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Youth, Culture and Education in Chile

Jóvenes, cultura y educación en Chile

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RESUMEN

Este artículo propone la revisión de un conjunto de fenómenos analizados en el contexto del estudio "Jóvenes, Cultura y Educación" del Ministerio de Educación del Gobierno de Chile y la Fundación Sistema de España; así también a partir de los antecedentes del estudio sobre el comportamiento cívico de los jóvenes en Chile, financiado por el Fondo de Ciencia y Tecnología de CONICYT (Fondecyt N°11121115). De esta forma, este texto analiza los aspectos más relevantes de la percepción juvenil sobre temas como: a) la caracterización y los valores de los jóvenes; b) la participación y la ciudadanía de los jóvenes y c) las tendencias educativas relativas a la ciudadanía juvenil. De igual forma, este texto propone una agenda de investigación temática que permita proyectar a futuro la investigación de fenómenos, los que, vinculados a esta área de preocupaciones académicas, requieren una atención de mayor aliento.

Palabras clave: Jóvenes; educación; cultura; valores; participación

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the revision of a series of phenomena analyzed within the framework of the study "Youth, Culture and Education" of the Ministry of Education of Chile and the Fundación Sistema of Spain and in the study about the civic behavior of young in Chile (Fondecyt N° 11121115). This paper describes the most relevant aspects of the young people's perception and verbalization of such areas as a) characterization and values of the young, b) participation and citizenship, and c) trends in education. The paper ends by suggesting a thematic research agenda that may permit to explore in greater depth some dimensions that this study did not fully address given the constraints inherent to its nature and purpose.

Keywords: Youth; education; culture; values; participation

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the most relevant aspects of the analysis of the responses of three focus groups, conducted within the framework of the study “Youth, culture and education”¹ of the Ministry of Education of Chile, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Fundación SISTEMA of Spain² and the analysis of the study about the civic behavior of young in Chile, N°Fondecyt N°11121115.

These focus groups were made up by high school youngsters grouped according to the type of school establishment attended: a) Private schools not subsidized by the State; b) State-subsidized private schools; y c) Municipal system public schools.

Each of these groups consisted of 8 young people. The meetings took place in April 2012 under the coordination and supervision of the professional team responsible for the project.

The discussion guidelines for the groups were structured around eight central axes: a) youth identity, b) education and school culture, c) associativity, d) sociability, e) support from the school system, f) use of new technologies, g) violence and otherness, h) values.

Within the framework described above, this article presents a series of reflections arising exclusively from the qualitative phase of the study. They will be summarized and addressed in four sections: I) characteristics and values of the world of the young, II) Youth participation and citizenship, III) Relevant trends in education, and IV) Research agenda. The aim is to highlight a series of general cross-cutting phenomena that emerge repeatedly in the discourse of young people. The characteristics and outlines of these phenomena facilitate an understanding of the particular aspects that motivated this study. They are also focal points for observers of reality and the imbrications of the young and the educational system, either from the specific perspective of academic research or from the more functional approach of public policy-making.

2. CHARACTERIZATION AND VALUES OF THE WORLD OF THE YOUNG

2.1. Juvenile identity: how the young see themselves

(...) today we have to decide, it's up to us whether we want to go on studying or not, go on studying, sort of deciding our future, mostly the employment aspect or also as a family, because we can take a different path, for instance studying or if not, simply having fun.

Female, municipal school

A relevant aspect of juvenile identity is that, regardless of school where they study, the young respondents say that *the project of going on to higher education* is the **structuring project in their lives**, both in the short and medium term. Other projects are conditioned to the shared expectation of managing to get some kind of professional training, especially, at university level.

Similarly, common to all young people is the conception of youth as a moratorium during which useful preparatory social tools for adult life are accumulated. Thus, youth appears to be a stage to get ready and to

¹ Research aimed to make a comparative analysis—Chile and Spain—of the matches/mismatches of the way in which the educational systems operate and the aspirations and expectations of the new generations of students. This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon by using a mixed methodology: a) qualitative methodology, through group interviews, and b) prospective-quantitative-type methodology through the application of a Delphi questionnaire to 32 experts in the case of Chile and 28 in the case of Spain.

This article also includes analysis of the study about the civic behavior of young in Chile. N° 11121115.

² <http://www.fundacionsistema.com/>

make decisions that will have a definite effect on their future life. It is in youth that opportunities are foreshadowed and it is essential not to miss them. Youth is a stage of increased freedom, which also makes it possible to take decisions with a greater degree of autonomy. However, this freedom seems to have more potentiality in some youngsters than in others. Young people from private schools show no fear of exercising this freedom and of its effects; they admit the possibility of making mistakes. In the case of young people from municipal and state-subsidized schools, freedom—a highly valued principle—somehow triggers a certain anxiety about not making mistakes at the time of deciding (there is in them, therefore, a feeling of having less right and a narrower margin to make “bad decisions”).

It is quite possible that young people from municipal and subsidized schools may be responding positively to the cultural call for self-realization (Bajoit: 2003), by virtue of which they must make autonomous decisions, which they know *a priori*, to be decisions that will have definite effects on their lives. It is this decision-making action that embodies the exercise of freedom that they, as already mentioned, hold in high regard.

However, they also understand that such freedom is not possible in absolute terms and that the future is not only a future of opportunities, but also one of obstacles and pitfalls. The careers that they may manage to build for themselves will depend on the way in which they confront these “constraints and “resistances” of the System. Young people from these schools are quite aware of this process, which accounts for their feeling of great responsibility for the decisions to be adopted.

