *'summing up, it's a necessary and bearable exchange to progress in the profession'* (Individual interview-ECEC Principal CO), and that it *'must be accepted and played'* (Group interview- Practitioners JSJ).

Rigorous professional evaluation versus inappropriate evaluation instruments

Participants agreed that the new STPD can rigorously evaluate ECEC teachers' professional performance; as asserted, *'the professional performance can be evaluated'* (Individual interview-National Leader AC), but only if certain conditions are met. Specifically, they posited that a valid assessment would require evaluation instruments that are appropriate to ECEC's pedagogical distinctiveness. According to the questionnaire results, 52% of ECEC teachers working with 0–3 year-olds, and 66% working with 4–5 year-olds explained that evaluation instruments should be focused on the moments that best reflect the integrality and dynamism of ECEC pedagogical practices. According to 55% of questionnaire respondents, the so-called *'variable learning experiences'*⁹ are the most reliable moment to use performance evaluation instruments, along with others such as *'classroom free-play, outdoor education and habit training'* (Group interview- Practitioners JCO).

However, all participant who had already participated in the professional evaluation (n = 121) and 87% of those who answered the questionnaire believed that the new STPD does not meet those evaluation conditions, as it relies on instruments that ignore the distinctiveness of ECEC pedagogy. Specifically, participants believed that these evaluation instruments were grounded in primary education pedagogical criteria, suggesting a misunderstanding and ignorance of what is distinctive about ECEC pedagogy. As stated, the new policy is *'not thought to recognize ECEC pedagogies'* (Group interview-Practitioners JEP) forcing the use of *'primary education rudiments such as disciplinary planning and classroom timing'* (Individual interview-ECEC Undergraduate Program

Chair ULA), and *'to gather useless information and end up doing artificial experiences, just to apply [to the career advancement]'* (Individual interview-ECEC Undergraduate Program Chair UCC).

Participants argued extensively about the inappropriateness of evaluation instruments. To support their viewpoints, they gave a plethora of examples and one of the most frequently mentioned was the pedagogical section of the portfolio. In their view, this does not value daily ECEC practices, such as *'emergent interactions'* and *'diaper changing'* or *'hygiene-self-care experiences'* which they deemed full of intended learning opportunities for children (Group interview-Practitioners JEC), not being able to, *'really show the ability that the ECEC teacher has to generate learning changes, influence teams, motivate and implement innovative strategies'* (Individual interview-ECEC School Principal BM). A second common example was the 40-minute video of a class, which they argued was a rigid period of time not corresponding with the schedule of learning activities in ECEC, therefore putting a strain on children's attention span. As explained *'we work with young children – unlike primary teachers- so it is complex. You have 45 minutes; perhaps your class gets truncated within 45 minutes, because you cannot close your class'* (Group interview- Practitioners JPO). A third frequent example was the test on pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge, which was considered *'extremely long and unrelated to practical teacher improvement'* (Individual interview-Principal JLP), and not able to capture the relevance of practical knowledge that underlies everyday pedagogical practices.

Thus, participants demanded a rigorous evaluation in terms of distinctive ECEC pedagogy, which in their view entails *'a specific set of instruments relevant to our educational level'* (Individual interview-Practitioners JMCC) and, as 55% of questionnaire participants acknowledge, the *'use of authentic pedagogical documentation and assessments developed by teachers'*.

Palpable individual career advancement versus doubtful development of the field

All participants expressed their confidence about the practical progress that this policy implies for the professional development of ECEC teachers. In their view, this STPD makes individual career advancement real and palpable. However, they questioned the individualistic and competitive character of the new System resulting from both the professional evaluation and the wage increase: *'Now, career advancement is a real run, rather a marathon because we'll get ranked!'* (Group interview- Practitioners JB). Thus, they felt that the new STPD instills competence while removing the pedagogical support, a characteristic they described as *'selfish professionalism'* (Individual interview-National Leader SM), rather than real progress for the whole ECEC professional community. As a participant stated, *'this policy does not nurture an ECEC professional esprit de corps'* (Individual interview- National Leader VP).

Deeming the lack of a collaborative dimension in professional development to be one of the detrimental issues of the new System, participants posited that *'there is no real progress if it's alone because we always depend on our colleagues'* (Group interview-Practitioners JLC). In elaborating this opinion, participants anticipated that the new System would lead to the loss of supportive pedagogical assessment and shared insightful experiences provided by the learning communities currently operating in their work

places. As ECEC teachers joked in a group interview: *'it's crystal clear that we will advance faster but also lonelier than before'* (Group interview- Practitioners JHJ).

Therefore, participants demanded that the new STPD should aim to develop a collaborative culture for the profession, which they consider *'much more relevant than just a grade or a happy face for the good job'* (Individual interview-Undergraduate Program Chair UCT). Thus, they recognised the need for a professional evaluation that includes *'feedback dialogue,' 'professional conversation with peers'* and *'pedagogical reflection with knowledgeable observers'* (Group interview- Practitioners JAS). In this regard, they request not only a standard written report presenting their results, but a *'sustained pedagogical reflection'* and *'shared tracing of changes and struggles to improve'* (Group interview-Practitioners BM).

