

## Perceptions on Chilean Education from High School Graduate Students who Attended an Academic Talent Program

### Percepciones acerca de la educación escolar en Chile de estudiantes egresados de enseñanza media y que participaron en un programa de talento académico

<sup>1</sup>Andrea López Barraza and <sup>2</sup>Catalina García Reñasco

<sup>1</sup>New York University, USA

<sup>2</sup>PentaUC, Chile

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**Post to:**

Andrea López Barraza  
Educational Leadership PhD, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, New York University.  
304E 90th St., Apt. 2D, 10128, New York, NY  
Email: andrealopezb@gmail.com

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## Abstract

This study explores the perceptions that a group of students, graduated from 12<sup>th</sup> grade and who participated in an extracurricular academic talent program, have about Chilean education through a discourse analysis that recognizes their critical and compliant language and their languages of possibility. This is in the context of the growing influence of the neoliberal economic model on the Chilean educational system, criticized by mass student movements in 2006 and 2011 that demanded greater equality. The particular interest in academically talented students' perceptions responds to the fact that their high analytical and critical abilities allow us to expect a certain richness of their perceptions and educational proposals, which adds to the fact that they participated in the 2011 student movement. This study consisted in applying an online written survey to students of the 2013 Class, the responses for which were addressed using the critical discourse analysis method. The results show that students have a critical vision of education, its model, and its inequality; they demand a more integral education that considers them as participating citizens, which creates tension with the need shown by the students to adjust to the test-driven accountability system; and they have a modest understanding of their active role in creating social change.

**Keywords:** educational policy, students' voice, critical discourse analysis, market-oriented education

## Resumen

El presente estudio explora las percepciones de un grupo de estudiantes egresados de educación media, que participaron en un programa de talento académico, acerca de la educación chilena, realizando un análisis que reconoce sus lenguajes críticos, complacientes y de posibilidad. Esto, en el contexto de la creciente presencia de un modelo económico neoliberal en el sistema educativo chileno, criticado por los movimientos estudiantiles masivos en 2006 y 2011. El interés por las percepciones de estudiantes con talento académico, en particular, responde a que sus altas habilidades analíticas y críticas permiten esperar una riqueza de sus percepciones y propuestas educativas, lo que se suma a su participación en el movimiento estudiantil de 2011. El estudio consistió en la aplicación de una encuesta en línea, escrita, a estudiantes de la generación 2013, cuyas respuestas se analizaron a través del método de análisis crítico del discurso. Los resultados muestran en los estudiantes una visión crítica de la educación y de su modelo e inequidad; un reclamo por una educación integral, que los considere ciudadanos participativos, lo que entra en tensión con su necesidad de adaptarse al sistema de pruebas estandarizadas; y una escasa noción de su rol activo en los cambios sociales.

**Palabras clave:** políticas educativas, voz de los estudiantes, análisis crítico del discurso, educación de mercado

This study explores the perceptions of a group of students, graduated from 12<sup>th</sup> grade and who participated in an extracurricular academic talent program (*Educational Program for Children with Academic Talent* [PentaUC]), with regard to Chilean education. The study was conducted through a discourse analysis that recognizes their critical and compliant language, and with possibility for change. This interest in studying students' perceptions arises from the public recognition of the effects that the growing presence of neoliberal economic model has had on the Chilean education system. In this context, which gave rise to student movements seeking greater equity in 2006 and 2011, listening to the voice of the students should be a priority, and this study aimed at contributing to this.

The particular interest in understanding the perceptions of students with high levels of academic talent responds to the fact that they tend to be intellectually restless individuals, with a high capacity for critical observation of their environment and for generating complex questions (Davis & Rimm, 1998). This allows us to expect a richness of their perceptions and proposals for education. Moreover, this generation, graduated in 2013, participated in one way or another, in the 2011 student movement.

### Methodology

This research aimed at identifying the perceptions and subjective experiences of education of students graduated from 12<sup>th</sup> grade, who participated in an extracurricular academic talent program. An online survey was sent by e-mail to the 99 students of PentaUC's 2013 generation, using QuestionPro. PentaUC students represent the distribution of students in accordance with school type (public, private-subsidized, and private) within the country. These students were selected via nomination by their teachers and a cognitive abilities test, they attended extracurricular classes two days a week at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PentaUC, 2014). The questions to be answered were open-ended, and covered both micro (personal experience) and macro (educational policy, dominant values in the education) aspects:

1. How would you describe your experience in school education? What aspects did you like, and which ones would you change?
2. What would you say were the educational objectives of the school where you studied?
3. What do you believe the objectives of school education should be?
4. How do you consider that educational policies in Chile respond to students' needs?
5. On what values or principles do you consider that the country's educational policies should be based?
6. What changes would you make to the country's educational policies?
7. What do you believe are the ways in which those changes should be made? Who should make these changes?
8. How do you consider that Chile addresses equity in education?