No less important is the fact that for them or their families, their going onto tertiary education studies is a major sacrifice, so making the right decision is a key factor. There are constant references to the risk of ending up having to work at something that is not satisfactory and may not justify the economic effort made (high indebtedness). The idea of “the vocational aspect” as the possibility of thinking about and deciding what they want to do and be in the future has gradually consolidated in this segment of the population, but—we insist—forces them to make a decision with little margin for error.

Similarly, it is interesting to note how the young verbalize the issue of going on to tertiary education studies. For private school students, the strategic actions to be undertaken are “**going to university**” and “**studying for a degree**”, whereas for public school students, the situation is verbalized as “**getting a degree**”. The difference is striking: in the case of the former, they perceive university studies as something ordinary that forms part of the regular course of life; in the case of the latter, university studies are perceived as something that calls for a major effort, namely, a strategy to have the possibility of succeeding in what has been projected. The idea of “project” as something consciously defined is present in all the segments, but it is more demanding and structuring of youth identity in the students from public schools, possibly due to the complexity and difficulty involved in its development.

This feeling of being under more pressure does not alter the fact that these youngsters are extremely optimistic about their individual future—and this is a characteristic that is already well-established and generalized.

Another interesting aspect of the discourse of youngsters from municipal and private state-subsidized schools is their use of the adjective “critical” as an inherent characteristic of this stage in life. It is during youth that, in their opinion, the faculty of observing society through this attitudinal prism is formed.

Among the students from private schools the elements that stand out are more oriented towards the idea of freedom: autonomy of action, the value given to entrepreneurship and the ability to articulate various projects.

One final identity-related element that gets cross-sectional mentions is openness to diversity, that is, the predisposition to accept and—in some cases more than in others—to coexist with the diverse, (homosexuality, heterogeneity of ideological positions, etc.). This contrasts with the image that they have of their parents’ generation as young people among whom, according to them, the degree of openness was significantly lower.

As can be seen, the young people’s self-representation appears to account for some of the major changes in society in recent decades. The importance attributed to the personal ability to attain the goals that have been set (self-realization) is a sign of the times that characterizes the new generations, which society itself

has ideologically reinforced in order to preserve the *status quo* and assign to each subject the results of their own agency. The feeling of being able to achieve everything, and that this only depends on individual effort, is a perspective that is the function of a cultural project, which is reinforced by the promise of meritocracy. Both messages from society have found an echo in today's youth, as perceived in their identity-related discourse, which is strongly structured from this perspective. This is expressed more explicitly when we observe the value that young people assign to education, which becomes the main tool to lay the foundations for future projects: education permits self-realization and, as already mentioned, underpins a meritocratic conception of society. Juvenile identity is more clearly defined as a stage of preparation for adult life, in which education is the most relevant issue. This is the reason why their student status defines them socially.

Summing up, the massive spread of education and the culture of self-realization are societal changes that have redefined the status of youth in a radical way.

Although the figure of the student as a role for the *preparation for self-realization* is significant for young people, there are also other identity-structuring figures. Thus, *consumption* as a symbolic indicator of autonomy and *tolerance to the diverse* as an element inherent to contemporary culture also appear to be elements defining juvenile identity today.

As mentioned, all young people, regardless of the type of establishment in which they study, consider education in general—and particularly higher education—to be the key tool to fulfill their personal expectations of individual development and social integration. While for some young people, mainly those from private schools, the idea of entrepreneurship not necessarily linked to regular professional training is highly valued, they rather tend to argue that higher education is "the path to follow" as well as "the easiest path" if the goal is future professional success.

Thus, the expectation of getting into higher education is a feature shared by all young people without exception.

In addition, studies on young people conducted in Chile, particularly the National Youth Survey³, have shown for several years the stabilization and consolidation of a phenomenon of "projective optimism", which is clearly expressed when young people are asked to picture themselves in a near-future scenario. In general, young people imagine themselves doing better than at present and even doing better than the country itself (personal optimism exceeds their optimism about institutions).

This phenomenon is fully confirmed by the observations made by the young respondents in the focus groups. They have a positive image of themselves in the future, although they are clearly aware of the problems they will have to face or be exposed to.

2.2. Goals and obstacles

For the students from private schools, their goal is displaying autonomy and their "benchmark" is achieving what their families have achieved. The main obstacles are, on the one hand, the context of competition that involves confrontation with other projects, and on the other, the risk of losing their way, going off-course (in which "partying"—*el carrete* in Spanish— appears as a potential negative factor). In their responses there is no explicit reference to the structural elements of society as major obstacles.

Students from subsidized schools emphasize the idea of forming a family as a goal, something not even mentioned by young people from private schools. When referring to the obstacles to their goals these young people express their fear of a job market in which they feel at a disadvantage, either because they are young or have little work experience.

For the young people from municipal schools, forming a family is clearly a goal. In them the discourse about obstacles has greater density when they describe some of the problems inherent to being young (e.g.

³ http://www.injuv.gob.cl/injuv2010/encuestas_juventud

being extremely dependent on parents, asymmetry of rights) as well as some structural constraints, particularly the situation of juvenile unemployment.

Young people in general refer to professional development and fulfillment of a "vocation" as essential goals. Thus work is defined as a task that must be consciously chosen ("vocation"), at which they have to be competent in order to live well, that is, be remunerated with a salary that allows them to be reasonably well off.

A goal or success indicator that is strongly marked is the idea of beginning to acquire certain assets (a house, a car, etc.), which act as symbolic externalities of the desired autonomy—an autonomy which also allows creating the necessary conditions to build a family. This image is more present in students from public and state-subsidized schools.

