Educational Reforms in post-neoliberal Chile.
Citizenship rights and governance

Inés Picazo
Université de Concepción, Chile
and
CRC en citoyenneté et gouvernance
Université de Montréal

mpicazo@udec.cl

27 May 2005

Proto-paper prepared for: Claiming Citizenship in the Americas
A Conference Organised by the Canada Research Chair in Citizenship and Governance
www.cccg.umontreal.ca
**Introduction**

This paper argues that the current educational decentralization in Chile and the political discourse about participation of the community – that is, families and teachers - is not simply a neoliberal vision of regulation of education. Nor is it simply due to pressures coming from external agencies. Rather it represents a post-neoliberal understanding of the relation among the state, the educational sector and society, reflecting demands coming Chilean society itself. Nonetheless, participation of the “education community” in ways that would involve sharing political power in educational matters has been translated into concrete legislation only as the governance of the new democracy has been assured.

After almost two decades of dictatorship, the transition to democracy raised high expectations. There were hopes for more sharing of power, in order to exercise civil and political rights, and for a more just apportioning of the economic growth experienced over the last years. The hopes of social organisations as well as the society in general were further raised by the electoral promises and political discourse calling for reinforcement of “authentic participation.” It was only in the late 1990s, however, that this political voluntarism began to take concrete political shape. It was at this time that the political and institutional dimensions of the democratic regime seemed solidified. At this moment, discourse was translated into a series of legislative initiatives, institutions, and practices, shaping a new relation based on participation and some shared responsibility for reforms of educational policy. Thus, we can say, new forms of governance were taking shape (Saint-Martin, 2004).
Since 1990 the Chilean state has promoted a vision of democracy and of citizenship based on a) a redistribution of power among the state, market and organised society and b) full political, civil, and social citizenship. This has taken time to implement in the educational sector, however. The first half of the 1990s and the presidency of Patrico Aylwyn brought the construction of pacts and an increase in political and social confidence about the major changes the school system was undergoing. Strategies were focused on public information and individual consultation about new programmes and educational reform. The level of participation in and acceptance of these mechanisms varied. In general, however, teachers had little sense that the arrangements allowed them to participate meaningfully in the elaboration of reform proposals.

Then, and certainly by 1994 during the presidency of Eduardo Frei, discussion forums were created. These were of mixed and eclectic social and political composition, and they were always created at the initiative and under the aegis of the state. It was only starting in 2000 and during the presidency of Ricardo Lagos, that there was evidence of a real willingness to institutionalise a new role for the “educational community” in affairs of public schooling so as to truly make education “the responsibility of everyone,” and to give teachers and families a place as co-architects of the system.

The notion of the “responsibility of everyone” for the necessary reforms of educational quality and equity was not new, however. It was shared by all three governments of the Concertation, the centre-left coalition in office since 1990. It was an idea that respected the vision of democracy under construction and it included granting a major place in the reform process for teachers and civil society. Nonetheless, despite the shared notion that “everyone” was responsible for education, the actual routes of access made available by the Ministers of Education were not always as open as they might have been. In part this can be understood as the result of two decades of dictatorship that left civil society with only a limited capacity for
association and little tradition of involvement in education. Moreover, the privatisation of the school system during the dictatorship offered dissatisfied parents an “exit” option (Hirschman, 1977). Nevertheless, teachers retained a strong and large association, despite the efforts of the Pinochet dictatorship to weaken them, whether by repression or liberalisation of their working conditions. Therefore, the timing of the process of change in governance merits analysis.

This paper’s goal is not to add more pages to the enthusiastic literature about governance or about transitions and consolidation. Rather, it is focused on the formation of education policy, because it is here than participation in the educational sector has been needed since 1990. The goal is to assess the political strategies put into place; the obstacles, whether political, institutional or cultural, to the participation of teachers and families; and the efforts made to overcome them. This perspective is adopted because it is also at the stage of policy formulation that governance arrangements most often confront the challenge of balancing diverse interests and ideas and translating them into concrete political action. An additional goal, inspired by the task of this workshop, is to identify the similarities and differences in the Chilean case, as compared to situations elsewhere in the Americas.

