



2013

Through the Eyes of Urban Students: Educational Inequality and Socioeconomic Disparities in Santiago, Chile

Hillary Sapanski
Colby College

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Through the Eyes of Urban Students: Educational Inequality and Socioeconomic Disparities in Santiago, Chile

Hillary Sapanski
Colby College

Abstract

This project explores student perceptions of educational inequality in Santiago, Chile. Educational inequality in Santiago is statistically well documented; this study is novel in that it gives voice to the students. Despite a major emerging middle class, across all classes there is an overwhelming awareness of inequality. The results in this study are two-fold: not only do the diverse student experiences illustrate the stark divisions in the Chilean education system and society, but their experiences also demonstrate the development of a critical consciousness empowering students to act. Although there are limitations, student contributions to the ongoing conversation about inequality and education offer a pathway toward effective reform. As Chile's society transitions away from a post-dictatorship society, students are actively demonstrating leadership and addressing societal norms that for so long have gone unquestioned.

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Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without many people who are all very important to me. The support system I had, despite being all over the world, was incredible. My advisor, Patrice Franko, forever a role model, guided and helped me throughout the whole process, despite being in either Brazil or California. She believed in me when I myself did not, and pushed me to produce the best work I could. My reader, Adam Howard, inspired me to think about inequality and social class through student perceptions, and he also introduced me to Paulo Freire, the inspiration of my thesis. Although both of these professors were on sabbatical, they were both extremely valuable and helped me shape my thesis.

On campus at Colby, Jen Yoder, Director of the Global Studies Program was there every step of the way, and was literally right across the hall. Her positive energy and encouragement kept me going from week to week, and helped me find my way when I was in a writer's block or just needed to talk things out. Education Program Director Mark Tappan, although not directly involved in my thesis, taught me about social justice, critical pedagogical theory, and how to be critical over the academic year. My four years of learning at Colby with the Global Studies Program and the Education Program allowed me to create this project. I would also like to extend my gratitude to David Hunt, for his continued generosity to Colby and for funding my field research in January 2013.

To my fellow thesis writers: Georgie Hurst, Grace Schlesinger, Claire Dunn and Abbott Matthews, I don't know if I would still be writing a thesis if it wasn't for our group! Whether it was at Colby or during our January abroad, you were whom I confided in! To my family, my biggest support system of all, thank you for giving me the opportunity to pursue my dream of returning to Chile, and for loving me unconditionally. You'll never know how much your support and love means to me, and I can't wait to bring you to Chile one day.

In Chile, none of this would have been possible without the help of Director Roberto Villaseca and Assistant Director Rossanna Zurita from The SIT Chile: Comparative Education and Social Change Program. My semester abroad forever changed my life and introduced me to a passion for Chile, education and social justice that only seems to grow everyday. Not only did they challenge and broaden my perspective, but they also taught me more than I'll ever know. I would also like to thank Luis Vicencio from *El Colegio de los Profesores*, who put me into contact with notable student leaders, and took the time out of his workday to help me find students to interview during my fieldwork in January 2013. Another big thank you to fellow Colby student Marguerite Paterson, who helped me find student contacts in Santiago when I found myself in dire need for interviews.

And of course, I would like to acknowledge and thank all of the students that I interviewed, and to the students who are continuing to fight, everyday, for a better education for Chile. Thank you for challenging societal norms, for fighting for a cause you truly believe in, and for not giving up. You give me hope for the fight towards social justice, and give me the motivation to do the same. ¡*Venceremos!*

Love,
Hillary

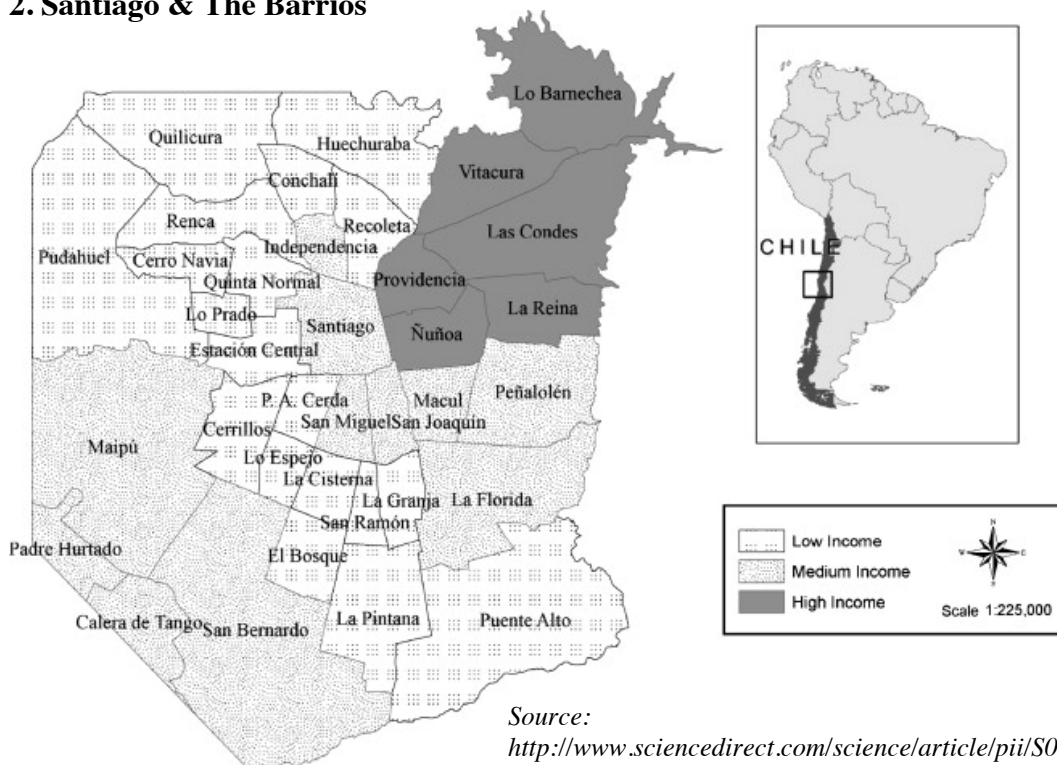
Maps

1. Chile



Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/south-america/chile/>

2. Santiago & The Barrios



Source:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204608001801>

Preface

When I was in Chile over January, I left with more questions than I came with. I found myself overwhelmed and stuck on what it was I was investigating. I was asking students about all sorts of issues, from their educational experiences and perceptions of inequality, to their views of the student movement, and what the most important education reform was to them. After every interview I had, I felt empowered. Despite their different perspectives, I understood where each student was coming from, their answers all made sense to me, and I couldn't identify one as right or wrong. I was receiving a variety of responses from students, from wealthy students who have been privileged and have had successful lives, to those who are on the front lines of the movement. How can I make claims about education reform in Chile when I didn't have one dominating answer with a small sample?

After my three and a half weeks, I had compiled all of this data, and I didn't know what to do with it. What was I arguing? I found myself wanting to explain why inequality exists in a society, and how as people, we react to inequality, how we incorporate it into our daily lives, how we accept these social hierarchies resulting from numerous factors, and how I sense the inequality between even Chileans and me, based on my education, nationality and income level. I remember during my time in Chile how uncomfortable I felt in certain areas of the city; I think I feared people's perception of me. This made me realize how much perceptions of inequality can shape a society, and made me question: why are these perceptions of inequality so powerful? And in thinking of the students and their identification of inequality, what does this say about their educational experience and their lives? And how do we change this? I understood that a lot of student

perceptions were generally based on their social class and opportunities to education. Those who had the opportunities to go to great schools felt that it was okay to add more scholarships rather than reform the system, because they were able to do it. But then there were those that were unhappy with the education they received. I came to realize, however, that I was learning about students' critical consciousness.

I was motivated to do this project because I thought it was important to not only look at Chile's education system from a student's perspective, but to demonstrate the validity of student perceptions and experiences. We take professional, official knowledge to be the end-all, superior perspective, but in reality, that knowledge has gaps: it doesn't encompass all of the local knowledge needed to truly understand how certain systems and societies work. Students, as subjects of the education system, are aware of the education they are receiving, good or bad. They perceive people in specific ways because of their upbringing, because of societal norms.

The Chilean youth have a level of passion that I can't say I have experienced among my generation in the United States. Even as I read the survey results, I found myself emotional: the amount of passion these students have is something very special, and powerful. The students who are part of the movement firmly believe they can make a difference. The revolution rhetoric has been a common discourse in many Latin American countries within the last century. What I think scares many people, including those within the United States, is that we perceive revolution as being geared towards communism and socialism, because of reforms such as nationalization that, although is meant to provide a free, equal quality education to all, can take away individual gains and success. But these students are critically aware of themselves, of their place in society, of

general assumptions that we as people generally let happen. And they believe they can politically transform their society. So why don't we?

Chile is without a doubt the place where I have been the happiest, but what I constantly ask myself is: why? Why am I so happy, especially when I talk to these students who are struggling, who are fighting for a better education, students who are telling me that Chile lives a lie in its economy, that it is very unequal. And I think it is because I feel challenged, because I am excited about Chile's future, and because I feel empowered.

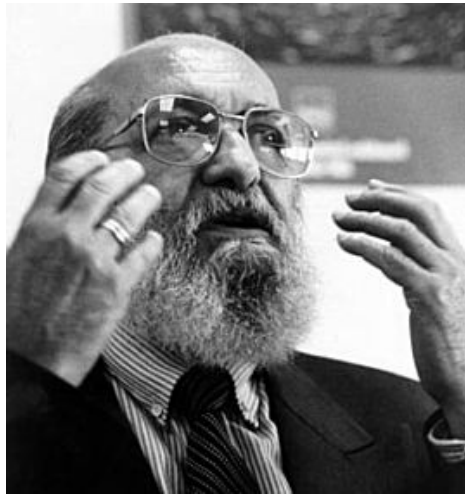
Not only does critical theory support the experiences of students within the education system, but Paulo Freire's process of critical consciousness demonstrates that these students *have* the ability, and are empowered to make change, but they are limited by politics of power within the government, Pinochet's laws, politicians, and older generations who for so long have remained silent. Paulo Freire said,

“Just as objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance. If humankind produce social reality (which in the ‘inversion of the praxis’ turns back upon them and conditions them), then transforming that reality is a historical task, a task for humanity.”¹

Chile is in transition, and these students will become the new governmental leaders, the new parents, the new teachers, the new lawyers, doctors, and businessmen. Chile will change. I can't say I know exactly when or how, but I think it will be through the students and the leaders they are soon becoming.

¹ Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. (New York, 1970) p 51.

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970)



Source: www.pedagogyoftheoppressed.com

“In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform” –*p. 49.*

“It is essential for the oppressed to realize that when they accept the struggle for humanization they also accept, from that moment, their total responsibility for the struggle.” –*p. 68.*

“Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in men’s incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search—a search, which can be carried out only in communion with others. Hopelessness is a form of science, of denying the world and fleeing from it.” –*p. 91.*

“The revolution is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor by the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakable solidarity.” –*p. 129.*

“Some may think that to affirm dialogue—the encounter of women and men in the world in order to transform the world—is naively and subjectively idealistic. There is nothing, however, more real or concrete than people in the world and with the world, than humans with other humans—and some people against others, as oppressing and oppressed classes” –*p. 129.*

Introduction

“I do not feel proud to have gone to a school whose main motto implies discrimination. If education in Chile were good in all educational establishments, what motive would there even be for the existence of *Instituto Nacional*? None. In other words, if my old school could have offered me the same quality of teaching as *Instituto Nacional*, I would not have had to change schools.”²

On December 28, 2012, Benjamin Gonzalez Guzman, President of the Student Center, took the stage at *Instituto Nacional*'s commencement ceremony to give a speech on behalf of his classmates at the most elite, traditional high school in all of Chile. However, what he said took everyone in the audience by surprise, even his family and closest friends. Benjamin put into question the education and culture of *Instituto Nacional* in Santiago, and the issue of educational inequality in Chile. He critiqued the “best” secondary education in all of Chile, pointing out the parts of history left out in the curriculum, the glorifying of leaders who killed thousands. He pointed out elitist, classist attitudes, and how their traditional education was geared towards economic success rather than happiness and learning how to be critical thinkers. He also addressed the unequal education system in Chile, emphasizing that if the system were actually equal, *Instituto Nacional* would not even exist. Benjamin's speech went viral throughout Chile, Latin America, even to other parts of the world. And at the time he was only seventeen.