The idea of "going off-course", described in connection with young people from private schools, also appears in varying degrees in the rest of the young respondents. One of the obstacles they mention is giving in to excess, to the "*carrete*".

It is interestingly to note that the main obstacles mentioned (especially by students from public and subsidized schools) have to do with what prevents or hinders them from completing tertiary education. Shortage of funds or not being able to get the desired qualification or degree, or a poor academic performance are the main fears in this connection. In this sense, they appear to believe that getting a degree (regardless of other circumstances) almost automatically triggers a series of positive situations in terms of social status (starting a family, becoming independent, getting a good job, being socially valued, etc.), which raises the issue of high expectations regarding the effects of the professional training process.

This reveals how deeply rooted in the young is the ideology of meritocracy, i.e. the belief that if they perform well at education (translated into access to higher education) they can attain a higher position in the social structure. Young people appear to believe that this comes almost hand-in-hand with getting into university. All this imagery is underpinned by what used to be the outcome of higher education some twenty or even more years ago, particularly in the case of "fellowship students" or "the deserving poor", who achieved social mobility thanks to their performance and the access they had to higher education (Dubet: 2005). Today tertiary education has become massive, both in terms of number of beneficiaries and quantity and variety of the existing institutions offering such services (not all of them actually attracting takers). This has had obvious consequences: loss of value of the diploma (even more so in the case of those institutions of lesser social value) and uncertainty regarding social mobility. Some recent studies show that today in Chile this massive spread of higher education can be clearly observed when we consider the number of students who are the first generation in their families to have access to this type of education. Thus, 64.4% of students in tertiary education are first generation (Castillo & Cabezas: 2010).

2.3. Significant models for the young

"... in my case, it might be the PSU, obviously the first person I shall turn to is my dad, more than anybody, that's who will be with me when I need help to figure out what I want..."

Male, private school

As for the issue of trust, practically all the young students show doubts when it comes to identifying references to illustrate it. Ultimately, the students from private schools define the figure of "anonymous enterprising people in everyday life", who overcome difficulties. In the case of municipal and state-funded school students, their trust is placed on **significant persons**, who are members of their family or immediate circle. It is their example that guides and motivates them.

Seen from a different perspective, the evidence seems to indicate that the students from private schools are more inclined to define an "ideal type" that serves as an incentive (for example, "the enterprising person", "the hard-worker", "the persevering", "the impulsive", etc.). As for the youngsters from municipal and state-subsidized schools, this process is less abstract and is triggered by "very specific people" who essentially and mostly are to be found within the family, i.e. the space that generates the higher levels of trust.

As already mentioned, the role models described by the students from subsidized and public schools involve typical examples of resilience and social mobility. They refer mainly to people close to them (usually a close relative also close in age, e.g. a brother) who are studying or managed to finish their higher education and are now working, and thus have begun to acquire the first assets-symbols of autonomy. They are generally models that embody personal effort.

These role models somehow seem to reinforce the idea of meritocracy, which makes it plausible to continue to believe in the opportunities that society offers. The message is clear: "you have to work hard since it's up to you to make the most of these opportunities". In this sense, it is essential to "get a professional qualification"—the necessary requirement for the possibility to actually materialize.

All the youngsters agree that, first and foremost, they refer to the family at the time of taking a decision. In this context, the family appears to be a safety factor that makes up for the eventual deterioration of the social and associative networks. Given the difficulty to create social bonds, young people tend to withdraw into family bonds. Other studies have already shown that strictly speaking young people withdraw into their family as a way to "escape" from society (family is a haven) (Lechner: 2004).

For young people from private schools, other role models when making "important decisions" are teachers and friends. Young people from municipal and subsidized schools refer exclusively to their group of friends.

In any case, decisions regarding studies, which are considered to be the most significant ones, are usually taken in consultation with the family. On the contrary, the decisions concerning the affective and sexual sphere are usually discussed with the group of peers (friends, schoolmates, etc.).

2.4. Structuring of sociability networks

The young people's discourse shows a very limited and fragmented sociability. In the case of students from private schools, their networks are structured around the extended family (this can be observed very clearly), the school and the neighborhood. As for young people from municipal and subsidized schools, there are two specific sources of networking: the school and the neighborhood.

If we believe that sociability is indeed a principle of openness and social transcendence, which allows to know and assimilate what is unknown because of its own nature, and if we also believe that the characteristic of sociability is the ability to establish links that go beyond a direct identity-structuring context, these youngsters appear to be highly entrenched in a sort of territorial and social communitarianism, which prevents them from clearly resolving the issues of differences and otherness through wider networks.

Indeed, we find that these networks are primarily developed for recreational activities (chatting, going to the mall, hanging out in the square, going to the movies and, basically, partying). An interesting aspect is that in connection with partying, students from subsidized schools repeatedly mention "partying in the square". This means that there is a more frequent use of this type of public space and that this entails some kind of risk. For young people from private schools the situation is different; sociability is constructed in an apparently more private context.

The social networks are involved in this process, but they only allow for increased communication between actors of networks already formed. There are no references to exploration processes or to the search for other networks. The students refer instead to the consolidation of predefined networks.

Once again the youngsters' discourse is symbolically determined by the family space. This is a protective space, the shelter that ultimately makes the process of exposure to new and unknown environments less distressing (Guell: 2008).

For this reason, the bonds that are created with friends from school and the neighborhood are permeated by the need to "recognize one another" in one same experience, one same system of values or one same vision of society.

Sociability, in this case, bears more relation to the (joint) construction of a "small world" which can be managed without being forced to make exceptional efforts of openness or of social transcendence.

