Harnessing The Power of Conflict: Grade-Level Coordinators' Experiences

Name: Daniella Mazzini

Student number: 0638749

First assessor: Ellen Daniëls

Second assessor: Brianna Kennedy

Date: 18/01/2023

Wordcount: 6,121.

Abstract

With the fast pace of educational change, schools are becoming too complex for principals to be the sole providers of leadership. Middle leaders, teachers appointed to a formal position of authority, are essential to ensuring collaboration in teacher teams. For teams to function effectively, middle leaders need to productively embrace conflict. However, little is known about conflicts in teacher teams and how middle leaders manage them. To gather insights into their experiences, semi-structured interviews were carried out in this study, following an exploratory qualitative single-case design. Results reveal that for middle leaders, the most difficult conflicts to manage are inadequate personal interactions and interpersonal differences, and most are solved with integrative strategies. In addition, a differentiation of integrative approaches is proposed by the researcher, namely proactive and reactive, which serve distinct purposes when managing conflicts. The findings point to a need to increase proactive strategies to generate collaboration in team meetings whilst keeping reactive strategies in mind to manage conflict when it arises.

Keywords: Distributed leadership, school leaders, conflict, conflict management, teacher teams.

Introduction

Research from the early 1990s indicated that with the fast pace of educational change, schools were becoming too complex for principals to be the sole providers of leadership (Keedy & Finch, 1994). This way, the concept of distributed leadership, which states that using leadership expertise from different levels of the school leads to change and improvement, has become a mantra over the past decade (Koemhong, 2021). One of the actors who have emerged in the distributed leadership model is the middle leader, who is a teacher appointed to a formal position of authority within the school's organizational structure (Bryant et al., 2020). Middle leaders play a key role in fostering collaboration and reflection on student performance and teaching practices in grade-level teacher teams (Hallinger, 2018). As teachers are given an increased voice in team meetings, there is more need for consensus and cooperation, so for these teams to function effectively, middle leaders need to productively embrace conflict and dissent (Graham, 2007; Toole & Louis, 2002).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development stresses the need for leadership strategies that promote collaboration among school leaders, teachers, and school boards and a culture of continuous improvement (Pont et al., 2008). Indeed, academics have agreed on the importance of positive working relationships in effective schools (De Nobile, 2018; Vangrieken et al., 2016). Nonetheless, Postholm and Boylan (2018) found that middle leaders struggle to foster these constructive interactions and mentioned that more studies are needed to identify the specific skills required for these actors. Notably, not identifying the challenges of collaboration can lead to leaders acting in ways that increase team conflicts (Sanders, 2006).

Middle leaders include department heads, grade-level leaders, instructional coaches, program coordinators, and cross-school experts in technology or special education needs (De Nobile, 2018). The present study focuses on grade-level leaders, also called grade-level coordinators (GLCs), who are teachers that lead grade-level teacher teams. Drawing on diverse studies on middle leadership and conflict management, this study provides insights into how GLCs manage conflicts in their teams and identifies management challenges that remain. It addresses the need to increase the

research on middle leadership, which has been repetitively identified as a related variable of effective teacher teams (De Nobile, 2018; Kin, 2021).

By being a case study, the current research aims to understand the case of the GLCs in a private school in Lima, Peru. As middle leadership and conflict management are contemporary issues in schools, the case study design is useful. Yin (2017) explains that this type of research allows the exploration of a wide range of factors influencing the topic at hand and results in a comprehensive, multifaceted understanding of a complicated problem in its practical setting. Thus, this study will address a complex social phenomenon by focusing in-depth on a specific school and the small group behaviors in it while maintaining a holistic view of the issue. On the other hand, the present research will lead to specific social insights for other educational contexts in which the middle leadership is having similar conflict issues since a description of context and operationalization of instruments will allow them to use the empirical evidence for future research.

Theoretical framework

To address the problems mentioned above, the current study aims to identify the conflicts GLCs encounter during grade-level team meetings, the management strategies they employ to manage them, and the management challenges that remain. Thus, the following concepts will be explained; GLCs and conflict management strategies.

Grade-level coordinators

As mentioned before, school leadership is not only carried out by principals but other people in formal leadership positions such as assistant principals and GLCs, classroom teachers who have a middle leadership position between teachers in their grade-level team, and senior management (Devos et al., 2014). De Nobile (2018) mentions some of their usual responsibilities: improvement of student well-being, curriculum and teacher development, and communicating the senior management team's agenda to the teachers they lead. Nonetheless, many authors have called for additional empirical research on the effectiveness of their roles and work (Cooper, 2021; Crane & De Nobile, 2014).

Grade-level teams. GLCs lead grade-level teams in which collaboration between teachers is encouraged. Some of the tasks they engage in include "curriculum planning and integration, reviewing data to make instructional decisions, examining student work and behavior, problem-solving, and individual student concerns" (Kahn et al., 2015, p. 2).

Conflict

As stated by Achinstein (2002), teachers engaged in collaboration generate and thrive on conflict. The latter is defined as the inconsistency in people's values and goals (Valente et al., 2020).

Types of conflict. The present study follows the distinction made by Valente et al. (2020) between constructive and destructive conflicts, which depend on how they are managed. Constructive conflicts are beneficial for teams because the different points of view are integrated through constructive negotiation (Decuyper et al., 2010). This entails an open and courteous presentation of opposing viewpoints in which involved parties listen and try to understand one another in a search for mutually acceptable agreements and combinations of different ideas (Tjosvold et al., 2004). In contrast, destructive conflicts involve team members interfering with each other's behaviors and refusing to accept feedback because of disputes about the distribution of work, incompatible goals, personalities, and vague assignments (Somech, 2008). Moreover, certain conflicts may be overlooked or misinterpreted by team members as a personal and emotional rejection rather than a difference in opinion (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Sources of conflict. Valente et al. (2020) mention its four components: causes, parties involved, how it is faced, and context. Concerning the sources of conflict, Saiti (2014) identified the following: 1) problems in communication such as inadequate message encoding, interpersonal interactions, and information exchange procedures, 2) role ambiguity about the job requirements, 3) incompatible goals or goal conflict, and 4) conflict of interest with resource allocation. Moreover, Afful-Broni (2012) mentions that age differences, membership in the institution, the struggle for power and competition for the available scarce resources, goal incompatibility, and interpersonal disputes are common sources of conflicts in schools. On this line, Martinez (2005) identified the most

common causes of school conflicts: lack of communication, personal interests, previous conflicts, issues of power, or political and ideological differences. Also, Kipyego (2013) states that school conflicts can arise because of image perceptions relating to authority, duties, and personality traits; role conflict, and conflict over core values. Finally, Ajai (2017) lists the following sources of conflict: 1) poor communication resulting from ambiguity and misunderstandings, 2) different values and beliefs, 3) differing interests and goals, 4) scarce resources available to do jobs, 5) personality clashes and 6) poor effective performance that is not addressed.