Twenty students of both genders, between 18 and 20 years old, graduates from public and private-subsidized institutions answered the questionnaire. This sample could include a self-selection bias, where those students wishing to present an overly negative or positive vision of the school system would be more motivated to participate. Along with this, a non-response bias may also be present, where those with lesser ability to express themselves through writing could be less likely to participate. Despite these shortcomings, this methodology allows us to obtain in-depth opinions, when the generalization of the findings is not the goal (Hernández, Fernández, & Baptista, 2010).

In order to analyze the responses, critical discourse analysis was used (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998; Fairclough, 2003), which considers discourse as a mode of action and representation. Discursive practice contributes to the reproduction of identities and social relationships, and of knowledge systems and beliefs, but it also contributes to the transformation of society. Discourse is analyzed as the site of power struggles, where discursive practice is fed by the conventions that naturalize power relationships and specific ideologies. All discourse can become a «regime of truth», with its own disciplinary practices and forms of oppression (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998). This method looks at three different levels (Fairclough, 2003):

- The context of discourse (historical, political, cultural and economic), or *social practice*: this includes ideology (constructions of reality that contribute to the production, reproduction or transformation of the relationships of domination) and hegemony (power over society of one class in particular, in alliance with other social classes).
- The conditions of production, distribution and consumption of discourse, or *discursive practice*: this includes the speech acts carried out by discourse, their gender, coherence, intertextuality, metatextuality and irony. It analyzes how the participants produce and interpret texts, and if they use their resources in a regulatory or creative way.
- The *text*: this includes both, the form and the meaning, covering topics, vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, structure, verbal modes, metaphors, and transitivity.

### Theoretical framework

Aspects of the Chilean educational system were reviewed, which constitutes the context of this research. The issues, tensions and proposals that appear in the students' discourse were considered in relation to three axes: the effects of the introduction of the market logic in education on a structural level; the

effects of this on teaching practices and learning; and the students' capacity for resistance to this type of educational model, and how this was demonstrated in the 2011 student movement.

### **Market education in Chile**

According to Bellei (2011), Chile has created the most market-oriented education system in the world, allowing this logic to organize the provision of educational services, and is the most socioeconomically segregated country during school age of all OECD members (Valenzuela, 2008). This system allows parents to choose the school that their children will attend and assumes equal conditions to make that choice.

It is under free-market competition, based on the scores obtained by schools on standardized tests Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación, SIMCE (*System of Measurement of the Education Quality*) and Prueba de Selección Universitaria, PSU (*University Selection Test*) that education is self-regulated, without significant state intervention. This generates intense selection by ability, in order to have the best students and the highest scores (Bellei, 2011), corollary of an accountability system or results-based auditing, guided by tests of a measurable and statistical nature, an approach that has become dominant in policies and educational practice (Lee, 2008).

According to Anderson (2009), this auditing culture entails an excess of rationalism in the school system that has become part of common sense. In the classroom, standardized tests carry perverse incentives that distort the teaching-learning process. This has led to a narrowing of curriculum and an education oriented towards tests which overlook critical abilities, especially for those students from lower socioeconomic levels (Darling-Hammond, as cited in Hong & Youngs, 2008), and where schools are focused on the construction of a positive image with the aim of *marketing* (Anderson, 2014). The neoliberal model in education has transferred market logic to other aspects of life, with the notion of citizens or students as consumers (Mautner, 2010), or as human capital for the economic development of the country (L. Anderson, 2014).

In Chile, social segmentation in education has been accentuated in recent years as a result of the selection and copayment processes (García-Huidobro, 2007). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests show differences in results depending on the educational institution (OCDE, 2011). However, this analysis does not take into account the differences in family income levels, and therefore does not reflect the quality of education provided by the school (Almonacid, Luzón, & Torres, 2008). Furthermore, few parents have the necessary information to make informed educational decisions for their children, which increases segregation (Elacqua, 2009).

These arguments were used by the students, who organized themselves in mass protest movements in 2006 and 2011, with the aim of reforming the education system (Bellei & Cabalin, 2013).