2.5. Otherness and violence

(...) we women are more direct, we are more sort of "hey, what's the matter with you, jerk", we confront (people) straight away, men instead say "oh, I can't stand this guy" and he says "hi, how are you" and when they turn their back, "oh, I hate that guy's guts", that's the way men are.
Female, subsidized school.

Social violence (characteristics and causes)

All the young respondents coincide in saying that Chilean society is a society in which the experience of violence is multiplying. Therefore, violence exists as a form of relationship and this has a permanent effect on the way in which we Chileans build our bonds (Théza & Reinoso: 2005).

Despite this general framework, there are certain differences when they describe the causes that give rise to violence. For the young people from private schools the reasons are clear: lack of education, a weak family environment and difficulties to integrate into society, to feel a part of it.

Young people from subsidized schools lay the stress on a more essentialist vision, suggesting that people are violent by nature. Therefore, violence is a fact that involves certain "normality".

It is the young people from municipal schools that mention that violence could be a response to intolerance and to the social malaise that people experience every day.

Violence at school

All the young respondents coincide in saying that violence is a permanent feature at school. Students from private and municipal schools highlight psychological violence and bullying, while physical violence is mentioned mostly by students from subsidized schools. It is young people from subsidized schools that refer to a phenomenon that surprises and disturbs them: the increase of physical violence among women.

The students from private school mention, however, that violence is under control in their establishments and that there is a downward trend.

As regards violence between teachers and students (two-way violence), all the young people regardless of school of origins say that violence does in fact exist, with varying degrees of intensity. However, they are unanimous in saying that this is not normal and that relationships between students and teachers should always be characterized by mutual respect.

The examples of violence mentioned here have to do with forms of abuse of authority by teachers, who resort to power as a way to maintain order, but also as a possible manifestation of the frustration they feel when the educational process undergoes difficulties.

An interesting aspect is the function of containment in case of eventual acts of violence involving teachers and students. According to the young people from private schools, the parents are the ones that act quickly ("my parents would not accept it"). In the case of private and subsidized schools, it is up to the youngsters themselves to elicit respect.

Experiences of violence

The most significant personal experiences of violence undergone by the young respondents are episodes of violence while partying; violence at parties in the case of youngsters from private schools; psychological harassment and mockery in the case of subsidized schools; and abuse of authority in the case of youngsters from municipal schools.

The issue of violence is usually addressed as a mere disturbance of the social order, which must be confronted through successful control mechanisms. This conception of social disruption usually tends to divide society between the healthy and the sick, between good guys and bad guys. However, the young people's discourse is more oriented towards a conception of violence that installs it among the forms of social relation.

Here violence appears as the expression of conflicts, but also of antagonistic interests at the psychosocial, political and/or cultural level. Thus, violence becomes the result of the inability to deal with situations of conflict (different ideas, dispute over a boy/girl-friend, membership in a different group, etc.) through legitimate mechanisms (words, rituals, symbolic mediations, etc.).

Violence is not in this case an attribute of the young and their discourse reaffirms it: violence appears when there is an inability to develop instruments of conflict resolution and/or when personal gratification fails to be satisfied. In this case it is often the peer groups that end up reinforcing the risk circuits that make it difficult to implement a logic of non-violence.

This shows how important it is to focus on the improvement of cohesion factors based on the idea of "coexistence". In this framework, the school, neighborhood, family and society must be addressed in an integral way. In fact, according to what the young respondents say, the occasions of greater exposure to violence take place away from the school premises.

Young people live their daily lives in very specific places and, therefore, their behaviors are no different from those of the networks that give meaning to their practices. Strengthening these networks ought to foster a closer dialogue between identity and otherness.

2.6. Values

(...) this will not generate an argument with them either because I also have gay friends and everything is super cool with them, but I don't agree with homosexuality, on principle and all that, but I don't cross them off, because I know they are people and all that.

Female, municipal school.

To address the issue of values, the youngsters debated on two key topics: the relationship with foreign students in the classroom and their impressions about homosexuality.

All the young respondents show **selective tolerance** in that they accept and acknowledge cultural differences without any problem, but there is a limit in that the reality accepted should neither affect nor interfere too much with the reality of the person doing the judging.

For instance, the treatment of "the foreign" follows this pattern because it has an exotic and attractive character that is inherent to this search for cultural references that are more ample than the respondents' own country. However, it also expresses the idea of "I accept them, but they are not allowed to criticize my country". It should be noted that there is a significant bias: many of the young foreigners they mention have come to Chile on some kind of exchange program or come from countries other than the ones often discriminated against in Chile (e.g. countries with which we share a border).

As for homosexuality, the same criterion applies: "I accept it, but don't mess with me". The students from private schools are the most reluctant to describe this phenomenon in their schools as they say that the criterion prevailing there is that the private dimension should not be publicly exposed.

The young respondents' discourse shows that there is in them a spirit of openness, understanding and tolerance of the idea of diversity. Their assertions occasionally incorporate aspects of a politically correct context that disapproves of a different discourse. Also, their description of specific situations indicates that these perceptions are well established and that they differ significantly from those of previous generations (mainly, their parents).

Similarly, the opinions voiced by the young respondents do not have the moralizing restrictions that used to regulate opinion in a very significant way in the past. The young people today feel free and more autonomous to state their own personal and situational opinions unmediated by given institutional criteria (family, church, etc.).