Conflict management strategies

As mentioned beforehand, a conflict is constructive or destructive depending on how it is managed. Kipyego (2013) lists the following conflict resolution strategies: 1) creating a shared goal between the conflicting parties, 2) using behavioral change techniques to reduce attitudes that influence conflict, 3) altering the formal interaction patterns of the conflicting parties such as job reorganization, 4) using formal authority to determine the desired outcome of the conflict, 5) avoiding and withdrawing from the situation, 6) teachers involved in the conflict compromise, 7) face-to-face meeting where the problem is solved, and 8) smoothing differences while emphasizing common interests. Moreover, Gumuseli and Hacifazlioglu (2009) identified the most popular conflict management strategy classification: 1) integration, which involves identifying the differences to reach the best consensus, 2) dominating, which refers to leaders imposing their view, 3) avoidance where the leader withdraws, 4) accommodating, in which leaders put more emphasis on the coinciding views instead of the differences and 5) compromising, in which both parties have to give up something to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision.

Furthermore, Fitzpatrick (2007) distinguishes between proactive and reactive conflict management. According to the author, reactive strategies encourage individuals to concentrate on problem-fixing and crisis management, and "addresses symptoms rather than causes'' (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 296). In contrast, proactive strategies seek to generate collaboration instead of responding to emerging conflicts. Behfar et al. (2008) found that "teams with consistently high/increasing

performance and satisfaction described norms about proactive problem solving, foreseeing and preventing problems, and learning to work with individual member's unique traits'' – (Behfar et al., 2008, p. 177).

Present study

The present study aims to explore how GLCs manage conflict in grade-level teams and what management challenges remain. Specifically, the following questions will be addressed: 1) What are the main conflicts in grade-level teams? 2) What are the sources of these conflicts? 3) What conflict management strategies are used by GLCs? 4) Which strategies used by GLCs are (not) effective?

Methods

Research design

To gather in-depth insights into GLCs' experiences, this study used an exploratory qualitative single-case study design, following Yin (2017), with semi-structured interviews. As stated by the aforementioned author, exploratory studies are used to identify which topics should be investigated further, plus information about the most relevant research questions and methods. Moreover, a case study was selected to study the specific phenomenon of middle leaders, grade-level team conflict, and conflict management strategies. Therefore, since the purpose of the study was to explore how GLCs manage conflicts in their teams and what challenges remain, the exploration was judged as successful when conflict situations and conflict management strategies were identified. This way, the conceptual framework for a later study was developed, and now, through quantitative studies, the most prevalent conflicts and strategies can be determined (Yin, 2017).

Participants

The participants of the present study are all the GLCs of a private international school in Peru. The intended number of respondents was 15, one per grade level from the first year of Early Childhood through Grade 12 if they all agree to participate in the study. However, due to the distance limitation, it was not possible to reach the planned amount and only 9 middle leaders were interviewed. The sampling method used by the researcher was purposeful sampling since, according

to Patton (1991) "it allows for a selection of information-rich cases for study in-depth" (p. 230) in which it is possible to investigate specific issues that correspond to the purpose of the research. Relevant participant characteristics such as age, previous studies, and work experience were determined in the interview (see Appendix C). About the context of the study, this specific school belongs to the Association of American Schools in South America, which entails that some participants might be American, and also, the teacher teams consist of American and Peruvian teachers.

Table 1

Participants' demographic information

Participant (Pseudonym)	Age (Years)	Experience as GLC (Years)	Grade they teach
Denise	36	3	5
Maria	37	5	3
Eva	54	3	1
Marcela	40	3	4
Elena	36	3	K
Lara	62	5	5
Michelle	34	3	2
Alessia	30	1	4
Silvana	28	2	1

Instrumentation

The data collection was done through semi-structured interviews, which were evidenced and operationalized in Appendix C and D respectively. Interviews were chosen since, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) state, in-depth interviews aim to expose information through the theoretical framework and describe the participants' perceptions. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) mention,

individual in-depth interviews are employed to co-construct meaning with participants by recreating perceptions of experiences. To develop the interview questions, an initial coding scheme was developed (see Appendix C) with the theoretical framework in mind. The research questions are used in the interview as well as more specific questions to search to have a deeper understanding of the participant's experiences and the different aspects of the phenomenon under study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

As Yin (2017) states, to produce relevant and usable results, research must be conducted thoroughly and methodically to allow readers to judge whether the process is trustworthy. For this, methods of analysis were recorded, systematized, and recorded. Qualitative research in which researchers' interpretations are part of the study continues to follow the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility, the confidence that can be had in the truth of the findings, has been assured by prolonged engagement because the researcher has worked in the studied school so rapport and trust have been established. It is pertinent to clarify that the researcher conducted the present study independently from the school.

Moreover, peer debriefing was done with a colleague regarding transcripts, methodology, and findings, which also ensured dependability and confirmability. Also, as the present research is an exploratory case study, transferability, which is the applicability of findings to other contexts, was ensured by providing think descriptions but "the real business of case study is particularization, not a generalization" (p. 8, Stake, 1995). An accurate description of the case was accomplished since the researcher made descriptions and interpretations, being vigilant about biases and being specific (Suryani, 2008).

Finally, it was crucial to describe researcher-participant relationships to increase transparency and thus, ensure the methodological quality of the present study. The researcher worked in the school 1 year ago and had close interactions with 2 teacher leaders, from the grade-level department she belonged to. The specific dynamics of these 2 relationships will be

considered and reported specifically. The latter may have an impact on the research process; it may be helpful or harmful since participants may withhold or share more information because of this prior relationship. To decrease such possibilities, the researcher made clear that confidence would be kept in the content of the interview.

Procedure

First, an informational email was sent to participants to request their participation in the study (see Appendix E) and then, informed consent forms to be signed (see Appendix F). Then, an online meeting was scheduled through Zoom at an agreed-upon time by the participants and the researcher. The phases of the research can be found in Appendix B and information about the data analysis process can be found in the next section.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and then codified using the tool NVivo. As mentioned by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), qualitative data analysis is an iterative process parallel to data collection in which an emerging understanding of research questions leads to a modification of the questions being asked. Saturation signals the end of data collection, which refers to the point where no new themes appear. The lack of consensus regarding conflicting situations and management strategies required a method that allowed for a flexible exploration of emerging themes from different participants, in which similarities and differences can be highlighted, and that allows for unanticipated insights to appear (King, 2012). Thus, template analysis was chosen; this way, the coding of data shown in Appendix D allowed modification after the first interviews. Then, data was analyzed with the final coding.

The following procedural steps in carrying out template analysis as defined by Brooks et al. (2014) were followed: 1) Tentative a priori themes relevant to the analysis were identified, 2) Preliminary coding by highlighting coded concepts, 3) Themes are organized and related to each other, which will include hierarchical relations, 4) The initial coding template was defined after 3 interviews, after which the researcher was convinced that it enclosed the necessary information, 5)

Template is applied to data and modified if necessary in an iterative process, for example, if new themes are introduced, and 6) The final template is defined and applied to all the data when it allows to develop a description of the case in response to the research questions.