### **Banking education**

As well as protesting against inequality in access to education, the student movements addressed both educational quality and objectives, criticizing an education centered on the PSU, (Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile [CONFECH], 2011). This can be understood from the perspective of Freire (1970), who maintains that education has been converted in an act of *depositing*, where the teacher deposits knowledge that students receive, memorize and passively repeat. This is known as the «banking» model of education, where the teacher is the one who thinks, speaks and acts. It is taken for granted that students are ignorant, not allowing them to be truly human or creative. However, teachers can also exercise resistance, overcoming the teacher/student contradiction and proposing a «liberating education» (Freire, 1970). According to Freire (as cited in Anderson, 2009), teachers that teach successfully, first get to know their students and establish relationships with them. Teachers then involve students in a problematizing pedagogy, which is not afraid to deal with controversial social issues. This has become difficult in a context where transactions have replaced authentic relationships, and have affected teaching relationships in schools, where the relationship between teacher and student should involve an emotional commitment and care (Anderson, 2009).

### Voice of the students

The 2011 student movement in Chile allowed the voice of the students to be heard, which should be understood in a paradoxical context where schools can reproduce society and, at the same time, transform it. According to Foucault (as cited in Anderson & Grinberg, 1998), schools instill discipline through the internalization of correct behavior, or *normalization*. Giroux (2003) maintains that schools have become primarily reproductive environments, overlooking the possibility of counterhegemonic struggle and ideological battle. However, Foucault (as cited in Anderson & Grinberg, 1998) suggests that the voices of resistance can be heard in public spheres when the risk of violence is reduced. These public spaces, in schools and society, should be created as participatory and authentic spaces, in which problematization, instead of normalization, exist.

The need for the student movement can be interpreted from the perspective of Harvey (2005), who indicates that the more neoliberalism is considered as a failed utopian rhetoric that disguises a plan to restore the dominant class's power, the more the foundations are laid for the resurgence of mass movements fighting for demands of equality. Freire (1970) adds that if increasing awareness paves the way for the expression of social dissatisfaction, it is because a situation of oppression exists.

Regarding how the voice of the students can be transformed into concrete changes, Arendt (as cited in Waghid, 2005) postulates that it is necessary to promote both voice and action to cultivate democratic citizenship in schools. Meanwhile, Anyon (2005) indicates that reimagining the economic model, institutions and cultural forms in ways that oppose the *status quo* does not bring a social change by itself. To motivate people to believe or join a social movement, it is important to involve them in contentious acts that create new politicized identities. According to Freire (1970), the oppressed will reach liberation «through the praxis of its search, through the knowledge and recognition of the necessity to fight for it» (p. 26).

## Results

### Social practice

This section will review the students' answers and provide an account of the prevailing ideology and hegemony in the studied context, as well as the alternative perspectives that challenge them.

The students showed a critical vision of the neoliberal economic model in education, indicating how the spirit of competition and individualism have affected the sense of community with a supremacy of market logics, where students are seen as consumers. They indicate this as follows: «I would leave the management in the hands of education professionals, taking it from the businessmen, who do not care»<sup>1</sup> (Student N, private-subsidized school); «Education is usually considered as an economic good» (Student B, private-subsidized school); «To deliver students who would then work to produce» (Student N, private-subsidized school).

The most positively evaluated aspect of the school experience corresponds to friendships and good relationships with teachers, emphasizing the importance of authentic relationships: «I liked getting to know classmates who, in the future, would become my best friends; also getting to know dedicated teachers who were interested in my learning» (Student R, private-subsidized school); «The aspects I liked most were perhaps the friends I made and some teachers who gave everything for us at school» (Student A, public school); «It seems to me that the relationships with my classmates were the best thing about my experience in education (...). Also the relationships with the majority of my teachers, which was quite close» (Student F, private-subsidized school).

These aspects contrast with those that the students perceived as the main institutional educational objectives of their schools: to obtain good results on standardized tests, cover the contents of the curriculum, graduate students and market the school. These objectives are aligned with the audit or accountability

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<sup>1</sup> The spelling in the students's quotations was corrected to facilitate their comprehension.

culture, where schools have to demonstrate results in order to be competitive in the market. As such, the curriculum and teaching strategies are reduced to the preparation for these tests: «To score more than 600 points in the PSU in order to appear in the ‘best schools’ ranking» (Student K, private-subsidized school); «Sincerely... I think it was to get an average score on the PSU, apart from the basic knowledge» (Student D, public school); «The objectives were complying with the curriculum, and simply teaching the contents» (Student J, private-subsidized school).

In some cases, the students positively evaluated the formation in values of their schools: «To form citizens who honor the country, that make it flourish and give it honor» (Student C, public school); «To form solidary people who contribute positively to society» (Student I, public school).