However, there are boundaries or limits to tolerance. These limits are effectively defined by some kind of selectivity, which can be summarized in the following formula: "I accept the difference as long as such difference does not affect me or impinge on my life". In the discourse of young people from private schools it is expressed as "I accept homosexuality as long as it belongs within the private space and not in the public space of my school"; in that of young people from municipal schools it is "I accept homosexuality, but I don't want them to involve me in their practices". The students' discourse gives the impression of more tolerance in students from private subsidized schools and above all from municipal schools.

3. YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND CITIZENSHIP

3.1. Youth and the representational system: the problem of trust

The young respondents confirm the already generalized and shared diagnosis of distrust of politico-institutional actors at all levels. There is distrust, but above all, there is ignorance of the way in which the institutional system and its representatives operate. In this area, there are no big differences between the young of any of the school systems and the only relevant fact is that young people who study in municipal and state-subsidized schools show a greater knowledge of, and interest in, authorities at the local level (INJUV: 2011).

It should be noted that this study does not aim at analyzing in depth the relationship between young people and politics. Thus, it concerns itself exclusively with highlighting the pervading problem of trust in the institutions of the democratic system as a context for the understanding of other phenomena that are more pertinent to the school setting.

As already mentioned, trust in the authorities is very weak. This is aggravated by the fact that, paradoxically enough, the young people themselves do not know much about the authorities that should be the formal recipients of their trust. The young respondents know who the President of the Republic is and have formed different opinions about his performance, but at local government level, they have difficulty identifying the mayors. It is the young people studying at state-subsidized and municipal schools that show a greater knowledge of their local authorities.

The reasons for this distrust are varied, but they focus mainly on the respondents' perception that politics is an activity in which it is the interests of the political actors that prevail. And these interests do not necessarily coincide with those of the citizens. Politics has a face that is dark, secret, unfathomable. Their own reference to political competence is misleading given since their bottom-line is that from a practical point of view all politicians are the same and there is no difference that can be clearly appreciated.

3.2. Youth and criticism of society

The young respondents criticize many aspects that they term as embarrassing, irritating or unpleasant in society. A large part of this criticism concentrates on the “competition” factor. However, the point of view from which competition is criticized is not the same in all the cases. For the private school young, extreme competition is a threat that introduces tension above all into their desired development in the professional field: “competing with others reduces my chances”. In this context, the criticism is functional; it is not aimed at the idea of competition as such, but at the obstacles to personal development that it represents. On the contrary, in the case of the young people studying at state-subsidized and municipal schools, the criticism falls within the domain of ethics: extreme competition denaturalizes the school atmosphere and destroys the cooperation links with society. These students not only consider that competition “may be detrimental to me”; the key issue here is “I don’t like” it. Thus, it is possible to perceive a criticism of the system and of the role of education in this context. The model is perceived as one that forces them to act “against nature”; that trains them in the skills and competencies that are necessary to get into the “machine” (society and its demands) which, in their words “envelops you and does not let you go out and enjoy life”. This “machine” makes you work to survive (a similar idea to that of getting into debt in order to study and having to work in order to pay back the debt incurred). Seen from this perspective, education has adopted an approach that goes against the integral development of the person. This type of discourse is more consolidated in students of municipal schools, and is partly observed in the students from subsidized private schools.

3.3. Participation (school and society)

(...) yes ...one year and that's it, not because of the demonstrations in the streets or those things. So in my case, I did something, but the rest of the students' union, nobody else, they were busy with their own thing, the school anniversary and that's it, no more.
Male, subsidized school.

Most of the respondents say that they do not participate much in the association structures of their schools (Student unions, student councils, etc.). These activities are undertaken mainly outside the school setting. On the whole, their participation outside the school has to do with youth associations involving sports, religious or volunteer service or just fun activities.

None of the students mention other types of “emerging” activities (groups organized in favor of a social cause, anti-globalization groups, etc.).

However, it is interesting that under a clearly instrumental and more individualistic perspective, students from private schools should refer to participation in terms of the idea of “acquiring more experience”, which will be of use in their future lives. In the case of youngsters from municipal and state-subsidized schools, they participate for the sake of cooperation and good fellowship, but mainly to exercise “rights”. This last concept appears very clearly in the discourse of these respondents in particular.

A priori considerations about young people and participation issues may often lead us to believe that as this generation will be a key actor in the new issues arising citizen interest—the rights of social minorities, environmental rights, etc.—this new set of choices of social and cultural interests should be translated into an increase of participation, mainly participation that materializes outside the framework of the traditional representational institutions. However, in actual practice, this has not happened, as the young respondents do not say anything about permanent and active associative participation. Or at least, this is not a central issue with them.

Similarly, as the context for this study has been the assumption of the existence of general cultural changes that have an objective impact on the young, it was to be expected that this dynamics of change would be observable in the field of participation. Very much to the contrary, the young respondents' participation initiatives are rather traditional and respond to some very precise needs for the conformation of their identity.

However, it would be inadvisable to disregard two other important elements that can be gleaned from the discourse of the young. The first one is their reference to the notion of "defense of (one's) rights" (not specified) as an incentive to participation. This can be observed mainly in the case of students from non-private schools. The second one is that their weak actual participation in associations occurs within a context of very deep institutional distrust—which is the reason why the representation system does not contribute to the process of formation of citizens that are more active, involved and also more watchful.

This notwithstanding, the practices and discourse of the young are contradictory in many areas, which leads us to believe that there is still an ongoing adjustment process—at the stage of redefinition—which does not allow us to speak of fully defined and realized participation modalities.

