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What do Support Professionals do in Schools? Construction and Validation of an Instrument for Assessing Whole-School Prevention and Promotion Strategies

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Abstract

Education policies worldwide have encouraged the entry and permanence of nonteaching support professionals in schools. During the last decade, Chilean regulations have allowed a massive incorporation of these professionals—mostly school psychologists and social workers—in publicly funded schools. However, there is scarce evidence regarding the actions of these professionals, including whether and how they align with whole-school approaches. In this study, we constructed and validated scales to assess professional

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practices aligned with universal prevention and whole-school approaches deployed by nonteaching professionals in schools. Participants were 329 professionals from municipal, private subsidized, and private Chilean schools. Psychometric properties were analyzed through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses for construct validation and with Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency. The results show that the instruments had adequate psychometric properties in terms of validity and reliability, allowing the assessment of four types of practices: individual socioemotional and academic support, group socioemotional and academic support, leadership practices, and interdisciplinary collaborative practices. We argue that these practices can be theoretically organized based on whole-school prevention and promotion strategies. Preliminary mean comparisons show that the most prevalent practice is through individual supports. We highlight the need to provide sound instruments that may allow comprehensive assessments of the actions deployed by nonteaching support professionals in whole-school improvement efforts.

Keywords
instruments, prevention, psychosocial support, school counseling, school psychology

Historically, student support interventions have stemmed from either efforts to facilitate academic excellence and career planning or compensatory programs and policies to ensure successful school trajectories, given social and educational disparities (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). These policies and programs have been implemented with the participation of different nonteaching support professionals, defined as nonteaching professional staff members who aid and assist in support interventions and who include but are not limited to school counselors, school psychologists, and social workers, among others. The assumption has been that to promote academic success and provide equal opportunities, support systems that incorporate nonteaching support professionals are needed (Betters-Bubon et al., 2016; Cohen & Espelage, 2020). These professionals have varied according to the policies of each country and program characteristics (Healy et al., 2020; O'Connor, 2018).

In the United States, the role of support professionals is clearly defined by professional associations such as the American School Counselor Association (ASCA; 2012, 2019). For example, the ASCA (2019) model seeks to develop academic and socioemotional support activities and provide counseling for students' life projects. This model organizes skills, professional competencies, and actions based on evidence and provides behaviors and expected results for

certain actions and ethical principles that guide professional action (ASCA, 2019). However, in many countries, these roles are not clearly defined and tend to overlap (Barraza, 2015), a situation that generates profound difficulties for school intervention designs and implementations. This is the case in Chile, where the hiring of other professionals—especially school psychologists and social workers—has increased tremendously from 2008 onward, without clear guidance or orientation of their work from either professional associations or the executive branch that provides funding for hiring these professionals. Recent research in Chile shows that although these professionals have an influence on lower dropout rates and higher academic achievement (López et al., 2021), there is a substantial lack of evidence regarding the nature and types of action they have developed in schools and under what ethical principles they have construed their role in support of students' experiences.

Historically, school support programs were based on individual intervention models that do not consider institutional barriers or external factors that affect the most vulnerable students (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Schulze et al., 2019). However, in recent decades, school support systems have developed a systemic perspective distanced from an individual approach (Astramovich et al., 2013; Castillo et al., 2017), which embraces whole-school, universal prevention as defined by the public health sector (Cook et al., 2015; Haggerty & Mrazek, 1994) through evidence-based practices (EBPs; Greenberg et al., 2005) with special emphasis on issues of educational equity and social justice (Greenberg et al., 2005; Ratts & Hutchins, 2009; Williams & Greenleaf, 2012).

These support programs are usually based on or inspired by the three-tiered universal prevention model recommended by the Institute of Medicine (Cook et al., 2015; Haggerty & Mrazek, 1994). This model recommends a universal delivery of supports for all students (Tier 1), selected interventions for some students (Tier 2), and indicated treatments for a few students (Tier 3; Cook et al., 2015; Haggerty & Mrazek, 1994). In the school context, this prevention approach has followed the design of multitiered systems that allow supporting disadvantaged and at-risk students while promoting institutional change aligned with the evidence-based principles of prevention and promotion (Astramovich et al., 2013; Cohen & Espelage, 2020). Other examples of multitiered systems in the school context are whole-school approaches proposed by scholars working with students with learning and behavioral needs (Arias-Gundín & García, 2021) and by the literature on school violence prevention and school climate improvement (Cohen & Espelage, 2020; Shore, 2009). Whole-school approaches have been identified as the best EBPs for preventing bullying and other forms of school violence and improving school climate (Cohen & Espelage, 2020; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Elfrink et al., 2017; Healy et al., 2020). These approaches require promotion and prevention strategies (Cohen & Espelage, 2020) through multitiered support systems that

provide students with academic, social, and emotional support (Chapman et al., 2013; Lane & Menzies, 2003; Mau et al., 2016; Maynard et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2007). Yet another example is Response to Intervention (RTI), a major multitiered intervention model proposed for students with learning and behavioral needs. The aim of RTI is to provide support systems at multiple levels or tiers of intervention to engage all students in enriched and meaningful learning experiences that may buffer future learning, socioemotional, and behavioral problems (Betters-Bubon et al., 2016; Goodman-Scott et al., 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2006).

