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Tensions between State and Market in Chile: Educational Policy and Culture

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A programme of education reform co-financed by the Chilean government and the World Bank was implemented between 1991 and 2003. It aimed to invest strategically in resources and infrastructure, and to improve the quality of education as a prerequisite for economic growth and social cohesion. As a result of sustained investment and a strategic approach to policy-making, Chile out-performs other countries in the region with consistent increases in participation and retention at secondary level, and a sustained drop in early withdrawal rates, even among the poorest pupils (SITEAL 2004). Investment in early years and pre-school education among low-income groups has gone some way to improving the pre-conditions for effective learning (OECD 2004, Navarro 2002). From 2003, compulsory education was extended to twelve years and currently over one third of the eligible age group continues on to higher education. Yet, a high-quality education remains an elusive aspiration for the majority of children and the educational 'good' which is distributed is far from standard in Chile. Despite increased and sustained investment in education, the achievement gap between income groups and between the publicly funded schools and the fee-paying private schools is widening, the level of confidence in publicly funded education is low and falling.

The education system and its constituent parts represent the nexus between policy and practice. By operating within a national legislative framework imbued with ideology, meaning and values, schools and other key stakeholders are charged with translating policy into practice. This article focuses on the tensions between policies that aim to promote equity and their implementation in a market-oriented education system supported by a legislative framework that constrains policy changes that might depart from a neoliberal model. The first area of tension is related to the funding and provision of education for, while public expenditure on education has grown since 1990, private investment has increased its share as a proportion of the total spending. At primary and secondary levels, this has been facilitated by the introduction of shared funding mechanisms that allow parental contributions to municipal and private schools in receipt of state subsidy. The increase in private investment has been paralleled by a dramatic shift in student enrolment from municipal schools to privately-run schools, to the extent that currently half of all children in Chile are educated in privately-run schools.

The second area of tension is found in the growing segmentation of the education system. In 2004, a review of Chilean education by the OECD warned that the segregation by social class was so marked as to have a negative impact on democratic values and institutions. Stratification by income is also reflected in the quality of education received that varies according to socio-economic background and the type of school attended. The current situation clearly runs counter to the govern-

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ment's stated aims of promoting equity in education because student achievement does not reflect academic ability but family economics. For individuals, this situation adversely impacts on the preparedness of low-income students in the state funded schools for entry into the labour market and their prospects of progressing through to higher education. For the government, it limits the policy aims of promoting social mobility and overcoming poverty through education. At national level, it has a negative impact on Chile's competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-oriented, global economy. Concerns over student achievement are confirmed by international evaluations that reveal that the quality of education in Chile is below countries with a similar level of economic development.

A third area of tension relates to the cultural dimension of education. In the last decades of the twentieth century, the market replaced the State as the principal provider of education, as producer and reproducer of national culture, and the right to education became conflated with the freedom to provide and access the education of one's choice. Individualization has replaced the collective project, and Chilean society simultaneously legitimizes the right to exercise individual freedoms while acknowledging the unequal distribution of the resources that make such choice possible. A market-driven education system in a country with gross social and economic inequalities provides people with more opportunities to realize their fears – of affordability, academic failure, an education inadequate for social mobility – than their aspirations and desires. Despite evidence to the contrary, privately-run schools are perceived as providing a higher quality of education than municipal schools when, in fact, only the fee paying private schools attended by the children of the elite have a significant advantage. The gap between the objective performance of different categories of schools and the subjective perception of performance among key stakeholders is widening.

Methods and data

Primary materials and data used in this study were mainly drawn from official sources that have the advantage of affording reliability and already being in the public domain. Statistics from the Ministry of Education are used to demonstrate student enrolment trends, levels of state and private investment in education, and the changing distribution of educational establishments between the municipal, the subsidized private and the fee-paying private categories. The data on the quality of education in Chile were obtained from the Sistema de Medición de la Calidad en Educación (SIMCE) that operates through the annual application of a national test on a rolling programme to students in the fourth grade of primary school, the eighth grade of primary school, and the second grade of secondary school. For the purposes of this study, the SIMCE data for the second grade of secondary education from 1998, 2001 and 2003 were selected, as these cohorts of students have experienced the impact of the policy changes since 1990 at primary and secondary level over sufficient time to allow for the analysis of trends. In addition, extensive use was made of a diverse range of secondary source materials that provided essential background information and allowed for a multi-disciplinary approach to the subject matter.

From State to market: shifts in educational policy and culture

Historically, the State as the *Estado Docente* was the driving force behind the expansion of education which was framed as an integral part of the national project and a key element of citizenship (Jaksic and Serrano 1990, Yeagar 1991, Newland 1994). The *Ley de Educación Primaria Obligatoria* of 1920 provided four years of free education for boys and girls, and this was increased to six years in 1929. A school building programme initiated in 1937 facilitated the rapid expansion of enrolment, and participation grew steadily until eight years of universal primary education was achieved by 1965. Although the State was the dominant provider it did not hold a monopoly, for a private education system dating back to the colonial period and controlled by the religious institutions (both Catholic and Protestant) educated the children of the elite from primary school through to university (Aedo-Richmond 2000). Both the public education system and the private institutions had been an integral part of the Chilean social fabric and their co-existence reflected differences between religious and secular viewpoints, political ideologies, aspirations and social status.

The education reforms introduced by the military regime in 1980 and 1981 marked a radical departure from previous education policies. These had been influenced by modernization theories with the emphasis on education primarily in relation to the labour market, and meeting the demand for skilled personnel for employment in technical and professional careers (González Brito 1997). The education reforms were an important element in the re-structuring of the state that began with the Siete Modernizaciones in 1978. These expanded the influence of neoliberal economists into labour relations, pensions, education, healthcare, agriculture, justice and regionalization. The relationship between the state and society was reconfigured as a result of the partial withdrawal of the former from the provision of social services and its replacement by the market. The objective of these reforms was to create the material and cultural conditions on which this new, self-regulated, market-oriented society would be based. In this way, the policies served as a powerful socializing agent, by displacing social demands from the state to the market. Individuals would now resolve their problems and seek to further their interests through the market rather than collectively (Pollack and Matear 1996). While the impact of these changes was initially most apparent in the labour market and in pensions, we shall see that in the longer term the effects on education have been highly significant.