The analysis for this study was deductive, meaning that it was determined by the research questions and theoretical framework, in contrast to a "bottom-up" analysis where the themes arise from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the researcher documented the process by means of an audit trail (see Appendix G) which was then translated into the final coding system (Appendix H). Firstly, patterns in the transcripts were noted and a tentative code scheme was developed. Then, a coding procedure was used to create labels for the data segments that were pertinent to answering the study questions, and thus, themes were created by grouping together similar codes, eliminating, separating, and merging codes. This wasn't a linear process; it was recursive and reflective. The audit trail, also known as "analytic documentation," concentrated on how the codes and themes were created and set up (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993).

Results

The results of this study are presented through two themes. Theme 1, sources of conflict, presents the answers to the second research question "what are the sources of these conflicts?" and theme 2, conflict management strategies, to the third one "what conflict management strategies are used by GLCs?". About the first research question, "what are the main conflicts in grade-level teams?" the researcher noted that when participants described their experiences, they did not refer to the actual facts but their interpretations of them. Thus, it was not possible to gather information on the specific conflicts that arose. Moreover, the fourth research question, "which strategies used by GLCs are (not) effective?" was also not answered because GLCs refrain from giving the researcher an interpretation of the strategies they had employed and instead, only provided a recount of their actions.

Table 2

Frequency of code appearance

Theme	Category	Code	Sub-code	Frequency (*N* of interviews)	Frequency (*N* of references)
Sources of conflict	Inadequate personal interactions			5	24
		Hard personality		3	4
		Reduced tolerance		2	5
		Poor performance		2	2
	Inability to focus on content			3	4
	Power struggles			1	2
	Goal conflict			1	1
	Interpersonal differences			6	16
		Teaching styles		2	2
		Working styles		4	4
		Experience differences		3	3
Conflict management strategies	Integration strategies			9	94
		Reactive strategies		9	47
			Shared goal	5	10
			Smooth differences	2	3
			Compromise.	2	2
			Voting	2	4
			State conflict	3	5
			Acknowledge feelings.	3	5
			Third person	2	4

		Pros and cons	1	2
		Pause.	5	9
		Request help from superiors	1	1
		Remind of team agreements	3	5
	Proactive strategies		9	49
		Space for opinions	7	10
		Paraphrase	4	5
		Team agreements	7	14
		Agenda	4	7
		Anticipate conflict	3	4
		Personal relationships	5	11
Dominating strategy			1	2
Avoidant strategy			1	2

Theme 1. Sources of conflict

This theme refers to the reasons GLCs attribute to the destructive conflicts that arise in their team meetings. These sources of conflict correspond to perspectives and theories GLCs have about conflicts and their causes. Inadequate personal interactions and interpersonal differences proved to be the most common sources of conflict for the participants as they were mentioned in 5 and 6 interviews and referenced 24 and 16 times respectively as seen in Table 2. They are not presented in a ranked order.

Inadequate personal interactions

GLCs recalled moments when team members exhibited unpleasant behaviors toward others such as hurtful statements, aggressiveness, and criticism. The three main specific reasons GLCs attributed to these conducts were: 1) Hard personality, 2) Reduced tolerance and 3) Poor performance. First, participants mention some team members have personalities that are hard to work with. They mention some people having repetitive aggressive and avoidant behaviors, as well as domineering (wanting things your way) and dramatic (attention-seeking) conduct. About the latter, Elena mentioned: *"I think in general, that some people enjoy drama more than others"*.

Then, participants mention some team members are less tolerant of others because of stressful situations in their personal lives or in school (as there are too many changes). They mention people being hard because of hard moments in their lives. As Lara mentions, *"too many changes at the same time, kind of throws you off balance".* Finally, participants mention some team members address mistakes made by others in passive-aggressive and non-constructive ways. They mention errors in worksheets given to children and planning which results in added work for the others. Lara explains that *"sometimes just randomly when things don't work, or they seem to not work, sometimes it's hard not to point fingers".* Thus, poor performance leads to conflicts because the focus of the team meetings is on the fact that someone made the mistake and is to blame instead of addressing the issue.

Goal conflict

GLCs mention that sometimes team members have different or conflicting goals for the grade-level curricula or agenda. As Michelle explains, *"the one teacher wanted to do something for this specific subject, and the other one didn't feel comfortable doing that".* This causes conflict when they don't want to compromise and decide to argue for their own side relentlessly.

Inability to focus on content

Participants mention sometimes team members are unable to focus on the content at hand because the focus is put on feelings and points of view. They mention some people can't communicate effectively because they take things personally and misunderstand what others say and

view what is said in a personal way. Denise explains it as follows: *"when they (things) are taken personally it implies there are strong emotions behind it and it's hard to help overcome hard emotions"*.

Interpersonal differences

GLCs mention times when it is difficult for team members to cooperate and work together effectively because of interpersonal differences. The three main specific reasons GLCs attributed to these difficulties were: 1) Teaching styles, 2) Working styles 3) Experience differences. First, participants mention that sometimes team members cannot collaborate smoothly because of the difference in their teaching experiences. This contrast emerges from three different sources; years of teaching, years of age, and where they come from (foreign or local hires). Participants describe diverse ways in which this difference impacts teachers' collaboration in the classroom or in team meetings. For example, Elena mentions that *"Maybe people that have been doing the job for many, many years and think they know the best way to do things right"*.

Then, participants mention team members struggling to adapt to others' teaching styles when having to share materials (lesson planning or presentations) or the classroom (teacher and teacher assistant). Lara mentions *"there was one person who apparently was preparing lessons that were way below our standard, the expectations or what we wanted to get out of our students"*. Finally, participants mention team members not being able to relate well with others because of the incompatibility of their work habits. They mention some teachers have very different personalities which leads to conflicts when they work with each other. The following quote from Eva illustrates this idea:

> *Their mindset was totally opposite like... antagonistic totally. Like one teacher was like 100% concrete sequential like she needed to have everything written down like A.1 like A.2.. Like that... And the other teacher was thinking out of the box the whole time... Like a random thinker.*

Power struggles

Participants mention that there are limits to their role so they can't enforce specific limits on team members. This lack of clarity causes conflicts because when people decide to break these rules, it is not clear who has the final say. The following quote from Maria illustrates this experience:

When she tells us that she wants the copies made we tell her no because this is not what we are agreeing to do, she is now telling us I don't care and I am going to do it because I think that's best.

Theme 2. Conflict management strategies

This theme refers to the conflict resolution strategies used by GLCs when destructive conflicts arise in team meetings. These strategies are the ways in which GLCs manage the conflicts between team members during meetings. Integration strategies proved to be the most common conflict management strategies as they were mentioned in 9 interviews in comparison to avoidant and dominant strategies which were only mentioned in 1 interview. They are not presented in a ranked order.

Integration strategies

GLCs employ integration strategies that are aimed at reaching agreements that satisfy most involved parties. During the interviews, participants referred to integration strategies that could be further categorized into reactive and proactive strategies. Both these categories were referenced by 9 GLCs and with a similar frequency (47 and 49 respectively) as seen in Table 2. This provides insight into the need to combine both to effectively integrate the different needs of team members into a mutually acceptable decision.