Almost all of these tiered-system support approaches, models, or programs include the work of nonteaching professionals to deal with the multiplicity of issues related to students' social, emotional, and behavioral problems that affect academic outcomes (Goodman et al., 2011) and to promote mental health and preventing behavioral and mental health difficulties in children and youth (Greenberg et al., 2005). The importance of support programs that follow the structure of multitiered support systems lies in understanding the school system as the unit of analysis and intervention. This implies an emphasis on developing Tier 1 actions that involve support professionals providing services for all students to prevent risk factors, including the assessment of student risks and needs to facilitate supports that should be delivered early on, the use of data for decision making, and the activation of multitiered supports (Astor et al., 2017; Horner et al., 2009, 2010; Siegel et al., 2019). Additionally, support professionals should conduct Tier 2 targeted interventions for high-risk groups that require further support, usually representing no more than 15% of the student population. If students do not respond positively to Tier 1 and 2 interventions, Tier 3 intensive interventions should be activated, representing only 5% of the population (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Although these are highly individualized interventions, it is important that students requiring Tier 2 and 3 interventions keep receiving the same level of Tier 1 support as other students, because Tier 2 and 3 interventions are only effective when Tier 1 foundations are strong (Queensland Department of Education, 2020; Stewart et al., 2007).

Therefore, in terms of human resources, both nonteaching and teaching school staff members should spend more time involved in Tier 1 supports than Tier 3 interventions. Although, of course, some support professionals—such as speech therapists and assessment-oriented school psychologists—might require spending more time in Tier 3 supports, in all cases this requires strong articulation among tiers and close interdisciplinary coordination between teaching and nonteaching professional staff members (Montecinos et al., 2018; Sosa & McGrath, 2013). However, research has shown that in practice, nonteaching support professionals who provide support to students face difficulties in introducing a universal whole-school approach to intervention, describing a sense of role diffusion and ambiguous job expectations from their

principals and teachers, either because they are being asked to serve in roles that are outside of their competence or because they have too many non-professional tasks (Astramovich et al., 2013; DeKruyf et al., 2013). Similarly, McIntosh et al. (2014) reported that professionals indicate barriers such as inadequate resources like time, lack of funding, and turnover of professionals. Other barriers include insufficient post-training feedback, deficient support by leaderships teams (Cook et al., 2015), and professionals who often work almost in isolation and focus on Tier 3 specialized interventions (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016).

Assessing the Practices of Support Professionals in Schools

In this study, we argue that as part of small- or large-scale universal whole-school prevention efforts, it is possible and necessary to assess the practices that nonteaching support professionals deploy in schools to estimate if and how these practices align with multitiered intervention principles. This is especially necessary in developing countries that have recently incorporated support staff members such as school psychologists and social workers at a mass scale in public schools who due to lack of sufficient training, mandatory requirements for working in schools as support professionals, and lack of policy orientations might be undertrained and tend to reproduce traditional highly individualized forms of interventions (Lebeer et al., 2012).

To construct and validate scales that might aid in assessing the actions of nonteaching professionals regarding universal whole-school approaches, we performed a systematic review of the literature to identify available information on different professional roles and intervention models based on EBPs that support disadvantaged students in the school context. This systematic review gathered and selected peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus and ERIC from 2012 onward, using the keywords "school psychologist," "school counselor," "educational advisor," and "school psychosocial intervention." Additionally, we searched for school intervention models in professional associations internationally, because some of these associations have proposed school intervention models using whole-school universal prevention EBPs. We found most of these associations in the United States—especially relevant was ASCA's (2019) model, which was mentioned in most of the references searched and selected. Of the 56 articles and reports reviewed about school support interventions, we identified three main types of professional practices that characterize school intervention models: (a) emotional, social, and academic support to students; (b) leadership in the management of issues related to school climate issues; and (c) interdisciplinary collaboration.

Emotional, Social, and Academic Support to Students

Some actions support the emotional, social, and academic development of students and include interventions at the individual, group, and school system levels (ASCA, 2019; Astramovich et al., 2013; Atici, 2014; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005; Gatica, 2015; Mendes et al., 2013; School Social Work Association of America [SSWAA], 2013; Skalski et al., 2015; Trombetta et al., 2008; Whittlesey-Jerome, 2013). For example, these practices include assessing student needs (Gatica, 2015); providing individual or small-group counseling (ASCA, 2019); helping students identify attitudes, behaviors, and skills that promote successful learning through individual sessions (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005); or leading schoolwide initiatives focused on ensuring a positive learning environment (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005).

Leadership in the Management of School Climate

Another set of practices are aimed at ensuring the improvement of the school system, usually through the improvement of school climate. These actions support and encourage change to achieve optimal school performance (ASCA, 2019; Barraza, 2015; Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005; SSWAA, 2013; Skalski et al., 2015). The literature describes some examples, such as using student data and the results of a school climate improvement plan to support decision making in the design of programs and interventions (Armistead & Smallwood, 2014), using school climate survey data (ASCA, 2019), or using programs and interventions that strengthen school climate based on EBPs (Guiney et al., 2014).

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Yet another set of practices are geared toward establishing ongoing interdisciplinary work and professional networks. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, professionals identify networks in and outside the school that support attaining the goals of interventions (Bodenhorn & Skaggs, 2005; Ministry of Education of Chile, 2015; SSWAA, 2013; Skalski et al., 2015; Toro, 2012) or referral to other institutions (ASCA, 2019). The specialized literature describes actions such as coordination with teachers and curricular adaptations (Montecinos et al., 2018) or coordination with specialized services in the community (SSWAA, 2013; Toro, 2012).

Practices of Support Professionals in Chilean Schools

Like several Latin American countries (Ministry of Education of Bolivia, 2012; Ministry of Education of Chile, 2019; Ministry of Education of Perú,

2012), Chile has promoted prioritization policies to support the schooling experience of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds or with learning challenges. These policies have allowed hiring of nonteaching support professionals, and several of them have also established new roles and functions for the management of school improvement, positions that may be filled by nonteaching professional staff members (López et al., 2021). In Chile, the School Preferential Voucher Law (known as SEP, or *Subsidio Escolar Preferencial*) and the law that created the School Integration Program (PIE, or *Programa de Integración Escolar*) explicitly allow state funding to hire such professionals (Castillo & Rodríguez, 2016). Although there are no national norms regarding the proportion of professionals per student, an analysis of Chilean administrative data using the official registry of educational assistants in 2020 shows 37,366 professional education assistants served 3,457,146 students from public, private subsidized, and private institutions (Ministry of Education of Chile, 2020). The current ratio of students to professionals is 351 to 1 for psychologists and 847 to 1 for social workers; other professionals include speech therapists, physical therapists, and kinesiologists. Except for school psychologists, 90% of these professionals are concentrated in public schools and schools with low socioeconomic status (López et al., 2021). Between 2010 and 2018, the presence of both school psychologists and social workers in a school, hired to work as "psychosocial pairs," increased by 800% (López et al., 2021).