Legislative changes were introduced through Article 19 (10) of the 1980 Constitution. It guaranteed the role of the State in shaping and developing all levels of the education system, while simultaneously stimulating the role of the market by allowing the both the State and private operators to run schools and universities. The New Public Management (NPM) model, which proposed that the role of the state in the economy should be reduced and services should be delivered based on the principal-agent theory, underpinned these structural changes. It involved differentiating between the purchaser/strategic director and the providers of the service with the aim of promoting greater effectiveness, equity and economic efficiency (Hood 1990, Walsh 1995). The adoption of the NPM model for public sector reform was encouraged throughout Latin America by international finance organiza-

tions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank (Nickson 2002). The 1980 education reforms centred on several core initiatives including the decentralization of the education administration to local government, and the financing of schools based on a voucher system to cover operational and capital costs, as calculated on average monthly student attendance. The Ministry of Education retained control over the design of the curriculum, student progression and evaluation (Vargas and Peirano 2002). They fostered competition between schools for students and resources with the aim of increasing choice, promoting efficiency and improving standards. The entry of private providers was crucial to the expansion of the system at secondary level in the 1980s and 1990s at minimal cost to the public purse and, to this end, a new category of subsidized private schools was created. It encompassed religious schools, not-for-profit lay schools and, in the majority, schools which are businesses operated for profit. Schools in this diverse sector receive public funding through the voucher system but they are privately administered individually or as part of a consortium. In addition, there are private technical-vocational schools run by businesses or corporations and a flourishing fee-based private sector that are not in receipt of public funding (Aedo 1998, Taylor 2003). Furthermore, the reforms resulted in a dramatic shift from a political culture that viewed education as a fundamental right to a culture that emphasized the freedom of choice of the user as a consumer rather than as a citizen. Yet, this has proved largely illusory. While the voucher appears to offer parents the choice over which school their children should attend, in practice this is constrained by physical limitations on school capacity and the fact that many schools select the students based on their academic performance and on social criteria. In fee-paying private schools, over-subscribed subsidized private and even top-performing state schools, it is not unusual for a written statement and interview with the parents to also form part of the student selection process. As a result, parental choice is often restricted from the outset by schools' admissions criteria which act as a screening device on socio-economic, religious and academic grounds. Subsidized private and fee-paying private schools can exclude pupils for poor academic performance; teaching students with learning difficulties or behavioural problems can similarly be avoided (OECD 2004). Geographical location is a further curb on choice, as the subsidized private schools are concentrated in urban areas leaving the state schools as the dominant provider of education in rural areas (Navarro 2002). Furthermore, the majority of students study within their *comuna* of residence, making neighbourhood stratification an important factor influencing choice. In most instances, the education market operates at a very local level. Despite the policy rhetoric, the most salient outcome of the reforms was the creation of a competitive market between education providers and the segregation of schools by socio-economic criteria (Delannoy 2000).

The military regime was all too aware of the role of the education system in transmitting ideology and values to future generations and, to this end, on their last day in office, legislation (Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Educación, LOCE) was passed which made any future amendments to their education reforms of 1980 and 1981 subject to an unattainable quorum in the parliament. This meant that despite the change of regime in 1990, and efforts to promote equity over the coming years, continuity in the administrative and organizational structure of the education sys-

tem has inevitably impacted on the design and implementation of public policy. Opening political debate on changing the LOCE risked clashing with conservative forces close to the former military regime. Even after the transition to democracy was complete, successive governments of the Concertación opted for the politics of pragmatism, retained the status quo and increased investment with the aim of closing the gap in educational quality. During the 1990s, the contribution of markets and the private sector in education continued to be viewed positively, but policy makers also began to consider the need for mechanisms to compensate for social and economic disadvantage (González Brito 1997). The State was once again perceived to have a key role to play in the promotion of equity in a new paradigm that has been dubbed 'more State and more market' (Brunner 2000). This approach has been supported by international lending organizations, including the World Bank that, with the Chilean government, co-funded the lengthy programme of education reforms implemented between 1991 and 2003.

Education policy post-1990

For the first government of the Concertación (1990-94), led by the Christian Democrat Patricio Aylwin Azócar, the over-riding priority was to maintain political and economic stability in Chile and thus secure the transition to democracy. In education, the principal challenges centred around establishing a new articulation between the State and the market in a modern democratic society and, by extension, promoting quality education in a mixed system with both public and private provision and funding (Aedo 1998, Courard and Cox 1996). Teachers in the municipal schools benefited as some of the most pernicious effects of the deregulation of labour laws in 1980 were reversed with the new Estatuto Docente in 1991,[1] which improved the working conditions of teachers who had been disadvantaged by the changes in employment law. Subsequent legislation in 1995[2] and in 1997[3] further improved remuneration. A range of programmes was introduced to target the specific educational needs of schools in rural areas and the most educationally vulnerable schools via the Programa 900 (García-Huidobro 1999, Courard and Cox 1996, Delannoy 2000). As a result of these measures, more than 90 per cent of available resources for school improvements were destined to schools rated medium or high risk (PREAL/CINDE 1997).

The first stage in a new round of education reform was initiated at primary level in 1991 under the banner MECE-Básica. Jointly funded by the World Bank and the Chilean government, it aimed at improving classroom effectiveness, providing better quality teaching resources and introducing a new curriculum. More extensive reforms would take effect under the second government of the Concertación, led by Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle (1994-2000). The importance of the linkages between the different levels of education was acknowledged and continuity was facilitated by the introduction of MECE-Media, the second of the three stages of reform, which began in 1994 (Schiefelbein and Schiefelbein 2002). In the same year, a National Commission on the Modernization of Education was created in 1994 and henceforth, policy emphasis was on creating a modern education system for a democratic society which could overcome inequalities; promoting social justice and equity; and strengthening Chile's insertion into the global economy

through investment in skills, knowledge and technology. In 1996, the Full School Day (Jornada Escolar Completa, JEC) initiative was phased in thereby increasing the number of hours children spent in school. Considerable investment was made in improving educational resources including textbooks and the use of information technology was extended to schools through the Programa Enlaces (García-Huidobro 1999). In addition, the government targeted a range of support measures to children in socially vulnerable families that included early years and pre-school interventions, free school meals and learning materials, and support for teenage parents (MIDEPLAN 1999, MIDEPLAN 2001).

