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Terminating the Teaching Profession: Neoliberal Reform, Resistance and the Assault on Teachers in Chile

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Abstract

Chile was the first country in the world to broadly implement neoliberal educational reforms. The initial reforms of the 1980s, implemented during the military dictatorship, have left the country with a legacy difficult to overcome. Responses to ongoing reform efforts have varied, but resistance from teachers, students, and local communities have marked debates in education in recent years. Despite the pressure to preserve the public sector, recent reforms may provide the final mechanisms by which to complete the phasing out of public education in Chile, as those fearing the imminent demise of public education must scramble for strategies of effective advocacy.

Este Estado de carácter subsidiario ha modificado profundamente los objetivos mismos de la educación de nuestro país, concibiendo al educando básicamente como consumidor. De este modo, se ha ido transformando el concepto de calidad de la educación, reduciéndose a una capacitación eficiente para generar los diversos tipos de capital humano que esta sociedad requiere para el desarrollo productivo, así como a la formación de un ser humano competente para ser buen consumidor en esta sociedad de mercado. (Colegio de Profesores, July 1999)¹

This paper will provide a brief overview of ongoing education reforms in Chile, in particular the effects neoliberal reform has had on teachers and public education. It will begin with a brief overview of the history of neoliberal reform in the education sector beginning with the military coup of 1973 and up to the most recent set of reforms implemented during the government of Michelle Bachelet. Imbedded in this analysis is a review of some of the responses to neoliberal reform from various interest groups, notable among them the teachers union, the *colegio de profesores*. Across the scope of this now only marginally public-sector domain, education continues to be pressured and cajoled into compliance with the ideology of the free market. In the years following re-democratization, it is notable that Chile has embarked on a series of education reform efforts that re-emphasize the public sector, while reinforcing and strengthening essential

neoliberal elements of dictatorship education policy. While students and their families must deal with the choices the free-market of Chilean education offers them, teachers – particularly those left in the shrinking public sector - continue to be systematically marginalized.

History of Neoliberal Reform in Chile

Chile can claim as its legacy an extremely well organized, relatively egalitarian, and effective public educational system. This educational infrastructure has been in place since the early 19th century. However the political and economic changes since the military coup in 1973 created a number of interesting challenges concerning the organization and purpose of the educational system. During the 1980s the ruling military junta directed the country and all of its institutions firmly toward the global marketplace. This mapping of "market logic" onto an educational system whose mandate had previously been firmly rooted in expansion of coverage and ideas of equity and opportunity, rather than efficiency and competition has had many repercussions, both structural and ideological.

Given the political environment in which neoliberal reforms initially were couched, questions of legitimacy or debate concerning the changes in education that took place during the dictatorship pose a moot point - any opposition to change having been removed or violently repressed. But today Chile faces a different situation. In 1989 the country began the process of "re-democratization," again holding political elections in which candidates from a variety of political parties compete for popular support. Throughout the post-dictatorship years, a coalition of Centrist, sometimes slightly Left-leaning parties have come together to offer a strong and electorally successful alternative to the Right Wing constituencies. However, despite the election of two nominally Socialist presidents, Ricardo Lagos in 2000-2006 and Michele Bachelet 2006-2010, education policy remains entrenched within a neoliberal structure dependent on a voucher system for funding and heavily marked by semi-private, charter-type schools of which only marginal oversight and some accountability is required. Perhaps worse than the reticence of the neoliberal Chilean state to more fully challenge the structure of education since the dictatorship, is the broadly held belief that public schools are by their nature low quality. This belief is now endemic throughout the Chilean population.

The inequities in educational opportunity that have grown increasingly blatant since neoliberal reforms have conveniently merged with highly classed notions of parental commitment to education and student ability. The status of teaching as a profession is inextricably linked to this dynamic of marginalization. Not surprisingly, the primary voices in opposition to neoliberal education policy in Chile have come from teachers and students, most specifically the *Colegio de Profesores*, the *de facto* teacher union in Chile (*Colegio de Profesores de Chile*, July 1999). And from the *Dirigentes Secundarios* (*Congreso Nacional de Dirigentes Secundarios*, 2007).

Upon examination of the course of neoliberal reform since implementation began during the dictatorship, the diminished faith in the quality of public education in Chile can be directly linked to disinvestment in the public sector and the systematic development of

other educational “choices” made possible through public-to-private funding mechanisms (vouchers), and flexibilizing laws regarding privatization. Not only did neoliberal education policy systematically gut public education’s material infrastructure, but also the cycle of demise caused by under-funding and student flight to the private sector created the broad perception of the failure and weakness of the public sector. Historically, in Chile this was not always the case. In fact, the Chilean public education system had been steadily and impressively increasing its coverage and effectiveness up until the time of the coup in 1973.