However, it should be noted that in Chile, state funding for nonteaching support professionals through additional vouchers for targeted students (SEP for students with low socioeconomic status; PIE for students with disabilities) includes complex accountability mechanisms that sanction schools that do not achieve the expected performance (Parcerisa & Falabella, 2017; Sisto, 2019). This is known as a "high stakes accountability system," because it holds schools and their professionals accountable for the continuous improvement of measurable results of student performance (Grek et al., 2021). Therefore, the hiring of nonteaching professionals forms part of educational inclusion policies designed "the Chilean way" (Sisto, 2019)—that is, as part of advanced neoliberal policies that recognize Chile as a paradigmatic international case study (Parcerisa & Falabella, 2017).

The arrival of these professionals has brought at least two national challenges. First, although now there are support professionals in 60% of publicly funded schools in Chile, they tend to be young professionals who recently graduated. In 2018, around 45% of psychologists and social workers had a professional practice experience of 0–4 years (López et al., 2021). Their limited professional experience is relevant because in Chile, as in many developing countries, higher education curricula are focused on immediate job placement, which means that these professionals are not legally required to have a specialization or master's degree to work in a school. In addition, undergraduate curricula tend to have a generalist perspective and therefore do

not address or have very limited content specific to educational work, such as school climate, special learning needs, and universal prevention or whole-school intervention. This is complex, because 90% of these professionals work in schools with lower socioeconomic status (López et al., 2021) and that require systemic interventions.

Second, the growing incorporation of support professionals in Chilean schools occurred without an explicit intervention model but under the assumption of specific, intensive, and individual support in connection with a targeted educational policy. Instead of proposing a comprehensive EBP school intervention model, it was assumed that psychologists and social workers should work with students with the greatest needs (López et al., 2021), which has resulted in predominantly individual intervention with the most distressed students, which is called "case" or "crisis" intervention (Carrasco Aguilar et al., 2019; Cortéz et al., 2019; Gatica, 2015), with merely episodic or symbolic Tier 1 interventions such as organizing an annual "day of school climate" (Jarpa-Arriagada et al., 2020) and significant distance from the pedagogical actions of regular classroom teachers (Cárcamo-Vásquez et al., 2020; Montecinos et al., 2018). These qualitative findings represent a warning about the encapsulated roles of these professionals (López et al., 2011), unclear roles and functions (Cárcamo-Vásquez et al., 2020; Gatica, 2015), demands from school principals and teachers to work on issues considered outside of their role (Cárcamo-Vásquez et al., 2020), tensions with teachers (Montecinos et al., 2018), and interventions separate from the pedagogical process (Jarpa-Arriagada et al., 2020). Moreover, professionals have denounced the low impact of intervention plans, precarious work conditions, and an absence of intervention models (Gatica, 2015).

Therefore, in this study, we pose that nonteaching support professionals in Chile face multiple challenges and unclear roles. These are common challenges for many countries, and the increasing number of professionals working in Chile without an explicit intervention model or approach makes it necessary to assess their practices. However, to date, no quantitative studies have characterized the type of work these professionals carry out in schools to identify system gaps and design policies, programs, and professional training experiences based on scientific evidence. As a first step, this study constructed and validated scales to assess whole-school strategies developed by nonteaching support professionals working in schools.

Method

Scale Construction

Item construction followed multiple phases. First, we focused on the three theoretical constructs identified in the systematic literature review. The search

focused on items and practices in 56 articles and documents. Additionally, we carried out a detailed analysis of the Chilean National Policy for School Climate 2015–2018 and five other articles based on psychosocial interventions in Chile, identifying practices and actions described for support professionals (referred to as psychosocial pairs or *duplas psicosociales*; i.e., a school psychologist working with a social worker) and the role of the school climate coordinator (*encargado de convivencia escolar*).

To construct the instruments, items proposed by the international and national literature were considered. Although some items came from instruments in English, others were inspired by the standards and guidelines of professional associations, based on national school regulations on school climate, or constructed by the authors based on the conceptual framework (see footnotes in Tables 1–3 for details). The items adapted from English underwent a back-translation process. This led to 123 preliminary items organized in three scales. Second, three school support professionals and three researchers conducted qualitative content validation that reduced the items to 84. Third, eight professionals who held positions as school support staff members in municipal and private-subsidized schools (three women and five men; four school climate coordinators, three school psychologists, and one social worker; years of work in schools: $M = 9.5$, $SD = 4.5$, range = 3–16) acted as local expert judges by performing a second qualitative content validation, assessing the relevance and sufficiency of the items for their daily work. The comments by local judges included suggestions to adjust the language and include items about crisis management ("I dealt with spontaneous and/or crisis requests from students"). At the end of this phase, the item count was 65. Then, four external researchers with experience in scale item construction in topics related to school climate management evaluated each item's pertinence, relevance, and clarity on a scale of 1–5. Items that obtained a score of 1 in the three criteria or a score of 1 in pertinence or relevance were eliminated. Items with scores between 2 and 4 in any of the three criteria were adjusted by the research team. Given the types of practices to be assessed, the judges confirmed the organization of items in the three theoretical constructs proposed. This led to three scales for psychometric validation: a scale composed of 15 items (socioemotional and academic support practices); a second composed of 13 items (leadership practices); and a third composed of 10 items (collaboration practices). The instruments were administered in a Spanish version, which is available upon request.