Benjamin's act of courage demonstrates Chilean students' critical awareness of education inequality in Chile. His speech highlighted values of Chilean society and educational institutions that promote inequality. Among the countries in the Global South, Chile has an intricate story of success and inequality. It is an upper middle-income country considered to be the first developed country of Latin America, yet it battles high socioeconomic income disparity. Chile also struggles with educational inequality and

² Translated quote from Benjamin Gonzalez Guzman's Speech, 12/28/12

perceptions of unfairness in its public education system. Although twenty years of Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship created a booming, export-based economy, it widened socioeconomic disparities and privatized the education system, leaving the Chilean people unequal and divided.³ Today, the Chilean education system mirrors the socioeconomic income gap in its inequalities, quality and access. Students in particular are vocal in their discontent of their government and the existing societal inequalities. But are they really being heard? Benjamin was on all the major news stations, and went viral on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. But Benjamin went to a discriminatory and elitist school that eighteen Chilean presidents had attended. Was his speech truly acknowledged in a place where tradition outweighs equality of opportunity?

Benjamin is a prime example of the powerful knowledge, or critical consciousness, that many students have: an in-depth understanding of societal and political contradictions that if acted upon effectively can promote social change. Since the mid 2000s, students have consistently demonstrated and protested for a free, quality education for all. Understanding student perceptions and their knowledge across social classes can help identify current problems within the system, and provide insight for the road towards education reform. I would like to suggest that understanding students' critical consciousness can add to our use of professional knowledge beyond data analysis, teachers, administrators and the government. However, I will demonstrate the current limitations preventing this effective dialogue. Although student knowledge hasn't yet changed the education system, I argue Chilean society is in a state of transition. There's

³ "Lessons from the Students." *The Economist* 2012. April 12, 2012. www.economist.com

growing discontent around specific educational and economic policies, and a younger generation who did not live under Pinochet becoming its future leaders.

Against a backdrop of critical theory, a literature review of historical, economic and educational aspects of Chile, this thesis narrates the story of Chilean students.

Looking through the lens of Chilean students not only demonstrates real-life examples of the existing inequalities of the system, but it shows that the students are critically aware of their surroundings, and that they are questioning societal assumptions.

In this setting, I set out to investigate how students perceive inequality and their educational experiences. My research questions were as follows:

How does a student's experience in school and society shape his or her view on education inequality in Chile?

- How do students of different social classes understand *their own* educational opportunities and inequalities?
- How do students understand inequality? What aspects or characteristics of inequality do students point to? What does this say more broadly about inequality in Chilean society?
- What proposals do students have to improve equity in education? What can we learn from student voices compared to professional ones? What are the limitations?

Student perceptions and experiences are valuable pieces of knowledge that should be considered when combating social injustice. Systematically studied student views contribute to changing the educational environment in Chile if heard and respected by those in power.

Part I: An Overview of Chile: Education, Inequality and Activism

“The current movements of rebellion, especially those of youth, while they necessarily reflect the peculiarities of their respective settings, manifest in their essence this preoccupation with people as beings in the world and with the world—preoccupation with *what* and *how* they are ‘being.’ As they place consumer civilization in judgment, denounce bureaucracies of all types, demand the transformation of the universities (changing the rigid nature of the teacher-student relationship and placing that relationship within the context of reality), propose the transformation of reality itself so that universities can be renewed, attack old orders and establishes institutions in the attempt to affirm human beings as the Subjects of decision, all these movements reflect the style of our age, which is more anthropological than anthropocentric”

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 43.

Chapter 1: Methodology & Framework

This project is about real students. My fieldwork in January 2013 looked at the educational experiences and perceptions of high school and university students from distinct socioeconomic backgrounds in Santiago, Chile. My research involved participant observation, informal conversations, interviews and an online survey with the goal of actively listening to student voices.

The interview questions addressed educational and societal experiences, identifying the types of schools they went to and the quality of their education. I analyzed experiences using critical education theory, which questions the way things are, and asks questions about power. In this lens, I focused on how and why certain schools perpetuate issues of social justice. Further, I asked students about how they visualize inequality, their perceptions and level of participation in the student movement, and their suggestions for education reform. Some interviews incorporated more personal stories, their family situations, individual goals, and fears. The survey questions addressed these issues more

generally, and also asked about their future aspirations, and if they felt they were accessible to them. Although I primarily expected to find perceptions of inequality, I also sought signs of perceived equality of opportunity, and alternatives to the student movement. Interview and survey questions can be found in the *Appendix*. I attempted to interview students in distinct social classes to have a full range of perspectives, so I could assess how educational opportunities varied, and how that affected the experiences and perceptions of the education system, inequality, and the student movement.

My methodology was to understand student perceptions. I wanted to validate their experiences and to observe their developing critical consciousness while also giving them a voice. Thus, Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was the fundamental framework of my research. I use Freire's concept of critical consciousness to shine light on student voices. Rooted in Marxist theory, this concept focuses on a deep understanding of the world by perception and exposure to the social and political contradictions in a society. This understanding can empower the oppressed to become vocal and act. Freire says, "The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection—true reflection—leads to action...to achieve this praxis, however, it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason."⁴ Due to the student movement, which has shone light on socioeconomic disparities, many Chilean students seem to have reflected on their situations and have acted, though with limitations. I am interested however in all perceptions, not just the ones who have protested, because I believe all people have this critical consciousness, but it just might not be yet realized.

⁴ Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* p. 66.

This project demonstrates the developing understanding of students through their perceptions and experiences, encouraging us to take a second look at realities of educational inequality, and its complexities. It is a case study of Freire's process of critical consciousness that faces hierarchal power structures and conditions that limits empowerment. I hope at the very least this study encourages people to think about how inequality exists in a society, how we ourselves perceive inequality, and what would happen if students were more respected and had more power to transform society.

Initial Expectations of Outcome

In this study, it was hard to state a clear hypothesis, because the goal was to *listen* and *share* the experiences and stories students have had with educational inequality. I didn't want to test a single theory in this project, but I did have expectations of outcome. I expected students from lower, middle and upper social classes to have distinct levels of awareness of inequality, due to different experiences within the education system and within their own everyday experience. I also anticipated educational inequality to be on many student minds across social classes due to the current socioeconomic disparities, the history of the student movement and the dynamic of living in a post-dictatorship society. I perceived that perhaps the lower and middle class students would be more inclined to participate in the student movement than higher-income youth. Most importantly, however, I came into this study with the idea that understanding the critical consciousness of students across different social classes in Santiago, Chile would be valuable to the larger, professional discourse of educational inequality. I also sought out signs of hope, of indications that the student discourse would soon be respected by the government and acted upon.

In the Field: The Experience, Challenges and Successes

My fieldwork research over January 2013 in Santiago, Chile was an incredible experience. Things of course did not go as planned; at times I wasn't sure what I was doing in Santiago, or how this project would all come together. Yet, by the end, I had met an incredible group of students, and shared extremely valuable conversations. I came away with student voices ringing through my ears, echoing avenues for change, hope, and revolution. Voices spoke of the realities of the education system and Chilean society; voices expressed the phenomenon of inequality. I felt I had come away with voices that were *real*. I listened to the voices of future leaders.

Because it was summer vacation during January, my research was not conducted in a school setting. I coordinated with SIT Study Abroad, *El Colegio de los Profesores* (Chile's Teacher Federation Union), and other contacts to meet students and youth. Luis Vicencio, from *El Colegio de los Profesores*, first took me to some high schools to meet the principals and ask about interviewing students. The two high schools we went to were very different. One was a traditional public high school, which was very elitist; the other, was in a rougher part of the neighborhood, and lacked in resources. He then brought me to a matriculation school fair in La Plaza de Armas, in the Santiago Center where I talked with students who were a part of their high schools' Student Centers. Most of the students I talked to at the fair were involved with the student movement. Luis also put me in touch with Universidad de Santiago student leader Camilo Ballesteros, a notable figure in the 2011 student movement who worked alongside Camila Vallejo. Interviewing him was very exciting, but also informative in understanding where the movement is headed, and his reasons for being a part of it. I also had the opportunity to interview Benjamin

Guzman from *Instituto Nacional*, who courageously spoke at his graduation about the problems with the elitist education he received, and overall inequalities.

In addition, a Colby student who was also in Santiago helped me immensely. She put me in touch with her friends from Universidad Católica Pontificia de Chile, and I was able to interview five of them. Four of them I met in an office in Santiago Center, and the other I met during an *Enseña Chile*⁵ summer institute session in Puente Alto, a barrio on the outskirts of Santiago. This interview was perhaps the most in depth, and was with a student from a very low socioeconomic background, who made her way to Universidad Católica, the first student to do so from her high school in forty years. The rest of my interviews I found through my own contacts. One student I interviewed lives in Valparaíso, an hour and a half from Santiago, but his interview was very helpful and suggested alternatives that don't normally come up in the active student discourse, because he was Pro-Pinochet. Another interviewee was a good friend of mine, who was very critical of Chilean society and the emerging middle class. Each interview was unique, some lasted ten minutes, some were over an hour, but every interview was important. The students had a lot to say about their experience in school and their feelings about Chilean society, and together demonstrated different aspects of society.

In my final sample, I had nine official interviews, (six male, three female) with students in high school, university, or who had recently graduated. I also had four informal conversations with high school students at a school fair. The age range of students I spoke with (in interviews and informal conversations) was fifteen years to

⁵ *Enseña Chile* was founded on the premise of Teach for America. I went to observe the summer institute one day, where I sat in on the teachers being taught by *Enseña Chile* Corps Members, and then watched them teach students. I then returned to interview a college student who was working for them over the summer.

twenty-six years. After returning from Chile, two of my friends who are Chilean students helped me send out an open-ended online survey to university students through Facebook, and I received twenty responses. My sample is small, but each survey and interview provided a lens into the experience and perspective of the students. If time allowed I would have without a doubt reached out to more. Students ranged socioeconomically, in level and type of schooling, as well as where they lived in Santiago. I identified social classes based on the neighborhood they live in, since the neighborhoods of Santiago are demographically segregated socioeconomically. The majority of students whom I interviewed were in the middle class, but I felt that the voices in the lower and upper classes that I interviewed were extremely powerful.

During my fieldwork, I was impressed with the themes students pointed to in discussing educational inequality. Themes included political ideology, the student movement, the neoliberal economic model, and capitalism, even the Chilean constitution. Further, this idea of the Chilean consciousness and mentality echoed throughout the voices of the students, many of them addressed it directly. The students made me think about my own educational experience, my opportunities, and my perceptions of inequality. They made me really think about inequality beyond the scale of my project: why does inequality exist, how do we understand it? Can it be fixed? If so, how?

The student narrative was not only about unequal education but challenged broader societal patterns of inequality. It was clear that students have an exceptional perspective worth being listened to. This project shows some of the current student discourses surrounding educational inequality in Chile, after a military dictatorship had silenced society for so long. Chile is in transition, and these students are its future leaders.

Conceptual Framework: Understanding Student Perceptions of Education Inequality

In addition to Paul Freire's critical consciousness, I also used available literature on perception, discourse, knowledge, social class, issues of social justice, and education reform to conduct and analyze this study. I approached this project using educational critical theory, which questions power relations in a society, because it was the most effective way for me to observe inequality and social justice among the different types of schools in Chile. I also use literature from psychology and anthropology sources to understand perceptions, discourse and cultural experiences.