Reactive strategies. Participants mention that when team members start to engage in a conflict they have to employ strategies to help integrate their distinct viewpoints. The most commonly used reactive strategies were pausing, and helping team members see the shared goal. They were both referenced by 5 interviewees 9 and 10 times respectively.

Shared goal. Participants mention empathizing with the common ground of the work of team members who engage in a conflict. This way, they can focus on this instead of their differences.

Denise explains that "as a coordinator, you have to be able to see things from above and find a common ground from which to build on".

Smooth differences. Participants mention rephrasing the differences between team members in a way that they don't seem so contrary. For this, they state the positive aspects of the other person's attitude or actions. Eva mentions the following: *"I was highlighting all the great things about the other teachers' perspective and vice versa, and also highlighting what they were bringing into the meeting and that worked".*

Compromise. Participants mention asking team members to make concessions so everyone can be somewhat satisfied. This way, everyone gives up some of what they want in order to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision. As Alessia mentions: **"But this is where we're agreeing to be the same, and this is where we're agreeing for flexibility".**

Voting. Participants mention that voting sometimes is necessary when there are too many conflicting ideas or when it's just not possible to reach an agreement. They use different strategies such as post-it notes or re-stating all options verbally and asking the whole team to choose an option.

State conflict. Participants mention that sometimes conflicts are not properly addressed by team members and instead reflected as a general tension. When this happens, they assert the conflict so team members can give their opinion about it instead of containing their thoughts. Silvana mentions: *"I was very honest about like, these things are being said, these things are being said, and we're one team. And with this happening, it's creating a divide between our team. And if we're going to be supporting each other, we need to be like a united front".*

Acknowledge feelings. Participants mention that when conflicts arise in team meetings, they recognize and state the feelings that team members might be having. Eva explains how this strategy contributes to conflict management:

Sometimes it's not the idea that bothers them but it's something beyond that, that is not necessarily strictly related to the teaching or the idea but sometimes other things that are

affecting the teacher. So listening and as I said before, putting the human being first always.

Third person. Participants mention that sometimes conflicts cause certain conversations to extend longer than stipulated in the agenda and/or not lead anywhere productive. Then, they employ the strategy to ask someone who is not involved in the discussion for their opinion and thus change the conversation pathway. *"Ask, maybe ask other people in the team. So what do you think about this idea" (Lara)*

Pros and cons. Participants mention that when conflict arises because of the difficulty to reach an agreement, they compile a pros and cons list. They argue this is an effective way to visualize the different arguments.

Pause. Participants mentioned the importance of stopping discussions when a certain time has been dedicated to hearing everyone's arguments and sharing ideas. As Denise explains: *"If there is no common ground we'll give it a break and say we feel that we are not coming to an agreement so maybe let's give ourselves some time and next time we meet we'll see what we can come to".*

Request help from superiors. Participants mentioned the need to turn to their superiors (in this case, referred to as administration). Some request guidance in meetings and others ask that they attend the team meetings so they can attest to the conflict and talk to the involved parties. Eva mentions: *"Like, after doing all that, it's just like, okay, we've tried different things and I think it's time for, for admin to, to just see what is happening".*

Remind of team agreements. Participants mention they need to remind team members of the team agreements they previously have established as core elements of their collaboration. The most repetitive agreement was assuming positive intentions, which means that team members must always assume others' actions and opinions come from a positive intention and not take things personally. *"So when I start all the meetings I have as part of the agenda, the agreements posted at the beginning, and so somebody reads them." (Marcela)*

Proactive strategies. Participants mention that as they frequently experience conflicts in their teams, they employ some preventive strategies referenced in the present study as proactive

strategies. The most commonly used proactive strategies were giving space for opinions, and establishing team agreements. They were referenced by 7 interviewees 10 and 14 times respectively.

       Space for opinions. Participants mention that during team meetings they make sure everyone's voice is heard so they ask for opinions. As Alessia explains, it is important to *"make sure that. Everybody has the space to talk".*

       Paraphrase. Participants mentioned that they restate what team members say so it is clear for the rest of the team. This way, they avoid misunderstandings and make sure the message people want to convey has come across correctly. Maria explains why this strategy is effective: *"paraphrasing works a lot because some people just vent and when so when you paraphrase back to them, they listen to what they were saying and they kind of reflect".*

       Team agreements. Participants mention they have team agreements that are core elements of their teamwork and that all the members are aware of. The most repetitive agreement was assuming positive intentions, which means that team members must always assume others' actions and opinions come from a positive intention and not take things personally. Eva mentions another recurrent team agreement which is *"discussing the idea and not the person".*

       Agenda. Participants mention the role of having an agenda to have a reference to come back to when conflicts cause discussions to extend longer than intended. Marcela explains that *"always giving some time for the conversation is good because it can always be extended and it can go forever. So there has to be like a time limit and your agenda should have a time".*

       Anticipate conflict. Participants mentioned the importance of coming up with options when presenting an item on the agenda that demands an agreement to be made. They mention knowing the discussions that will most likely cause conflicts between team members and thus preparing options for resolution beforehand. As Marcela puts it:

       There has to be a thinking behind of how you're going to present an idea that might create some conflict because if you don't have thinking behind of how you are going to present an idea, then it can get out of hand.

Personal relationships. Participants mention that when team members engage with others in a personal way instead of only in a work-related manner, they are able to establish trust, which in turn avoids conflicts. As Marcela explains:

In order to be able to have a comfortable conflict, the members need to feel safe and they need to feel comfortable in expressing their ideas. If they don't feel comfortable, then people are not going to express... People might get some personal feelings if they don't agree with what I'm saying. So there has to be some trust built in at first, you know, for a team.

Dominating strategies

Participants determine the desired outcome without taking their team members' opinions into consideration. This strategy is sometimes used after prior integration strategies have been attempted or as a first resource. As Denise recalls:

There are many things I like to bring to the group to come to agreements but there are also things that I decide you know? Because… I mean… Let's put it like this, if I put everything on a vote, our productivity is lost. There are things that I make the executive choice of this will happen and this I will just inform.

Avoidant strategies

Participants avoid managing the conflict by withdrawing from the situation and arguing it is not their responsibility. Another way they justify not tackling the issue at hand is by altering the formal interaction patterns of the parties. Maria recalls a conflict that illustrates this point:

I have her saying I don't care and when that happens I just take a step to the side and I am not sure if it's the best as a GLC but I am not the administrator, the administrator should be saying hey why are you doing this if it is not in the planning, I am not the police officer.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore how GLCs manage conflict in grade-level teams and what management challenges remain. The researcher identified the most common sources of these conflicts and the conflict management strategies used by GLCs. Regarding research question 1, which

referred to the main conflicts in grade-level teams, participants in the present research did not differentiate between the conflict and the source of conflict and answered only the latter. Thus, the answer to research question 1 is present in the form of examples in the results of theme 1: sources of conflict. About research question 4, "which strategies used by GLCs are (not) effective??", participants only mentioned the strategies which were used but did not give an evaluation or comment on their effectiveness. Thus, as pointed out in the results, the researcher could not identify nor differentiate the effective and ineffective strategies.