Participants

The sample design was nonprobabilistic and intentional. A sample of 522 people was invited, with a response rate of 63%, which is considered adequate for this type of study (Joungtrakul, 2016). Participants were 329 support

Table 1. Factorial Structure Matrix for Socioemotional and Academic Support Practices.

Item		Factor Loading 1	2
1.	I conducted interviews with students and their families to investigate their problems and/or referral situation[a]	.38	.65
2.	I responded to spontaneous and/or crisis requests by students[b]*	.30	.22
3.	I developed and implemented individual intervention plans to support students[c]	.47	.76
4.	I developed diagnostic actions to detect or prevent situations where student rights might become vulnerable[a]	.54	.84
5.	I developed diagnoses that include individual, family, and social elements to establish student' issues[d]	.48	.88
6.	I conducted home visits to investigate students' difficulties[a] [b]*	.12	.19
7.	I provided guidance and inform parents and families about procedures, administrative processes, and to get access to benefits[d]	.53	.70
8.	I conducted classroom observations to collect information about student dynamics and/or students' behavior in the classroom[a]*	.62	.51
9.	I developed group activities on academic topics for students at risk[a]	.80	.52
10.	I developed group activities on social issues for students at risk[b]	.89	.57
11.	I developed group activities on emotional issues for students at risk[b]	.89	.54
12.	I planned and implemented support activities on social, academic, and emotional matters with all students in the classroom[e]	.86	.57
13.	I implemented classroom activities seeking students' emotional and/or social development[e]	.88	.43
14.	I implemented programs and/or interventions that strengthen school climate for all students in the school[f]	.78	.49
15.	I developed actions to monitor the progress of intervened students both at the individual and group and/or universal level[f]*	.67	.62

*Eliminated from further analyses.
[a]Adapted from Gatica (2015).
[b]Adapted from Cádiz and Manríquez (2015).
[c]Adapted from American School Counselor Association (2012).
[d]Adapted from Toro (2012).
[e]Adapted from Ministry of Education of Chile (2015).
[f]Adapted from Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005).

professionals from municipal (86.0%), private subsidized (11.2%), private (1.8%), and other (0.9%) schools. Support professionals were working in the following roles: school climate coordinators (53.2%), psychosocial pairs (34.3%), PIE professionals (7.3%), and other professionals (5.2%). Although the role of school climate coordinator may be occupied by teachers or other

Table 2. Factorial Structure Matrix for Leadership Practices.

Items	Factor Loading
16. I carried out actions to articulate my professional planning with the school climate management plan and/or the school's educational improvement plan[a]	.71
17. I monitored the psychosocial intervention plan with verifiers and indicators[bcd]*	.17
18. I designed and implemented actions to align the psychosocial team's mission statement with the school[ab]	.80
19. I developed actions for the socialization of the psychosocial team's mission[a]	.84
20. I checked student outcomes (attendance, behavior, and performance) to identify and implement target interventions with at-risk students[a]*	.33
21. I coordinated actions that school climate teams or committees implement at the school*	.24
22. I used student data and the outcome of school climate management plan to support decision-making in the design of programs and interventions[ad]	.75
23. I conducted systematic interventions to support individual cases. For instance, number of students, duration of the intervention, types of problems, etc.[ae]	.72
24. I developed ethical guidelines and information confidentiality protocols to work with students and families[ac]*	.28
25. I designed action protocols to be applied under problematic situations and/or emergencies[f]	.84
26. I implemented action protocols to be applied under problematic situations and/or emergencies[d]	.79
27. I identified needs of professional training to deal with issues of school climate and/or psychosocial intervention[b]	.76
28. I trained teachers on issues of school climate and/or psychosocial intervention	.76

*Eliminated from further analyses.
[a]Adapted from American School Counselor Association (2012).
[b]Adapted from Ministry of Education of Chile (2015).
[c]Adapted from Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005).
[d]Adapted from Ministry of Education of Chile (2013).
[e]Adapted from Barraza (2015).
[f]Adapted from Toro (2012).

professionals whose responsibility is to manage school climate in alignment with the school improvement plan, psychosocial pairs are school psychologists and social workers (sociologists can also occupy this role) who may or may not occupy the role of school climate coordinator and are usually

Table 3. Factorial Structure Matrix for Cooperation Practices.

Items	Factor Loading
29. I provided information to teachers about social and family characteristics of students[a]*	.21
30. I referred students to welfare institutions that implement social policies (family court, family health centers, women's centers, SENAME, etc.) in order to provide solution strategies for cases that arise in the school[b]	.68
31. I worked collaboratively with teachers to implement curriculum adjustments that enhance student learning[a]	.11
32. I collaborated with other student support teams to implement actions that support students and/or teachers; for example, with professionals from PIE, SENDA, HPV, Social protection Network, etc.	.70
33. I collaborated with the school principal to identify and implement actions aimed at supporting the emotional, social, and academic development of students	.78
34. I collaborated with the technical-pedagogical unit to identify and implement actions aimed at supporting the emotional, social, and academic development of students[c]	.78
35. I participated in community meetings and/or working groups for the management of school climate	.67
36. I conducted interventions with parents to support them in dealing with difficulties that affect student performance and well-being	.78
37. I conducted interviews with teachers to investigate the problems and/or situations concerning the referral of students[c]	.83
38. I developed integration actions to create common languages with other professionals for the diagnosis, intervention, and evaluation of the actions conducted[d]	.80

Note. SENAME = Servicio Nacional de Menores (National Service for Children); PIE = Programa de Integración Escolar (School Integration Program); SENDA = Servicio Nacional para la Prevención y Rehabilitación del Consumo de Drogas y Alcohol (National Service for Prevention and Rehabilitation of Drug and Alcohol Consumption); HPV = Programa Habilidades para la Vida (Life Skills Program).