But in general, discontent with the objectives of the education they received prevailed, due to the fact that it set aside the development of more complex abilities than those which can be demonstrated in a standardized test, and limited the curriculum to mandatory contents. Furthermore, they identified a lack of consideration for community and relational aspects, the formation of values and civic engagement that allow students to make contributions to society instead of focusing on the competition, which they perceive as prevailing. This broader vision of educational objectives does not adjust itself to the logic of accountability, since it is not so easily quantifiable.

Beyond delivering contents (which is also important), delivering values, love, and giving your life for the students, giving everything to those that are being educated, teaching them to form community, teaching them that competition is not a good thing (...) and that in its place we should mutually cooperate (Student B, private-subsidized school).

«To form citizens, not machines» (Student C, public school); «I believe that the objective should be to achieve the greatest possible integrality in people who are being educated and, likewise, that they are able to contribute to the social construction. To succeed in having active people who contribute to their environment» (Student F, private-subsidized school); «Educate students with values» (Student F, public school); «I believe that education in school should have citizenship objectives, to create integral citizens, conscious of their value and responsibility in society» (Student O, public school); «Involving more than just contents, as it also has moral and value aspects» (Student N, private-subsidized school).

Among the students, a tension was perceived between their desire for an education with an *integral* nature, not limited to PSU contents, and their complaint about the perceived deficiencies in the teaching of contents required for this test. They associated the latter aspect with educational inequality, highlighting the advantages that students from private institutions have in preparing for this test and access to higher education.

I feel that I had a big gap in terms of knowledge; I think that there was information that was not delivered to me, and that was what I did not like, seeing the difference that exists with other institutions in terms of content (Student I, public school).

«Socially it was a very good experience, but with many failures from the academic point of view. This last aspect has damaged my entry into the university» (Student G, public school); «As I attended a public school, I did not have all of the educational knowledge that my friends from other schools (private-subsidized and private) had» (Student S, public school).

It is possible to observe a dichotomy, in which the learning of contents and values are not necessarily perceived as complementary. Instead, students declare themselves in favor of one perspective or another one, in contrast to what was proposed by Freire (1970) in terms of an education based on relationships, which addresses problems in a critical way.

The students who advocate for an education in which they are participatory citizens show a discourse theoretically based on Freire’s *critical pedagogy*, linking it to their experience. In this way, students speak of the need to receive an education with greater challenges, which make them free and develops the values and abilities that are characteristic of human and creative beings. Their complaint is that the education they received follows the *banking model of education* (Freire, 1970): «My school did not seem very stimulating to me, I would give it a more holistic emphasis» (Student L, public school); «Few resources for creative and stimulating learning are provided» (Student J, private-subsidized school); «I

would change the approach of education, understanding that it is not just filling a box with knowledge, but rather preparing people to face their lives» (Student J, private-subsidized school); «The objectives of school should be to prepare integral people who do not focus just on production, but who complement it with arts and the love of learning itself» (Student N, private-subsidized school).

For students, school education in Chile has transformed teachers into experts who impart knowledge to «ignorant» students, seen as knowledge repositories (as dictated by standardized tests), where the teaching/learning process is limited to «filling a box with knowledge».

The students make a distinction between learning contents for the test and learning that involves critical thinking and passion for knowledge, which they consider more significant: «They should promote research, curiosity, and the pleasure for studying, not making it a mere obligation» (Student J, private-subsidized school); «To prepare a human being in the most complete possible way, giving preference to the development of critical thinking and passion for knowledge» (Student L, public school); «To create logical and critical thinking, and to develop the abilities that each student has (on a general level, artistic, mathematic, dialogic, with emphasis on problem solving or creation)» (Student K, private-subsidized school); «To motivate students, subjects should be taught so that the student has extensive knowledge of the subject, and not just study to score a 4 [the lowest passing grade in Chile's education system] on the test» (Student R, private-subsidized school).

Another tension observed was between a desire for greater equity and social justice —where the quality of education in all schools is guaranteed, socioeconomic segregation is addressed— and, although to a lesser extent, a meritocratic discourse, where the possibility of good academic performance is based on individual effort.

**Equity.** «To try to end with the difference between private and public schools» (Student I, public school); «The elite is highly prioritized. The elite is not just those who have greater incomes, but also those who can access (because of geographic and cognitive aspects) exemplary public high schools» (Student K, private-subsidized school); «I do not believe that educational policies are inclusive; social discrimination is obvious and this means that many students cannot access the education they need» (Student P, private-subsidized school); «Those who have greater resources pay more in their schools and receive a better education, while those who have fewer resources pay less or do not pay, which means a worse education» (Student M, public school).