Chile's first normal schools were founded early in the 19th century. Part of the program of the early national Chilean educational system included the founding of the highly regarded National School of Education. Normal schools in Chile provided sites for the training of teachers as well as secondary education (Farrell, 1986). Through extensive government support, and coupled with the outstanding accomplishments within the field of education nationwide, teaching grew into a very respected profession, offering middle class stability and mobility. Chilean teachers within the national system were free to move among schools located throughout the country as their seniority increased without facing decreases in pay or benefits (Núñez, 2004). The professional status awarded teachers in Chile and the encouragement and support for innovations in education was instrumental in fomenting 'activism' among teachers. This activism has taken various professional forms, as in political and unionized activism, as well as academic/theoretical activism. Chilean teachers traditionally have taken the initiative in striving to modernize and make improvements in teaching. It is interesting to note that some of the more senior teachers still working in Chile today identify very proudly as “*normalistas*,” graduates of the National School of Education. In a recent interview with one of these teachers in Valparaíso, it was brought to my attention that the *escuelas normales* were shut down at the end of September 1973. The military regime took immediate and violent action against teachers, the *colegio de profesores*, and students. All pre-service teachers, formally students in the National School of Education, were required to begin their teacher education programs again in the newly restructured, and militarized university teacher education programs. The colleague with whom I spoke, was to have graduated from the *escuela normal* in December 1973, instead she was forced to begin another new, four-year course of study. In her words, “*la educación de los normalistas fue la mayor educación que yo he tenido. Lo que nos entrego despues, los programas de los militares, no tenían nada que ver con lo que habíamos aprendido antes. Mi identidad profesional, de professor, viene de mi formación normalista. ¡Soy normalista!*” (Personal Interview, May, 2009).²

Chile and Chilean educational reform since 1973

On September 11 1973, following months of civil unrest marked by shortages, strikes, middle-class mobilization, and massive media propaganda, a group of senior military officers, headed by Augusto Pinochet, stormed the Moneda (the primary government residency) in Santiago. By the end of the day the President, Salvador Allende, was dead - the army claimed suicide - and thousands of people throughout the country, loyal to the Popular Unity government, were incarcerated - or worse. For months the Allende government had known that some type of military insurrection was in the making. Earlier

in June a similar *coup d'etat* had been attempted but was avoided thanks to a number of military officials loyal to the constitutional government. Few Chileans were prepared for the brutality and precision that would mark the end of Chile's long history of pluralistic electoral governance.

Foundations for the Free Market - Political, Economic and Educational: 1973-1980

After the military coup, the initial fallout within the educational system was marked by various "purges" of leftist or "dangerous" elements from the schools and educational system. This "purification," most intensively pursued from 1973-1975, was leveled not only against people but also certain institutions - such as community support centers active within various public schools, and also outside of the school system - i.e. student organizations. Books were banned, and massive book burnings took place. The "subversive" materials included writings in Philosophy, History, Anthropology, European (especially Eastern European) authors, and everything published by Quimantu - a state run publishing house revitalized during the Popular Unity Government (Fisher, 1979).

Repressive acts created an environment of widespread censorship - both internally and externally applied, and repression was felt harshly within the universities and the larger educational community. The universities in Chile, as in much of Latin America, have a long history of student and professorial activism. In the turbulent times before the Military coup, university campuses were completely politicized, and communities outside the universities often used the public schools as community meeting places where politics and social manifestations were planned. For this reason the Military Junta paid special attention to the educational establishment directly after the coup and in the years to follow (Brunner, 1977; Teitelboin, 1988). Hundreds of professors and students were rounded up and detained. Many were tortured. The stimulating and intense discussion of issues - political or otherwise controversial - which had for years marked a rich culture of socio-political participation, was silenced. Debate and the free expression of opinion were now considered dangerous and subversive, and were dealt with as such. Students, teachers, and staff seen as not supporting the junta were removed from schools and universities and imprisoned, "disappeared," or exiled. Those who survived were blacklisted. Testimonies reveal that many teachers and students believed their classrooms to be monitored by undercover informants. One colleague described how, the day of the coup, several of his students came to the *Universidad de Concepción* in their military fatigues. Signaling their military sympathies and roles as informants. They proceeded to denounce and assist in the arrest of hundreds of their former classmates/*compañeros de carrera* who were subsequently detained, many tortured and disappeared. Military officers were appointed presidents of the universities (not until 1982 was a civilian appointed to head a university). Curricula were also "cleaned up," especially the social sciences which virtually disappeared. Within education at all levels, any discipline, which traditionally encouraged an analysis of social-economic critique, was suppressed. Special courses on "National Security" or "the Doctrine of the Military regime" became required. These courses presented new revised history, omitting or distorting the recent past, and highlighting heroes from the military (Collins & Lear, 1995; Teitelboim, 1988).

These purges - or perhaps we could call them 'non-formal' reforms - effectively removed

any potential opposition to the coming changes: educational, economic, or otherwise, from both within the educational community and the broader society. Therefore, they can be seen as important precursors to the reforms of the 80s, preparing the country for the systematic changes that followed. Milton Friedman visited Chile for the first time in March of 1975, and the neoliberal educational reforms were formally implemented in 1980.