The first main finding of this study is that middle leaders struggle the most with managing conflicts related to inadequate personal interactions and interpersonal differences. These sources of conflict are consistent with previous studies which had identified both as some of the most common in schools. This study expands research by identifying the sources of conflict with which middle leaders struggle the most, e.g. inadequate personal interactions and interpersonal differences. The second main finding of this study is that most conflicts are solved with integration strategies such as identifying a shared goal, giving space for opinions and establishing team agreements. Previous studies identified a lack of research regarding the skills needed by middle leaders to foster effective collaboration in their teams. This study expands research by identifying effective conflict resolution strategies used by middle leaders which, as mentioned previously, are mostly integrative. The third main finding of this study is that integration strategies used to solve conflicts can be proactive or reactive and GLCs use both to effectively solve conflicts. Previous studies had identified the need to use proactive strategies to address the causes of conflicts. This study expands research by identifying the specific proactive strategies used by middle leaders.

Limitations and future research

The first limitation of this study relates to its low generalizability. There were a low number of participants because of the choice of design and that many possible participants in Peru were not comfortable with online interviews. Also, by being a single-case study, the experiences of GLCs are not intended to be representative for all Peruvian middle leaders. Moreover, the fact that the chosen

school is international makes the experience of the participants more specific. Future research could solve this limitation by interviewing a larger group of GLCs to corroborate these are indeed the most common sources of conflict.

On the other hand, this study identified integration strategies as the most used by GLCs but did not identify the specific conflicts that these strategies are useful. This limitation was also present in regards to the categorization within integration strategies, proactive and reactive. Future research could solve this limitation by conducting research on the effectiveness of integration strategies, paying attention to the differentiation between proactive and reactive strategies, on specific conflicts.

Conclusions and implications for practice

In conclusion, this study identified inadequate personal interactions and interpersonal differences as the most difficult conflicts to manage for middle leaders. Also, most conflicts in teacher teams are effectively solved with integration conflict management strategies. Finally, it was found that integration strategies can be proactive or reactive, and each serves a different purpose when managing conflicts.

These findings point to a need to increase proactive strategies to generate collaboration in team meetings whilst being prepared to employ reactive strategies to manage conflict when it arises. Moreover, it shows that the interviewees hold the knowledge to successfully manage these situations and bring about cooperation between teachers. Instead of relying on professional development, principals could assign time for middle leaders to discuss conflicts they find hard to manage in their teams.

References

Achinstein, B. (2002). Conflict amid community: The micropolitics of teacher collaboration. *Teachers College Record*, 104(3), 421-455.

Afful-Broni, A. (2012). Conflict management in Ghanaian schools: a case study of the role of leadership of Winneba Senior High School. *Journal of educational planning & administration*, 2(2), 65-76.

Ajai, E. A. (2017). Assessment of conflict management strategies in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Research Studies in Management*, 6(1), 99-115.

Behfar, K. J., Peterson, R. S., Mannix, E. A., & Trochim, W. M. K. (2008). The critical role of conflict resolution in teams: A close look at the links between conflict type, conflict management strategies, and team outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(1), 170–188.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brooks, J., McCluskey, S., Turley, E., & King, N. (2014). The Utility of Template Analysis in Qualitative Psychology Research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* 12(2), 202–222. doi:10.1080/14780887.2014.955224.

Bryant, D. A., Wong, Y. L., & Adames, A. (2020). How middle leaders support in-service teachers' on-site professional learning. *International journal of educational research*, 100, 101530.

Cooper, P. A. H. (2021). The preparation and development of middle leaders in Victorian secondary schools (Doctoral dissertation).

Crane, A., & De Nobile, J. (2014). Year coordinators as middle-leaders in independent girls' schools: Their role and accountability. *Leading and managing*, 20 (1), 80-92.

De Dreu, C. K., & Weingart, L. R. (2003). A contingency theory of task conflict and performance in groups and organizational teams. *International handbook of organizational teamwork and cooperative working*, 151-166.

De Nobile, J. (2018). Towards a theoretical model of middle leadership in schools. School Leadership & Management, 38(4), 395-416.

Decuyper, S., Dochy, F., & Van den Bossche, P. (2010). Grasping the dynamic complexity of team learning: An integrative model for effective team learning in organisations. *Educational Research Review*, *5*(2), 111-133.

Devos, G., Tuytens, M., & Hulpia, H. (2014). Teachers' Organizational Commitment: Examining the Mediating Effects of Distributed Leadership. American Journal of Education, 120(2), 205–231. doi:10.1086/674370.

DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education, 40*(4), 314-321. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x

Fitzpatrick, R. L. (2007). A literature review exploring values alignment as a proactive approach to conflict management. *International journal of conflict management,* 18(3), 280-305.

Graham, P. (2007). Improving Teacher Effectiveness through Structured Collaboration: A Case Study of a Professional Learning Community. RMLE Online, 31(1), 1–17. doi:10.1080/19404476.2007.1146204.

Gumuseli, A. I., & Hacifazlioglu, O. (2009). Globalization and conflict management in schools. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, *4*(3), 183-198.

Hallinger, P. (2018). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership. *Educational management administration & leadership*, 46(1), 5-24.

Kahn, L., Whitley, C., & Williams, M. (2015). Teacher teams that work. *MLET: The Journal of Middle Level Education in Texas*, 2(1), 3.

Keedy, J. L., & Finch, A. M. (1994). Examining teacher-principal empowerment: An analysis of power. *Journal of Research & Development in Education.*

Kin, M. (2021). An Analysis on the Implementation of Professional Learning Communities in Malaysian Secondary Schools. Asian Journal of University Education, 17(1), 192-206.

King, N. (2012). Doing template analysis. In: Symon G and Cassell C (eds) Qualitative Organisational Research. London: SAGE, 426–450.

Kipyego, L. B. (2013). Conflict Management Methods Used By Secondary Schools Head Teachers: A Case Of Nandi Central District, Nandi County, Kenya. Unpublished Master of Education (Administration) Thesis.

Koemhong, S. (2021). Distributed Leadership in Schools: A Brief Review of the Literature. *Cambodian Journal of Educational Research*. 1, 73-80.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2006). Designing qualitative research (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Martinez, Z. D. (2005). *Mediación educativa y resolución de conflictos: modelos de implementación.* Buenos Aires: Ediciones Novedades Educativas.

Patton, M. (1991). Towards utility in reviews of multivocal literatures. Review of Educational Research, 61(3), 287-292.

Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2008). *Improving school leadership, volume 1 policy and practice: Policy and practice*. OECD publishing.

Postholm, M., & Boylan, M. (2018), Teachers' professional development in school: A review study, Cogent Education, 5(1), doi:10.1080/2331186X.2018.1522781.