Education occupied a central position once more during the third consecutive government of the Concertación, headed by Ricardo Lagos Escobar (2000-2006). This third stage in education policy took an integrated approach in which the responsibility for education was shared between the family, the community and the State which guaranteed to prioritize investment towards the most economically disadvantaged sectors of the population (Lagos 1999). Education was framed as a means of overcoming inequality and poverty and of ensuring Chile's international economic competitiveness. In addition to the existing provision of eight years at primary level, compulsory education was extended to encompass a further four years of secondary schooling, so that today all Chilean children should have a minimum of 12 years of formal education (Lagos Escobar 2002). To support this measure, government initiatives to encourage student retention at secondary level were strengthened, with the introduction of financial incentives for municipal and subsidized private schools which successfully improve the attendance and retention of children from low-income families (Ministerio de Educación 2003).

Since 1990, Chilean education has benefited from sustained investment by the state, rising from 2.4 per cent of GDP in 1990 to 4.4 per cent of GDP in 2001 and this has been paralleled by increased private investment, which increased from 1.4 per cent of GDP in 1990 to 3.3 per cent in 2000.[4] This means that, in just over 10 years, Chile more than doubled the percentage of GDP spent on education from 3.8 per cent in 1990 to 7.4 per cent in 2000 (Ministerio de Educación 2002, p.127). The investment in teacher training, infrastructure, learning materials and technology produced positive results, and from a low base in the early 1990s, there were significant improvements in learning achievement until 1996. Since then progress has been more modest. The slowdown may be due to the inevitable time-lag between the introduction of policies and their impact in the system, or to the partial failure of policies which aimed to improve the quality of education and student achievement. Conversely, the current situation might indicate the success of policies which aimed to increase student retention for, as more students continue through to the end of secondary school, the number of low achieving students remaining in the education system is likely to increase (Wolff 2002). Consequently, at least in the short term, there may be a trade-off between advances in enrolment, student retention and raising standards in schools. Some critics have attributed the failure to sustain improvement to the lack of objective goals and criteria by which to measure improvements in equity, school performance, student learning and standards raising (Beyer, Eyzaguirre, Fontaine 2000). Others have gone further and questioned the feasibility of advancing equity and improving student achievement without addressing the structural constraints of segmentation, social stratification

and growing privatization (OECD 2004).

Whatever, its causes, the dissatisfaction over quality and equity in Chilean education found an outlet in a strike by municipal high school students in May and June of 2006. The protests secured substantial media coverage and appear to have provided the impetus for opening a full public debate on the future of education in Chile. Commentators from across the political spectrum expressed a strong desire for change although the solutions proposed varied from the recentralization of education to further privatization and even an end to state provision (La Segunda 2006). The students' demands were wide ranging and covered both material and ideological concerns including changes to the Jornada Escolar Completa and reform of the LOCE. President Michelle Bachelet responded quickly to the material demands by authorizing an increase in the number of students receiving free school meals; more investment to improve school infrastructure; free transport passes for all students who need them; increased subsidies to low income families to ensure that all children can afford to remain in education. Students of technical education on work experience will receive payment during their three-month placements; low-income students applying for university will no longer have to pay for the entrance examinations (Bachelet 2006). Addressing the need for more far-reaching reforms would prove complex and contentious due to the diverse views held by politicians, special interest groups, educators and the electorate. In view of this, the President established the Consejo Asesor Presidencial on 7 June 2006 which, after six months of deliberation, issued its final report on 11 December 2006. This document highlighted the need to amend the regulatory framework for education and, specifically, replace the LOCE introduced by the military in 1990. It emphasized the importance of improving the quality of education provided and enforcing minimum standards through a robust system for quality assurance. Other aspects covered in the report include the funding system for education; the administration of the municipal schools; the provisions made for the training, employment and remuneration of teachers; the curriculum and the linkages between the various tiers of the education system from primary through to higher education (Consejo Asesor Presidencial para la Calidad de la Educación 2006).

Having reached a consensus and produced the final report, it remains to be seen how the debate will progress through parliament, and whether recommendations requiring legislation will be approved, blocked, or watered down through cross-party compromises.

Having examined the major policy developments since 1990, let us now examine the principal areas of tension between policies that aim to promote equity in and through education and their implementation in a market-oriented environment.

Shared funding: privatization through the back door?

During the 1980s, the private and subsidized private sectors expanded as cuts in public expenditure on education gave parents a clear incentive to enrol their children in privately administered schools. However, by the end of the decade, the growth in the number of private providers had stalled because of the fall in the real value of the voucher. The Aylwin government introduced a system of shared funding in 1993 whereby the voucher system was retained and, henceforth, parents con-

tributed a complementary sum. This initiative simultaneously gave schools extra resources to improve the quality of education, and created incentives for the private sector to expand provision at minimal cost to the public purse. Municipal schools were limited in their use of the shared funding arrangement to secondary level and then only with the agreement of the parents; subsidized private schools could raise revenue through shared funding at both primary and secondary level (Raczynski 1999, Vargas and Peirano 2002). One year after the introduction of shared funding, 1/3 of subsidized private schools, accounting for 50 per cent of the enrolment in this category, had adopted this funding method; by 2000, 78.1 per cent of registration fees at secondary level in subsidized private schools came from the shared funding scheme (MIDEPLAN 2001). An educational hierarchy has emerged in the subsidized private sector based on family income, with schools attended by children from the higher income groups charging significantly more than those that cater for children from less wealthy families (MIDEPLAN 1999). Conversely, shared funding has been less welcome in the municipal schools that cater for children from the lowest income groups. By 2000, only 22.9 per cent of the municipal schools had availed themselves of this funding mechanism and the amount charged was considerably lower than in the subsidized private schools (MIDEPLAN 2001).