Implementation of Neoliberal Reforms 1980-1989

From 1980-1989, neoliberal educational reforms took effect. These reforms focused mainly on applying the 'logic of the market' to the educational system (Puiggrós, 1996). Key concepts used to promote and legitimate these changes fit into two categories: (1) Public or popular concern, i.e., "local control," and "choice;" and (2) Economic concern, i.e., "efficiency/decentralization" and privatization.

It is within the scope of these arguments that the foundational ideology of economic reforms such as those championed by Milton Friedman - excellence through competition, and the power of choice in the free market - find fertile ground in their translation into the realm of education.

In 1980 the government passed two decrees that drastically changed the nature of the Chilean education. Decree # 3,063 - which began the municipalization of K-12 schools (breaking apart the former state run, national system), and decree #3,476 - that created government subsidies to private and public schools for each student enrolled. These decrees effectively created a "voucher" system for schools level K-12 (Collins & Lear, 1995). The municipalization of primary, and secondary schools was complete by 1986. And the national subsidies for each student enrolled in public and private schools divided the Chilean system into basically three types of schools: (1) Municipal ("public"); (2) "Private subsidized" (or *escuelas subvencionadas* or semi-private, funded by state vouchers and sometimes additional family payments and similar to charter schools in terms of their potential autonomy from state accountability standards, curriculum, and hiring practices); and (3) "Private paid"

At the beginning of the reform in 1980, 67% of grade schools were public, 22% were "private subsidized", and 12% were "Private paid". By 1987 these numbers had changed to 43% public and 47% "private subsidized". This left 170,000 fewer students in the public system. Today estimates for the number of students left in the public system is even lower. As of March 2009, fewer than 40% of all Chilean students remained in the public municipal system, it is feared that because of recent policy changes (to be discussed further), within the next couple of years that number may drop to below 10% (MINEDUC, 2009; Data presented by Chilean economist Juan Pablo Valenzuela from the University of Chile, personal communication, March 2009).

There are many arguments for these changes - but most notably, as in the US context - parental and local control over municipal schools i.e., "streamlined bureaucratic efficiency," and "choice," continue to be used as rationale for decentralizing schools (Parry, 1997; Carnoy, 1998; Arenas, 2004). Schools must keep enrollment up to remain

viable, and municipal schools often find themselves at the losing end of the struggle to attract students. As expected, this competition with the private sector widens the gaps between affluent and lower income neighborhoods as municipal and semi-private schools in higher income areas are better able to supplement government per-student subsidies from parents, businesses and other municipal revenues. Meanwhile poor schools become run down, and are forced for economic reasons to adopt abbreviated school days and eliminate entire subjects from the curriculum which in turn, effects the morale of teachers and options for students within these institutions – and inspires families to seek out other educational options for their children. This dynamic creates a classic vicious circle of declining enrollments in the public sector, the municipal schools. Schools in higher income areas have been better able to attract 'star' teachers with higher pay, making these schools more appealing. Unfortunately, for families with school-aged children, glossy adds funded by state vouchers and parent co-pays, tend to present an inaccurate picture of the quality of schools that as a matter of common practice “select” the students who will continue to bolster performance results for the school. The “excellence” of any given school, as measured by the test score results may or may not reflect rich academics or pedagogical effectiveness. Regardless of the real academic quality of some schools, the result is the common belief that standardized tests accurately measure the quality of teaching and learning taking place in any given school. Hence, families who can afford to do so overwhelmingly choose to send their children to any school that is not public/municipal because, following this logic, any public/municipal school is bad, while any other school is better, and lower income schools = bad schools (Pinkney Pastrana, 2000).

The business of education is quite lucrative in Chile and there are estimates that within the congress, up to 60% of political representatives own or have a vested interest in at least one school or other education related enterprise (Montecinos, personal communication, 2008). It is not uncommon to find advertisements in Chilean newspapers listing schools for sale, with guaranteed revenues posted to entice any likely buyer. A well-known example of conflicts of interest in government favoring the neoliberal model, is the outgoing Minister of Education – Monica Jimenez, president of the educational foundation *Aprender*, which runs several schools. Also well-known is the incoming Minister of Education, Joaquin Lavin, former mayor of Santiago and founder of the private university *Universidad del Desarrollo* – a very profitable chain of private degree granting institutions sprinkled across the country. These two most recent ministers of education have direct interests in maintaining a market-based system. In fact, many elected officials have direct interests in this “industry” and no ties or loyalties to the municipal/public sector. Between early 2000 up to today, not a single elected official in the country has chosen to educate their children in the public system, rather vying either for a traditional elite private school, or some variety of *escuela subvencionada*/semi-private school. With such a political divestment in public education, who is left to advocate for the importance of educational equity and access for all Chileans? (Magendoza, 2005; Narodowski & Nores, 2002)