**Meritocracy.** «A tiered system in which those who are sufficiently able can have greater benefits to continue growing and, in the same way, not provide these benefits for those who do not deserve them (...). In a culture of self-improvement rather than mediocrity, in which those who make an effort to obtain approval are valued and rewarded, and not those who simply do not do anything» (Student D, public school); «Opportunities for those who have the abilities or who want to access a good education» (Student G, public school).

In some answers, the discourse of determination was also present: «To establish a firm mentality against academic failure and increasingly improving oneself» (Student D, public school). This type of discourse has been criticized by L. Anderson (2014) for ignoring the role of material conditions and social structures as determinants of success, and contributing to the myth of equal opportunities. The answers which aim in this direction should be put in the context of the discursive practices of the academic talent program, transmitted to the students as from their entry into sixth grade: «Meritocracy, the essence of democracy, must be supported» (Bruner, as cited in *El Mercurio*, 2003, p. 9), «Building alliances that generate meritocracy in Chile, which is what we lack» (Arancibia, as cited in *La Tercera*, 2010, para. 5).

It is also possible to find proposals of differentiation on the basis of ability among students. This aspect should be put in the context that the academic talent program which they attended performed a selection on the basis of academic abilities to provide curricular acceleration and enrichment. These students tend to have a good level of academic performance within their schools and learn quickly, which explains their frustration at having to wait for all students to learn the contents. However, it is possible to identify an individualistic approach and discourse of *efficiency* in the concern about wasting time during the lessons. This shows how these emphases have been installed as priorities: «I believe that to improve education, they should have internal screenings in each institution to set up courses for students with similar interests or

similar capacities, so they can advance at a constant pace without leaving anybody behind» (Student K, private-subsidized school); «I think that there should be independent subjects to be able to advance with each student at the pace that they are able to or need. In my eyes, I lost a couple of years with so much revision or going back over things for those who had no idea and who had to begin from zero to reach us» (Student K, private-subsidized school); «I would change the teaching method, and the contents on a national level, since a lot of time is wasted and it is not very efficient» (Student Q, private-subsidized school).

Unlike with the differentiation strategy proposed by some students, one of the current educational policy reform proposals includes ending selection by ability in schools. Although in many responses the students referred to the need to end discrimination, they allude to class discrimination. In only one of the responses a criticism of selection by ability appears, which can be understood in the context of students who studied mostly in schools in which they successfully dealt with the exclusive selection processes that were implemented.

### Discursive practice

Although the context of reception of the students' discourse is defined by the research context, in this section the responses which make creative use of text production resources will be collected. This responses recur to metadiscourse, intertextuality and irony, as well as the execution of different speech acts that address the reader.

In the use of Freire's concepts (*banking education*), a case of manifest intertextuality is seen, which in this case seeks to affirm political identity and awareness, but also to demonstrate knowledge with regard to power, as it is conceptualized by Foucault. This point is relevant, since critics of the student movement used the students' lack of understanding of the educational system as an argument against them (Melnick, 2011). On the other hand, in this response it is possible to observe the resource of comparison of the school's management with the dictatorship. This provides evidence of the need to liberate themselves from authoritarian constraints and a democracy that is not sufficiently participatory:

Internal administration on the level of a military dictatorship (or some sort of European fascism from the first half of the 20th century), in which if a teacher wanted to be better, to go beyond the content and leave an imprint on the student, he was fired without mercy. Many of the great teachers that I had (those who left an imprint on me and gave me the strength to embark on my journey) suffered that fate. Those teachers that leave an imprint are the only thing that I would like to maintain, those teachers that tried to abandon the *banking model of education*, and we only have to memorize a content and we are not seen as anything more than a client (Student B, private-subsidized school).

This response also gives account of how transactions have replaced authentic relationships in schools. This has been normalized to the point that the attempts to reestablish those relationships and to exercise resistance against the forms of relating to others established by the market are penalized by dismissal.