*Eliminated from further analyses.

[a]Adapted from Cádiz and Manríquez (2015).

[b]Adapted from Toro (2012).

[c]Adapted from Ministry of Education of Chile (2015).

[d]Adapted from Bodenhorn and Skaggs (2005).

assigned to cater to highly disruptive and at-risk students. PIE professionals are psychologists, special education teachers, and other professionals such as speech therapists, physical therapists, and kinesiologists hired to work with students with special educational needs associated with disabilities. Most

participants were women (73.3%). In terms of their profession, participants were teachers (34.9%), psychologists (34.9%), social workers (25.2%), special education teachers (1.52%), sociologists (0.3%), psychopedagogues (0.3%), and others (2.7%). The average age was 36 years ($SD = 10.85$; range = 23–74; 30% were younger than 30).

Instruments

The battery of instruments consisted of a first section on demographics, including the sociodemographic information of the schools and the personal demographics of the professionals, their contractual information, and the general and specific professional training they received in psychosocial support. Then, the three professional practice scales were presented (see Tables 1–3 for the specific elements). The scales were Likert-type and measured the frequency of carrying out support actions in the previous month (0 = *0 times*, 1 = *1 to 4 times*, 2 = *5 to 8 times*, 3 = *9 to 12 times*, 4 = *13 to 16 times*, 5 = *17 to 20 times*, and 6 = *21 or more times*).

Procedure

The survey was administered online in Spanish. This modality was chosen because it allowed access to more participants in a large territory such as Chile. The participants were summoned via email using the Chilean national registry of education assistants for 2017 and 2018. In addition, a weekly reminder was made through email and telephone using this registry. The administration occurred between December 2017 and April 2018. The response time was approximately 25 minutes.

Analytic Plan

Data analysis was performed using the Spanish version. To analyze validity, the underlying factors were first explored using maximum likelihood exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with the oblimin rotation method, based on eigenvalues greater than 1. We performed separate EFAs for each theoretical scale because we did not theoretically assume an underlying factor of "professional actions." This analysis allowed for eliminating items with a factor loading at or below .35, following Hair et al.'s (1999) criteria. We also eliminated items that did not present a clear discrimination between factors and those with communalities less than .40 (Costello & Osborne, 2005). These items were removed nonsequentially. Second, we performed a one-dimensional confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to analyze the underlying structure. Modification indexes were used to strengthen the adjustment indicators (Orgaz, 2008). Finally, we analyzed the internal consistency of each

scale using Cronbach's alpha. We did not carry out a second-order analysis, because each scale of practices responded to a different theoretical construct. We analyzed the data using SPSS version 23 and Stata 13.

Ethical Considerations

The study design was approved by the institutional review board of the first author's institution. To safeguard ethical aspects, we included informed consent in the survey, which described the study objectives, scope of the research, and access to information in case of doubts or questions.

Results

Exploring Underlying Factors

Socioemotional and academic support practices. Initially, this dimension consisted of 15 items that included emotional, social, and academic support practices for students at individual, group, and universal levels. The results suggested the presence of two factors with an explained variance of 68.76% (KMO = .931; $\chi^2 = 3056.674$; $p < .001$), attributable to the implementation of individual and group actions. We found two items with factor loadings below .30 (items 2 and 6), which were not part of either factor and were not included in further analyses. We also found two items that shared factor loads in both factors (items 8 and 15). These items, because they did not indicate their position in one of the factors clearly, were eliminated from the scale in subsequent analyses (see Table 1).

Following these findings, we decided that the original scale of socioemotional and academic support should be considered as two scales (individual and group supports). The scale for individual socioemotional and academic support practices featured five items (items 1, 3–5, and 7). The reliability of this scale was high ($\alpha = .87$). The scale for group socioemotional and academic support practices featured six items (items 9–14), and its reliability was also high ($\alpha = .94$).

Leadership practices. Initially, this scale featured 13 items describing actions requiring leadership skills for managing school climate. The results of the factorial matrix showed the presence of one factor that explained 64.72% of the variance (KMO = .904; $\chi^2 = 2146.436$; $p < .001$). However, EFA results showed four items with factor loadings below .33 (items 17, 20, 21, and 24), which were eliminated from further analyses (see Table 2). Based on EFA findings together with further content analyses of the items that loaded on each factor, we concluded that the remaining nine items theoretically reflected the

dimension of leadership practices (items 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, and 25–28). The reliability for this scale was high (α = .93).

Interdisciplinary collaboration practices. Initially, this scale featured 10 items that described collaboration practices in the implementation of school interventions for managing school climate and student-related issues. It also included networking activities to strengthen the management of school climate and solve specific students' welfare issues. EFA results suggested the presence of a single factor with 61.95% explained variance (KMO = .915; χ^2 = 1511.816; $p < .001$). The matrix of factor loadings showed two items with factor loadings less than .20 (items 29 and 31; see Table 3). After content analysis of these items, both of which describe forms of collaboration with teachers, we decided to eliminate item 29 but keep item 31, given its theoretical pertinence based on Chilean studies that report that support programs present difficulties to establish collaboration in the pedagogic area (Carrasco Aguilar et al., 2019; Jarpa-Arriagada et al., 2020). Theoretically, we considered that this action is fundamental for establishing universal prevention. Based on these findings, we constructed the scale of collaboration practices with nine items (items 30–38). Reliability for this dimension was high (α = .91), and Cronbach's alpha was higher when item 31 was included.

Confirmation of Underlying Factors

The four scales underwent separate CFAs. The modification indexes suggest the integration of covariances of the errors to improve the adjustment indicators for each scale (Orgaz, 2008; see Figures 1–4 for details of error covariances incorporated in each CFA). In general, the scales showed good levels of adjustment (see Figures 1–4), with significant χ^2 ($p < .001$), RMSEA values less than .05, and IFC and TLI indicators greater than .95 (Byrne, 2013).