The paper has two parts. The first documents that the decentralisation of education with an emphasis on wider access by civil society organisations can only partially be explained by the two factors most often invoked – that is, policy legacies of the dictatorship and adaptation to global pressures. The second part tracks the ways that these initiatives, albeit very timid at the beginning of the 1990s, are the fruit of a post-neoliberal policy paradigm (referential) and its vision of the role of education in the construction of a modern country as well as the roles of the community and the market in this societal project. This post-neoliberal view of the role of the responsibilities of the state, the community, the family and the market is promoted by the Concertation of democratic parties. Influential beyond the educational sector, it represents a
vision of a citizenship regime different from both that of the neo-liberal Chicago Boys and that of Chile before 1973.
Globalisation and education in Chile

Too often in the public policy literature, one is confronted with ideological overdetermination of globalization on public policy or the incapacity of the state to change direction, and take a path different from that followed in the past. This overdetermination means that one accepts too rapidly that there is a direct neoliberal impact resulting from globalization on national public policies or those policies taken at time 0 determine those at time 1. The analysis of Chilean education policy over the last 14 years suggests that this perspective is not always justified. In effect, the decentralization of the educational system, privatization of education, legislation opening the formulation of school policy to the community, co-financing of education or encouragement of families to co-manage schools are in large part explained by a post-neoliberal conception of the role of the state, of the market, of the family and of the community to take responsibility for quality and equitable education and for more efficiency.

Internationals agencies, civil society and education

For several years the majority of international agencies such as the World Bank and the IDB have promoted the organization and participation of the civil society in areas traditionally considered a prerogative of the state. For these agencies, the organizations of civil society are fundamental for democratization, governability, modernisation of society as well as the efficiency of public policies. However, a literature review shows important differences regarding the strategies and approaches of these agencies in terms of their relationship with civil society or the state. These differences may be examined in terms of the principles on which they are founded, their administration, the projects negotiated with states, or the financing mechanism. The World Bank maintains a vision of social organizations based on the market; “international development is
advanced through alliances between governments, donors, the private sector and civil society. In these multisectoral alliances, civil society organizations (CSOs) play a particularly critical role” (World Bank, 2003).

The version of educational reform applied in Latin-American countries during the 1990s, under the financing and recommendations of the World Bank, included recommendations such as the acceleration of decentralization and greater administrative independence in pedagogy and financing of school establishments; greater participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations in order to diversify educational supply; construction of a national consensus around reform; encouragement of the participation of families and the community in the financing and management of schools and public consultation (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1990).

In negotiations of the financing for the star program of the Concertacion, for the amelioration of the quality and equity (MECE), these recommendations were not always present. Over the course of the negotiation of the MECE programme, the World Bank established three conditions for the Chilean negotiators as a basis for granting the financing: continuity over time of the program measures, maintenance of policies benefiting primary education, and respect for the role of the private sector in education.

For the international organisation, Chile presented a “favourable context” for the financial cooperation of the Bank (Cox and Avalos, 1999) because of the structural transformations in its social security system and economy undertaken by the team of Chicago Boys during the 1980s. In terms of the educational system, the neoliberal transformations, described as “modernizing” (involving decentralization, privatization, efficiency seeking in the employment of resources and focusing of programmes) were broadly appreciated by the Bank.
Most strategies put into place by MECE were institutionalized in internal programmes of the Ministry of Education, once the MECE had concluded its work. In both for the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance there was a consensus that school-level problems should be the object special attention. This priority in the public agenda explains that the education, unlike other social sectors, did not suffer from budgetary cutbacks despite the financial belt-tightening imposed on the region by the Asian crisis in the late 1990s (CEPAL, 1998).