“The Poverty of Democracy and the Democracy of Poverty”

This quote comes from an article by renowned scholar James Petras (1994) in which he

explores and critiques the limits of constitutional democracy within the re-democratized Chilean state. The limitations of democratic change in Chile are multiple and stem from structural constitutional limitations which have been continually modified and slightly improved since the process of re-democratization began in 1989. Limitations are also ideological, the logic of neoliberal capitalism having been grafted onto the Chilean psyche for more than 17 years of dictatorship and not yet facing significant challenge, especially among the official political parties in power. Education in Chile today reflects these limitations and, as such, it is the scene of many contradictory visions and practices. The “progressive” vision nascent within elements of education reform that have been taking place in this post-dictatorship period is noteworthy for at times emphasizing constructivist pedagogies, a return to a discourse of equity, a commitment to gradually improving the conditions of teaching, and a slow but steady reinvestment in the education sector. These progressive elements collide with a legacy of authoritarian practices and a structural foundation that reinforces market competition between schools and requires a continued commitment to the basic elements of neoliberal policy which ultimately prohibit many of the very tenets that are the essence of progressive reform. *La Reforma Educacional Chilena (1997~2006)* is a prime example of how these contradictory frameworks, the “progressive” and the neoliberal, play out in the practical realm (Pinkney Pastrana, 2000).

Some progress in improving public education was initially made in the years immediately following the end of the military regime, much of this can be credited to the *Estatuto Docente*. The passage of the *Estatuto Docente* in 1990 by the newly elected *Conservación* government granted a degree of job security and recognized that teachers were not ordinary private sector workers by establishing a body of law specifically to govern their profession. At this time, pay differentials between municipal and some semi-private schools had been actually decreasing. Additionally, the working conditions in Municipal schools in terms of job security and benefits, advocated for and minimally protected by agreements negotiated with supporters of public education, such as the *colegio de profesores* and protected by the *Estatuto Docente* had become increasingly more favorable for teachers. Despite this, the decades of the dictatorship and years of anti-State free-market propaganda, combined with “snob appeal” (the very classist yearning for material and cultural markers of “high class” and the resulting social status and real life social and economic opportunities the acquisition of these ‘goods’ afford individuals), left a lingering impression that any school is better than a municipal one. This is despite the fact that the academic differences between the different types of schools are negligible (McEwan, 2001). In fact if one controls for socio-economic class in an analysis of school effectiveness there is virtually no difference between the different types of schools in fact, by some measures, municipal schools have been shown to be more “efficient” (Carnoy, 1998). The different types of educational institutions often share the same teachers, and teacher practices across various types of schools largely follow very traditional, generally non-democratic norms. Schooling in Chile is a business, and a very profitable one for unscrupulous entrepreneurs who play on the desperation of a destitute system to entice families into committing their children and economic resources into painfully overcrowded classrooms staffed by overworked, underpaid, professionals (Gardner, 2005). Meanwhile the public system, with its crumbling physical infrastructure

left by years of neglect and no budget to invest in glossy ads, must also compete in this educational free-market fiasco.

There seems to be a general consensus among educators that decentralization via municipalization was one of the key factors responsible for the downfall of Chilean education. The decentralization of Chilean education is sometimes referred to by practitioners as “*alcaldización*,” referring to the transfer of authority in schools away from the centralized regulations coming from the National Ministry to the mayors – *alcaldes* – of each municipality. The mayors of each municipality, almost without exception, are not educators and have a limited understanding of the lives of teachers as well as the educational needs of students and their families in municipal schools, yet they hold authority over many important educational decisions related to running the schools in each municipality. These education administrators are responsible for the distribution of funding and teacher pay, following state regulations, implementing teacher evaluations, and following national testing schedules. In the spirit of “local control” some municipalities even develop their own sets of standards and assessments, in short the responsibility for handling all the details necessary for running schools in Chile lies squarely decentralized within each municipality.

Interestingly, the attitude of the mayors in Chile towards the relative desirability of municipal/public schools varies. Running municipal schools is just one of the multiple administrative responsibilities left up to each municipal government. Generally speaking, the administration of the education sector is a complex task wrought with conflicts between multiple interest groups and set in a context of continually changing national and perhaps local guidelines. Either the transfer of these responsibilities back to the state re-creating a strong National system or the complete end of municipal education would make their work much easier.

The origin of many of the ongoing conflicts between teachers in municipal schools and local governments is the failure of local governments to follow and implement changing policy, especially as this relates to teacher pay. This was the case with the recent teacher strikes in 2009 whose partial focus was that teachers be paid their “*deuda histórica*,” their historic debt. This refers to an amount of income that should have been included in teacher salaries but was rather absorbed into the costs of running local government over various years’ (Colegio de Profesores, 2008). These continual tensions and administrative oversights make this model of educational administration very complex and almost unworkable. This organizational structure tends to create an environment in which the elected municipal officials are generally hostile to public education and the multiple interests that defend it, namely teachers and the *colegio de profesores*, and recently students and families that stand in solidarity with teachers to demand the state reinforce and maintain public Education.