Descriptive Results by Role and Profession

Descriptive statistics showed that the most frequent types of practices performed by participants were individual socioemotional and academic support practices (M = 2.33, SD = 1.36). These actions, in turn, were carried out mainly by professionals holding the position of psychosocial pairs (M = 2.62, SD = 1.37) and PIE professionals (M = 2.53, SD = 1.45), whose statistics exceeded the global means. A similar distribution was observed when data were analyzed by profession: Psychologists (M = 2.61, SD = 1.29) and social workers (M = 2.55, SD = 1.41) most frequently performed individual socioemotional and academic support practices, group socioemotional and academic support practices, and collaboration. Overall, leadership practices were

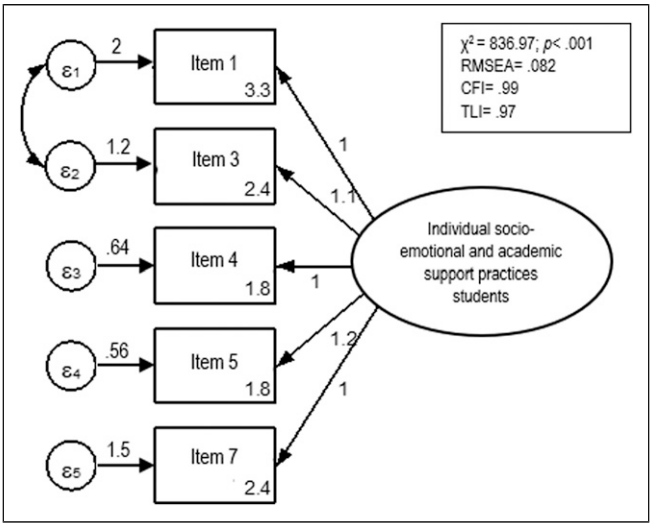

Figure 1. *Individual socioemotional and academic support practices. Note.* Ellipse = latent variable; rectangle = observed variable. Standardized regression coefficients are indicated in the connectors between latent and observed variables and between the error terms of observed variables. The covariance errors show a moderate and significant correlation between the items (r = .57, p < .001).

the least developed (M = 1.40, SD = 1.12). Analysis of variance with post hoc Tukey comparisons confirmed that significant differences were found only for individual socioemotional and academic support practices, which were developed more frequently by psychosocial pairs (F = 9.739, p < .01) and psychologists (F = 9.891, p < .001; see Table 4).

Discussion

Universal prevention in schools is a salient topic in the field of prevention science. The focus on intervening only with the most distressed students rather than universal prevention is a barrier experienced in the United States and elsewhere (Turri et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was to construct and validate scales that would allow researchers, school administrators, and practitioners to characterize the actions of support professionals in schools based on universal prevention and whole-school approaches, which might be used to assess and enhance these approaches.

The findings of the psychometric analysis attest to the reliability and validity of the scales, presenting four types of professional support practices: (a) individual socioemotional and academic support practices, (b) group socioemotional and academic support practices, (c) leadership practices, and

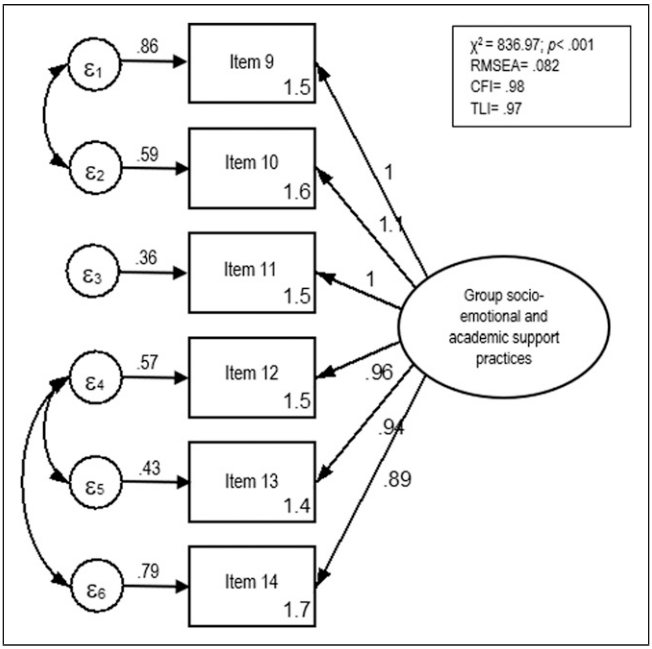

Figure 2. *Group socioemotional and academic support practices. Note.* Ellipse = latent variable; rectangle = observed variable. Standardized regression coefficients are indicated in the connectors between latent and observed variables and between the error terms of observed variables. The covariance errors show a high ($r > .60$), very high ($r > .80$), and significant correlation between the items ($p < .001$).

(d) interdisciplinary collaboration practices. Theoretically, we posit that these scales allow an initial characterization and understanding of whether and how the day-to-day practices of nonteaching school support professionals are aligned with universal whole-school approaches (ASCA, 2019; Betters-Bubon et al., 2016; Cohen & Espelage, 2020; Elfrink et al., 2017; Goodman-Scott et al., 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Because a multitiered approach requires that Tier 1 support interventions be ongoing and provided to all students, even for students participating in Tier 2 and 3 interventions, it is reasonable to expect that the amount of time invested in different tiered supports depends on the role of the support professional. For example and depending on their role, a school psychologist may need to spend more time on Tier 3 interventions, as do school nurses and speech pathologists. In turn, school counselors will probably spend more time in Tier 1 and 2, but depending on the school and number of school counselors, they may need to provide Tier 3 supports.