One of the most remarkable characteristics of these measures is its continuity in time, just as the Bank requested and this despite three presidential changes and seven changes of minister. The Chilean politics of the last 14 years have been incremental, using a technique of “building-on” rather than starting over with a clean slate. So that we can affirm that, during the 1990s, the new strategy of the Bank of bringing together diverse sectors of civil society in each country of Latin America was present in the ideas and the speeches of the Chilean Concertacion before taking power in 1990.

The Economic Commission for Latin America: An International Proposal Converges with National Analyses

In 1992 ECLAC and UNESCO (1992) published a document on perspectives on educational reform that to different degrees would inspire educational reform in Latin America. The central objective of the proposition was to “contribute over the next ten years to creating the conditions for education and professional training and the introduction of scientific progress and technology capable of advancing the transformation of the productive structure of the region in the context of progressive social equity».

The ECLAC/UNESCO proposal agreed with the technical and political proposals expressed from the “dissident” research centers in the 1980s and by a group of experts on
education who would become policymakers a decade later. In 1990, two years before the
diffusion of the international proposal, the electoral platform of the *Concertacion* had already
included the majority of the policies proposed by the organisation.

This was not a coincidence. Several Chilean specialists were the intellectual co-authors or
had been consulted in the formulation of the proposal: José Joaquin Brunner, Father Patricio
Cariola, the Director of CIDE, Cristián Cox and Iván Núñez, then advisors to Minister Lagos,
Alejandro Foxley, Minister of Finance, Ricardo Lagos, Minister of Education and Osvaldo
Verdugo, President of the College of Professors.

The international proposal redefined the role of the state and abandoned the centralized
bureaucratic-administrative approach which generated traditional rather than innovative policies.
It suggested that this kind of state could be replaced by another that would focus itself
strategically and would regulate from a distance, guaranteeing the independence of centres and
the evaluation of the results. ECLAC/UNESCO defended a financing of education which would
be shared with the private sector and sought from a diversity of sources. In terms of teachers, the
international proposition granted them a fundamental role in the transformation of the system. In
this respect, the economic and political under-appreciation from which they suffered would be
challenged by policies on training and conditions of work which would grant the profession
prestige and consideration based on its “merits”. Finally, for ECLAC and UNESCO, these
changes could not succeed without a wide consensus on education that involved diverse social,
political and economic actors.

In terms of the institutional dimension, ECLAC-UNESCO proposed two reforms in order
to reorganize the management of the educational system. On the one hand, it proposed
decentralization of school establishments, and on the other hand, integration within a common
framework of tactical objectives. Individual schools were considered too rigid and impermeable
to the needs of their environment, and this due to their bureaucratic centralization and “corporate close-mindedness”. The proposal advanced a concept of a schooling centre as an intellectual and institutional project. The traditional approach which aimed at the uniformity of the system without consideration of cultural diversity, was criticized. In this sense, the international forum proposed that the state should assure the coordination of the system “through a minimal regime, but with efficient public regulation, non-bureaucratic, and as much as possible, applied by local and regional bodies”.

In summary, the international proposition advanced and even formulated in part by Chilean policymakers must be explained by internal Chilean factors. It involved the reinterpretation of the institutional authoritarian heritage. There was a resignification of certain “strong ideas”, quasi-mythical, about the policy of the state in education before the arrival of the military in 1973. Both phenomena show the great capacity for political learning or social learning by the policymakers. Such learning is defined by Peter Hall as “a deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in the light of past policy and new information so as to better obtain the ultimate objects of governance” (Hall, 1993). The origins of this process of reinterpretation are found in the research, debates and proposals conducted in certain educational forums or dissident academic centres. Intellectuals, politicians, university professors and experts from these centres engaged analytical categories and ideas about education that sought to go beyond both the pre-1973 centralized and bureaucratic state, and the centralized neoliberal system post-1973 which did not dispose of the means to assure quality or equity.
Towards a new governance

Historically the relationship between teachers and the state had been characterized by alliances and conflicts. This relationship became more complex after 1990, in the context of democratic consolidation and the fear of social or political destabilization. In this scenario, the demands for participation, and above all the demands by teachers to put an end to the neoliberal measures of the military government (privatization and decentralization of education, and deregulation of the teachers’ labour market) were perceived as legitimate, but as a potential source of social destabilization in the educational sector. However, it was also risky to govern the sector, in the sense of approving and putting in place new public policies, without involving the principal social organization in the country which was highly organized and had been historically very implicated in political and social projects. Mobilization and strikes had been rituals of teachers’ culture in the 1940s and 1970s (Nunez, 1986). Even during the dictatorship, the College of Professors was capable of defeating government-sponsored candidates in the internal elections of the College after the dictatorship began to open up.