Teachers and the Education Marketplace

There is no arena in which the clash between the logic of the marketplace and the logic of education are more drastic than the teaching profession, especially when considering the effects of specific economic efficiency policies. As one scholar recently noted, “It’s very

easy to become efficient and reduce overall educational costs if you simply cut teacher's salaries and increase class sizes" (See also Schugurensky, 2009). These were in fact a significant part of the changes that initially were linked to education reform in Chile during the dictatorship. The resulting drop in pay experienced by teachers in Chile as part of this vision of efficiency necessitated that most teachers held several jobs simultaneously in order to make ends meet. Thus, the term "taxi teachers" was coined referring to educators who travel from school to school by taxi to complete their working day. Teachers are now often paid by the "chronological hour," for each 60 minutes of time spent in a class, rather than the "pedagogical hour" which is equal to 45 minutes. This means that teaching four 45-minute classes is only worth three hours pay with prep time and homework not considered part of the financial compensation of the teaching profession. With protection from the *Estatuto Docente* and some improvement from the *Reforma Educacional Chilena* (Pinkney Pastrana, 2000), the conditions in municipal schools are often notably better than those found in the majority of private and semi-private schools who continue to operate with a market efficiency mentality. Especially in the private sector, teachers have become part of the "flexible" work force with "indefinite contracts," and they can be fired for no stated reason in most schools (Sisto & Fardella, 2009; Sisto, Montecinos & Ahumada, 2008).

Under the old nationalized system, teachers were able to transfer to other regions or schools while preserving their seniority and rate of pay. There were also many provisions under the nationalized system that enhanced teacher status. Continuing education for teachers was supported by the national system and there were many professional development opportunities available (Austin, 2003; Núñez, 2004). In contrast to many countries in Latin America, ongoing in-service professional development was a normal part of the Chilean teaching profession in the years preceding the coup. With the municipalization of education, these opportunities have virtually disappeared in many schools. Many regions are simply unable to offer such professional development because of fiscal and other resource constraints. Innovation and professional development are unnecessary when the work force is seen as just that - workers rather than professionals. Indeed, decentralizing and privatizing the educational system has significantly affected the professionalism of teaching.

Localized support for respected teachers may still be found throughout Chile, but teaching, a profession once highly respected, has in essence become yet another occupation of the proletariat. Teachers currently represent another segment of workers who lack job security and perhaps even the minimal guarantees (once enjoyed by all national employees) of due process and defense against accusation (Núñez, 2004). Although as we have seen, the passage of the *Estatuto Docente* by the *Consorcio* government in 1990 sought to undo some of the disastrous policies implemented during the dictatorship, teachers are not even regular municipal salaried employees (like school janitors), but "workers" under contract of the municipality's education corporation (Marin, 1990). As in the case of teacher pay, the security afforded teachers varies per type of school and municipality. Generally speaking, municipal schools still offer marginally better job security and benefits followed by the semi-private and private institutions. Teachers remain a marginalized and exploited sector of the workforce within

the neoliberal Chilean market.

“Free market” logic has promoted competition in schools through the mechanisms of decentralization and privatization. Accountability and efficiency measures function as the means through which the market model is assessed and enforced. As neoliberal education reform continues to develop throughout various “democratic” Chilean administrations, efficiency and accountability within this model continue to be approached through means that effectively promise to dismantle the teaching profession. This assault has taken the form of pay cuts, flexible contracts, the diminishing possibility of collective bargaining, cuts in hiring in municipal schools and school closures – due to falling enrollments - and a slow undermining of the *Estatuto Docente*. These varied policy shifts have come about through specifically targeted changes embedded within and sometimes masked by larger reform efforts. The following section will detail some of the more recent and provocative changes brought about through the transformation of the LOCE (*Ley Organica Constitucional de la Educación*) into the LGE (*Ley General de la Educación*) (MINEDUC, 2007), and the implementation of the *Ley SEP*, (*Ley de Subvención Escolar Preferencial*).

The *LOCE*, or *Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza*, was the law enacted shortly before the end of the Pinochet regime. It institutionalized decentralization and other aspects of the neo-liberal structure of the educational system in Chile, though these policies had been in place throughout the dictatorship. As a direct undemocratically implemented legacy of the dictatorship the *LOCE* has always received the ire of teachers, students, and others and quickly became one of the flashpoints of contention for education reformers and various political actors committed to re-democratizing Chile. Finally, after years of strikes, culminating with the massive *Revolución Pengüina* in which thousands of high school students initially took to the streets at the end of May, 2006 (mobilizations continued throughout the following years), the demands of the protestors were apparently met and the *LOCE* was abolished, replaced by the *Ley General de la Educación*, *LGE* (Congreso Secundario Nacional, 2007). It soon became clear that what seemed initially a potential victory for democracy and public education was nothing more than a repackaged and re-branded set of neo-liberal reforms, with a couple of important additions. Interestingly these additions embedded within the *LGE* came about in response to some of the demands articulated by the student movement, such as accountability and evaluation of teachers, and more emphasis within the system on the education of the most underserved and marginalized segments of the population – the “highly vulnerable” or “high risk” populations. The policy makers seized on these demands that arose during the protests and used them as another mechanism for expanding the neo-liberal model (Pinkney Pastrana, 2009b).