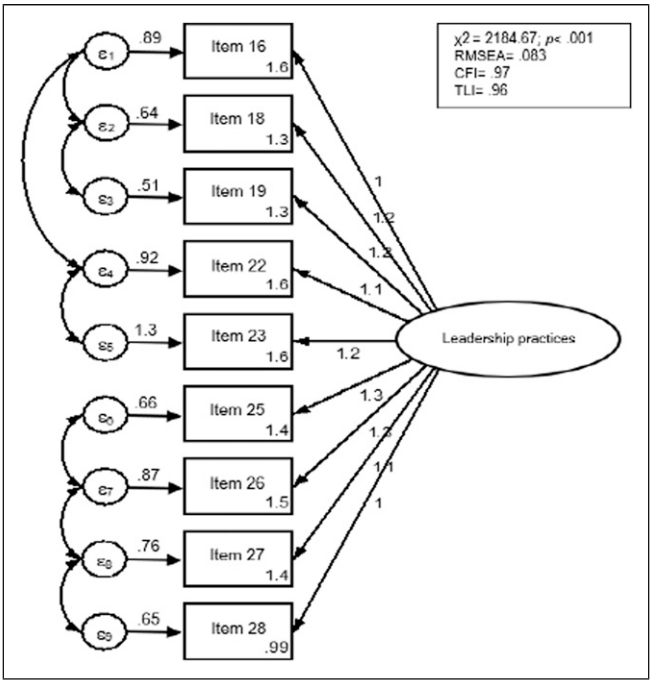

Figure 3. *Leadership practices. Note.* Ellipse = latent variable; rectangle = observed variable. Standardized regression coefficients are indicated in the connectors between latent and observed variables and between the error terms of observed variables. The covariance errors show a high ($r > .60$), very high ($r > .80$), and significant correlation between the items ($p < .001$).

However, it is also reasonable to expect that support professionals whose aim is to improve school climate spend significant amounts of time on Tier 1 supports. They will need to provide multiple forms of Tier 1 practices that require leadership and interdisciplinary collaborative skills for working with teachers, parents, school staff members, and students and for networking with school mental health and welfare professionals inside and outside the school boundaries (Chapman et al., 2013; Lane & Menzies, 2003; Mau et al., 2016; Maynard et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2007). Hence, we pose that the scales of leadership and interdisciplinary collaborative practices, respectively, are an expression of Tier 1 universal supports, as depicted in Figure 5.

Likewise, because targeted interventions for high-risk groups of students are usually performed through group interventions—to specific groups of students or in specific classrooms, given certain situations—we pose that the scale of group socioemotional and academic support practices reflects Tier 2 focused interventions (see Figure 5). Finally, we hold that the scale of

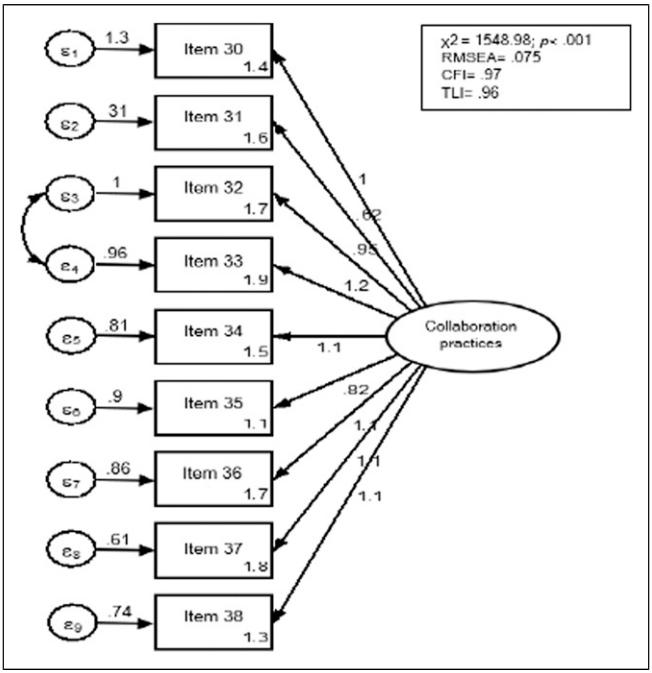

Figure 4. *Collaboration practices. Note.* Ellipse = latent variable; rectangle = observed variable. Standardized regression coefficients are indicated in the connectors between latent and observed variables and between the error terms of observed variables. The covariance errors show a high and significant correlation between the items (r = .68, p < .001).

individual socioemotional and academic support practices is an expression of Tier 3 intensive and highly individualized interventions (see Figure 5; Dimmitt & Wilkerson, 2012; Queensland Department of Education, 2020).

Therefore, we propose that these scales can shed light on the kinds of practices to which support professionals are committed, which would allow understanding of the (appropriate) design and implementation of whole-school strategies of intervention. We argue that these scales make it possible to advance the characterization of professional actions, considering different disciplines of origin, and provide relevant information for the construction and delimitation of roles and functions. Additionally, they may assist in identifying and developing whole-school improvement efforts inspired by universal prevention models, by identifying practices less developed by these professionals.

The international literature has shown wide implementation of support systems for disadvantaged students in schools (ASCA, 2019; Betters-Bubon

Table 4. Means, standard deviations, and group mean comparisons for the final scales.