Beyond the educational system, since 1990 political discourse has claimed to favour the participation of society in public affairs. The focus on governance can be understood here as the will of the authorities to “democratize the democracy” and for reason. More than a century of having power concentrated in the hands of capitalist and bureaucratic elites (delegative democracy) and two decades of dictatorship justified it.

Legislative initiatives for meaningful social participation moved to the top of the political agenda at the same time as the democratic regime was believed to have reached consolidation. Beginning with the second government, when the Chilean democracy seemed to have consolidated itself and the dialectic of participation-governability lost its rigidness, confidence
was re-established, and space for dialogue had become more frequent, and the glue of new alliance began to be mixed.

**Teachers : From Agents of the Reform to Subjects of Change**

It seems that Chile had become a sort of “enlightened dictatorship” since practically until the year 2000 everything had been done for teachers but without the teachers. Consciously or not, the fear of unleashing social conflict and sharp political confrontation had left the doors of the Ministry only half open to the teachers. In the memory of the political class, and including the opposition, there was always present the social and political conflict provoked by the educational reform proposals of Salvador Allende. This project had not only united opposition forces against the Popular Unity government, but had influenced the middle classes to withdraw their support for the government (Farrel, 1983). However, it was also difficult to govern the educational sector without counting on the largest organization in the country, so strongly organized that their voice prompted an echo in the media and in society.

In the early 1990s, the disagreements between the teachers and the government were based in problems substance as well as form. In terms of the first: the maintenance of decentralization and a financing system based on demand; the failure to reintegrate teachers as public servants. In terms of form, teachers rejected the introduction of mechanisms of individual participation and public-opinion polling, and deplored the lack of possibility of collective participation or organization (Assael and Pavez, 2001). In turn, the government did not want to convert, once again, the educational sector into a source of social destabilization. In addition, one should note the government’s pragmatic and technocratic style in the formulation of public policy.
The speed with which the government of Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994) focused on the problems of teachers was based not only in their obviously unstable work conditions after the privatization of their status, but also in the necessity of guaranteeing a certain social peace in the sector. It was thus necessary to find the formula to calm the impatience of teachers, which was believed to be perfectly legitimate. In 1991, scarcely a year after arriving in power, the government approved the Teachers’ Statute. This law redefined the work regime of teachers in the sense that they ceased being regulated by the Labour Code, which regulated private sector activities, and instead found themselves governed by a national law which fixed their working conditions, but without restoring their previous status as civil servants.

The Statute was the most controversial law of these fourteen years and was only adopted thanks to the firm backing of the President. For the opposition, the Statute represented a step backwards from the deregulation of the labour market and was in profound contradiction with maintaining the financing system based on a subsidy per student. In effect the lack of job mobility contemplated by the Statute introduced rigidities in the management of the system and made its efficient administration more difficult. In reality, between 1991 and 1995, the date of the modification of the Statute, educational establishments could not adjust their human resources to the number of students with the subsidy received from the government. However, the Teachers’ Statute permitted the governability of the system and thus the establishment of the minimal political conditions to continue with the planned reforms on the political agenda. From March 1990 to March 2003 there were 48 strike days by teachers, of which 28 occurred during a single conflict in 1998 (Cox, 2003).¹

¹These numbers contrast, for example, with the open and long confrontation between the Confederacion de Trabajadores de la Educacion and the Argentinean government. In April 1997 the Confederation installed a "White Tent" in front of the National Congress and it remained until December 1999.
The Statute inaugurated the formula which would define the arena of future negotiations. In this case, the solution adopted represented a balance between the reality of the inherited neoliberal past (decentralization and financing by voucher) and the new post-neoliberal representation and orientations of the government of President Aylwin (teachers are key to quality education; national regulation of their work conditions without returning to the pre-dictatorship status quo of public servants).