Saiti, A. (2014). Conflicts in schools, conflict management styles and the role of the school leader. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43(4), 582–609. Doi: 10.1177/1741143214523007.

Sanders, M. G. (2006). Missteps in Team Leadership. Urban Education, 41(3), 277–304. doi:10.1177/0042085906287903.

Somech, A. (2008). Managing conflict in school teams: The impact of task and goal interdependence on conflict management and team effectiveness. *Educational administration quarterly*, 44(3), 359-390.

Stake, R. (1995). The art of case study research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Suryani, A. (2008). Comparing case study and ethnography as qualitative research approaches. Ilmu Komunikasi, 5(1), 117-127.

Tjosvold, D., Yu, Z., & Hui, C. (2004). Team learning from mistakes: The contribution of cooperative goals and problem-solving. Journal of Management Studies, 41(7), 1223–1245.

Toole, J., & Louis, K. (2002). The role of professional learning communities in international education. In *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration.* 245-279. Springer, Dordrecht.

Rodgers, B. L., & Cowles, K. V. (1993). The qualitative research audit trail: A complex collection of documentation. Research in nursing & health, 16(3), 219-226

Valente, S., Lourenço, A. A., & Németh, Z. (2020). School Conflicts: Causes and Management Strategies in Classroom Relationships. In *Interpersonal Relationships*. IntechOpen.

Vangrieken, K., Dochy, F., & Raes, E. (2016). Team learning in teacher teams: Team entitativity as a bridge between teams-in-theory and teams-in-practice. *European Journal of Psychology of Education,* 31(3), 275-298

Yin, R. K. (2017). Case study research: Design and methods (Vol. 6): SAGE

Appendix A

Ethical aspects

The present study has taken into consideration the possibility of encountering certain issues, risks, and/or dilemmas and is prepared for them. The researcher-participant relationship was addressed in the methods section. Concerning the academic integrity of the study, firstly, concerning sample characteristics and consent procedures, as the selected school is an American school, all teachers are proficient in the English language. Thus, the researcher is confident there will not be a language barrier. On this line, it is pertinent to mention that the team meetings are also conducted in English. Then, to manage the possibly sensitive questions it will be mentioned at the start of each interview, included in the consent and initial email, that participants can skip any questions which make them uncomfortable. Considering the effort required from participants and how this weighs against the relevance of the study, the researcher has prepared eight questions as suggested by Edwards (2008). Also, as the interview will require participants to remember specific information, open-ended questions were developed. This way, themes will be asked from different perspectives and if participants remember any specific details, they will be able to include them afterwards. Finally, data will be handled with the utmost care and the recordings will be deleted after the transcripts are done.

Appendix B

Timetable

Table B1.

Timetable for the implementation of the research plan.

Date	Activity	Preliminary work
January 2022	Draft research plan	Outline sent to supervisor + Meeting with supervisor
February	Final research plan	Finish research plan with supervisor input and feedback
	Contact participants	Meeting with supervisor before contacting participants
May	Transcribe interviews.	Download NVivo.
June	Audit trail	Work on coding scheme.
July	Code interviews	Define coding scheme.
October	Write results.	Write draft results and send to supervisor.
November	Write discussion.	Write draft discussion and send to supervisor.
January 2023	Deadline final thesis	Include supervisor feedback and finish the final thesis.

<p style="text-align:center">Appendix C</p>

<p style="text-align:center">Interview protocol</p>

Guidelines

- During the interview, repeat concisely what the participant says to get confirmation I am understanding correctly.

- Focus interview on 2-3 conflict situations so participants can provide enough detail and the interviewer can refer back to them without it being confusing.

Introduction

- Hello [participant name], how are you? (wait for response).

- I am grateful for you giving me some of your time to participate in my research. My name is Daniella Mazzini and I am an Educational Sciences Master's student at Utrecht University. As you read in the introduction letter I sent you, I am studying the conflict management strategies used by grade-level coordinators in grade-level teams. This interview will have a duration of 30 to 60 minutes which I would like to record so no details are lost. Of course, everything we discuss is confidential and will be anonymous. As soon as the interview is transcribed, the recording will be deleted. Do you agree? (wait for response).

- Please know you are free to stop the interview and skip any questions if you do not feel comfortable. Would you like to ask me any questions before we start? (wait for response).

- I will start by asking for some information about yourself and then we will start the interview. What is your name? (wait for response) What is your age? (wait for response) What is the highest education degree you attained? (wait for response) How long have you been teaching? (wait for response) How long have you been working at this school? (wait for response) What grade-level do you coordinate? (wait for response) For how long have you had that role? (wait for response) Have you completed trainings on conflict resolution? (wait for response) [If yes,] Which? (wait for response)

Open-ended questions

Table C1.

Interview questions.

Concepts	Interview questions

Introductory questions	1. Can you describe what your experience as a GLC has been like?
	   1.1. What are your specific responsibilities besides your teaching role?
	   1.2. How do you balance them with your teaching role?
	   1.3. Have you received any specific training to undertake these extra roles? Could you tell me about them?
	
	2. How do you feel about leading grade-level teams?
	   2.1. How do you think this has contributed to your career?
	   2.2. What are the aspects you most enjoy?
	   2.3. Are there any aspects you struggle with? Can you tell me about them?

Sources of conflict	3. As I mentioned before, I am studying the conflicts that arise in grade-level teams, so could you tell me how this looks in your team?
	   3.1. Could you tell me about a recent conflict?
	   3.2. What are the most frequent conflicts?
	
	4. Could you tell me more about this conflict? *Focus on 2-3 conflicts mentioned and ask the following questions about each.*
	   4.1. What do you think causes this conflict?
	   4.2. Are the people involved usually the same or does it vary?
	      4.2.1. *(If yes)* Is this person new in the team? Are they experienced teachers? How old are they?
	
	5. What other recurring conflict can you think of? *Ask about conflict description, causes and participants.*
	
	The researcher will take note of these conflicts and refer back to them in the next questions.

Conflict management strategies	6. How do you usually manage these conflicts?
	   6.1. What conflict management strategies do you use for this conflict? *Ask this question for the 2-3 conflicts.*
	
	7. Which conflicts do you find hardest to manage? *Refer back to mentioned conflicts if needed.*
	   7.1. *(The researcher will not ask this question if the participant mentions a conflict covered in 6.1)* What conflict management strategies do you use for them?
	
	8. What conflict management strategies do you find useful? *Refer back to mentioned conflicts if needed.*
	   8.1. What strategies do you use often?
	   8.2. Are there strategies you used and did not work?

Closing

- Thank you for your time, these were all the questions I wanted to ask you. Is there anything else you want to add? (wait for response)

- Do you have any questions? (wait for response) Please feel free to email me if you have any further questions or comments.

Operationalization of interview

Table D1.

Operationalization of interview.