Characteristic	*n*	Individual socioemotional and academic support			Group socioemotional and academic support			Leadership			Interdisciplinary collaboration		
		M	*SD*	*F*(*df*)	*M*	*SD*	*F*(*df*)	*M*	*SD*	*F*(*df*)	*M*	*SD*	*F*(*df*)
Role													
Psychosocial pairs	113	2.62	1.37	9.739(1) p = .002	1.64	1.34	0.982(1) p = .323	1.51	1.21	0.717(1) p = .398	1.71	1.21	1.708(1) p =.192
School climate coordinators	175	2.11	1.32		1.49	1.23		1.39	1.10		1.52	1.13	
PIE professionals	24	2.53	1.45	—	1.55	1.27	—	1.09	1.03	—	1.45	1.00	—
Other	17	2.34	1.21	—	1.35	1.20	—	1.22	0.79	—	1.48	0.93	—
Profession													
Teacher	115	1.9	1.25	9.891(2)	1.37	1.18	1.889(2)	1.37	1.12	0.304(2)	1.44	1.14	1.632(2)
Psychologist	115	2.61	1.29	p < .001	1.65	1.24	p = .153	1.36	1.02	p = .738	1.64	1.10	p = .197
Social worker	83	2.55	1.41		1.66	1.39		1.48	1.27		1.72	1.21	
Special ed teacher	5	1.08	1.04	—	0.58	0.49	—	0.84	0.19	—	1.09	0.38	—
Other	9	2.86	1.75	—	1.72	1.56	—	1.90	1.26	—	1.50	1.16	—
Global	329	2.33	1.36		1.54	1.26		1.40	1.12		1.58	1.14	

Note. *n* = observations; *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; *F*(*df*) = *F*-test (degrees of freedom); PIE = Programa de Integración Escolar (School Integration Program). For the descriptive statistics, only professionals with *n* greater than 1 (there was one sociologist and one psychopedagogue) were considered. For analyses of variance, groups with a similar *n* were considered (role: psychosocial pairs and school climate coordinators; profession: psychologists, social workers, and teachers).

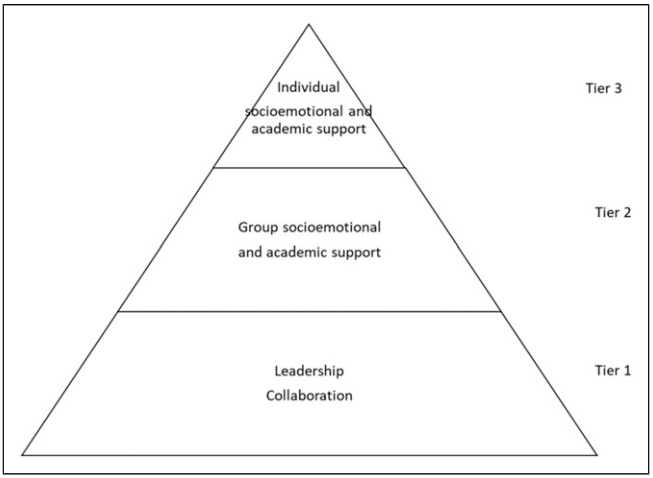

Figure 5. *Theoretical whole-school prevention and promotion professional practices assessed by the instrument.*

et al., 2016; Freeman et al., 2006) and for preventing school violence and improving school climate (Cohen & Espelage, 2020; Elfrink et al., 2017). The emergence and implementation of these programs tend to open the field to psychosocial support professionals. At first, they were responsible for serving students through individual interventions (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). Throughout the years, these professionals have expanded their focus of intervention by seeking to incorporate contextual elements into the school, integrating levels of intervention to groups of students and at the school level (Astramovich et al., 2013; Betters-Bubon et al., 2016; Goodman-Scott et al., 2015; Sugai & Horner, 2006) and directing their action toward ethical principles emphasized by professional associations (ASCA, 2019), which allows articulated work with clear and socialized guidelines in schools.

However, in Chile, educational policies have focused on accountability during the last decades, and school climate has been subordinated to the logic of accountability through high-stakes testing without offering clear orientation and guidance to these nonteaching support professionals, who are supposed to cater to the most vulnerable students in the country (López et al., 2021). In addition, the focused policies translated into subsidized funding—that is, additional vouchers—for "at-risk" students have influenced the organization of work, mandating that professionals often must respond exclusively to these students because their contracts are subject to resources received by these students. In effect, the preliminary findings from group comparisons by role and profession in this sample provide evidence that Chilean psychosocial pairs, particularly school psychologists, spend more time on Tier 3 individual

supports, and that overall, nonteaching professionals hardly participate in activities that require their leadership skills. In this line, in recent years, professional associations have begun to speak out against generalized individual interventions as the main focus of intervention (Asociación Nacional de Psicólogos Educacionales de Chile, 2015), but their discourse has not been sufficiently heard or considered by legal regulations.

Because the scales constructed and validated in this study present adequate psychometric properties in terms of reliability and validity, we suggest their use among representative samples of nonteaching support professionals in Chile and other countries to further characterize their professional practices. The scales may be used to assess tiered prevention intervention, both separately and jointly. Special attention should be given to depicting which types of practices are most frequent among which professions and associated with which roles, as outlined by work contracts. In this sense, a limitation of this study was that the sample did not include speech therapists, physical therapists, or kinesiologists, who have a current professional-to-student ratio of 574, 3,392 and 3,516, respectively. Future studies could also adapt the instruments to suit their school system to characterize the intervention practices led by these professionals. We suggest including data on the proportion of time that professionals report spending in each of the four practices. Methodologically, a venue for further scale construction and validation is items regarding collaboration with teachers and pedagogical matters, which did not load properly on the interdisciplinary collaboration scale, suggesting that this might be a separate topic of study.

With respect to the limitations of this study, the sample was not representative but rather nonprobabilistic and intentional. The scales were administered online, which could have generated bias in terms of digital alphabetization and expertise of the participants who responded, who were older than expected given previous findings (López et al., 2021). We could not cross-check the types of practices indicated by participants with observational data, which is something future studies should consider. Finally and in more conceptual terms, most of the participants were hired in the framework of educational legislation and policies framed by logics of high-stakes testing, which create punitive educational environments (Wayman et al., 2013). This may generate biases in the types of actions reported by these professionals, given the social and policy expectations of individual (Tier 3) interventions for the most disadvantaged students. However, progress in the identification of actions and practices of support for students' school experiences is a first step to precisely problematizing the policies that have allowed the entry of these professionals in schools and that today require their characterization and evaluation.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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