However, teachers complained about the high-level dialogue which made it difficult for the ordinary membership to own the reforms put in place: “Unfortunately, in most of these processes the teachers have been considered as simple executors, deprived of the capacity and legitimacy of valid interlocutors opposite policymakers” (Assael and Pavez, 2001). In addition, one of the weaknesses of the governmental policy was to not have sufficiently taken into account the subjective dimensions and repeated requests for communication and participation in spaces beyond the national forums. According to studies conducted by sociologists, the teachers felt frustrated by the social devaluation of their profession after the privatization of their working conditions during the dictatorship. In this way, despite the increase in their salaries and the Teachers’ Statute, when compared with other categories of professionals in the country, they realized they did not have access to the same type of market, consumption, or cultural goods (Bellei, 2001; Adler and Melnik, 1998).

The change in government in 2000 opened a window of opportunity for the governance of the sector. President Ricardo Lagos, previously Minister of Education (1990-1992), negotiated an historic accord with the organization of teachers and all the political sectors. In consequence the government committed itself to ameliorate the conditions of work, salaries and the participation of teachers. For their part, the teachers accepted, among other things, to tie a part of their remuneration and professional qualifications to a system of evaluation and merit.
This accord created the basis of a strategic alliance with the government and teachers which contrasted with the conflictual relationship which had characterized the previous decade. The accord was the result of several factors: a) the use of mobilization (particularly in 1998); b) acceptance of dialogue as the best means of advancing demands; c) a political style which was open to labour unions; d) a professionalization of the style of negotiations and union demands (the teachers called on expert assistance to craft their demands); e) the affiliation of the Chilean organization to the Education International which was less ideological than the majority of its Latin American counterparts (Nunez, 2003). This accord was also reinforced by favourable material conditions which improved the salaries of teachers and contributed to the resolution of other educational problems. It was also accompanied by measures which enlarged participation and the place of the families in the educational mission.

_Civil society in a Post-neoliberal State_

The revaluation of civil society in political discourse, and the increasingly important role attributed to them in addressing the well-being of families is far from the neoliberal conception of the Chicago Boys. To the contrary, this revaluation drew on the need perceived by the political class and policymakers of the Ministry of Education to think of the state in terms of democracy. It is likely that this revaluation in the governance of the educational sector would not have occurred without the influence of neoliberal ideas, particularly that of the minimal state, or without the profound social repression that occurred during the dictatorship. The marginalization and retreat into “dissident centres” or NGOs by dozens of intellectuals, politicians and experts, including those from the educational sector, had the result of developing a democratic utopia. According to them, the return to democracy is explained by the birth of a powerful civil society, by community and local self-government, and the autonomy of schools and teachers.
This approach has points in common with the neoliberal conception of the state in the sense that the two visions share the idea of a social transformation based on society itself and not due to the monopoly of the state. But logically the perspectives differ in terms of the way they reject statism. If for the liberal right, the market is a liberating factor, for the centre-left coalition in power, statism would be reduced by promoting decentralization, development of social organizations and the pedagogic independence of schools.

However, in practice, the legislative initiatives during the 1990 which aimed to create the conditions to enable citizens to participate in the definition of educational policy and the management of schools were few. Following the tax reform of 1993, it was permitted that private schools subsidized by the state, and subsidized high-schools, both public and private, could ask parents to participate in the financing of education. The participation of parents in the co-financing of the education of their children could give the illusion that society was deeply involved in setting up school programmes. This risks confusing the behaviour of parents and those of consumers, or confusing the idea of citizen with that of the consumer, and give the illusion of a real participation of families in school policy. The success of the shared financing formula permitted increasing the private resources put into education, but a dynamic of stratification of the private-subsidized education began to appear, in which schools could be differentiated according the level of resources under their control.