Perceptions of Inequality

The LLAKES Institute in London's paper in October 2012 titled, "Perceptions of inequalities: implications for social cohesion" shows that individual history, experiences, gender, social class, educational background, income, social norms and ideology are just a few concepts that shape perceptions of inequality. This paper helped me validate and frame perceptions in my research. The beginning of the paper explains concepts and terms that can be used in relation to *perception*, such as experience, beliefs, understandings, values or judgments, where the individual makes a mental effort to make sense of and evaluate their surroundings and situations. The paper focuses on the psychological aspects of perceptions and inequality, but it helped me identify these concepts and how students obtain their perceptions. In the US, for example, race often comes into play in perceptions of inequality. This also plays a part in Chile. The authors state, "Perceptions of inequality are influenced by standards adopted by individuals in terms of what they consider to be unequal or unjust...hence, what one considers unequal—and how such inequality should be addressed—depends on societal norms and

the conception of social justice used.”⁶ Understanding how perceptions are constituted helped me analyze my data; societal norms do differ from class to class, and it has in effect shaped different perceptions.

Box 1.1: Key Terms

Equality: Equality is referenced as, “equality of opportunity to achieve desirable ends,” and “equality of condition where there is an attempt to make conditions of life equal for relevant social groups” (LLAKES pg 11).

Inequality: When I use inequality, I am referencing the differences in outcomes for students both in education and in society (LLAKES 2012, 12).

Perception: Perception, in social psychology, is ‘the science of human thought, feeling and behavior as they are influenced by and have influence on other people’ (Hogg and Vaughan 2002, 41) (LLAKES 2012, 14). When understanding student perceptions the goal is to analyze one’s effort to make sense of what he or she is experiencing.

Source: “Perceptions of Inequalities: implications for social cohesion,” released by Center For Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES) from the Institute of Education at the University of London in October 2012.

This study also looks at the institutions and circumstances young people point to as responsible for the inequality or for their experiences. Do students see their situation as being unequal or unjust? And what impact did their experiences have on either sense of personal agency, and through this, their social attitudes and future civic participation?⁷ This study suggests that much of the student experiences come from situations with family and friends and in school.

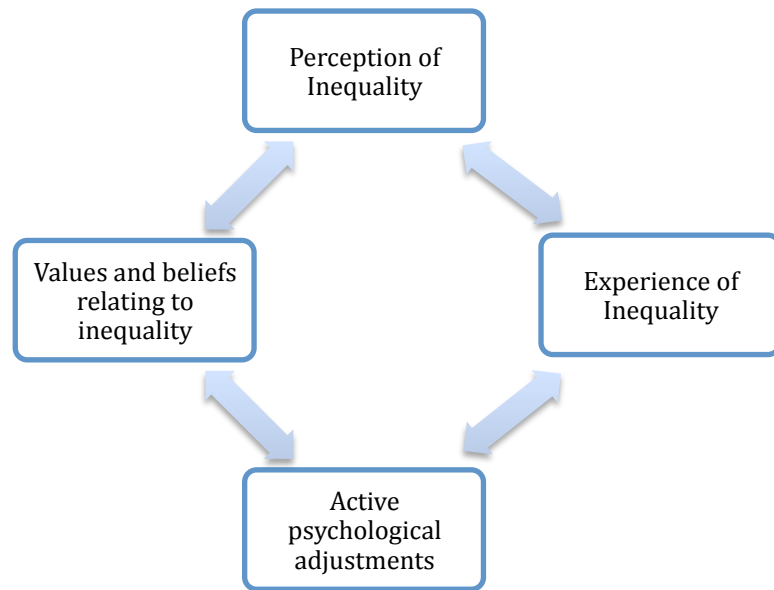
Perceptions of inequality are important because one’s awareness of inequality affects one’s attitude and behavior. How students experience and perceive inequality is

⁶ Christine Han, Jan German Janmaat, Bryony Hoskins & Andy Green. “Perceptions of Inequalities: implications for social cohesion.” *LLAKES: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies*. Research Paper 35, 2012. www.llakes.org.uk. Pp. 28-29.

⁷ Ibid, p 59.

potentially one of the critical mechanisms linking actual inequality to a range of social outcomes.⁸ Figure 1.1 below illustrates how inequality and perception are connected. The perception of inequality is based on one's experience with inequality, one's values and beliefs relating to inequality, and one's beliefs and experiences.⁹

Figure 1.1: Factors Influencing, and Influenced by, Perceptions of Inequality



Source: *LLAKES 2012*

The LLAKES 2012 Report points out that different forms of inequality can reinforce each other; in this case, income differences can correlate with education inequity and social class. In addition, the report quotes social psychologist Robinson (1983), who states, “Perceptions of inequality refer to people’s impressions of the nature and extent of inequality in the opportunities available to particular social groups, in the treatment accorded them by other social groups and institutions, and in the conditions of

⁸ Christine Han. “Perceptions of Inequalities: implications for social cohesion.”

⁹ Ibid.

life that they experience.”¹⁰ Perception involves someone trying to make sense of situations. In our case, student perceptions demonstrate their opportunities within the education system, their treatment and their experience with inequality.

Given this relationship, it is imperative to understand societal perceptions surrounding inequality. Many people perceive education as a solution for everything: poverty, socioeconomic inequality, violence, and crime.¹¹ As we will investigate, the Chilean education system is often perceived as causing inequality rather than providing a solution. In chapter 3 we will see that many families feel that in order to give their child a good education, they will have to endure a large debt.¹² This is because most Chileans perceive that private schools are good, and public schools are bad.

Using Perceptions: Jason Corburn & Local Knowledge

Similar to Freire’s “critical consciousness,” anthropologist Jason Corburn’s framework of “local knowledge,” which he describes in his ethnography *Street Science* (2005) focuses on the hierarchal discourses of environmental health and justice. His framework can be adapted to hierarchal discourses of education, where local knowledge is a student’s perception of educational inequality. Further, environmental justice is analogous to social justice. Corburn points to Theda Skocpol (1999) and her book *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, which states, “today’s professionals see themselves as experts who can best contribute to national well being by working with other specialists to tackle complex technical and social problems.”¹³ In Chile,

¹⁰ Christine Han. “Perceptions of Inequalities: implications for social cohesion.” p 15.

¹¹ John Marsh. Class Dismissed. (New York 2011).

¹² “Chile: Progress and its discontents.” *The Economist*. 12 Apr 2012. www.economist.com

¹³ Jason Corburn. Street Science (MIT Press 2005). p 495.

professionals and government officials don't find it necessary to work with non-professional fellow citizens, let alone students. However, *knowledge of the locals*, obtained through experience, social norms, symbols, stories, the human senses and everyday living, has a lot more to offer than many realize. Local, or in our case student knowledge can be effectively used in conjunction with professional, or governmental/official objectives.

Student perceptions of inequality can be discovered by learning about their everyday experiences in their lives, in school, by hearing stories, understanding their identity, and how they symbolize and perceive inequality. Corburn argues that local knowledge has contributed to new policies and management practices in a positive way. The idea of "street science" is the interaction between local and professional knowledge. By juxtaposing student perceptions and discourses of education inequality with professional knowledge (which can be done by browsing the Chilean Ministry of Education website, for example), from both the academic and policy communities, we can point to ways of how to bridge that gap and bring student perceptions to the conversation. Like Corburn, one can research through participant-observation, shadowing community members, unstructured interviews, conversations, and facilitate a dialogue on educational inequality.

Politics and the Study of Discourse: Michel Foucault

In order for the local knowledge of the students to be acted upon, students must make it a central discourse. Michel Foucault's argument about discourse is also very influential in the framework of this project. In the beginning of his chapter "Politics and the Study of Discourse" in the book, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (1991), he lists questions that guided his own work: "Does a mode of thought which introduces discontinuity and the constraints of system into the history of the mind not remove all basis for a progressive political intervention? Does it not lead to the following dilemma: either the acceptance of the system or the appeal to an unconditioned event, to an eruption of exterior violence which alone is capable of upsetting the system?"¹⁴

Foucault dives into an argument about discourse, and how, if you can transform a discourse, you can transform power relations, because power relations in a society are driven by power. In the framework of Foucault, the student discourse, especially in terms of the student movement, *can* indeed transform society, and could transform the power dynamic of the government versus the Chilean people. However, the idea that a student discourse should carry more weight is too often dismissed because of power relations in society, and in effect, the power of discourse in a society. However, if the student discourse had more power, how would that change the power dynamic of Chile and lead to change?

¹⁴ Michel Foucault. "Politics and the study of discourse." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds. Great Britain, Harvester Wheatsheaf: 1991 p. 53.

From A Larger Societal Perspective: Marx & Education

Furthermore, looking at the Chilean education system through a Marxian framework is crucial when understanding the students' experiences. This perspective observes the social and cultural dynamic of Chile, and identifies overarching social trends of inequality. Progressive education scholars as well as the student movement in Chile tend to turn to Marx to explain the issues of injustice in education. Scholar Jean Anyon (2011), Professor of Social and Educational Policy in the Urban Education Doctoral Program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, applies two concepts in Marxian theory to educational inequality relevant in this study. First, capitalism is a primary source for systemic social, educational and economic inequality. Secondly, social class is "an explanatory social and educational heuristic."¹⁵ The analysis of culture that accompanies this capitalist system can be neo-Marxist practice otherwise known as critical classroom pedagogy.¹⁶

This framework has allowed me to not only look at the economic model of Chile and investigate societal effects on education, but it helped me look at perception, because many Chilean students pointed to the economy and Chile's neoliberal economic model to describe their educational experience. Looking through the lens of a Marxian framework, one can see how the neoliberal, market-based system in Chile has funneled money and power to a small elite group, making Chile one of the countries with the highest socioeconomic inequalities. In addition, in critical pedagogy, scholars must look beyond the walls of the classroom, into the different communities where students live, to see the social justices, opportunities and rights they do or do not have. As we will learn later in

¹⁵ Jean Anyon. Marx & Education (New York & London 2011).

¹⁶ Ibid.

chapter 3, Anyon identifies stark differences in the resources and culture of schools based on the income level of the community.

Critical Theory: Combating Social Justice in Schools

A major component of this project is looking at education from a critical perspective. According to Patricia Hinchey (2004) in her *Finding Freedom in the Classroom: A Practical Introduction to Critical Theory*, critical theory surrounding pedagogy is useful because “it helps open our minds to possibilities we once found unimaginable...Critical theory is about possibility, hope and change.”¹⁷ Most importantly, however, critical theory questions *power*. Who has power, how do they keep it, and how can things be different?¹⁸ Questioning the framework and functions of the educational system also involve questioning who is in control and why things continue the way they do. This ideology is essential in this project, because not only am I questioning institutional practices within the school system, but also I’m curious how the power dynamic could change in a way to give students more voice, validating their experiences and knowledge. Critical theory supports Freire’s process of critical consciousness, and the students’ knowledge is not only valuable, but it can also be empowering.¹⁹

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¹⁷ Patricia Hinchey. Finding Freedom in the Classroom: A Practical Introduction to Critical Theory. (New York: 2004) p. 15.

¹⁸ Ibid, p 17.

¹⁹ Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed p. 85.