The irony used in the following response to the question on equity in education can be analyzed from the point of view of its interpellating effect on the reader, adding humor to a diagnosis of the country and the interference of the market in all aspects of life, from education to natural resources. Referring to Chile in the diminutive form indicates aspects such as the enormous social inequality, which makes it difficult to consider Chile as a developed country, as discourses centered on economic growth figures suggest. The chosen style, by using rhetorical questions as a speech act, also represents resistance with regard to the gender of the survey and to the language conventionally used in academic research, delivering factual data that support the argument in a creative way. Finally, the intertextuality of citing her teacher's expression «poorly» refers to the importance both of relationships, as well as, of an education that tackles social problems for meaningful learning. This shows that for the student, what his or her teacher said made sense:

As a former teacher of mine from high school would say, «poorly». To begin... Is not «*Chilito*»<sup>2</sup> the most unequal country of Latin America? Is not «*Santiaguito*»<sup>3</sup> the city with the highest level of socio-spatial segregation in the world? Is not «*Chilito*» one of the countries where a teacher's work is the most disregarded? Is not «*Chilito*» one of the countries that

<sup>2</sup> Diminutive of Chile.

<sup>3</sup> Diminutive of Santiago, capital of Chile.



have most commercialized its schools, universities, technical training centers, etc.? Is not “*Chilito*” the country that does not have its own water, despite the fact that, geographically, the largest fresh water reserves in the world are in our territory? Is not «*Chilito*» the country which sells everything? ... If we sell water, education, being able to pass from one side to another (tolls), teachers’ salaries... Do not you think that education is no more than a business, and that consequently, good teachers seek to earn more money in order to live a little better, since in public schools (which the majority of the school population attend) they are not paid enough, with an intense screening process to enter the schools that pay well, leaving the lower-quality teachers, those of the banking model of education, in the schools of Puente Alto, La Pintana, San Bernardo, etc.? (Student B, private-subsidized school).

The inclusion of speech acts in a creative way is also present in the following response, where students put themselves in the place of making a political discourse, convincing an audience of using the expression «gentlemen»: «Improving teachers’ quality of life (I am not just referring to them earning more money... gentlemen, money is not everything, I am referring to working hours)» (Student B, private-subsidized school).

The use of irony can be seen again in the following response that presents the values declared by the school’s mission, and their subsequent denial. This clarifies that they are limited to what is on paper, while in reality the opposite occurred, promoting individualism without consideration for others. This textual resource is also present in the second response, where the use of resources to promote the school in a radio advertisement, without paying attention to the building’s infrastructure needs. This provides an account of the extremes that the commercialization of education has reached.

The objectives were to create a community, people committed to others, to deliver values, etc. That is what was said on paper; from my point of view, I see the delivery of anti-values such as ignoring your neighbors to transform them into the other, into someone we do not care about and that we can destroy to continue in the race, competitiveness —that complements the prior value, individualism, etc. (Student B, private-subsidized school).

Graduating students that reflect good results in indexes such as the PSU, SIMCE or the place where they will study in the future. As the school works like a business, it creates a good reputation for itself, but instead of investing in quality infrastructure, I listened to a radio advertisement for my school when I went to study (Student E, private-subsidized school).

To summarize, the students’ discursive practices make creative use of the resources of textual production, for example, recurring to intertextuality both with academic authors and ordinary people. This validates different forms of knowledge. They also appeal to an active reading on the part of the receiver through strategies such as questions and the use of vocatives and comparisons. The prevalence of the irony resource, on the other hand, demonstrates the critical view of the students with regard to the educational system and the prevailing economic model.

### **Textual strategies**

In this section, the predominant themes of discourse and some of the formal strategies used will be collected.

The words that students use to refer to the intrusion of the market logic in education and the inequity that this generates include: *Company, business, competition, production, profit, efficiency, economic good, sell, commercialize, unequal, segregation, filter, discrimination, elite, advantage, opportunities*. Although students use this language to criticize the system, it is possible to see how business vocabulary dominates the discourse about education, relegating issues such as educational objectives, learning or educational quality to a secondary level.

Some students mention to how the values brandished by neoliberalism have become part of common sense —they have been converted into the current «regime of truth»— criticizing that the importance of changing these values is not recognized, and referring in a meta-reflective way to the power of language (in this case, the slogans *free* and *quality*) to create reality: «I do not believe that they are getting to the core of the issue, it is not just free and quality education, the idea is to encourage a change of mentality and leave competition aside» (Student P, private-subsidized school).

One student made an explicit distinction between the objectives of the teachers and those of the institution:

Sincerely, I believe that the institution purposes were very different from those of my teachers. Therefore, for my teachers, education was a step towards social mobility and integrality as human beings; on the contrary, for the school I think it was to achieve greater success to promote the institution (Student F, private-subsidized school).

The choice of the word *sincerely*, used above by another student, suggests that we live in a time of fabrications and simulations, where what schools state, on occasions, does not coincide with reality (since what is sought is to present a positive image, and to obtain a good ranking). Hence, the students' need of highlighting the authenticity and veracity of their statements.