In terms of the maintenance of the decentralized architecture put in place by the military regime, despite the disagreement of teachers and arduous discussions, in 1990 a compromise was reached. The state defended decentralization as an element of democracy and efficiency. Teachers, for their part, were less concerned by an pedagogical and administrative decentralization than by the possibility that their work conditions would be set by a multitude of municipalities. Finally the two parties agreed on the decentralization of the direct management of
schools within a framework set by a state which remained proactive and responsible in education policy, which differentiated it from the absent state of the neoliberal model.

The maintenance of administrative and financial decentralization of schools and public high schools in the hands of cities also had two distinct reasons. The first was a result of the demands of the political architecture and the global coherence of the political programme of the three governments. In effect, the community was assigned a crucial role in the process of decentralization and democratization of the country. The community and the regions have a political and economic weight necessary to the success of effective social participation. It was not a matter of maintaining the farce of privatization and authoritarian decentralization. It was a matter of favouring the administrative, financial and pedagogical decentralization based on the idea that education is one of the first “experiments of a participative democracy” (Núñez et Vera, 1983). The second reason was the impending centralization of the regulation of the labour conditions of teacher in the Teachers’ Statute.

Other roads to civic participation were opening up gradually along the decade. In the first half of the 1990s, the government of Patricio Alywin hoped to base school policy on studies undertaken by the universities, independent research centres, and popular consultation. In this process, more than 30,000 persons organized in 2,043 groups composed of professors, students and parents had discussed their opinions on secondary education (Mineduc, 1994). The campaign programme of Ricardo Lagos represented a change in comparison with his predecessors, and put the emphasis particularly on the reinforcement of the participation of civil society organizations and families in educational establishments.

“In order to grow with equity we must grant more power to the citizenry, in such a way that they participate more actively in the decisions that affect them, in their neighbourhood, community and region, and with a style of government that is closer
to the people and more committed to an equitable distribution of resources…

Democratic institutionalization is enriched when citizen contributions are increased”

(Chile, Programme de la Concertation III, 1999)

In July 2000, only four months after his election, Ricardo Lagos created the Citizens Council for the Strengthening of Civil Society. It was an attempt to develop a renewed relationship between the state and civil society, the ultimate objective of which was to construct “a shared social order of diversity”. Thus, beginning in 2001, an announcement was sent to the universities, research centres, non-profit citizen organizations, calling for their participation in an overview of the state-of-the-art of citizen participation in Chile. Studies were later commissioned to the same social organizations on the existing legislation, on public opinion about volunteering, some twenty-odd programmes that involved civil society in their management benefited from financial support, and the training of neighbourhood social leaders (women or youth) was financed.

A grant from the International Bank of Development (IBD) permitted the government of Ricardo Lagos to put in place the Programme to Strengthen Alliances between Civil Society and the State, which had four principal objectives: strengthening civil society; citizen participation in public programmes and policies; strengthening of volunteering; and communication with communities about the importance of their involvement in the “integrated development of the country”.

Unlike the World Bank, the IDB seemed to have a vision closer to the ideal of “democratizing the democracies” and the creation of a “new institutionalization” in which the modernization of the state and citizen participation played a fundamental role. It supported national initiatives aiming to reinforce the dialogue between the state and civil society organizations.
A last public initiative from Ricardo Lagos government aimed to involve families in the educational mission and create an “educational community” composed of students, families, teachers and school management. The legislative initiative embraced the conceptual evolution in the definition of community participation in educational tasks, including the responsibility to motivate children to learn, in this way expanding the educational mission from the school to the home.

**Conclusion**

Still to come....
Bibliography

Adler Larissa Adler and Melnick Ana. 1998. Neoliberalismo y clase media: el caso de los profesores de Chile; Santiago de Chile: Editorial DIBAM; Centro de Investigación Diego Barros Arana.