Paulo Freire states, “I never advocate either a theoretic elitism or a practice ungrounded in theory, but the unity between theory and practice. In order to achieve this unity, one must have an epistemological curiosity—a curiosity that is often missing in dialogue as conversation.”²⁰ Essentially, combining the practice and the theory is combining student experiences with education policies and the professional knowledge that makes the decisions. Freire’s pedagogy also demonstrates the oppressed versus the oppressor relationship, analogous to Jason Corburn’s study of local versus professional knowledge, or Michel Foucault’s discourse and power relations. Freire puts forth the notion that students can transform their experiences into usable knowledge, and that they need to. If they don’t, they will never be able to engage in the process of learning and knowing. The Chilean state, professionals, and officials currently do not validate the students and their rhetoric. Freire notes in his work that the oppressed are not “marginals”, they are not living outside society; they’ve always been on the inside. Thus, the students must empower themselves to transform society, so that they can be included in the on-going dialogue with the government. This study presents a small selection of knowledgeable, yet often-forgotten student voices that can provide exceptional insight on how to address and combat educational inequality.

²⁰ Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed p. 19.

Chapter 2: An Introduction to Chile

In the context of a post-dictatorship society, high socioeconomic inequality, and an on-going student movement, we begin our story. Before introducing student perceptions, it is imperative to capture a basic understanding of Chile's society. First, we will look into a brief history of education in Chile, then the socioeconomic disparities and inequalities that exist. Finally, I'll discuss the student movement, which is important to this study because not only has it brought the discourse on educational inequality to the table, but it also shines light on the students, their voices, and their power.

A Brief History of Education: Before, During and Post-Dictator Augusto Pinochet

A nuanced understanding of student perceptions of educational inequality in Chile requires an appreciation of the history and basic framework of the Chilean education system, as well as its current policies and performance. Chile has the most comprehensive school choice system in the world, yet its performance remains highly controversial.²¹ This section will first review the recent history of Chilean education, including Pinochet's reforms that altered the education system. I will then address the university system and the overall performance of education in Chile.

Free, public education was introduced to Chile in the 1920s. Expansion of the system in the 1960s led to universal access of primary and secondary schools regardless of class or race. The system's track is comprised of eight years of primary education, four years of secondary, and a choice of three types of higher education: college, professional institutes and technical institutes.²² By 1970, as a result of universal access to primary and

²¹ Gregory Elacqua, Dante Contreras & Felipe Salazar. "Scaling Up in Chile." *Education Next* 2008 pp. 62-68. www.educationnext.org

²² Florencia Torche. "Privatization Reform and Inequality of Educational Opportunity: The Case of Chile." *Sociology of Education* 78 (4) pp. 316-343. 2005.
<http://soe.sagepub.com/content/78/4/316.abstract>

secondary education, 93 percent of children were enrolled in primary schools, and 49 percent enrollment in secondary schools.²³

Salvador Allende, the first democratically elected socialist president in Chile, broadened education inclusiveness in 1970. Allende aimed to provide more education facilities to minorities, such as the Mapuche, Chile's largest indigenous population, as well as the poorest people in Chilean society who did not have access to social welfare programs.²⁴ Allende and his Socialist party, *Unidad Popular*, proposed a reform known as *Escuela Nacional Unificada*, (National Schools United), which sought to democratize the education system. The state would control the education system, and would ensure that education was a basic right for *every* citizen, including indigenous populations, farmers and the poor.²⁵ However, the reform never passed in Allende's three years of presidency; individual actors such as the Catholic Church feared that if the government had this much power, their rights would disappear.²⁶ Government control, a sign of socialism, was a highly disputed political theory.

The 1973 economic crisis prompted strikes and protests for reform against Salvador Allende. On September 11, 1973, the military bombed *La Moneda*, Chile's capital building, in a coup d'état against Socialist President Salvador Allende, resulting in a twenty-year dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet.²⁷ Pinochet's military government

²³ Torche. "Privatization Reform and Inequality of Educational Opportunity" Pp. 316-343.

²⁴ Marcus Taylor. From Pinochet to the 'Third Way': Neoliberalism and Social Transformation in Chile. (London 2006)

²⁵ Paula De la Cruz Fernández. "La Educación Forman en Chile Desde 1973 A 1990: Un Instrumento Para el Proyecto de Nación." *Universidad de Granada*, 2006.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ It should be noted that the military coup d'état was actually funded and aided by the US-CIA, due to the anti-Socialist sentiments during the Cold War. The CIA also aided in anti-Communist movements such as *Operation Condor*, which led to thousands of leftist individuals either killed or being *desaparecido*, disappeared (The Central Intelligence Agency 2012).

envisioned a different society and nation from Allende, leading to a radical change of the Chilean education system.²⁸ Pinochet's free market ideology didn't stop in the business sector. Instead, he applied newly introduced neoliberal market-based methods to education, allowing for privatization and competition among schools. Even one of Pinochet's Education Ministers, Gonzalo Vial (1978-1979), stated that the dictatorship's education policies were viewed more as economic policies.²⁹

Education reforms during the military regime varied politically and structurally. Teachers were under the surveillance of the police and government officials. New curriculums were instituted that reflected the national security doctrine of Pinochet's regime, and the tertiary level of education was meant to encourage studies that would be productive to Chilean society, rather than liberal arts or humanity studies.³⁰ Pinochet targeted schools to reshape society and instill new, economic values.

Structurally, under the influence of Milton Friedman, the system was decentralized in 1981, and the Ministry of Education gave the responsibilities of running public schools to local municipalities.³¹ Juan Prawda (1992) in his report, "Educational Decentralization in Latin America: Lessons Learned," explains how decentralization in education, which occurred throughout Latin America in the late twentieth century, was designed to make the central government more of a facilitator rather than a director and owner. In Chile, this would not only minimize central government power, but it would increase quality by promoting competition among schools, weeding out those of poor

²⁸ De la Cruz Fernández. "La Educación Forman en Chile Desde 1973 A 1990"

²⁹ From Castiglioni 2001 in: Marcus Taylor. From Pinochet to the 'Third Way'

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Manuel Riesco Larraín & Francisco Durán del Fierro, Francisco. "Reconstruir el Sistema Nacional de Educación Pública en todos sus niveles: Una tarea posible y necesaria." *Docencia* N°45, December 2011.

quality. The size of the Ministry of Education went from twenty thousand employees in 1980, to a mere three thousand by 1990. Of the three thousand, twenty-one percent were in the central offices of Santiago, and the rest in regional/municipal offices.³²

By 1982, eighty-five percent of public schools were under the control of municipal governments.³³ Municipalities were given two options. In the first, they could establish a Municipal Education Administration Department (DAEM) that would be headed by a teacher and staffed by municipal employees. Alternatively, they could privatize the education administration under the Municipal Corporation. In this case, education would be run as a “privately operating entity,” and would include outside entrepreneurial actors.³⁴ Most municipal governments formed DAEMs, because it was easier and cost less. The decentralization of public schools is one of the most significant reforms that promoted educational inequality. Because household incomes varied across municipalities, public schools also varied in funds and resources.

A second, notable structural reform was the refinancing of schools. Instead of funding public schools directly, funding was allocated to school materials and resources for students. The amount of funding given was based on the number of students at a given school. In other words, it was a demand-side approach. Schools that could not compete in this market-based environment would be weeded out.³⁵ This also created a voucher subsidy system, which was used both in public and private municipal schools. The vouchers were distributed in proportion to the number of students in a school, promoting

³² Juan Prawda. “Educational Decentralization in Latin America Lessons Learned.” *The World Bank* March 1992.

³³ Taylor. From Pinochet to the ‘Third Way.’

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

competition among schools.³⁶ These schools came to be known as *subvencionados*, or subsidized voucher schools. As a result, the number of students enrolled in a school would heavily impact a school's budget.³⁷

Perhaps Pinochet's most well known piece of legislation is *Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Educación (LOCE)*, passed on March 10, 1990, the day before he left office. *LOCE* was approved by the Military but not by Congress or popular representation. The law consisted of eighty-seven permanent and eight temporary articles.³⁸ It mandated that subsidized voucher schools and private schools were to be funded by privately owned companies with minimal central government oversight.³⁹ This further divided the education system, because where the wealthy could pay to attend for-profit private schools and receive higher quality, the poor were stuck in overcrowded, run-down public schools with a lack of resources. The law is still active today, because to modify or eradicate it would require four out of the seven deputies and active senators to support it, and many of Pinochet's followers remain in government positions today.⁴⁰

Post dictatorship, the La Concertación governments (center left parties governing after Pinochet) tried to use education as a way to address the social inequality fostered by the neoliberal model. La Concertación strove for equality of opportunity.⁴¹ Nevertheless, although La Concertación increased spending and increased teacher salaries, it allowed

³⁶ Andrea Arango. "The Failings of Chile's Education System: Institutionalized Inequality and a Preference for the Affluent." *Council on Hemispheric Affairs*, Jul 30, 2008. www.coha.org

³⁷ Gregory Elacqua. "The Impact of school choice and public policy on segregation: Evidence from Chile." *International Journal of Educational Development*. Elsevier Ltd, 2011.

³⁸ Fabián Urtubia Banda & Helmuth Heyer Álvarez. "Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza: Artículo Crítico Centrado en la Enseñanza Básica y Media." *CEME – Centro de Estudios Miguel Enríquez - Archivo Chile*, 2006. <http://www.archivo-chile.com>

³⁹ Kevin A. Barry & Mitch Weerth. "The repressive legacy of Pinochet." *News & Letters*, Feb-March 2007. www.newsandletters.org

⁴⁰ Fabián Urtubia Banda. "Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza"

⁴¹ Keaney 2005 in: Taylor. From Pinochet to the 'Third Way'

voucher schools to also charge a co-payment, further stratifying the system.⁴² According to Taylor, La Concertación further commodified education rather than making it universal; by enforcing the public, voucher and private schools, severe distinctions of quality continued.⁴³ In 2006 President Michele Bachelet (2006-2010) introduced *Ley General de Educación (LGE)* to replace Pinochet's LOCE. Although the law stopped discriminatory practices for admissions in higher learning, subsidized student transportation fees, and increased voucher subsidies for lower-income students, it continued financing through market-based strategies.⁴⁴ This led to a mass student movement, known as the Pingüinos, which I will discuss in a later chapter. Box 2.1 below lays out some of the most important educational laws and reforms over the past fifty years. The table highlights decentralization, the introduction to subsidized voucher schools and reforms post Pinochet that have tried to but unsuccessfully equate the system. I will break down the three types of schools (public, voucher and private) in Part II with student experiences. What is important to note is that despite reform, the system replicates inequality.

⁴² Taylor. From Pinochet to the 'Third Way'

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Arango. "The Failings of Chile's Education System"

Box 2.1: Notable Education Reforms over Fifty Years			
<i>Reform</i>	<i>President (Years)</i>	<i>Description of Reform</i>	<i>Effects</i>
Universal Primary Education, 1965	Eduardo Frei Montalva (1964-1970)	-K-8 th grade mandatory and “accessible” to all Chilean students.	-Enrollment in education increased.
Increased Privatization, 1980	Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990)	-Private sector, businesses/entrepreneurs invest in voucher or private schools	-Although increased quality of those institutions, exacerbated inequality.
1981 Decentralization	Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990)	-Public schools controlled by Municipalities, Ministry of Ed. more of a facilitator. -Two options: establish a Municipal Education Administration Department (DAEM) or privatize the school.	Public Spending for Education: 4.9% in 1982, dropped to 2.5% in 1989 (Torche 2005) -By 1982, 85% public schools controlled by municipalities.
Voucher-Subsidy Refinancing 1980s	Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990)	-“Funds follow the student” -The ministry provides a specific amount of funds to a school based on the number of students. Funds go towards resources etc. -In voucher schools: similar financing as long as no admission rate.	-Created competition among schools to enroll the most students. -Loss of student enrollment=financial loss. -Municipalities in low-income neighborhoods fewer funds, poorer quality.
<i>Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Educación (LOCE)</i> , 1990	Augusto Pinochet (1973-1990)	-Many reforms, notably: privately owned companies and businesses could finance schools with no central government oversight	-Further stratification of system, private entities favored wealthy.
2003 Voucher Reform	Ricardo Lagos Escobar (2000-2006)	Vouchers tied to family-income, no longer a flat-rate, can no longer select students in primary school, for secondary can have tests but no parental interviews (Elacqua, Contreras & Salazar 2008)	-Although meant to provide more access to voucher schools for lower-income families, still lack of access to information and transportation costs allowed for educational choice
<i>Ley General de Educación (LGE)</i>	Michele Bachelet (2006-2010)	-Created Presidential Advisory Council for the Quality of Education in response to the 2006 Pingüino Student Movement. -National Education Council to advance school autonomy from state control. -Upped the voucher-school fee per student to \$100 per month, \$150 for poorer students. -Eliminate discriminatory admissions policies.	-Student Pingüino movement was a response to this reform, because students and teachers felt that the law wasn’t fixing the financing of public education—Bachelet made reforms in result of the movement; subsidizing transportation costs, still no refinancing of the system.