Discussion

This paper discussed ECEC teachers' views on the newly established System for Teacher Professional Development in Chile (BCN 2016). This STPD, for the first time in the history of the field, regulates the professional development of all ECEC teachers working in publicly funded ECEC centers and schools, placing them under the same umbrella as the rest of the teaching professionals.

Our findings show that all participants -in total consensus- expressed a positive appreciation of the wage increase and higher professional status promised by the new STPD, resolving historical lags in the field. Despite these optimistic views, they also manifested negative opinions concerning the System's individualistic and counter-ECEC pedagogical nature, which raise new problems. These contradictory views can be synthesized in four paradoxes: salary justice versus monetizing the profession; professional teaching recognition versus counter-pedagogical identity; rigorous evaluation versus inadequate evaluation instruments and palpable individual career advancement versus doubtful field development. These paradoxes suggest that while they do see the new STPD as an achievement, they also have a clear awareness of the transactions, losses, and contradictions that it entails.

Despite being part of a quite singular System for Teacher Professional Development, the views of ECEC teachers in Chile can be discussed in light of the international debate. On one hand, the decisive weight of the wage increase and higher social recognition that define their overall positive views of the new STPD suggests that ECEC teachers may consider it as a means to advocate and solve their long-postponed rights to decent working conditions (ILO 2012; Shaeffer 2015). This dimension of the STPD appears to be a priority much more urgent than others such as ECEC pedagogy and quality (Bown and Sumsion 2016a). On the other hand, their criticisms of the new STPD, consistent with previous national literature (Falabella 2013; Barco 2019), may permissibly be discussed from the vantage point of critical perspectives. Thus, it seems plausible that ECEC teachers' views of the individualistic character of the new STPD can be interpreted as a rejection of its widely contested neoliberal foundations associated with accountability purposes (Assaél, Albornoz, and Caro 2018; Sisto 2012).

As this is an exploratory study on an issue not previously addressed in research, we cannot draw definite conclusions from our findings, suggesting the need for further

research to better understand how ECEC teachers in Chile perceive the national policies aimed at fostering their professional development.

Notes

1. Normal Schools were institutions initially created to prepare primary teachers in Chile, which operated between 1842 and 1974. Receiving students from 13 or 14 years of age, the Normal School program lasted six years (Rojas Flores 2010).
2. In Chile, ECEC provision is carried out by six main institutions: publicly subsidized private schools (42.3%), National Board for Early Childhood Education (JUNJI) (23.4%), municipal schools (15.3%), Integra Foundation (11.1%), Local Services of Education (1.3%), and privately funded schools (6.5%) (Ministerio de Educación 2019). Each of those institutions has been regulated by its own rules, regarding, for instance, requirements for provision, and ECEC teachers' working conditions. Concerning professional development, ECEC teachers working for municipal schools, Local Services of Education, JUNJI and Integra Foundation are the only ones that have benefited from regulated professional development frameworks (Pardo and Adlerstein 2015).
3. This work was part of a larger study that was awarded to the authors under a public tender launched by the Chilean Undersecretary for Early Childhood Education and OREALC-UNESCO. Its main aim was to define criteria for the design of the instruments to be used for the evaluation of ECEC teachers in newly established System for Teacher Professional Development, conducted between 2016 and 2017.
4. In Chile, early childhood education is provided by two main types of institutions. On the one hand, ECEC centers, which mainly provide Nursery Level (0–1 year-olds), and Medium Level (2–3 year-olds). On the other hand, schools, which mainly provide Transition Level (4–5 year-olds) (Ministerio de Educación 2019).
5. The only teachers who are not entitled to join this new system are those who are within ten years of retirement as of 2016; also, the system excludes teachers working in privately funded schools (Ministerio de Educación 2019).
6. In Chile almost 100% of ECEC teachers are women (CPEIP 2019).
7. These outstanding ECEC teachers were part of the Teacher of Teachers Network (RMM, for its acronym in Spanish) -sponsored by the Ministry of Education- which gathers outstanding teachers, aiming to strengthen teaching in the classroom. Those who voluntarily take part in it have accredited pedagogical and disciplinary skills, and seek to contribute to the professional development of other teachers (Ministerio de Educación 2019).
8. It is important to take into account that many participants expressed their views colloquially, using traditional expressions, metaphors, and unstructured sentences, without strict attention to formal Spanish language rules, as frequently occurs in everyday language in Chile. Our translation of these quotes tried to preserve this style, at risk of seeming odd.
9. In the Chilean pedagogical context, a *variable* learning experience is a pedagogically scheduled time for children and ECEC teachers to engage in a planned learning opportunity. It is named 'variable' because its core purposes, duration and children groupings change accordingly to learning interests and needs. Variable learning experiences are linked to diverse teaching methodologies and learning outcomes, in contrast to the 'regular learning experiences' (such as lunch, outdoor play, hygiene and shared snack) that are planned with fixed timing and learning outcomes (MINEDUC 2019).

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