4. TRENDS IN EDUCATION

(...) not everyone gets the same education, that is, if you compare a private subsidized school and a private non-subsidized school, the education is not the same. I mean, I cannot explain it, but the academic level of each type of school is quite different. For example, I attend a private subsidized school and I also have to attend pre-university courses. Students from private schools do not need this, since they are better prepared.

*This inequality is wrong.
Female, subsidized school.*

4.1. Perception of the quality of the system

Widely shared by all young people, regardless of the type of school they attend is the categorical judgment that **"the quality of education in general—the one that others get—is poor, but the one I get is good"**. This has been observed many times and shows the inability of young people to make objective judgments when it is their own reality. In fact, every day they hear that Chilean education is poor, but they lack the assessment tools to enable them to analyze their own, and, therefore, their attitude filter seems to be affective rather than objective.

The young respondents are unable to formulate what "quality" in education is, let alone its indicators. However, their statements show that there is a common criterion: education—primary as well as secondary—must provide a highly instrumental preparation to be admitted into higher education and to overcome the hurdle that the university entrance test represents. In fact, when the quality of education is poor, students are forced to attend pre-university courses ("crammers") to fill in the gaps in their school education. Thus pre-university courses have become practically a new level of formal education of the Chilean model. This statement is more strongly couched in the respondents from subsidized schools.

For the young respondents from private schools, quality is also associated with the knowledge and competencies of teachers and the conditions of the educational context (e.g. number of students per class). In this sense, the idea of quality is defined from a broader, more complex and procedural notion than in earlier comments.

However, there are some differences. For the young people from private schools, education is poor because their reference is the school reality of other countries which, in their opinion, results in better "performance." For the young people from subsidized schools it is poor because it is unequal (not the same quality for all), and for the youngsters from municipal education it is poor because it fosters unhealthy competition. In the last two cases, the reproach is eminently ethical in nature, a phenomenon that we have already mentioned.

Related to this last perspective (but somehow in contradiction with the initial comments), there is the cross-sectional perception—more strongly couched in the discourse of the public school students— that what there is today is an education that is very pragmatically focused on "the cognitive", on what is more relevant to the prevailing economic system, which has forgotten the integral nature that education ought to have. Their criticism refers to the fact that some school subjects, particularly those more humanistic, have been neglected in the present curriculum: there is not much sports, arts, civic education, etc., in the curriculum. Specifically, they talk of an impersonal system that produces subjects that live in terms of the "machine" (society): an education for economic development and not for human development, as Nussbaum says (Nussbaum: 2010).

It is important to insist on the apparently contradictory nature of the students' opinions: they demand better education focusing on an effective preparation for the university selection test, but, at the same time they criticize this type of education, which does not offer more opportunities for full development. The students' words themselves offer some clarification of this paradox: although they do not accept the rationale imposed by the system because they consider it dehumanizing, they acknowledge that they lack the necessary strength to change the model. This is the reason why they demand that education, biased as it is, should be equitable providing everyone with the necessary tools to have the same opportunities to access higher education and thus be "competent" for the System.

4.2. Pertinence of contents

Reinterpreting the opinion of the young, we can say that beyond their personal judgments about the relevance of the courses that are not to their liking or at which they do not perform well, there are expectations of what ought to be further developed in the overall educational process. In the case of young people from private schools, it is social skills related to the ability to express their ideas, a better use of the new technologies, sports and arts; in the case of young people from subsidized schools it is clearly sports; and in the case of young people from municipal schools it is history and foreign languages (particularly English).

Another important aspect is sex education at school. All the respondents pointed out that this subject should be seriously addressed in the curriculum. Their perception is that what inhibits dealing with this subject at school is not related to the institutional restrictions (neutrality) or ideological constraints of the establishments, but mainly their parents' attitude, constantly critical of the development of these activities in the classroom. In addition, when these contents are belatedly dealt with in the Biology curriculum many of the students have already initiated their sex life.

As regards civic/citizenship education—another shortcoming in the curriculum that was discussed in certain depth—the respondents said that this subject was not suitably dealt with and that there were only some references to it in their History classes. All of them feel that this is an essential subject and ought to be given proper attention.

The private school respondents argue that civic education ought to focus on providing information (who the authorities are, how institutions work, etc.), while the students from municipal schools insist that civic education should focus particularly on spreading information on the rights of individuals. Both groups criticize not getting more civic education at school; both groups demand it.

Once again, the students' demands involve a paradox: they want contents that are more practical and relevant to the school-leaving profile, but at the same time, they demand a more integral curriculum (more civic education, extra-curricular workshops, etc.)

There is also an incipient demand for more autonomy in the structuring of their syllabuses. Specifically, they ask for more freedom of choice regarding the classes to take, and to be allowed to choose subjects that have been traditionally considered from different areas of knowledge.

4.3. Students' perception of teachers

Regardless of school, all youngsters show an extremely devalued view of the teaching profession. The opposition between teaching vocation versus job-market pragmatism is recurrent. These young people criticize the lack of a true vocation in teachers, and consider that, apparently, they are not working at what they like and would have chosen another profession if they had had the chance. According to the respondents, most teachers are "*failed doctors or lawyers*".

However, the same as on judging the quality of education, when the respondents themselves differentiate between the "poor quality of education in general" and "the good education I get", the differentiation reappears when most of them say, "my teachers are good". In the case of students from municipal schools there is an additional fact: they believe that it is in this type of education (municipal) that true vocation is to be found (those who teach at municipal schools have an honest vocation for teaching).

All these young people coincide in saying that the characteristics that distinguish a "good teacher" are: a) accurate knowledge of the subject that is taught (an aspect commonly criticized), b) knowledge of how to transmit these contents in a smooth way, and c) linking these contents with reality (pertinence). Also other aspects are mentioned: being capable of generating motivation, being close to the students, treating students well, and challenging them to make them think.