Sources: Andrea Arango (2008), “The Failings of Chile’s Education System: Institutionalized Inequality and a Preference for the Affluent” *And Council of Hemispheric Affairs (COHA)* & Marcus Taylor (2006), *From Pinochet to the ‘Third Way’*

The Most Expensive University System in the World

Educational inequality isn't limited to primary and secondary schools. There is a high degree of frustration with the persistent inequality in Chilean universities. This has become a central focus in the education reform debate, and is worth noting in this study. In comparison to the rest of the world, the Chilean university system is one of the most expensive. It costs around \$3,400 a year to attend university, yet the average annual salary is only \$8,500.⁴⁵ This ratio of cost to salary stands as a barrier to secondary students who do not have the means to continue their education after high school. Camilo Ballesteros, echoed this looming reality, "In Chile there are good universities for the rich and bad universities for the poor."⁴⁶ Camilo voices the sentiments of many students in Chile. Chile has around 1.2 million students enrolled in universities today, a large increase from only 200,000 students twenty years ago. Although the amount of students has increased, because fees to attend university remain extremely high, the overall perception of high education inequity remains.⁴⁷

Privatization of the university system also took place in Pinochet's LOCE reform. Because of the high fees, it is often more realistic for lower-income students to drop out and go into the work force directly after secondary school, rather than face the burdens of debt and loans.⁴⁸ As a result, the university system primarily enrolls middle and higher income students.⁴⁹ For example, at the prestigious *Pontificia Universidad Católica* in Santiago, over 70 percent of its students came from private schools, 14.3 percent came

⁴⁵ Francisco Goldman. "Camila Vallejo, the World's Most Glamorous Revolutionary." *The New York Times*, April 5, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com>

⁴⁶ "Progress and its discontents." *The Economist*. April 12, 2012. www.economist.com

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Arango. "The Failings of Chile's Education System"

⁴⁹ Ramona Waldi. "Seeking Social Justice Through Education in Chile." *Upside Down World*, August 25, 2011. <http://www.upsidedownworld.org>

from voucher schools and 15.1 percent came from municipal schools.⁵⁰ The debates on the Chilean university system are multi-faceted. For example, because the length of degree programs is abnormally long, it promotes inequality due to the finances of obtaining a degree; it delays entry into the labor force, and also erodes graduation rates.⁵¹

In addition, Chile's tertiary education also suffers from severe corruption. In June 2012, the Ministry of Education began an investigation on Universidad del Mar in Valparaíso, an hour and half from Santiago, for illegal financial actions and false accreditation.⁵² Near the end of 2012, the decision was made to shut down Universidad del Mar at the end of 2014. This means that 18,000 students have been receiving an education that is not "credible," and will have to transfer to a new university. Education Minister, Harald Beyer, was impeached April 17, 2013, because he did not do anything for the for-profit scandals.⁵³ Nibaldo Mosciatti from Radio BioBio commented, "The government sees the university as a market that sells degrees and the students as its customers. In this case, the students are paying but the university is not fulfilling its part of the contract to provide high-quality degrees."⁵⁴ Students would look at me straight in the eye and say that education in Chile is a business: this perception is widely spread and can be easily supported with evidence such as the scandal of Universidad del Mar.

⁵⁰ Arango. "The Failings of Chile's Education System"

⁵¹ OECD & The World Bank. "Tertiary Education in Chile." *Reviews of National Policies for Education*, 2009.

⁵² Michelle Tullo. "Faltering Chilean university remains in purgatory." *The Santiago Times*. Nov 8, 2012. www.santiagotimes.cl

⁵³ Amelia Duggan. "Chilean education minister impeached by Senate in landmark vote." *The Santiago Times*. April 19, 2013. www.santiagotimes.cl

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Performance of Education in Chile

Before studying education in Chile, I had talked to a few Chileans about education, and they boasted to me how they have the highest quality of education in Latin America, especially private schools. Even afterwards, when I met a Chilean in the United States, a student told me how his education, especially his university, was equivalent to a high quality university in the United States. Yet, the lower-income families I came to know in Chile evidenced a clear divide: equal opportunity to a quality education is non-existent. This made me wonder, how do people have such different perceptions? The OECD (2009) reports that, “as a society, Chileans value education and it is a subject of frequent and intense public debate and successive governments have responded to social demand through reforms to basic secondary, and tertiary education.”⁵⁵ Decades of research on the Chilean system have resulted in mixed results of performance and student achievement. In 2006, Chilean students outperformed all of Latin America in reading, and were only behind Uruguay in mathematics.⁵⁶ Yet the system remains controversial. Chile has yet to offer a high quality education that is free and accessible to all.

The Program for International Assessment (PISA) exam tests fifteen-year old student knowledge in mathematics literacy, reading literacy and science literacy. In 2006, the PISA placed Chile as having the largest achievement gap, the gap between the highest and lowest scores in its education system out of fifty-four countries in 2006. Chile’s score range was 52 points, compared to Finland’s 9, Brazil and Argentina tied with 39, Mexico and Colombia also tied with a difference of 40, and the United States had a difference of

⁵⁵ OECD & The World Bank. “Tertiary Education in Chile.”

⁵⁶ Elacqua, Contreras, & Salazar. “Scaling Up in Chile.”

26.⁵⁷ Finland had the smallest achievement gap by a significant amount, and the United States' score, although its gap is half of Chile's, is still relatively high. Juan Eduardo García-Huidobro, Director of CIDE and the Department Chair of Education at the University of Alberto Hurtado in Santiago, argues that the financing of the education system and the selective private and voucher schools have contributed to this segregation.

Table 2.1 below compares Chile's 2009 PISA average scores for reading, mathematics and science to other countries. Although Chile's test scores may be outperforming its neighbors in Latin America, specifically Brazil and Argentina, it still falls behind the OECD average.

Table 2.1

Comparison of 2009 PISA Scores					
	<i>Chile</i>	<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Argentina</i>	<i>United States</i>	<i>OECD Average</i>
Reading Literacy	449	412	398	500	493
Mathematics	421	386	388	487	496
Science Literacy	447	405	401	502	501
Aggregate Total	439.30	400.99	395.72	496.41	496.67

Source: U.S. Department of Education: PISA 2009 & The Learning Curve 2012.

Although Chile's scores may be the highest in Latin America, the achievement gap is also the largest, suggesting a big distinction in the private school scores versus public school scores. It is important to note, however, that the problem here is not

⁵⁷ Juan Eduardo García-Huidobro. "Segregación en la Escuela." *Semana de Acción Mundial por la Escuela*. Universidad Alberto Hurtado, May 2011.

necessarily just the test scores or achievement gap, but it is this overwhelming discourse and perception of education inequality that Chilean students and society have.

Within Chile, high school students aspiring to go to university have had troubling results. The scores for the mandatory University Selection Test, known as the PSU, dropped 31 percent in 2013, suggesting a lack of preparation in secondary education. According to *The Santiago Times*, only 219 students received the maximum score of 850 points, which is 97 points less than 2012, and the lowest it has been since 2004. The average differences of scores between public and private school increased to 160 points, and public school averages decreased, demonstrating a wider achievement gap.⁵⁸ Some scholars have argued that the PSU tests are not as important as they may seem, but up until this year, it was the only part of the admissions process into university. Although now grades have become part of the process, PSU is still perceived as the number one factor for university admission, and it is heavily disputed because many students aren't prepared enough for the test. One student, Cristobal* told me because of his good PSU scores, he was given a scholarship to a public university. Yet, he came from a good quality subsidized voucher school, and from a comfortable middle class standing. Scholarships aren't as popular in Chile as they are in the US, and are usually based on one's merit, yet, many of those with good grades have had access to a better education, so there is still exclusion. Another aspect worth noting is that to study education pedagogy in university, students do not need a high PSU score. Because of this, many students perceive the teaching profession to be for those who are "less intelligent," and thus the

⁵⁸ Manon Paulic. "High scores for Chile's university entrance exam drop in 2013" *The Santiago Times*. Jan 3 2013. www.santiagotimes.cl

* Name has been changed.

discipline has a bad reputation. However, there are non-profits trying to change this stigma. For example, the *Enseña Chile* program recruits students who received degrees in other disciplines to teach in high school, because college graduates can teach high school without a degree in pedagogy, but a degree in pedagogy is required for teaching all other grades.

Test scores are not the only factors that characterize Chile's performance in education. The Ministry of Education announced at the end of 2012 that thirty-eight municipal high schools across the country would lose accreditation and funding from the government, due to poor qualities such as undereducated teachers, incorrect attendance records, unpaid workers' pension funds, and lack of staffing. Twenty of these public schools are within the Santiago Metropolitan Region. Earlier, in April 2012, another thirty-seven schools also had to give up their accreditation.⁵⁹ Although 2,865 schools did receive an "A" in their evaluation, shutting down any school affects the students and their access to any sort of education. Although this may be a necessary move for the government to sanction nonperforming schools, again, there exists the perception that these schools underperform because of the lack of government support and resources.

The performance of education in Chile is multi-faceted. Although a top performer in Latin America, its scores still fall behind its fellow OECD countries, and its achievement gap is wide. Listening to student experiences demonstrates the complexities of the system, but also maintains an overall perception of inequality. The next section will look at the socioeconomic disparities in Chile, to provide a context for Chilean society and how it contributes to perceptions of inequality.

⁵⁹ Katie Manning. "Government cuts accreditation for Chile's problem high schools." *The Santiago Times*. Dec 13 2012. www.santiagotimes.cl

Socioeconomic Disparities in Chile

In addition to the strong presence of educational inequality, Chile's burden of a large societal income gap sets the tone for everyday living, and is crucial to understanding student perceptions. This socioeconomic disparity actually reflects the stratification of the education system: lower-income students generally receive a lower quality of education compared to higher-income students. After twenty years of Pinochet's military dictatorship, the Chilean economy boomed under its neoliberal and export-based economic model. However, Chile's economic success did not smoothly translate socioeconomically. Its social inequity gap only grew; in the late 2000s, not including taxes, the Gini coefficient of Chile, which measures a society's income disparity, hovered around .526.⁶⁰ Chile has the highest Gini coefficient of the OECD countries and in Latin America, as shown in Chart 2.2 and Chart 2.3 below. Most of the Latin American countries' Gini Coefficients hover above .5.⁶¹

Chart 2.1 Source: *The Economist*, 2012.