The students' proposals to improve education include modifications to the Constitution, which they evaluate as illegitimate due to its origin in the dictatorship, as a symbol of the need to change the essential structures of society. The permanent reference to the Constitution demonstrates the power that this text can have to synthesize an ideology and, from there, to build and maintain social practices: «Unfortunately, the essential needs of petitioners are not fulfilled, they guarantee profit and bad practices in education, all of which is a legacy of Pinochet's constitutional reforms» (Student C, public school); «The Magna Carta (which in itself is completely illegal, consult the testimonies of ex-soldiers regarding the 1980 plebiscite)» (Student B, private-subsidized school); «Legalize the Constitution or change it completely» (Student B, private-subsidized school).

They identify, on a more concrete level, the need for educational policies that address the access to education, its financing and quality. The two principles most mentioned by students with regard to what education reforms in Chile should be, refer to free education and quality education. When students use these principles, they operate as slogans, without further elaboration as to what they understand as *quality* or how free education for everyone could be financed. The use of slogans is also criticized metalinguistically by one of the students: «And with this I am not referring to slogans such as 'education should be free'» (Student E, private-subsidized school). Students, indistinctly, are in favor of one option or the other as a priority: «Offer quality education and guarantee it for everyone» (Student C, public school); «First, ensure quality; what does it matter that I can study for free if what I am studying is not worth while» (Student K, private-subsidized school); «It should be equal for all social classes, I think that this is the most important thing. And, of course, it should be inclusive, since we all deserve the right to have the same education» (Student J, private-subsidized school); «In ensuring the quality of totally egalitarian education, that both poor and rich children have the same rights and facilities to choose the school in which they want to study» (Student M, public school).

Although, in some cases, students recognize themselves as agents capable of implementing changes to improve education from a perspective of democratic participation: «Changes begin with oneself» (Student G, public school); «The agreement between authorities and students» (Student M, public school); «We all must help to make these changes» (Student H, public school); «I believe that it is everyone's task; the first step is to create an active awareness among students, as well as parents and teachers» (Student O, public school); «It is necessary to have students giving ideas» (Student P, private-subsidized school); in other cases, they use the third person and conditional verbal form to refer to the agents of change, assigning responsibility to those with formal authority (although they also criticize the bureaucracy and simulation of politics): «I believe that Congress is the fairest and most institutional way; nevertheless, there is a tremendous gap here as well. As long as the binominal system remains unchanged, it is absolutely unjust and complex to make changes» (Student F, private-subsidized school); «The ministries, municipalities and the same teachers in the classrooms» (Student J, private-subsidized school).

The only way that currently exists is the classic one: project, parliament, approval? Executive, bureaucracy; bureaucracy, propaganda, slow implementation. For now, we can only trust that some type of project will be sent, so that it can be completely modified and distorted in parliament (in order to do everything except fulfill its purpose), be approved and implemented after a yearlong show (Student K, private-subsidized school).

«Politicians should make the changes, with their laws. Principals enabling the changes and teachers doing their part» (Student L, public school); «The channels are both from the government and the institutions» (Student N, private-subsidized school); «Those who own the schools or the State should make the changes» (Student I, public school).

The large absence in the use of the first plural person *we* —normally used to indicate that one is speaking for ordinary people (Fairclough, 2003)— provides evidence of the hegemony of a certain authoritarianism that obstructs civic empowerment.

Other proposals adhere to a logic of accountability and auditing. This is paradoxical considering the criticisms that students make of this point of view with regard to standardized tests: «The best way to make these reforms and changes in education would be to rely on proper supervision of the school students' classes, taking samples from different schools with different resources» (Student A, public school); «Supervise both teachers and the schools» (Student B, private-subsidized school); «Organizations (or, rather institutions) should also be formed to supervise all of the above» (Student B, private-subsidized school).

As Anyon (2005) indicates, there is a big gap between politicized identity and action; in this case, after having developed a certain identity as a student movement, today students do not seem to be clear as to what their role as agents of change is. While attributing the regulatory responsibility to the experts («institutions»), they do not recognize their own position of being able to evaluate education.

There is no recognition of the other structural aspects (such as poverty, employment, wages, housing conditions or transportation) that complicate the transformation of education into a route for social mobility. These issues do not appear, nor does any vocabulary refer to them. Students also do not mention the role that the State should have in the solution of those problems that go beyond education. One student suggests that it is with education that changes must begin. This discourse is aligned with the meritocratic perspective promoted by the academic talent program that they attended, whose purpose is aims for them to continue their university degrees as a route to social mobility:

I think that I would give much greater priority to the area of education, since it is at this point that we will find solutions to the rest of the problems. If we focus on delivering an education that guarantees quality education to everybody, we will take the first right step in favor of a better society (Student E, private-subsidized school).