The students are aware that the teaching profession is not socially valued, which is the reason why many young people who do well at school and have a capability for teaching do not choose this profession. Specifically, they mention the lack of incentives to opt for a teaching career.

In their assessment of teachers in general, they recognize that the Chilean reality provides no incentive to becoming a teacher, and that teaching is often being taken up by people with no vocation. They also mention very clearly that the requirements to be a teacher are more demanding today than in the past: teachers should be able to attract and motivate not only through their knowledge of the subject, but also by using other teaching tools and technology. They must adapt not only to new knowledge but also to the characteristics of the new students.

4.4. Support of the school system to opt for post-secondary school choices

(...) last year I met many people from universities because of the student movements. Then I ask them on Facebook, hey you know I have a problem, what's up in Beauchef, what about the scores, and things like that.

Male, municipal school

As already mentioned, all young people want or feel the obligation to get into higher education. They say this type of education guarantees better insertion into the labor market in later life. Not going to university discriminates against you. Even the students from technical schools mention going to university as the chance to "become someone, move up in life" and have more stability.

All the young respondents say that the help that they receive from their schools in terms of information and vocational orientation is insufficient. In general, they say that they themselves look up the information they

need. They also say that the schools could do much more in this connection, but they do not specify which forms such support could take.

An interesting aspect, which we've already referred to, is that the young people from municipal and subsidized schools appear to rely on "significant persons" (older siblings, cousins, friends, etc.) who have already gone through the same process and have succeeded in their "search strategies". The school is less relied on, unlike the case of students from private schools. Even the Internet gets more mentions than the schools, and in the case of the students who took part in the student movement mobilizations in 2011⁴, they mention the links they had with university students at the time. They say that the schools organize fairs and give information on events where it is possible to find relevant information for the taking of decisions, but demand still more support from their establishments. According to them, the job of municipal schools is to actually get their students into higher education.

Specifically, the students from public schools mention that the issue of vocational support ought to be more open-ended, as not everyone wishes or can go to college, and not everyone considers pursuing a traditional university degree course. They mention that in the case of less traditional or more artistic career choices, the schools provide no support. The students from public schools in particular rely on "significant persons", as their models to make decisions about higher education. Such is the case of "elder brothers or sisters" who become their role models (they have already done it, they made an effort, were successful and know what to do / it is useful to rely on them).

In the case of the respondents from private schools this process of finding information seems to be smoother and there are also different sources of information. It is important to mention that the school appears to have a relevant role in this. Yet, interestingly, while the school is mentioned as a major supplier of decision-making information, it is criticized since it should be concerned with identifying the skills and interests of the students, and not just provide information on a wide range of degree courses and higher education institutions. They demand more vocational tests to be applied at school. This group of students has more information and know more about what to do. They mention some websites where they know that they will find the information they seek about different academic courses.

As can be clearly seen, all the students, regardless of socioeconomic level, have high expectations of going on to higher education, and their choice is largely marked what they perceive to be their vocational definition. Assigning priority—or, at any rate, attempting to assign priority—to the likes and interests of the students to determine the goals they want to realize at work is an element that is new to some segments of the Chilean society, particularly, to students from the more vulnerable establishments.

These new circumstances call for more support, as expressed by the students themselves, especially considering how difficult it is to choose well in such a complex educational market as that of Chile. Also, it is necessary to bear in mind that many of these students are not culturally familiar with this type of education, or if they are, it is rather recent and incipient phenomenon ("significant role models").

The students admit that they are informed of what's on offer, but this is generally restricted to more traditional institutions and courses. They demand a more comprehensive orientation including not only the wide range of professional studies, but also other training and development options available today. Although orientation now has become more massively available, it is still almost exclusively circumscribed to providing information, and does not train in the skills needed to design and implement more complex life projects, involving more varied and complex road-maps than in the past, for instance, the "yo-yo" type versus linear type projects (Dávila Ghiardo & Medrano 2005; Baeza 2007) of postmodern societies. They also demand more support to clarify their own interests and abilities in order to make better-informed decisions.

⁴ Demonstrations of high school students, mainly from municipal schools, demanding public, free and good-quality education.

4.5. New technologies

(...) in my case for instance, my computer broke down and I couldn't study because I always use Word to write summaries as for me it is easier to learn when I write things down.

Female, private school.

Use of the Internet

The young people's responses do not show anything new in this area. There is a generalized use of the Internet for communication purposes and school assignments. When they look up information, it is either something they themselves are interested in or something they need for school. In this latter case, the young respondents resort to the Internet to clarify things that they did not understand in class or just to do their homework. As for use of the Internet in general, they download music or get information about their favorite artists and read the news.

The most widely used applications are, therefore, those that enable communication (Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp). The use of Twitter is very marginal, and is more used among students from private schools. Messenger has also decreased its impact: only young people from subsidized schools still use it.

Relationship between new technologies and the school

All the young respondents agree on two basic things: a) the use of new technologies is essential in the classroom and in the overall educational process, and b) new technologies will NEVER replace the classroom teacher and the school in their physical dimension.

As for new technologies, they allow them to cope better with the demands imposed on them by the school, particularly homework and presentations. As for the Internet, its use is more diverse, since it allows them to do several tasks to support the school work. In the first place they use the Internet to look up information necessary for a good performance (do their homework, clarify matters dealt with in class, etc.). In addition, the Internet is widely used for networking purposes, which allows them to do group projects or define interest groups to keep in touch and inform one another of school events (there are groups of students in a class or groups of students doing an elective subject). In this respect, this type of groups extend the school activity far beyond the school's time and space boundaries and permit the smooth and practical communication to approach the school demands in a better way.