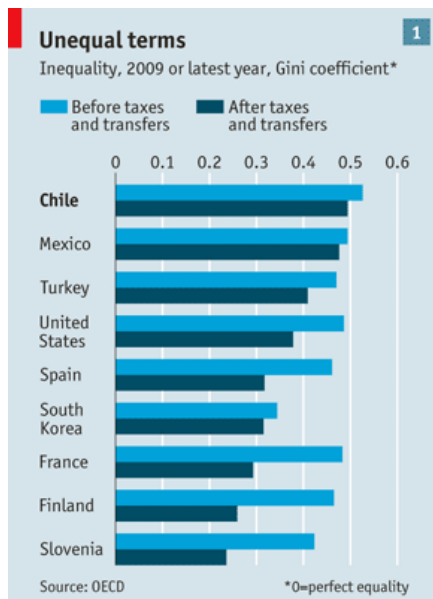
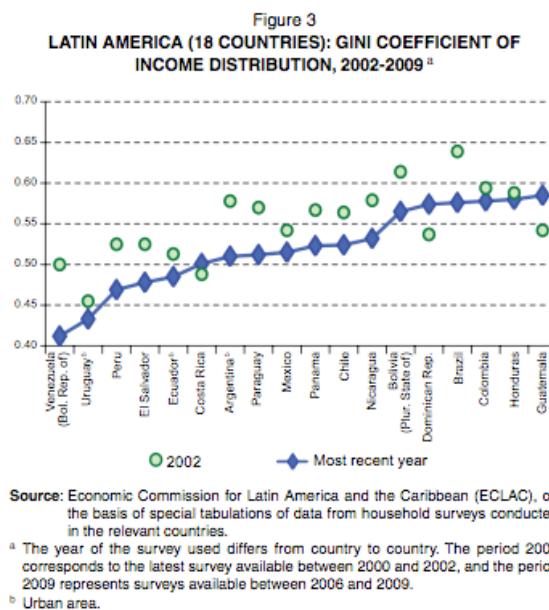


Chart 2.2 Source: *The Social Panorama 2010*



⁶⁰ OECD Stat Extracts. OECD 2012. <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=26068>

⁶¹ *Social Panorama 2010*. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. United Nations, Santiago Chile: March 2011.

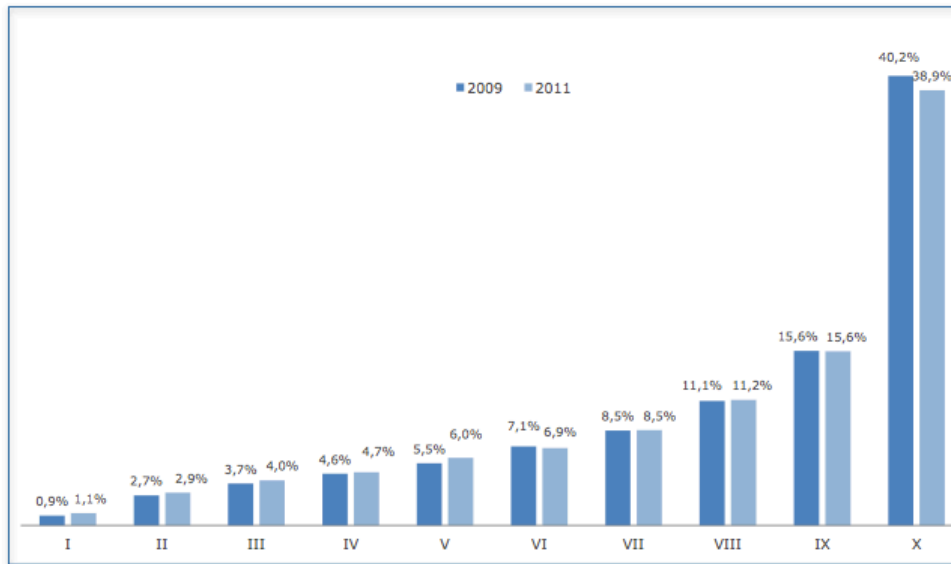
Existing Disparity Versus Economic Growth

Chile's economy is growing six percent a year as it transitions from a middle-income country to a rich country.⁶² Chile is one of the most open, trade-dependent economies in the world. Although its growth picture is attractive, there is a mounting sense that Chile's system is full of insiders with elites in power, dominant businesses that don't face much competition, and a political system still rooted in Pinochet laws that are very hard to change. The top 20 percent of Chile's society earns twelve times as much as the bottom 20 percent (\$23,667 per year versus \$1,855 in the mid 2000s).⁶³ Thus, how do these facts play a role in forming perceptions of inequality, in the midst of this suggested economic success? A *Latinobarometro* poll showed that 88.8 percent of the population found Chile's income distribution to be either unfair or very unfair.⁶⁴ Chart 2.3 on the following page compares the distribution of household income in 1- percent increments per capita in Chile in 2009 and 2011. Group 1 is the poorest 10 percent of the population, and group x is the richest 10 percent. Although the inequality has slightly lessened, notable disparities remain.

⁶² "Progress and its discontents." *The Economist*. 12 April 2012. www.economist.com

⁶³ OECD Stat Extracts. OECD 2012. <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=26068>

⁶⁴ "Es justa la distribución del ingreso." Análisis de Resultados en línea Latinobarometro Corporation 2013. www.latinobarometro.org

Chart 2.3: Evolution of the Distribution of Household Income per Capita

Fuente: Ministerio de Desarrollo Social, CASEN 2009- 2011

Socioeconomic Disparities and Education Inequality Linked

Without a doubt, the socioeconomic disparities are reflective of and continued by the lack of equal access for a quality education. Percentages of students attending the various levels of education differ across social class lines. Table 2.2 below shows data from 1996 across five quintiles of income, demonstrating realities of schooling across income levels in the *early years* of a post-Pinochet society. The bottom 20 percent of society has the lowest percentages of students enrolled, most notably after secondary education, with only 8.5 percent receiving a tertiary education, compared to 59.7 percent in the highest 20 percent of society. Primary education does have a high attendance rate across all social classes, but for pre-school and secondary school, numbers clearly vary. Although these percentages have since improved, Table 2.2 demonstrates how Pinochet's educational laws created educational stratification, and although not as severe, still exists today. Perhaps because many of Pinochet's laws are still in place, the perception of oppression and inequality remains strong.

Table 2.2: Educational Coverage by Income Quintile 1996

Education (Child Age)	Quintile I (lowest 20%)	Quintile II	Quintile III	Quintile IV	Quintile V (top 20%)
Pre-School (2-5)	22.3	26.8	30.0	36.8	48.4
Primary (5-13)	96.5	98.4	98.0	99.4	99.7
Secondary (14-17)	75.3	81.0	89.3	95.3	97.2
Further (18+)	8.5	15.1	21.5	34.7	59.7
<i>Source: Marcus Taylor (2006)'s From Pinochet to the 'Third Way', Data drawn from FNPSP 2000, p.183</i>					

The New Emerging Middle Class & Inequality

According to the World Bank, to the OECD, to economists and scholars, Chile's middle class is not only emerging, but it is prosperous and leading Latin America in social mobility. When I use the term middle class, I am referencing two definitions. Andy Sumner (2012) for the Center for Global Development defines middle class as those that do not own the means of production, but control skills and knowledge or authority as a source of power, and they have assets and security. The World Bank defines middle class as making between \$10 and \$50 dollars a day.⁶⁵ In short, the statistics are there: Chile's middle class is indeed getting bigger, yet, the discourse on inequality continues with strength: *why?* What does this middle class mean to the students?

According to the Economic Perception Index (IPEC), at the end of 2012 Chilean consumer confidence was the highest it has been in seven years, 58.1 on a scale from 1 to 100, where over 50 shows optimism. However, in terms of long-term growth, surveyed Chileans were more pessimistic, averaging 40.4 points in confidence levels.⁶⁶ Although Chile's middle class has been emerging rapidly, there is still a general perception that

⁶⁵ Gwynne Hogan. "Chile leads continent in social mobility, World Bank says." *The Santiago Times*. Nov 14, 2012. www.santiagotimes.cl

⁶⁶ Amelia Duggan. "Consumer confidence at seven-year high in Chile." *The Santiago Times*. Jan 9 2013. www.santiagotimes.cl

inequality is high. The Latin American Economic Outlook 2011 released by the OECD stated that 49.14 percent of the Chilean population is in the middle class, third to Uruguay with 55.51 percent, and Mexico with 52.88 percent. Bolivia and Colombia have the lowest proportions of the middle class.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, about 43 percent of Chilean society is still considered to be vulnerable, and 10 percent in poverty, earning under \$4 per day.⁶⁸ The number of those living below the poverty line in Santiago dropped to 15 percent in 2009, and in 2011 to around 14 percent.⁶⁹

This discontent among the middle class might seem odd at first because of the growth of the middle class. Wages are increasing; income per head has nearly tripled since 1990 to about \$16,000, and unemployment rates remain low.⁷⁰ But the country's wealth continues to be controlled by a small elite group of insiders, and the middle class is very vocal about exclaiming their discontent about this.⁷¹ Many of the students whom I spoke with pointed to this issue, that the rich are *very* rich, and that there aren't that many of them. In addition, many middle-class citizens have jobs in the informal sector.

According to Jeff Dayton-Johnson, Head of America's Desk at OECD, "Many don't own their homes or don't own major consumer durables. They're vulnerable to falling into poverty and they need public policies to support their upward mobility."⁷² According to *Latinobarometro*, in a public opinion survey, 55.1 percent of Chileans felt that it is not

⁶⁷ Dominique Farrell. "Uruguay, Mexico and Chile have the most numerous middle-class in Latam." *Mercopress*, Dec 9, 2010. www.en.mercopress.com

⁶⁸ Hogan. "Chile leads continent in social mobility, World Bank says."

⁶⁹ "Progress and its discontents." *The Economist*. April 12 2012. www.economist.com

⁷⁰ "Lessons from the students." *The Economist*. Apr 14th 2012. www.economist.com

⁷¹ John Paul Rathbone. "Middle-Class discontent hits Prosperous Chile." *The Globe and Mail*, Oct 1, 2012. www.theglobeandmail.com

⁷² Farrell. "Uruguay, Mexico and Chile"

possible to be born poor and to become rich.⁷³ Similarly, 77.3 percent did not feel that there are equal opportunities to get out of poverty.⁷⁴ Many Chileans still feel economically vulnerable in the middle class, and want more support from their government, because less than half of the middle class perceives that they can become rich in Chile.⁷⁵ Ángel Gurría, Secretary General of OECD, said, “Latin Americans in the middle of the income distribution still face serious hurdles in terms of purchasing power, education and job security...these groups still have some way to go to be fully comparable to the middle classes in more advanced economies.”⁷⁶ In other words, the middle class in Latin America is not the middle class we know in the United States; it does yet not have the same benefits and security.

~

The next section will dive into the historic student activism that has been taking place since 2006 as a result of education inequality and socioeconomic disparities in Chile. The student movement is critical in this project because it has heightened the discourse on inequality, and is what brought my attention to the injustices of the education system. The movement also gives students an opportunity to demonstrate their discontent with society and their educational experiences. As we will learn later on, the student discourse does much more than demonstrate discontent; it presents a critical consciousness of experienced oppression, due to the inequalities of the education system and within Chilean society.

⁷³ “Expectativa de nacer pobre y llegar a ser rico.” Análisis de Resultados en línea Latinobarometro Corporation 2013. www.latinobarometro.org

⁷⁴ “Igualdad de oportunidades para salir de la pobreza.” Análisis de Resultados en línea Latinobarometro Corporation 2013. www.latinobarometro.org

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

In Response to Inequality: The Student Movements: Past & Present

“Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.” –Paulo Freire

Given Chile's history of high inequality, it is not a surprise that Chile also has a history of social mobilization. Before Pinochet's dictatorship, *La Nueva Canción* Movement, spearheaded by musical artists Victor Jara and Violeta Parra in the 1960s, sought to reintegrate traditional indigenous Chilean culture in the mainstream media, and to also protest for social justice and peace for the oppressed. The movement tended to reject disposable consumer-like songs, music streaming from the U.S. and Europe, and encouraged Chileans to recognize its own culturally rich music and traditions.⁷⁷ When the coup d'état occurred on September 11, 1973, Victor Jara was captured and became a prisoner at the *Estadio Nacional* (National Football Stadium), where thousands of leftist individuals were kidnapped, abused, and killed. A few days later, Victor Jara was publicly shot forty-four times in the stadium, silencing a voice of social justice, of the oppressed.⁷⁸

Pinochet's regime silenced a generation. Chileans still fear speaking of Pinochet, because many still support him and his economic policies, despite the thousands he killed and the harsh rules he imposed. Today, however, the young generation who did not live through the dictatorship are bringing voices back to the people, and asking to change this system that Pinochet left in his footsteps. This is a crucial theme in this study. Notable movements began in 2006, and the past two years have been full of marches,

⁷⁷Nancy Morris. Canto Porque es Necesario Cantar: The New Song Movement in Chile, 1973-1983. *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (1996) pp. 117-136. *The Latin American Studies Association*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2503359>.