Although it could be due to the lack of knowledge or the complexity of a structural reading, the existence of a taboo against speaking about poverty can also be seen, which supports the idea of social mobility as the only way to overcome oppression, with education as a panacea.

## Discussion

Upon analyzing the different levels of discourse, it is possible to discover how institutional relationships discipline the ways of thinking and acting, and how this is reflected in the language. It is also possible to see how, through discourse, various forms of subjugated and marginal knowledge can be revealed and reactivated.

The results of this research show this tension in the responses of the students, with hybrid discourses that indicate the competing influences of different ideologies on the level of social practice. On the one hand, there is the ideology brandished by the student movement, which considers education as a universal right, with a focus on resolving the inequities and segregation in society. And on the other hand, the homogenic neoliberal ideology challenged by this movement, ideology which sees education as one more field that should be regulated by the market. In this way, although the students demand an education that aims at resolving social injustice, this claim is nuanced by a meritocratic approach that maintains the equal opportunity model (to occupy better positions and enter the elite through individual effort). There is also no vision that major structural changes are necessary in society (a perception of equality of positions, where the gap in life conditions between social positions is not so large) (Dubet, 2014).

On the other hand, the criticism that students make of the education system on the textual level uses the language of the market logic to which they are opposed (aiming at ending competition, segregation, privatization and commercialization of education). This inevitably tends to reproduce this logic, but also offers, in a propositive way, a wider vision of education whose objectives would include the training of citizens committed to their community, participatory, critical and who have a passion for learning. Here it is possible to recognize the creative potential of discourse. An intertextual reference is made to forgotten models in the context of the prevailing accountability model, such as critical teaching (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2003), in an effort to rethink education and to install other priorities in public discussion. Likewise, students execute discursive practices that use the resources of textual production in creative ways to address the readers and question the prevailing system in the educational field. Unfortunately, these proposals lose force when the students take back to the market logic to demand equitable education in terms of the contents evaluated in the PSU, as a way of obtaining good grades to apply for a good university education.

Tensions in the students' discourse were also observed regarding how they perceive themselves as civic actors and their levels of self-efficacy to drive changes in education. Some students recognize the importance of generating a change in social conscience, and of practices such as a dialog with authorities. However, the majority of students attribute this responsibility to the level of the Executive and Legislative powers, whose effectiveness they also see with hopelessness. In this way, a gap between their critical discourse and how this can be put in action is observed. In spite of having participated in a mass student movement, they did not experience profound changes in their patterns of citizen participation and involvement. This can be understood in a context in which school spaces have traditionally not promoted this, with an education, in Freire's (1970) words, that is more banking than problematizing.

A discourse that integrates aspects of the homogenic perspective has the risk of contributing to maintain the *status quo*. This is why it is necessary to encourage a critical discourse among students that questions an enormously unequal education system. It is the oppressed who are in the best position to understand the terrible meaning of an oppressive society, and liberate themselves from oppression (Freire, 1970). The coexistence of these discourses, nevertheless, provides us with signs that we are living a moment of change in education, where a single discourse has not been naturalized. At this time, listening to what students have to say is especially relevant, so that changes may consider their needs and opinions in a democratic way.

The results show the importance of discussing the place that market practices and discourses have in Chilean education, and their implications for students, who demand an integral education that recovers authentic relationships, but they also show how the culture of accountability and auditing make the score on standardized tests the priority, and are not clear about their active role as citizens. Spaces and permanent instances should, then, be promoted for students to integrate their discourse with action, exercising critical citizenship. For this to occur, it is necessary to have schools in which citizenship training is practiced on a daily basis, with a commitment to social justice.

In the research field, this need should be addressed through studies that recover the students' voice and action capacity. This will allow the identification and diffusion of good practices and contexts for the development of critical and citizen abilities among the students. Likewise, given the limitation of the sample in this research to academically talented students, it is necessary to broaden this focus. Different socioeconomic levels must be represented in order to extrapolate the conclusions to Chilean students as a whole, and to distinguish how high ability levels can favor a meritocratic perspective. In the context of the massive influence of the student movement, it is important to approach students' critical citizenship from an academic perspective, where the movement's protagonists are highlighted and different methods are used to explore their perceptions, thoughts, discourses and actions.

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