Ley SEP

The *Ley SEP* or *Ley de Subvención Escolar Preferencial* is one such policy embedded within the *LGE*. It was designed to specifically target funds to students who are the “most vulnerable” in Chile. Hence students are considered “*prioritarios*” or “high risk” as determined by their SES, level of education of their mothers, and participation in various types of social programs. The argument behind this new policy is that students fitting

these criteria are truly the most under-served students in Chile. Using the power of vouchers, this plan basically doubles the value of each voucher paid to schools that serve a qualifying number of these high priority students. This is causing an interesting development. Because this population of students in Chile has tended to test lower, they have therefore not been considered highly desirable students to populate any given school. Schools much prefer to attract and keep “good” students, as this helps to attract and keep more of the same, keeping enrollments full – competition vigorous, and profits high. Hence, the lower performing student population, from a market driven perspective is the “undesirable” or “less profitable” population. Now with a newly increased voucher following these students wherever they choose to attend school, a new, highly profitable and thus highly attractive population of students has been born, giving rise to the latest generation of private and semi-private schools. These schools are eager to take advantage of this new government largess, though based on past performance, they are likely not to well serve the needs of the hundreds of students poised to enroll. The growth of this newest market niche in Chilean education will further sap the population from the municipal/public schools, and we can anticipate that school closures and fewer teachers being hired by the municipal/public sector will be the natural results.

Teacher Evaluations the *Estatuto Docente* and Merit

Despite relatively few changes in the neoliberal structure of education in Chile post-dictatorship, the passage of the *Estatuto Docente* in 1990 was instrumental in improving the working conditions of teachers in Chile. However, what was initially a progressive shift in policy has also been specifically undermined in recent years, and the recent *Ley General de Educación/LGE* contains several provisions that contribute to this trend (Pinkney Pastrana, 2009). In the years following its passage, criticism of the *Estatuto Docente* had inspired a counter-development of further policies that re-affirm the neoliberal model. Only five years after its passage in September 1995, President Frei appointed a high-level commission to review the state of education in the country (Diálogo Nacional sobre la Modernización de la Educación Chilena (1995)) and concluded that the *Estatuto Docente* was responsible for “catastrophic” results in terms of teacher incentives. The commission called for merit pay, hiring flexibility at the school level and the transfer of subvention/voucher revenues directly to schools so that the high-performing schools would not subsidize those that were performing poorly. Clearly from within the centrist *Concertación* government the market model offering competitive measures for insuring “quality” in the schools is widely favored.

The requirement that teachers be systematically evaluated through a standardized mechanism is another recent addition to state mandated and municipally managed oversight of teacher work. Only teachers in the municipal schools are required to comply with the national evaluation process, further discouraging the entrance of new teachers into this sector. It is the teachers in the municipal schools, a minority of the Chilean teaching force, who had until now, been contractually offered some employment protection. Embedded within the evaluation process are provisions that can lead to the dismissal of teachers formerly protected by the *Estatuto Docente*.

Closely tied to the process of teacher evaluation is a program to establish a system of

merit pay throughout Chile. Currently, this plan has not been fully finalized but implementation of the system has begun. A branch of the Ministry of Education, the *Centro de Perfeccionamiento, Experimentación e Investigaciones Pedagógicas* or CPEIP, has been charged with the development, implementation, and assessment of the teacher evaluation program. This is also the branch of the Ministry playing a vital role in framing and developing a system of merit pay. Teachers from public and semi-private schools can all be accredited with the title of *Aseñación de Excelencia Pedagógica* (AEP). These teachers receive an extra bonus pay of approximately \$100.00 per month in addition to their regular salary (CPEIP, 2010). These policies were being systematically developed during the past presidency of Leftist president Michelle Bachelet. The ideological bent of the current administration of Sebastian Piñera, that leans firmly to the right, would lead one to postulate that merit-based policies are poised to increase and reach even farther into the Chilean teacher corps.

We are familiar with merit-based policies as tools comprising the usual arsenal of neoliberal reform measures. The logic often accompanying merit-based policies being that of teacher accountability, and the desire to reward excellence and sanction low performance, incentives and disincentives embedded in the teaching profession. These policies are problematic on many levels, not the least of which is the difficulty of assessing the effectiveness of teaching via assumed student learning as measured by standardized tests or teacher evaluation measures. The process of teaching and learning is a highly collaborative and dynamic social event. Hence, the process of pedagogical competency is a complex and context embedded set of practices necessitating the expert negotiation of multiple skills by the teacher. It is sobering to note that recent research has uncovered some interesting effects that teacher evaluation and merit-based policies have had on the communities of teachers impacted by these recent mandates.