⁷⁸ “They Couldn't Kill His Songs.” *BBC News, World: Americas*. Sept 5. 1998. <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

demonstrations and protests. Not unlike La Nueva Canción, contemporary student movements over the past six years reject the neoliberal, consumer mentality, and are fighting for social justice and equality. This section will briefly describe the recent student mobilizations, and the role of active voices in Chilean society. The student movement has encouraged Chileans to think about inequality, and shapes how they perceive it as well.

2006: The Pingüino Movement

During the presidency of Michele Bachelet (2006-2010), widespread student protests began over her proposed education policy *Ley General de Educación* (LGE).⁷⁹ This legislation promised to eliminate discriminatory admissions policies at all levels of education, and would create the National Education Council, meant to further advance school autonomy away from state control.⁸⁰ However, questions were raised over the role of entrepreneurs in the education system, and whether or not they should be able to own and run private voucher schools for profit.⁸¹ Many felt that the education system had become a market for business rather than to educate.

Students opposed the LGE reform because they felt that it did not address the fundamental financial strategies that would create a more equitable system.⁸² Privatization continues to be perceived by many students as the real enemy of the education system, because it only reinforced a profit-based nature of education. Students also believed that LGE had the same pillars of Pinochet's LOCE, because it continues subsidies to private schools. The proposed and later implemented legislation only continued the lack of

⁷⁹ Arango. "The Failings of Chile's Education System"

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Elacqua, Contreras & Salazar. "Scaling Up in Chile."

⁸² Arango. "The Failings of Chile's Education System"

access to low-income families, and public education was neglected, because public schools still received the same subsidies as private schools.⁸³ The president of the Student Federation of the Universidad of Chile (FECH) in 2006 stated, "...We reject having the profit motive inserted into education on any level—elementary, high school, and in the university...education reform is the only means we have for solving the social problems in this country."⁸⁴ For-profit education exacerbates inequality within the system.

In effect, although the law still passed, many of the students' demands were actually acted upon. The Bachelet administration subsidized transportation costs, waved the fee for the university admissions test, and created a residential Advisory Committee, which would include high school students in conversations on education reform. Looking back, many students were still unhappy and felt that LGE did not replace LOCE, and the refinancing did not lessen the inequalities of the education system. This discontent would quiet for a few years, and then return in full force in 2011.

⁸³ Arango. "The Failings of Chile's Education System."

⁸⁴ Ibid.

2011: The Chilean Winter

“The fight is the whole society’s. Free education for all.” –Sign at a student march in Santiago, Chile, *The New York Times*, 2012



Source: www.gse.harvard.edu

Santiago students, distressed by educational disparities before, once again engaged in student movements (see Box 2.2 on following page). Marches in Santiago during what came to be known as the *Chilean Winter* in 2011 reached as many as 80,000 participants.⁸⁵ Students demanded education reform to change Pinochet’s privatized system. Although the government agreed to increase funding by \$1 billion through taxes, students say it is not enough. Students won’t stop fighting until the private sector is more regulated, and there’s an equal and free education for all.⁸⁶ The student movement in Chile started because of student discontent and perceptions of educational inequality, and anger that the government doesn’t listen to the demands of its constituents. It is crucial to understand the history and current state of this movement, because it will contribute to how a sample of students perceive, identify and react to educational inequality.

⁸⁵ “Marching On: The Discontents of a Healthy Democracy.” *The Economist*. Jun 23 2011. <http://www.economist.com>

⁸⁶ “Chile student protesters occupy high schools.” *The Guardian*, Aug 14, 2012. www.guardian.co.uk

Box 2.2: Summary of Student Protests in Chile: Since 2011, Chilean students have been protesting against the Chilean government for a free, quality education for all. Over 70 percent of the general public is in support of the students' demands; many believe the Piñera Administration has not produced significant reform. Piñera's approval rate has dropped to 29 percent.

Student Demands:

- Education (especially university) should be free.
- Education should be under the control of the Ministry of Education and the central government instead of municipalities.
- The education system should not be for-profit.
- Nationalization of copper mines (Because want state to have more control of capital).
- For the system to not favor the privilege (affluent students who attend the traditional universities get cheaper loans than others).

Student Actions:

- Organized (authorized and unauthorized) movements throughout the country. Unauthorized movements turn violent *extremely* quickly.
- National student organizations at high school and university level.
- Highly politicized (strong socialist, communist influence)—leaders include Camila Vallejo, twenty-two year old Communist student leader, president of the University of Chile student federation (FECH).

The Results?

- Violent Responses by the *pacos* (police) during demonstrations; water cannons, tear gas, etc.
- An increased \$1 billion towards education in taxes (though students argue it's not enough).
- An increase in scholarships (not just based on grades; the wealthier tend to benefit more)
- Interest rates going down to 2 percent per year for all student loans.
- Continued education reform talks between the Ministry of Education and students.
- Trust in the neoliberal economic model has continued to weaken (from 60 percent 30 years ago to 40 percent in 2012).
- Marks a generational change in Chile, students no longer afraid of the government because they grew up in a post-dictatorship society.
- 30 percent of student population tweeting (4th highest usage of Twitter per person in the world).

Information taken from The Economist, 2012 and the New York Times, 2012.

What began as peaceful protests soon became manifestations. Sit-ins, barricades, marches, hunger strikes, “kiss-ins,” dancing to Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” in the streets, having *cacerolazo* protests (involves banging on pots with kitchen utensils): students did it all in response to the government’s position on education. The government most often responded to protests violently. Tear gas, water cannons, and rubber bullets were constantly used; I myself grew accustomed to walking by army tanks in downtown Santiago. Chilean policemen, known as *pacos*, normally resorted to violence early when the protests weren’t officially “authorized,” a law implemented by Pinochet. In addition to police brutality, students faced other consequences. Some had to go to summer school, others had to repeat a year in school, since some schools were shut down as a result of the protests. Students were also often suspended if the school knew they were a part of the student movements.

Student protest is a generational change from the silencing of the Pinochet era. Rafael Gumucio from the Mexican magazine *Gatopardo*, interviewed student Giorgio Jackson, and had asked, “What does the dictatorship mean to you?” Jackson replied, “Nothing. I was born in 1987...The student protests that have mobilized Chile are perhaps the result of a radical change in the roles of fathers and sons...because in Chile it’s the fathers who are the nihilists, the suicides, the silent ones, the frustrated, and their children the reformers, the realists, the strategists.”⁸⁷ This is a theme that has surfaced often, that the students are essentially reclaiming active voices, after decades of fear and silence.

⁸⁷ Goldman. “Camila Vallejo, the World’s Most Glamorous Revolutionary.”

Spotlight: Camila Vallejo

When you think of the Chilean Winter, you think of Camila Vallejo. The fact that a 23-year old female college student has had a higher support rating than standing President Sebastián Piñera says something.



Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk>

Camila Vallejo, who was the president of the University of Chile student federation (FECH), became a national leader, and the face of the student movements. She is a member of the Communist Youth party, and the *Wall Street Journal* called her a “red-diaper baby,” for being raised by supporters of Salvador Allende.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Camila is passionate for education equality. She states, “Our fight is not versus the police or to destroy commercial shops...our fight is to recover the right to education.”⁸⁹ Camila later told *New York Times* Reporter Robert Goldman, “Obviously someone has to pay...but there’s no reason why it must be families financing between 80 and 100 percent of it...Here are more than 50 million pesos worth of tear-gas bombs...”⁹⁰ Understanding student perceptions of Camila alone are instrumental in identifying sentiments towards the student movement and inequality: Camila views education as a universal right. She also recognizes the strong link between the neoliberal system and educational inequality.

⁸⁸ “Chilean students’ leader rejoices with WSJ calling her a ‘re-diaper baby.’” *MercoPress*. May 2, 2012. en.mercopress.com

⁸⁹ Patrice Franko. “Chile protests provide a salutary lesson to region.” *The Financial Times*, 2012. www.ft.com

⁹⁰ Goldman. “Camila Vallejo, the World’s Most Glamorous Revolutionary.”

This brief overview of Chile provides a foundation to understand the current inequalities within society, both generally and within the education system. This section also demonstrated the culture around social movements and the importance of living in a post-military dictatorship society. Now, we will take a look into Chilean society through the eyes of the students, to see the realities and effects of policies and history and how students have perceived them. Not only will we have an opportunity to understand how social injustice and inequality within the school system exist, but we will also explore the different discourses revolving around inequality and avenues of change proposed by critically conscious students, the future leaders of Chile.

Part II: Through the Eyes of the Students: Demonstrating Critical Consciousness

“The awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation”
--Francisco Weffort, in Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p 36.

Chapter 3: Experiences and Perceptions of Chile’s Education System

“Until I went to university I thought I had received a good education, I had the opportunity to go through all the different types of education that exist in Chile, and despite excelling with superior grades above average...upon majoring in education I realized that the knowledge obtained was not sufficient, it prioritized the cognitive and not the actual human being.”⁹¹

Let’s now take a tour of the Chilean education system through student perspectives. We will look at how students view their experience as well as the overall performance of education in Chile, and how students have developed their critical consciousness, also linking it to critical theory. As you will see, student experiences in the different types of schools vary, but all point to concepts that many critical theorists claim: that in addition to a lack of resources, schools in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods often teach a different curriculum and agenda as opposed to more affluent, private schools. This is imperative for understanding the impact of educational inequality in Chile, as well as the students’ critical consciousness, in part formed by their experiences in school.

⁹¹ Translated from Survey, respondent number 19. Feb 19, 2013. The student is currently in university studying to be a teacher.

The Big Three: Public, Voucher and Private Schools

As discussed earlier, the Chilean education system today has primarily three types of schools: public, which is run by municipalities, voucher schools and private schools. Box 2.2 below lays out distinctions among the types of schools. The three types of schools were intended to give students and parents a choice in education.⁹² It is often perceived that this comprehensive choice system furthers stratification between public and private schools rather than creating a more equal system.⁹³ Comparing student experiences at different schools within the system demonstrate that the system is extremely unequal. This section explores the three types of schools, the student experience within them, and how social injustice exists.

Box 3.1

Summary of Three Types of Schools in Chile	
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run by municipal governments, The Ministry of Education distributes funding based on number of students in a school. • Less than half of Chilean student population attends for perception of low quality; those who attend tend to be lower-income students. • Poorly funded: amount of funding depends on wealth of a given municipality and number of students enrolled, in turn results in teacher quality, resources, etc. • Enrollment loss=financial loss. • *There are currently about ten <i>traditional</i> public high schools in Chile, that are of high quality. <i>Instituto Nacional</i>, for example, was started by the state, all male, and has an admissions test, but is considered to be one of the best schools in the nation. 18 Chilean presidents attended.
Voucher/Subsidized Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private schools that don't require families to pay, but instead rely on vouchers from the government (essentially same financing scheme as public schools). • Can charge parent fees. • Created to give lower income families a choice and opportunity to go to a better school, but many families don't have access to this information, nor the transportation for their students to travel to these schools. • Quality varies from school to school/different municipalities because vouchers based on number of students in a school "funds follow the student."