Concepts	Sub-concepts	Operationalization	Literature support
Sources of conflict	1. Problems in communication	1.1. Inadequate message encoding such as choice of words and tone of voice. 1.2. Inadequate interpersonal interactions such as aggressive or avoidant behaviours. 1.3. Inadequate information exchange procedures such as bad timing of meetings or non-responsive policies to conflict. 1.4. Poor performance that is not addressed.	Saiti (2014)
	2. Role ambiguity	2.1. Unclear job requirements. 2.2. Power struggles in which it is not clear who has the final say.	Ajai (2017)
	3. Incompatible goals or goal conflict	3.1. Teachers express having different or conflicting goals for the grade-level curricula or agenda.	Afful-Broni (2012)
	4. Conflict of interest about resource allocation.	4.1. Teachers compete for available resources such as materials, games, or shared spaces.	Martinez (2005)
	5. Conflict over interpersonal differences	5.1. Conflicts over political and ideological matters such as the political situation of the country or teaching methods to be employed. 5.2. Personality clashes.	Kipyego (2013)
Conflict management strategies	1. Integration strategies.	1.1. Creating a shared goal between the conflicting parties. 1.2. Smoothing differences while emphasising common interests. 1.3. Both parties have to give up something to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision.	Kipyego, (2013)
	2. Dominating strategies.	2.1. Using formal authority to determine the desired outcome of the conflict.	Gumuseli & Hacifazlioglu (2009)

| 3. Avoidant strategies. | 3.1. Avoiding and withdrawing from the situation. |
| | 3.2. Altering the formal interaction patterns of the conflicting parties such as job reorganisation. |

Information letter

Title of the investigation: Harnessing The Power of Conflict: Grade-Level Coordinators' Experiences

Student Investigator: Daniella Mazzini, Utrecht University, d.e.mazzinimolfino@uu.nl

Faculty Supervisor: Ellen Daniëls, Utrecht University, e.e.daniels@uu.nl

Contact details for official complaints: klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl

Contact details of the Data Protection Officer of Utrecht University: privacy@uu.nl

Document version date: 18/02/2022

Dear participant,

My name is Daniella Mazzini and I am an Educational Sciences Master student at Utrecht University. You are invited to participate in my research about the conflict management strategies used by grade-level coordinators in grade-level teams. This letter will explain what the study is about, the possible risks and benefits, and your rights as a research participant to help you make an informed decision about your involvement. If you have any questions about anything in the letter, please contact me before agreeing to participate in the study. If you opt to participate in the study, you will receive a copy of the information as well as a consent form.

My investigation aims to gather insights into how grade-level coordinators manage conflicts in their teams and what management challenges remain. Past research has shown the importance of effectively managing conflicts in teacher teams and I have found a lack of empirical research about the conflict management strategies used by grade-level coordinators. This is important because as teachers are given an increased voice in team meetings, there is more need for consensus and

cooperation, so for these teams to function effectively, grade-level coordinators need to productively embrace conflict and dissent.

Participation in the study will consist of one interview of up to one hour via Zoom in which you will be asked to answer open-ended questions about your experience managing conflict as a grade-level coordinator. Personal data such as age and previous work experience will be requested but will remain confidential and stored only on protected servers from Utrecht University. The data will be accessed only by the researchers involved and will be deleted once the research is done. Your participation is voluntary and can be ended at any time without any explanation needed, and it will result in the collected data being eliminated.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Thank you beforehand for your time,

Daniella Mazzini

Appendix F

Statement of consent

Title of the investigation: Harnessing The Power of Conflict: Grade-Level Coordinators' Experiences

Document version date: 18/02/2022

I volunteer to participate in this research project conducted by Daniella Mazzini from Utrecht University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about how grade-level coordinators manage conflicts in grade-level teams.

I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty Ethics Review Board (FERB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioural Sciences Committee at the Utrecht University. Also, for research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted through klachtenfunctionarisfetcsocwet@uu.nl.

With this document I declare I have been fully informed, through the information letter, about the study's purpose, the manner in which the data will be handled and that I can quit the study at all times without any explanation or consequences.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix G

Audit Trail

Version 1. Preliminary codes based on literature review

These codes emerge from the theoretical framework and the interview guide. No interview has been analyzed yet.

Sources of conflict	Problems in communication	Inadequate message encoding such as choice of words and tone of voice.
		Inadequate interpersonal interactions such as aggressive or avoidant behaviors.
		Inadequate information exchange procedures such as bad timing of meetings or non-responsive policies to conflict.
		Poor performance that is not addressed.
	Role ambiguity	Unclear job requirements.
	Incompatible goals or goal conflict	Power struggles in which it is not clear who has the final say.
		Teachers express having different or conflicting goals for the grade-level curricula or agenda.
	Conflict over resource allocation	Teachers compete for available resources such as materials, games, or shared spaces.
	Conflict over interpersonal differences	Conflicts over political and ideological matters such as the political situation of the country or teaching methods to be employed.
		Personality clashes.
Conflict management strategies	Integration strategies.	Creating a shared goal between the conflicting parties.
		Smoothing differences while emphasizing common interests.
		Both parties have to give up something to arrive at a mutually acceptable decision.
	Dominating strategies.	Using formal authority to determine the desired outcome of the conflict.
	Avoidant strategies.	Avoiding and withdrawing from the situation.
		Altering the formal interaction patterns of the conflicting parties such as job reorganisation.

Version 2. Codes after coding all of the interviews

This version contains all the codes discovered after carefully going through each interview and revising a preliminary code list. Even though they are not final, the names reflect some thought. The frequency of each code's presence hasn't been considered in this version. Understanding and arranging the data from the interviews is the main goal. The category integration strategies, which now contains two distinct sets of codes split into reactive and proactive, has undergone the most significant alteration.

Sources of conflict	Problems in communication	Inadequate personal interactions.	Feelings involved	
			Hard personality	
		Inadequate information exchange procedures.		
	Role ambiguity	Power struggles.		
	Incompatible goals			
	Conflict over resource allocation			
	Conflict over interpersonal differences	Conflicts about teaching styles.		
		Conflicts about working styles.		
		Preconceptions about others intentions.		
		Conflicts about experience differences.	Years of teaching	
			Years of age	
			Foreign/local hires	
Conflict management strategies	Integration strategies.	Reactive	Shared goal.	
			Smooth differences.	
			Compromise.	
			Voting.	
			Put things on the table.	
			Acknowledge feelings.	
			Third person.	
			Pros and cons.	

		Pause.	
		Request help from superiors	
	Proactive	Ask and listen to opinions.	
		Paraphrase.	
		Team agreements	Positive intentions
			Focus on content
			Clear expectations
		Agenda	Time limits
			Parking lot
			Clear expectations
		Anticipate conflict	
		Personal relationships	
		Reduce meeting times	
	Dominating strategies.	Determine the desired outcome.	
	Avoidant strategies.	Withdrawing from the situation	
		Alter the formal interaction patterns.	