Although the shared funding arrangement has undoubtedly increased the total expenditure on education, it has impacted negatively on equity in education by increasing the available resource base in schools that cater disproportionately for children from middle-income families. A recent study revealed that, while 54 per cent of investment currently comes from the public purse, private expenditure on all levels of education now stands at 46 per cent of the total (Dirección de Presupuestos 2005). When the total amount destined for education is broken down to the level of the household we see marked differences by socio-economic group. On average, a household in the highest socio-economic group spends US $350 (172,930 Chilean pesos) per month on education while a household in the lowest socio-economic group spends US $35 (17,933 Chilean pesos) (Dirección de Presupuestos 2005).[5] The gap between the richest and the poorest is ten-fold; for the former, the cost of education represents 11 per cent of their monthly income while for the latter, it is 15 per cent. This situation underlines the reality in Chile, that choice in education is determined by ability to pay.

Between 1990 and 2001, the subsidized private category expanded from 32.4 per cent to 36.6 per cent of total enrolments, mainly drawing children from middle-income families away from the municipal schools. Over the same period, registrations in private schools ranged from a low of 7.7 per cent in 1990 to a high of 9.5 per cent in 1996, only to drop off again to 8.8 per cent in 2001.[6] Thus, the municipal sector has experienced the greatest and most consistent fall in enrolments, dropping from 58 per cent in 1990 to 53.1 per cent in 2001 despite increased funding to the municipal schools (Ministerio de Educación 2002, p.45). The downward trend continued and by 2003, the proportion of children studying in municipal schools had fallen to 50 per cent and projections based on demographic trends suggest that by 2010 the percentage could be as low as 36 per cent (Zúñiga 2005). Overwhelmingly, the municipal schools educate children from the poorest households; in 2000, 80.9 per cent of those attending primary school in this sector were from families in the income deciles 1 to 5 and 43.2 per cent were from income dec-

iles 1 and 2 and 38.9 per cent were in households with incomes below the poverty line (MIDEPLAN 2001, p. 14, 19). At secondary level, 72.1 per cent of children in the municipal schools are from the lowest five income deciles and 28.8 per cent are from homes below the poverty line (MIDEPLAN 2001, p. 24-5). In large part, the social stratification of education results from middle class students transferring from the municipal sector to the subsidized private schools but it may also be linked to policy initiatives that aim to alleviate poverty. The state subsidies targeted at schools catering predominantly for children from poor families may influence low-income parents when choosing between municipal and subsidized private schools. Unlike the vouchers, whereby funding follows the student, income-related benefits including free school meals, text books and other learning materials are allocated directly to schools by the Ministry of Education. Their coverage is disproportionately concentrated in the municipal schools and, as a result, these non-transferable subsidies may act as a disincentive for low-income parents to send their child to a subsidized private school (Sapelli and Torche 2002). The evolution of enrolments across the administrative categories between 1990 and 2004 can be seen in Table 1, and the distribution of educational establishments between 1990 and 2004 is detailed in Table 2.

Privatization and the quality of education

Part of the rationale behind the introduction of the subsidized private schools was the assumption that their presence would increase competition for students between education providers. This would drive up standards and thereby would improve academic results, yet this assumption does not appear to be confirmed by studies into the effects of competition on school performance. Mechanisms to measure performance, to demonstrate efficiency and efficacy in the delivery of education are a key feature of the New Public Management model. They aim to ensure accountability by the various actors in the education system – central government, local government, school management, teachers and students – according to the objectives set (Eyzaguirre 2002). Chile was one of the first countries in Latin America to introduce a national system of testing to monitor and improve the educational performance of schools. The Sistema de Medición de la Calidad de la Educación (SIMCE) came into effect in 1988 with the remit of monitoring, evaluating and improving student achievement and the educational performance of all schools in receipt of state subsidies.

The effects of privatization on school performance have been extensively studied in Chile. Gauri (1998) criticized the reforms of the early 1980s for failing to significantly improve school performance and for exacerbating social stratification, thus serving the interests of parents and children with the economic and social capital to exercise choice and further their advantage. McEwan and Carnoy (2000) found that municipal schools achieved lower scores in the SIMCE tests in *comunas* that had a large number of subsidized private and fee-paying private schools. They attributed this to the migration of higher achieving students from the municipal to the privately run schools and the concomitant effect on the composition of the student body and performance profiles. Similar findings were reported by Hsieh and

Table 1: Distribution of Primary and Secondary Student Enrolment by Administrative Category, 1990-2004

Year	Total Enrolments N (%)		Municipal Enrolments N (%)		Subsidized Private Enrolment N (%)		Private Enrolments N (%)		Corporation Enrolments N (%)	
1990	2,973,752	(100%)	1,717,928	(57.76%)	963,212	(32.39%)	235,342	(7.91%)	57,270	(1.92%)
1991	2,951,862	(100%)	1,699,700	(57.58%)	952,973	(32.28%)	242,791	(8.22%)	56,398	(1.91%)
1992	2,995,858	(100%)	1,721,836	(57.47%)	967,025	(32.27%)	253,635	(8.46%)	53,362	(1.78%)
1993	3,020,199	(100%)	1,725,908	(57.14%)	977,300	(32.35%)	265,198	(8.78%)	51,793	(1.71%)
1994	3,058,873	(100%)	1,745,179	(57.07%)	**989,250**	**(32.34%)**	273,351	(8.93%)	51,093	(1.67%)
1995	3,150,629	(100%)	1,788,447	(56.76%)	1,023,423	(32.48%)	288,583	(9.15%)	50,176	(1.59%)
1996	3,271,785	(100%)	1,828,088	(55.87%)	1,081,427	(33.05%)	309,558	(9.46%)	52,712	(1.61%)
1997	3,306,600	(100%)	1,839,570	(55.63%)	1,104,623	(33.4%)	311,483	(9.42%)	50,924	(1.54%)
1998	3,337,976	(100%)	1,840,184	(55.12%)	1,138,080	(34.09%)	309,378	(9.26%)	50,334	(1.5%)
1999	3,429,927	(100%)	1,866,991	(54.43%)	1,202,327	(35.05%)	306,591	(8.93%)	54,018	(1.57%)
2000	3,508,509	(100%)	1,884,320	(53.7%)	1,256,116	(35.8%)	312,808	(8.91%)	55,265	(1.57%)
2001	3,559,022	(100%)	1,889,645	(53.09%)	1,302,010	(36.58%)	312,928	(8.79%)	54,439	(1.52%)
2002	3,601,214	(100%)	1,875,362	(52.07%)	1,361,944	(37.81%)	306,029	(8.49%)	57,879	(1.6%)
2003	3,628,711	(100%)	1,843,228	(50.79%)	1,441,511	(39.72%)	287,572	(7.92%)	56,400	(1.55%)
2004	3,638,417	(100%)	1,795,369	(49.34%)	1,510,134	(41.5%)	281,140	(7.72%)	51,774	(1.42%)