Teaching is not a solitary activity. Obviously students and the classroom teachers are involved. Teacher culture, in ideal pedagogical environments of effective teaching and learning, is a culture that is highly collaborative and supportive in nature. Most good teachers recognize that their work does not happen effectively in a vacuum, and that their colleagues as well as the students and broader community all contribute to student learning. But, teacher evaluations attempt to measure the performance of individual teachers, in isolation, ignoring the collaborative nature of their daily work. Similarly, merit incentives are set up to reward individual teachers for their work. As such, both these types of policies force the logic of individualism onto a culture that is collaborative in nature, further undermining teacher culture, and re-defining teacher work (Sisto, Montecinos & Ahumada, under review).

Colegio de profesores

The resistance to the structural changes that have taken place in Chile's educational system has been consistently led by the *Colegio de Profesores*. Their critique of education policy, throughout the years of reform since re-democratization is based on a solidly anti-neoliberal critique that not only intends to improve the condition of teachers in Chile, but also to dismantle the neoliberal structures that underlie the educational system (Colegio de Profesores de Chile A.G. July, 1999). Their primary critique, is that

neoliberal policies have changed the role of the state from that of guarantor of public education to a superficial role overseeing standards and testing and imposing economic decentralization through subsidies/vouchers. Embedded in this analysis is the idea that a shift to a market logic in education changes the concept of education from that of a “right” guaranteed by the state, to a “good” delivered through the market and subjected to the narrow criteria of efficiency and competition in which the state assumes the weak role of regulator. This is the shift from the *Estado Docente*, to the *Estado Subsidiario*, the state as guarantor of education versus state as subsidizer of education. Continuing its critique, the *colegio de profesores* contends that no longer does the state take responsibility for the real educational needs of the population; it has cut the public investment for education and forced families to invest privately in financing the education of their children. These elements are all responsible for generating a profound segmentation of the educational system, seriously affecting its equity and quality. Privatizations inspired by the free market model have had disastrous effects throughout the specific segments of the economy it has been able to impact, as was eloquently relayed by Chilean sociologist Fernando De Laire:

Beyond euphemisms, privatization of health, social security and education operated by neo-liberals has imposed a brutal rationale: depending on the amount of money you have, you will have so much health care, quality of education for your children and pension upon retirement. If you are privileged, you will have access to privileged services. If you are poor, you will have to make do with what the public system is able to give you.” (De Laire, 2002)

Weakening commitment to public education and the turn toward the logic of the market in determining the foci of projects for educational development has changed the very objectives of education. Questions concerning the “what for?” of education are avoided while students and their families are viewed as yet another type of “consumer,” a consumer of education. This has caused a conceptual transformation in what constitutes a “quality” education.

Within this framework – notions of “quality” are reduced to simple criteria that reflect the ability of the system to produce the kind of human capital necessary for the productive development of the Chilean economy, as well as its ability to produce human beings as competent consumers within this market society. Perhaps one of the most poignant critiques of the neoliberal policy and its impact on education was recently articulated by the secondary students of Chile:

En la práctica, la aplicación de este modelo de municipalización y su perpetuación por los gobiernos de la Concertación significó el establecimiento de una ‘educación para pobres.’ Una fabricación de mano de obra barata no calificada cuyo bajo costo jugará un rol funcional al proyecto capitalista neoclásico imperante. Todo esto bajo la bandera ideológica de la ‘libertad de enseñanza.’” (Congreso Nacional de Dirigentes Secundarios, 2007)³

According to the *colegio de profesores*, and the national student organization, Chile is in the midst of (and has been for some time within) a “*crisis del sistema educativo nacional*”/crises in the national educational system (Colegio de Profesores A.G., July 1999). The assault on public education continues. As of March 2009, the implementation of a provision, modeled after the program in the United States, “Teach for America,” allows that any college graduate may be hired as a teacher without having been trained as a teacher. This new source of teacher labor provides, as in the case of the U.S., a cheap and eager unprofessional labor source that helps schools primarily interested in keeping down their bottom line, to keep costs low. Will this new flexibilization of teaching requirements whose effect delegitimizes and negates the profession of teaching, be the final straw that breaks the back of public education in Chile?

My research since 1998 has consistently upheld the claims put forth by the *colegio de profesores* and others that with very few exceptions, reform (the passage of the *Estatuto Docente* in 1990 being one very important and notable example), though sometimes appearing to be progressive, remains essentially “more of the same” in terms of its refusal to address, or challenge the neoliberal structural foundation of the Chilean educational system. In fact the most recent set of reforms including the LGE and Ley SEP, as well as the Chilean version of “Teach for America” may indeed signal the end of public education in Chile altogether.