As for the possibility that the new technologies might in the long run replace the school as a provider of key knowledge for the cultural socialization and social integration of the younger generations, the students are convinced that this is impossible. The humanizing aspect of teacher and school would be missed if the educational process involved exclusively the use of new technologies. Education involves not only cognitive knowledge, but is also a way to socialize with others, which makes face-to-face interaction indispensable. Although there are some young people who can educate themselves with the help of such tools as the Internet, what is generally required is a teacher-student relationship in which an expert accompanies the students' progress and is always available to clarify their doubts.

The findings of the study show us that the new technologies and their increasingly intensive and massive use by the new generations of students are giving a new meaning to the school space in some relevant dimensions. In the first place, they appear to be increasingly essential tools for successful academic performance. Both ICTs and the Internet have become key tools that are being internalized by the school world and made available to their students. Many school requirements, especially in the wealthier school

population, assume their everyday accessibility (students from private schools can send their assignments by e-mail to the teacher until the midnight of their deadline date). This has expanded the school domain, by colonizing traditionally off-school time.

We can also observe that the groups of students formed to “share” relevant information related to the courses is reinforcing this trend. Apparently, the school world boundaries have become wider and more diffuse than they used to be (suffice it to mention how cyber-bullying has spread harassment beyond the space and temporal boundaries of the school).

Another aspect that can be attributed to the use of ICTs and their underlying rationale (increased interactivity and autonomy in their use; multimedia applications, etc.) can be derived from the standards against which the students assess the disciplines or school subjects and the pedagogical performance of their teachers. Their demand for more “fun”, practical and interactive classes may be reinforced by the rationale imposed by these technological teaching tools and the use that youngsters are giving them (Pedró: 2006). In Pedró’s opinion, the new ICTs are changing the way in which the new generations approach knowledge, so this may lead to stronger demands about the way in which they are included within the school format.

All this stresses the need to consider how these new technologies are changing some aspects of today’s education and how they are imposing new demands that should be assessed by the educational policies in order to make them more pertinent and promote quality education for all.

5. AGENDA

The different elements that we have referred to in this article reveal, and in some cases reinforce, an important range of concerns related to unresolved adjustments involving young people and the educational system. These potential “mismatches” can be globally considered as a to-do agenda to be translated into advanced research to be undertaken in the academic sphere. They also should be of interest to those who design public policies and are examining the relevance of the model and strategies of our current educational system.

For this reason, we consider it necessary to specify some issues which, because of the nature and the constraints of this study, were not dealt with in greater depth. Because of their relevance and given that they also part of the findings of this study, they deserve to be considered in a future research agenda.

In this context, we would like to point out the following:

1.- Mismatches between the promise of social mobility and the effective integration of young people.

As regards social mobility, it is essential to inquire about the symbolic consequences of the promises of social mobility associated with education (e.g. the delicate balance between expectations of insertion into the labor market and effective participation in the workforce). In this line, possible mechanisms of regulation of the labor market should be studied, so that progress in education is mirrored by progress in the system, thus validating the meritocracy rationale.

It is urgent to reflect on the excessive expectations that education itself arouses and to enquire whether the quality assurance system will be able to tackle in the right way the structural problems of unequal results and segregation.

From a sociological perspective, it is necessary to think of the consequences of a model that symbolically offers high expectations of integration through education—preferably university education—but lacks the mechanisms to guarantee that this integration will operate correctly. In other words, we need to wonder what the behavior of “today’s optimists” will be like if their mobility expectations are not met in the future.

2.- Mismatches between the promise of a future and the “eternal present” of the juvenile imagination.

The education system and the experience of the young seem to move through time dimensions of extremely antagonistic nature and characteristics. On the one hand, education is organized around a structured view of time based on a not very defined future which, strictly speaking, is a “promise of a future”. By contrast, although young people are not against the idea of a project that is built over time, they feel better interpreted by the here-and-now, which they find far more intelligible. Thus, in the imaginary of the young, “what is valuable and useful seems to be what is livable and verifiable today”.

Therefore, all this requires thinking of ways to reconcile both perspectives so that education responds to the young people’s typical demands of **today**, while it symbolically reinserts them in a conception of **extensive or extended time**. Somehow the incorporation of ICTs into the everyday world of the young and progressively in the school space is expressing this tension in an explicit way. The temporal dimension and its representations have become an issue that must be considered in studies on youth and education.

3.- Mismatches between abstract civic participation and effective participation.

Despite the strong consensus on the idea that favoring democratic institutions, willingness to participate in political processes and development of what is commonly called public virtues depend largely on the education that young people receive at school—since it is at school that otherness is specifically experienced and the essential tools for community life are acquired—the educational system continues to reinforce a strategy of neutrality that prevents young people from developing a true sense of collective solidarity. Paradoxically, this neutrality also leans on an essentialist and abstract civic conception that seems to demand from young people a natural behavior that requires neither learning nor practice.

This highlights the need to reorient the role of the school in relation to civic education, by developing clearer and more relevant educational lines structured from specific challenges in the areas of otherness, associativity, entitlement to rights and responsibilities arising from them, among other aspects.

In this context it is also important to consider what the educational system can do with respect to the vote and elections as the cornerstone mechanism of representative democracy and also what it can do to strengthen social cohesion, pro-sociality and empathy, to offset the cultural individualism that we have described in the first section of this article.

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