Source: Ministerio de Educación de Chile (2005). Estadísticas de la Educación Año 2004.

Urquiola (2002) who expressed concern over the peer effect of such shifts, as the private schools cream off the more academically able pupils leaving a concentration of less talented students in the municipal schools. When social class is factored into the analysis, comparative studies concur that the performance gap in the SIMCE scores between the subsidized private and municipal sectors is small to nonexistent (Winkler and Rounds 1996). The significantly higher results of the fee-paying private schools are explained by their superior resources and the socioeconcomic profile of the student body (Bravo, Contreras and Sanhueza 1999, Mizala and Romaguera 2000). Even within the subsidized private sector the evidence of competition on academic achievement is mixed. While there is evidence that competition between schools in the same sector did drive up results as schools responded to the incentives of the voucher system (Gallegos 2002), a comparative study of religious and secular schools in the subsidized private sector revealed that only the church schools demonstrated a significantly higher performance in the SIMCE tests (McEwan 2001). Overall, these studies suggest that there is no demonstrable, causal relationship between the presence of private schools and a higher quality education. Conversely, there is strong evidence that the presence of the subsidized private schools in a *comuna* encourages high achieving students to move out of the municipal schools, with a negative effect on the composition of the student body for those left behind. As a result, competition widens the performance gap between public and private schools by altering the distribution of results but it does not raise standards overall.

The government's own data on school performance reflects the findings of these studies. The results of the SIMCE evaluations are presented by school administrative category (municipal, subsidized private and private) and by socioeconomic group (low, lower-middle, middle, upper-middle, and high); they are reported as a mean score so the average marks on the tests reflect the level of the average student. Consequently, they give no indication of the quality of teaching in schools, they provide no information on the levels of learning experienced by students, nor do they evaluate educational achievement against established external criteria (Larrañaga 2004). The individual students' marks are not made available to parents and the SIMCE evaluation does not form part of the internal marking systems operated by individual schools whereby teachers assess students on coursework and in periodic examinations (Eyzaguirre 2002). Finally, the SIMCE evaluations have no mechanism for recording value added (or otherwise) in schools where student achievement is above or below the expected levels based on the socioeconomic profile of the student intake. While the test scores have been published by individual schools since 1995, the compilation and reporting of the data has an impact on their potential uses by stakeholders and, in particular, their usefulness for parents in making an informed choice of school for their children is limited.

Despite the aforementioned limitations of the evaluation system, it has the benefit of producing data from test scores that are relative and so allow for the construction of rankings and gap analyses between the different categories of schools and between socioeconomic groups. A base value of 250 points was assigned to the mean score obtained in the 1998 assessment thereby allowing comparisons to be

Table 2: The Distribution of Primary and Secondary Educational Establishments by Administrative Category, 1990-2004

Year	Total Schools		Municipal		Subsidized Private		Private		Corporations	
	N (%)		N (%)		N (%)		N (%)		N (%)	
1990	9,811	(100%)	6286	(64.07%)	2694	(27.45%)	758	(7.72%)	73	(0.74%)
1991	9,801	(100%)	6273	(64.0%)	2678	(27.32%)	777	(7.92%)	73	(0.74%)
1992	9,802	(100%)	6294	(64.21%)	2651	(27.04%)	787	(8.02%)	70	(0.71%)
1993	9,831	(100%)	6276	(63.83%)	2653	(26.98%)	831	(8.45%)	71	(0.72%)
1994	9,810	(100%)	6243	(63.63%)	2637	(26.88%)	860	(8.76%)	70	(0.71%)
1995	10,296	(100%)	6377	(61.95%)	2790	(27.09%)	1058	(10.27%)	71	(0.69%)
1996	10,515	(100%)	6456	(61.39%)	2883	(27.41%)	1105	(10.5%)	71	(0.67%)
1997	10,318	(100%)	6341	(61.45%)	2857	(27.68%)	1050	(10.17%)	70	(0.67%)
1998	10,631	(100%)	6337	(59.6%)	3065	(28.83%)	1159	(10.9%)	70	(0.65%)
1999	10,712	(100%)	6297	(58.78%)	3170	(29.59%)	1175	(10.96%)	70	(0.65%)
2000	10,610	(100%)	6255	(58.95%)	3217	(30.32%)	1068	(10.06%)	70	(0.66%)
2001	10,799	(100%)	6242	(57.8%)	3459	(32.03%)	1031	(9.54%)	67	(0.62%)
2002	10,879	(100%)	6177	(56.77%)	3640	(33.45%)	991	(9.1%)	71	(0.65%)
2003	11,223	(100%)	6138	(54.69%)	4084	(36.38%)	930	(8.28%)	71	(0.63%)
2004	11,296	(100%)	6095	(53.95%)	4274	(37.83%)	862	(7.63%)	65	(0.57%)

Source: Ministerio de Educación de Chile (2005). Estadísticas de la Educación Año 2004.

made with the subsequent evaluations. Thus, using the official data from the SIMCE tests between 1998 and 2003, we can chart the relative positions of the municipal, subsidized private and fee-paying private schools. All categories have improved their performance in comparison to 1994 but there are marked differences in average achievement levels. The municipal schools score lower average results in the core subjects of mathematics and language compared to subsidized private schools and these lag far behind the fee-paying private schools. By 2003, the gap in achievement between school types had widened and two divergent trends were becoming apparent with the results in municipal schools falling and the private schools rising over time. The subsidized private sector registered little variation in results between 1998 and 2003. SIMCE scores by administrative category are detailed in Table 3. Over the same period, it is fair to conclude that little progress was made towards reducing the performance gap in mathematics and language over the five-year period between 1998 and 2003 in either of the core subjects measured. However, once again distinct trends in performance between socio-economic groups can be observed with results in mathematics consistently falling between 1998 and 2003 for the two lowest income groups, marginal changes for the middle-income group, and improved results for the upper middle and high-income groups. The differences in attainment by socio-economic group are detailed in Table 4.