There are thousands of activists in part represented by the *colegio de profesores*, who reject outright the political and structural foundations in which post-dictatorship reform is set and militantly resist neoliberal reform in every way possible, often calling on and organizing national strikes. Though the sharp and precise critique expressed by such interest groups may fall on sympathetic ears among Chileans, the Chilean mainstream are beginning to experience a level of “strike fatigue” as ongoing mobilizations by teachers and students are extremely disruptive to daily life and families remain concerned about how these interruptions affect the education of their children. However, anti-neoliberal sentiments are shared by the majority of teachers, students and the *colegio de profesores* who continue to mount impressive actions, strikes and school shutdowns, to get their agenda in the public media. The picture of several thousand respectable teachers marching on the Ministry offices in Santiago and confronting the Chilean Carabineros, garbed in full riot gear, leaves a lasting impression.

Due to their relatively more secure contractual agreement, teachers from Municipal schools generally participate more fully and directly in the civic arena to organize and rally in support of work related issues (though this can depend on the leadership of the municipality) while teachers from *escuelas subvencionadas*/semi-private schools, are often hesitant to participate. The reason for the discrepancy in levels of activism between teachers from Municipal versus semi-private schools is that semi-private and private schools exercise significant autonomy in the conditions of work and the type of contracts they offer their employees. Throughout my multiple years of research and work with teachers and schools in Chile, and in the multiple strikes that have occurred during this time, teachers from municipal schools always make up the majority of the participants.

Teachers from the private sector and the *escuelas subvencionadas* are free to associate with the *colegio de profesores* and participate in direct action, but the majority do not, fearing dismissal from their jobs, commonly an imminent threat. As one teacher put it, in semi-private schools “*tenemos que cuidar la pega*”/“we have to protect our jobs” (personal correspondence, April 2009). There is some evidence that worry about the lost days of instruction resulting from lengthy strikes, is putting further pressure on families to shift their students into more “stable” schools, i.e., schools that do not lose faculty to strikes, furthering the exodus from the public sector.

Those of us concerned with the fate of public education in Chile and elsewhere can only hope that burnout and mobilization fatigue will not overwhelm the good will of the Chilean people, and the energy of the already over-taxed Chilean teacher corp. The essence and conditions and logic of teaching have been redefined by neoliberal reforms. Is it essential to also create new methods of resistance to neoliberal logic and policies? We can learn a lot from Chile and their years of resistance to these shifts. We can continue to explore and think creatively about alternatives to direct mobilizations and actions that have begun to chip away at public support for this struggle. And finally, we need to continue to develop an international dialogue to rethink our strategies of resistance to neoliberal reforms and in solidarity, continue our indefatigable project to reform, reframe, undermine and prevent the expansion of these disastrous policies where they exist and wherever they are proposed. The future of public education depends on this.

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¹ TRANSLATION: This state, of subsidiary character has profoundly modified the very objectives of education in our country, conceiving of the student basically as a consumer. From this perspective it has transformed the concept of quality in education. Quality education in this sense means the efficient production of the human capital necessary to meet the needs of production in society. In this way, the purpose of education is to form human beings competent to act as good consumers in the market society.

“Semi-private” schools were created through the implementation of a national voucher system, known in Chile as a system of *subvenciones* or *subsidios*. In Chile these schools are called *escuelas subvencionadas*, or *escuelas particular subvencionados*. In English language literature they are sometimes referred to as “public paid.” Throughout this paper I will use these terms interchangeably when referencing this type of educational institution.

² “The education at the Normal school was the best education I have had. What we got afterward, the programs set up by the military government, was nothing compared to what we had learned before. My identity as a teacher comes from my training at the Normal school, I’m a “*normalista!*”

Debates concerning the rationale behind neoliberal reforms did not take place in Chile in the early 1980’s. There was little or no civic participation on issues concerning the restructuring of the Educational System. From all reports, the workings of the National Education Ministry and other governmental agencies during the Military Regime was clothed in secrecy and notably free from debate.

Interestingly, the situation of teachers holding several jobs in different schools simultaneously (this condition has decreased slightly in the past couple of years following the implementation of *la jornada completa* – which was part of the *Reforma Educacional Chilena* - in many municipal schools) poses a challenge for those who consistently maintain the superiority of private institutions. Many teachers in Chile today are teaching in both the public and private spheres. Lacking prep time, they often present the same lessons in both contexts, regardless of the material resources that exist at the specific site. One must question whether or not the advantages of abundant material resources sometimes found in private institutions (such as computers, didactic materials, extra texts, and perhaps even smaller class size) are realized when the actual human resources in both public and private sectors are identical.

³ TRANSLATION: “Practically speaking, the application of this model of decentralization and its perpetuation by the Concertación governments means the establishment of an “education for the poor.” An assembly line for cheap unqualified labor whose low cost plays a supportive role in the prevailing neoclassical capitalist project - all this under the ideological banner of “free choice” in education.