Version 3. Codes after considering frequency to eliminate and merge some codes

This version takes into account the codes' propensity to appear frequently. This was crucial to lowering the amount of codes and reducing some bias. Some codes, for instance, stood out because they neatly fit into a category and were intriguing from an analytical standpoint. However, based on the frequency, I could conclude that just one or two participants brought up this topic. At the same time, I saw that some sub-codes had a very low frequency, so it made more sense to merely make generic references to the main code and then explain the richness inside this code in the description. I began writing each code's descriptions during this stage. This made it easier to distinguish between different people. I also modified several code names as I was doing this because I knew what they stood for now and I wanted to use names that were highly descriptive. For instance, I previously used some sources of conflict identified in the literature (such as "Problems in communication") but I altered them to "Inadequate personal interactions" because it better reflected my data and the participating participants' stories.

Sources of conflict	Inadequate personal interactions	Hard personality
		Reduced tolerance
		Poor performance
	Inability to focus on content	
	Power struggles	
	Goal conflict	
	Interpersonal differences	Teaching styles.
		Working styles.
		Experience differences
Conflict management strategies	Integration strategies.	Reactive strategies	Shared goal.
			Smooth differences.
			Compromise.

			Voting.
			State conflict.
			Acknowledge feelings.
			Third person.
			Pros and cons
			Pause.
			Request help from superiors
			Remind of team agreements.
		Proactive strategies	Space for opinions
			Paraphrase.
			Team agreements
			Agenda
			Anticipate conflict
			Personal relationships
	Dominating strategies.		
	Avoidant strategies.		

Appendix H contains the final coding system and definitions for each code.

Theme 1. Sources of conflict

This theme refers to the reasons GLCs attribute to the destructive conflicts that arise in their team meetings. These sources of conflict correspond to perspectives and theories GLCs have about the conflicts and their causes.

Category	Code	Definition
Inadequate personal interactions	Hard personality	Participants mention some team members have personalities that are hard to work with. They mention some people having repetitive aggressive and avoidant behaviors, as well as domineering (wanting things your way) and dramatic (attention-seeking) conducts.
	Reduced tolerance	Participants mention some team members are less tolerant with others because of stressful situations in their personal lives or in the school (as there being too many changes). They mention people being hard because of hard moments in their lives.
	Poor performance	Participants mention some team members address mistakes made by others in passive aggressive and non-constructive ways. They mention errors in worksheets given to children and planning which results in added work for the others.
Inability to focus on content		Participants mention sometimes team members are unable to focus on the content at hand because the focus is put on feelings and points of view. They mention some people can't communicate effectively because they take things personally and misunderstand what others say and view what is said in a personal way.
Power struggles		Participants mention that there are limits to their role so they can't enforce specific limits to team members. This lack of clarity causes conflicts because when people decide to break these rules, it is not clear who has the final say.
Goal conflict		Participants mention that sometimes team members

			have different or conflicting goals for the grade-level curricula or agenda. This causes conflict when they don't want to compromise and decide to argue for their own side relentlessly.
Interpersonal differences	Teaching styles.		Participants mention team members struggling to adapt to others' teaching styles when having to share materials (lesson planning or presentations) or the classroom (teacher and teacher assistant).
	Working styles.		Participants mention team members not being able to relate well with others' because of the incompatibility of their work habits. They mention some teachers have very different personalities which leads the conflicts when they work with each other.
	Experience differences		Participants mention that sometimes team members are not able to collaborate smoothly because of the difference in their teaching experiences. This contrast emerges from three different sources; years of teaching, years of age and where they come from (foreign or local hires). Participants describe diverse ways in which this difference impacts teachers' collaboration in the classroom or in team meetings.

Theme 2. Conflict management strategies

This theme refers to the conflict resolution strategies used by GLCs when destructive conflicts arise in team meetings. These strategies are the ways in which GLCs manage the conflicts between team members during meetings.

Category	Code	Sub-code	Definition
Integration strategies	Reactive strategies	Shared goal.	Participants mention empathizing the common ground of the work of team members who engage in a conflict. This way, they can focus on this instead of their differences.
		Smooth differences.	Participants mention rephrasing the differences between team members in a way that they don't seem so contrary. For this, they state the positive aspects of the other person's attitude or actions.
		Compromise.	Participants mention asking team members to

			make concessions so everyone can be somewhat satisfied. This way, everyone gives up some of what they want in order to move forward.
		Voting.	Participants mention that voting sometimes is necessary when there are too many conflicting ideas or when it's just not possible to reach an agreement. They use different strategies such as posting notes or re-stating all options verbally and asking the whole team to choose an option.
		State conflict.	Participants mention that sometimes conflicts are not properly addressed by team members and instead reflected as a general tension. When this happens, they assert the conflict so team members can give their opinion about it instead of containing their thoughts.
		Acknowledge feelings.	Participants mention that when conflicts arise in team meetings, they recognize and state the feelings that team members might be having.
		Third person.	Participants mention that sometimes conflicts cause certain conversations to extend longer than stipulated in the agenda and/or not lead anywhere productive. Then, they employ the strategy to ask someone who is not involved in the discussion for their opinion and thus change the conversation pathway.
		Pros and cons.	Participants mention that when conflict arises because of the difficulty to reach an agreement, they compile a pros and cons list. They argue this is an effective way to visualize the different arguments.
		Pause.	Participants mention the importance of stopping discussions when a certain time has been dedicated to hearing everyone's arguments and sharing ideas.
		Request help from superiors.	Participants mention the need to turn to their superiors (in this case, referred to as administration). Some request guidance in meetings and others ask that they attend the team meetings so they can attest the conflict and talk to the involved parties.
		Remind of team agreements.	Participants mention they need to remind team members of the team agreements they previously have established as core elements of their collaboration. The most repetitive

			agreement was assuming positive intentions, which means that team members must always assume others' actions and opinions come from a positive intention and not take things personally.
	Proactive strategies	Space for opinions	Participants mention that during team meetings they make sure everyone's voice is heard so they ask for opinions.
		Paraphrase.	Participants mention that they restate what team members say so it is clear for the rest of the team. This way, they avoid misunderstandings and make sure the message people want to convey has come across correctly.
		Team agreements	Participants mention they have team agreements that are core elements of their team work and that all the members are aware of. The most repetitive agreement was assuming positive intentions, which means that team members must always assume others' actions and opinions come from a positive intention and not take things personally.
		Agenda	Participants mention the role of having an agenda to have a reference to come back to when conflicts cause discussions to extend longer than intended.
		Anticipate conflict	Participants mention the importance of coming with options when presenting an item in the agenda that demands an agreement to be made. They mention knowing the discussions that will most likely cause conflicts between team members and thus they prepare options of resolution beforehand.
		Personal relationships	Participants mention that when team members engage amongst each other in a personal way instead of only in a work related manner, they are able to establish trust, which in turn avoids conflicts.
Dominating strategy.			Participants determine the desired outcome without taking their team members' opinions into consideration. This strategy is sometimes used after prior integration strategies have been attempted or as a first resource.
Avoidant strategy.			Participants avoid managing the conflict by

| | withdrawing from the situation and arguing it is not their responsibility. Another way they justify not tackling the issue at hand, is by altering the formal interaction patterns of the parties. |