The combined analysis of data from 2001 and 2003 (Tables 5 and 6) demonstrates that socio-economic background has a greater influence on children's performance in the tests than the type of school they attend. On average, low-income children perform at a similar level in language and mathematics in both municipal and subsidized private schools. This suggests that the subsidized private schools are not compensating educationally for the social disadvantages of the home and community environment, despite enjoying more resources than the municipal schools from the parental contributions to top up the voucher. Conversely, the municipal schools are 'achieving more with less', which suggests that the policy initiatives targeted at schools serving low-income communities have been relatively effective. Middle-income students in municipal schools out-performed their counterparts in the subsidized private schools in both mathematics and language in 2001 and 2003. Although the difference is not great, the findings demonstrate that the subsidized private schools are failing to add value to the performance of children from middle-income families who enjoy social, cultural and economic advantages compared to children from poor backgrounds. The municipal schools are achieving as good or better results than the subsidized private category for with fewer resources and a less advantageous intake of pupils. The SIMCE results confirm beyond doubt that that children from upper-middle and high-income families benefit disproportionately from the best educational services available. The majority of these students are educated in fee-paying private schools and the fees charged provide for human and capital resources; the selective admissions policies serve the purposes of social and academic screening. However, the data from 2003 (Table 6) reveals that students from upper-middle income families who remain within the municipal sector, on average, out-perform any other social group. It must be acknowledged that this represents a very small proportion of students nationally; they

Table 3: SIMCE Results for Year 2, secondary level, 1998, 2001 and 2003 by administrative category

Administrative Category	Maths Average Marks, 1998(+/- 1994)	Language Average Marks, 1998(+/- 1994)	Maths Average Marks, 2001(+/- 1998)	Language Average Marks, 2001(+/- 1998)	Maths Average Marks, 2003 (+/- 2001)	Language Average Marks, 2003(+/- 2001)
Municipal	237 (+9)	236 (+1)	233 (-4)	240 (+4)	230 (-3)	241 (+1)
Subsidized Private	252 (+11)	254 (+3)	249 (-3)	255 (+1)	250 (+1)	257 (+2)
Private	299 (+6)	297 (+6)	312 (+13)	298 (+1)	317 (+5)	301 (+3)
National Total	250 (+8)	250 (+1)	248 (-2)	252 (+2)	246 (-2)	253 (+1)

Note: The points scale assigns 250 points as the baseline average for marks obtained annually by subject in 1998. This allows comparability across years.
Changes of +/- of 1-5 on the previous evaluation are not considered statistically significant.
Changes of +/- 6 and above on the previous evaluation are considered statistically significant.
Source: Adapted from SIMCE/Ministerio de Educación de Chile, http://www.simce.cl/paginas/res_nacionales_1998.htm (accessed 16-06-05).
Adapted from SIMCE/Ministerio de Educación de Chile, http://www.simce.cl/paginas/res_nacionales_2001.htm (accessed 06-01-05).
Adapted from SIMCE/Ministerio de Educación de Chile, http://www.simce.cl/paginas/res_nacionales_2003.htm (accessed 16-06-05).

Table 4: SIMCE Results for Year 2, secondary level, 1998, 2001 and 2003 by socio-economic group

Socio-economic Group	Maths Average Marks, 1998	Language Average Marks, 1998	Maths Average Marks, 2001(+/- 1998)	Language Average Marks, 2001(+/- 1998)	Maths Average Marks, 2003 (+/- 2001)	Language Average Marks, 2003(+/- 2001)
A (low)	226	222	220 (-6)	228 (+6)	216 (-4)	227 (-1)
B (lower middle)	238	239	233 (-5)	241 (+2)	228 (-5)	241 (0)
C (middle)	270	274	269 (-1)	273 (-1)	267 (-2)	271 (-2)
D (upper middle)	295	294	299 (+4)	292 (-2)	300 (+1)	292 (0)
E (high)	309	303	320 (+11)	303 (0)	325 (+5)	306 (+3)
National Total	250	250	248 (-2)	252 (+2)	246 (-2)	253 (+1)

Note: The points scale assigns 250 points as the baseline average for marks obtained each year in each subject since 1998. This allows comparability across years.
Changes of +/- of 1-5 on the previous evaluation are not considered statistically significant.
Changes of +/- 6 and above on the previous evaluation are considered statistically significant.
Source: Adapted from SIMCE/Ministerio de Educación de Chile, http://www.simce.cl/paginas/res_nacionales_2001.htm (accessed 06-01-05).
Adapted from SIMCE/Ministerio de Educación de Chile, http://www.simce.cl/paginas/res_nacionales_2003.htm (accessed 16-06-05).

are educated in highly selective schools which are often located in wealthy areas of the capital but which are, nonetheless under municipal administration.

Over and above the debates on the relative merits of the different types of school, it is evident from Chile's performance in international evaluations that there are serious problems with the quality of education provided and the quality of teaching and learning lags far behind the industrialized countries of North America, Europe and the Pacific Rim. In the 1999 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) exercise, Chile was ranked 35th out of 38 participating countries, below countries with a similar level of economic development and far behind the countries of South East Asia and Europe (Navarro 2002, Wolff 2002). There was little improvement by the 2002 round of TIMSS, when Chile was ranked 36th in science and 39th in mathematics out of the 46 participating nations that returned data (Ministerio de Educación / Gobierno de Chile 2003). Chile, along with Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Peru, took part in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study in 2000 and 2001. Chile was the best performer among the Latin American countries in terms of access to education, student retention and results obtained. However, the assessment highlighted concerns over standards in reading comprehension, mathematics and science, and also over the levels of skills and knowledge required as a basis for life-long learning, thus indicating that the problem of low academic achievement is both regional and national. Moreover, the gap between Chile and the developed economies was notable for, while the OECD average for all areas was 500, Chile came in far below with an average of 410 points in reading, 384 in mathematics, and 415 in science (Ministerio de Educación / Gobierno de Chile / OECD 2000).

Cultural values, perceptions and preconceptions

Consumption and consumerism are among the most dramatic social changes that have occurred in Chile in recent decades and they are an intrinsic part of the neoliberal economic system that redefined social relationships in a highly individualized form. With reference to education, however, the act of consuming is far from straightforward. Education is both a public good and a privately acquired service; it is offered under asymmetrical market conditions that distort perceptions; actors have unequal access to information that restricts their ability to exercise choice. Furthermore, education is a fundamental mechanism of socialization, a means of integrating the individual into society, of acquiring personal and collective identity. It creates a shared cultural tradition and values, a body of knowledge, a means of making sense of the world around us, of fostering hopes and expectations for the future (UNDP 1998). In short, the education system is a school for citizens and the values transmitted through it will have an impact on social norms. The education reforms from 1980 onwards increased the role of the market in the provision of education. They encouraged schools and universities to consider their role as 'service providers', relating to their students as 'clients', developing greater awareness of marketing and responding to customer needs. The preference for private sector provision over state schools can be traced back to this period. A representative survey of the population of Santiago, the Chilean capital, revealed majority preference

Table 5: SIMCE Results for Year 2, secondary level, 2001 by socio-economic group and by administrative category

Socio-economic group	Language Average Marks, 2001 / Variation 1998	Language Average Marks, 2001 / Variation 1998	Language Average Marks, 2001 / Variation 1998	Mathematics Average Marks, 2001 / Variation 1998	Mathematics Average Marks, 2001 / Variation 1998	Mathematics Average Marks, 2001 / Variation 1998
	Municipal	Subsidized Private	Private	Municipal	Subsidized Private	Private
A (low)	228 (+6)	228 (+4)	-	220 (-6)	220 (-8)	-
B (lower middle)	237 (+2)	245 (+2)	-	229 (-5)	238 (-5)	-
C (middle)	274 (+3)	272 (-3)	-	272 (+5)	267 (-4)	-
D (upper middle)	-	291 (0)	293 (-4)	-	297 (+3)	301 (+4)
E (high)	-	-	303 (0)	-	-	321 (+12)
National Total	240	255 (+1)	298 (+)1	233 (-4)	249 (-3)	312 (+13)

Changes of +/- of 1-5 on the previous evaluation are not considered statistically significant.
Changes of +/- 6 and above on the previous evaluation are considered statistically significant.
Source: Adapted from SIMCE/Ministerio de Educación de Chile, http://www.simce.cl/paginas/res_nacionales_2001.htm (accessed: 06-01-05).

Table 6: SIMCE Results for Year 2, secondary level, 2003 by socio-economic group and by administrative category

Socio-economic group	Language Average Marks, 2003 / Variation 2001	Language Average Marks, 2003/ Variation 2001	Language Average Marks, 2003 / Variation 2001	Mathematics Average Marks, 2003 / Variation 2001	Mathematics Average Marks, 2003 / Variation 2001	Mathematics Average Marks, 2003/ Variation 2001
	Municipal	Subsidized Private	Private	Municipal	Subsidized Private	Private
A (low)	226 (-2)	229 (+1)	-	215 (-5)	220 (0)	-
B (lower middle)	238 (+1)	245 (0)	-	223 (-6)	235 (-3)	-
C (middle)	273 (-1)	270 (-2)	-	270 (-2)	265 (-2)	
D (upper middle)	317 (-3)	289 (-2)	292 (-1)	347 (+6)	294 (-3)	301 (0)
E (high)	-	-	306 (+3)	-	-	325 (+4)
National Total	241 (+1)	257 (+2)	301 (+3)	230 (-3)	(250 (+1)	317 (+5)

Changes of +/- of 1-5 on the previous evaluation are not considered statistically significant.
Changes of +/- 6 and above on the previous evaluation are considered statistically significant.
Source: Adapted from SIMCE/Ministerio de Educación de Chile, http://www.simce.cl/paginas/res_nacionales_2003.htm (accessed 16-06-05).

(59.8 per cent) for private education over the public school system (33.2 per cent) (CEP 1987). Subsequent surveys revealed that the trend towards private education was growing and, by 1992, just under a third of respondents stated a preference for a state school (29.5 per cent) compared with 67.1 per cent who would opt for the private sector (CEP 1992). While these studies reflect a preference for private schooling that could not always become a reality for many families, the survey data indicate that the market-oriented policies introduced by the military regime enjoyed a significant level of synchronicity with public opinion and values. Significantly, this situation continued and even intensified after the return to democracy suggesting that market values and the perception of the private as preferable to the public have been internalized by a majority of the population.

Freedom of choice is a key consideration in any debate on education in Chile and this right has been enshrined in law since 1980. Individuals and social groups make choices based on their beliefs, shared cultural values and social norms; on their aspirations, desires, fears, or frustrations; on the information available to them, the resources they can access and the constraints they face. This means that the complex process of decision-making is arrived at through a mixture of rational criteria and inferential processes. An individual might reach the 'right' decision, or one that can be objectively mistaken in a particular context yet which is, overall, quite plausible (Goldthorpe 1998). A recent study of parental choice in education in Chile provides an insightful and much needed contribution to understanding how and why certain decisions are reached when choosing a school (Elaqua, Schneider and Buckley 2006). A majority of parents across all social groups stated that the academic quality of the school was the most important criterion when choosing a school. Yet, this apparently rational statement of preference was not borne out by their actual behaviour. When drawing up a shortlist of schools for serious consideration, parents included establishments whose performance in the SIMCE tests varied widely, and only 1 in 4 opted for the highest performing school. Conversely, 0.5 per cent of parents cited the demographic composition of a school as an important criterion, yet 87 per cent only shortlisted schools with a similar student demographic composition. Interestingly, the subsidized private parents were most likely to select schools with a narrower demographic range and to choose the academically best performing school from their choice set. Similar findings are reported by Sapelli and Torche (2002) who refer to parents acting as if they knew the SIMCE results when choosing a school. Yet, the empirical evidence indicated that their choice was informed by discussions with peers and the demographic composition of the school intake. A study by Winkler and Rounds (1996) revealed that 'Among the perceived indicators of quality in Chile are the school name, the presence of school uniforms, and the background of school peers' (p. 367) and that schools which changed their names from Spanish to English and introduced uniforms increased enrolments. The findings of these studies suggest that parents are using demographics and other criteria as a proxy for the academic quality of the school. A survey by DESUC-COPESA (1997, cited in UNDP 1998) revealed parental fears over their children mixing with students from different social classes and backgrounds. The parents in the study perceived education not as a unifying force that would create shared values, culture and identity but as a means to social differentiation and distinction. This desire that their children should avoid

others who were different became more marked from primary, through to secondary and high education. A particular form of cultural consumption appears to be occurring through the education system, as families and individuals exercise choice in order to represent themselves in opposition to others, and thus produce meanings that, in their own way, give significance to their lives.

The desire for segregation has far-reaching implications for a society based on a shared national identity, with democratic values, and the potential for social mobility through individual and collective investment in education. The links between expenditure on education, schooling levels and social mobility in Latin America are well documented and they demonstrate that inequalities in schooling and attainment can translate into significant differences in earnings potential over the lifetime of an individual (Behrman, Gaviria, Szekely 2001, Dahan and Gaviria 1999, Andersen 2001). The Chilean education system is segmented and stratified by social class; society is notably class conscious and family background carries considerable weight; the labour market is far from meritocratic and individuals secure advantages through personal contacts. There is evidence that, when seeking employment, an individual's potential earnings are determined more by the school they attended, their family background and the neighbourhood in which they live than their academic performance at school or university (Núñez and Gutiérrez 2004). Attending a municipal, subsidized private or fee-paying private school conveys cultural information that is easily recognizable to other Chileans, including employers, who construct meaning accordingly, and make judgements that have a significant impact on life chances. While individuals can do little to alter their family background, they can aspire to effect change through their choice of school for their children, thereby constructing a peer group, a network of raised social capital as an investment for the future generation. The subsidized private schools appeal to Chile's growing middle class, even when their academic performance is no better than state schools. This heterogeneous group aspires to the private education which remains the preserve of Chile's elite and consequently beyond their means; they seek to distance themselves from those of a lower social class who are concentrated in the municipal schools.

Conclusions

Government policy on education post-1990 has, at its core, several related tensions. On the one hand, are policy interventions to promote equity and social mobility, to raise standards and improve the quality of education delivered. On the other, is a legislative framework whose ideological inspiration lies in the perpetuation of a marketized system that fosters competition and militates against a more equitable distribution of educational opportunity for all. These tensions are played out through the complex relationship between the state and the market over the financing and delivery of education. The transformative potential of education, its importance to national development, and social cohesion, has been reflected in an increased share of public spending. Yet, while state investment has grown so too has private expenditure as the cost of education is increasingly transferred on to individuals and their families by government financing initiatives. The tendency for children to attend schools with shared funding arrangements is higher among

wealthier households thereby increasing parental contributions to education. The shift from state schools to privately-run establishments is continuing as these schools grow in number and their share of the total enrolment increases. The popular perception of private schools as providing a higher quality education than state schools is reflected in the changing distribution of student numbers. This trend is likely to be self-perpetuating because, under the voucher system, school funding is allocated on a *per capita* basis and the shifts in student numbers will be reflected in new patterns of resource allocation between school categories. Despite the increased public investment overall, a greater proportion of this funding will be destined to the privately run education providers through the voucher system.

The tensions are also revealed in the socio-economic stratification of the education system that distributes access to quality education inequitably and contingent on the purchasing power of the family. Yet, the simplistic assumption of private=good, public=bad, is not supported by the school performance data for, when the socio-economic background of the students is factored in, the subsidized private schools perform no better than municipal schools. Consequently, they are failing to compensate for social disadvantage of low-income children and they are failing to add value for middle class children. In view of this, further destination of state resources to the subsidized private schools and the further expansion of this sector should be challenged as unlikely to provide a positive social return on public investment. While the education reforms in Chile have displayed a high degree of coherence, consensus and continuity since 1990, the goal of promoting equity through a competitive, market-oriented, and socially stratified system must be questioned in terms of the state's capacity for influence and action and the level of accountability to which schools in receipt of public funds are held.

The neoliberal reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s produced a cultural shift which saw the State displaced by the market, the public sector undervalued and replaced by the private sector, the collective national project dismantled and, in its place, the rise of individualism and consumerism. In this context, President Bachelet's recent statement on her hopes for the future of education in Chile seems far from the current reality. 'El país quiere también una educación más integrada. Quiere una escuela que enseñe a mirarnos como iguales en dignidad y derechos. Que enseñe a apreciarnos en nuestras diferencias y no a separarnos unos de otros con murallas de prejuicios, que son un fruto no deseado, de una educación nacional profundamente segmentada' (Bachelet 2006).

* * *

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Notes

1. Law No. 19,070
2. Law No. 19,410.
3. Law No. 19,504.
4. Private investment in education comprises expenditure by families on school fees and other associated costs such as tranport, books and other materials, or extra-curricular activities. It also includes donations be businesses to schools whether as financial contributions or in goods and services.
5. The calculations are based on current exchange rates for November 2005.
6. These fluctuations are likely to be influenced by the economic cycle as the fall in enrollments of the late 1990s correlates with the economic recession that began in 1998.

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