⁹² It is imperative to note that technical schools are becoming more and more popular in Chile, and a few students from the survey had gone to technical schools. However, it was not a primary focus in my study.

⁹³ Gregory Elacqua. "The Impact of school choice and public policy on segregation: Evidence from Chile." *International Journal of Educational Development*. Elsevier Ltd, 2011.

- Some part of larger organizations or networks: In 2008, 25% of Chilean students attended stand-alone schools, 13% are a part of networks.
- Voucher Schools can be run by former municipal teachers or by business entrepreneurs.
- Fastest growing segment of education system.
- Can have a selection process.

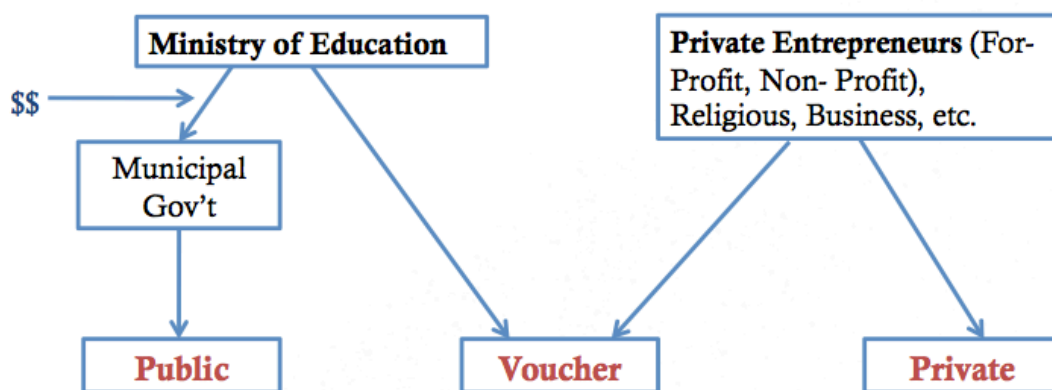
Private

- Expensive.
- Most elite institutions.
- Middle/Higher-income students attend.
- The perception in Chile is if you can afford to go to a private school, you go.
- Can administer admission tests → "Creaming," Only taking the cream of the crop students.

Sources: *Education Next* (2008), *COHA* (2008)

Many reforms of the Chilean education system are geared towards financing, decentralization and privatization, further promoting inequality. Although in recent years the government has tried to lessen the systemic inequality, it will continue to be unsuccessful if it does not increase public spending and restructure its financing, with more funds going to municipal schools and less towards for-profit schools. Chart 3.1 demonstrates this flow of finances in the Chilean education system. Analyzing the framework of the Chilean education system is crucial when understanding the experiences of students in school.

Chart 3.1: Flow of Finances in Education System



Sources: *Education Next* (2008), *COHA* (2008)

Public Schools

“It wasn’t totally bad, in my case there always existed one or two teachers that stood out from the rest; we were converted into a bubble of oxygen inside the sea of smog that represents the poor public education and municipality of my neighborhood.”⁹⁴

The Chilean public schools are some of the most underfunded schools in the world. Although the government funds municipalities based on the number of students in schools, only about half of the student age cohort attends public schools.⁹⁵ In effect, funding is low, which leads to low quality because there’s a lack of resources and not enough teacher support. Thus, those who attend public schools are those who don’t have access to another viable option. Ask anyone about the public school system in Chile, and almost all will shake their heads; the perception of Chile’s municipal schools is not an encouraging one.

Poorer municipalities cannot provide the resources or the teacher wages to sustain a high quality environment. Many municipal education authorities have had to borrow money, furthering debts of municipalities.⁹⁶ Lack of funds also creates conflict in how to prioritize spending among education, health and other services. Taylor quotes Gustavo Rayo and Gonzalo de la Maza, who said, “Poor municipalities face serious difficulties in maintaining significant social programs, not only because of structural financial restrictions, but also for the deficit in program financing from the previous decade.”⁹⁷ Hence, the municipal governments and their financial burdens reflect the quality and

⁹⁴ Translated from Online Survey, Feb. 19, 2013.

⁹⁵ Ben Levin. “Chile, Latin America, and inequality in education.” *Global Voices: The Overview*. Phi Delta Kappan, October 2011.

⁹⁶ Taylor. *From Pinochet to the ‘Third Way.’* quoting Rayo and de la Maza 1998, p. 431.

⁹⁷ *Ibid* p. 182.

resources of its municipal schools. In this context, it is easy to see how the system remains stratified due to decentralization.

One student I interviewed, Carla*, from Lo Espejo, came from a very low socioeconomic background. The school she went to from kindergarten through 8th grade was across the street from her house, but was a very bad school, with low SIMCE scores and below standards. SIMCE scores are Chile's national test scores that measure education quality. Carla told me that although her school had very few resources, she had a positive experience because she went into school with the mindset that she would graduate and go to university. She tried to not focus on the negative aspects of the school but to do the best she could do. Most of the students at this school would not continue to high school or university, because their parents needed them to work, and because of their parents' background, they don't see how their education will serve them for their future jobs in the informal sector. Nevertheless, it is most likely because of her positive mindset that Carla was actually the first person from her school to go to Pontificia Universidad Católica in forty years.

Jose* also received his early public education in the rural south. He commented that his teachers did the best that they could, but given their resources and conditions in their community, life was extremely tough. He lived in an extremely impoverished Pehuenche community, where domestic violence, and alcoholism were present and reflected in the school environment.⁹⁸ Cultural differences between the Chilean curriculum and the Pehuenche students were also difficult. His primary school's SIMCE scores were extremely low. He noted that the public high school he later went to was

* Name has been changed.

⁹⁸ The Pehuenche are an indigenous group in central/southern Chile.

known to be the best in the region, yet in reality it wasn't that great. The students weren't taught English (a standard in Chile), nor were they taught advanced levels of physics or chemistry.

The majority of the surveyed students who went to municipal public schools expressed their dissatisfaction with their education. One pointed to the fact that their education was really a preparation to regurgitate information for the PSU, the standardized test required to attend university. Many felt that the education they received was simply not good. One student exclaimed that there were many gaps in many academic subjects. A surveyed student from La Florida reflected that he overall had a good educational experience, but he did have to go to a pre-university to cover gaps in his high school education (he went to a technical public high school, so not all academic subjects were taught in depth). But he recalls, "Despite this, those were the best years of my life that ended with the Pingüino Revolution, and as a university student the student movement of 2011, where I participated in both."⁹⁹ For this student, what was memorable about his public education experience was the activism that he participated in.

One exception to the perceived, "horrible" public schools is the existence of traditional public high schools, such as *Instituto Nacional*. There are about ten of them in Santiago. *Instituto Nacional*, an all-male high school, is Chile's oldest and most prestigious school, and was founded after Chile declared independence. Eighteen of Chile's presidents went to this school. Although it is public, it requires an admissions test and good grades. Generally middle-class males attend the school, although Benjamin Gonzalez Guzman, its former President of the Student Center, noted that he found the

⁹⁹ Translated from Online Survey, Feb 18, 2013.

school extremely classist. Even though it may be one of the best high schools in Chile, it still has issues. I had the opportunity to converse with some students who went to these elite public high schools. They had more resources; art, music, could formulate their own opinions. Yet some felt that the schools were very elitist. Benjamin, who spoke at his graduation, felt that their curriculum was clearly geared purely towards economic gain, and they were taught to be competitive and professional. He also felt that a lot of discrimination occurred within school: many students and teachers were classist, homophobic, and racist.

One of the students I interviewed, Victor,* from *Internado Nacional Barros Arana*, an elite all-male public high school in the center of Santiago, had a lot to say on the subject of education inequality in Chile. Although he is in a good public school now, it wasn't always that way. He was sent to a public school in a rural area in the 7th region when he was younger, and said the school was just *horrible*. Victor noted that the environment, the infrastructure of the school, the way the classes were taught, the food, and the resources were all lacking. The public school was very strict, had many rules, yet the quality was awful. He pointed out that on Fridays at this school, they would have something called, “*lunmami*,” which was a combination of the cafeteria food from Monday-Wednesday.¹⁰⁰ Victor expressed that unless you do not attend one of the maybe ten elite public schools in Santiago, you won't get ahead unless you go to a private school, and, to him, for this reason, poor people can't emerge out of their social classes. For Victor the power of schools is like a game of Russian roulette—you can win big if you are able to attend an elite school, but most lose it all.

* Name has been changed.

¹⁰⁰ “*Lunmami*” combines the days Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday together.

There is a general consensus across every social class that Chile's municipal schools are of low quality. But why is the experience in public schools so negative? Many students point to the lack of resources, the mix of good and bad teachers, and the curriculum. Often times, the teachers are good, and they do the best they can within an institution that can't provide them with all the support they need. A former municipal high school student from Maipu commented, "School in general was a pain. There were good teachers but the content and methods were always of little significance."¹⁰¹ Students who attend public school for the most part are stuck with the worst education in Chile, and are very aware of it.

¹⁰¹ Translated from Online Survey, Feb 18, 2013.

Subsidized Voucher Schools

“Obviously I am not happy. The education that you receive in Chile is unequal, this cannot satisfy anyone.”¹⁰²

Introduced by Pinochet in the 1980s were voucher-schools, which are now the fastest growing segment of the education system. Private voucher-schools have the same financing as municipal schools, where the government will pay a fixed fee per student, but they also receive funding from the private sector as well as family contributions. Private entities can charge families additional fees, depending on specific contexts and what is allowed.¹⁰³ A reform in 1994, the “shared financing” law, allowed private voucher schools to charge a monthly tuition fee to parents.¹⁰⁴ Business entrepreneurs or non-profit organizations can run voucher schools. Non-profit organizations, including religious and secular organizations make up fifty-nine percent of voucher schools. In this case the organization may supplement family contributions. The rest are for-profit schools.¹⁰⁵ Voucher schools present the idea of a “shared funding,” where the government, private sector and families help fund the school, allowing for more resources.¹⁰⁶ Generally voucher schools have a higher quality and better reputation than public schools.

Voucher schools were meant to give Chileans a choice of where they want to go to school, and to give those of lower-economic status an opportunity to attend higher performing schools rather than failing local schools.¹⁰⁷ Voucher schools are prosperous in urban, high-populated areas because they attract middle-income families who cannot

¹⁰² Translated from Online Survey, Feb 18, 2013.

¹⁰³ “Challenges of the Chilean Education System.” *OECD, UNESCO, & MINEDUC*. Santiago, January 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Elacqua. “The Impact of school choice and public policy on segregation”

¹⁰⁵ Elacqua, Contreras & Salazar. “Scaling Up in Chile.”

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁷ Elacqua. “The Impact of school choice and public policy on segregation”

afford private schools. Thus, many students in Santiago attend these institutions. Of my sample, a majority went to subsidized voucher schools. Many of these schools however, have failed in poor, more rural areas because there is still a lack of resources and funds.¹⁰⁸ Gregory Elacqua (2011) argues that voucher skeptics believe that the schools actually risk exacerbating socioeconomic and racial inequalities, because many minority and less educated families do not have access to the information about voucher schools and thus cannot make an informed decision. Transportation to school creates a problem for many families that juggle multiple jobs; thus lower-income students often don't have access to voucher schools. In practice, the Chilean case demonstrates that voucher schools have not widened choice for lower income families.

Alexandra Mizala and Florencia Torche, prominent scholars in this field, also note the variation among voucher schools. Not only do voucher schools serve a broad cross-section of the Chilean student population, but each voucher school is also characterized by the socioeconomic status of its student body. In turn, according to Mizala and Torche (2010), “the educational achievement of a child attending the private-voucher sector depends considerably more on the aggregate socioeconomic status (SES) of her school than on her own family's SES.” Thus, the quality and resources of a school may exacerbate inequality more so than a student's family income. It is very important to be aware of not only the differences among the types of schools and family income, but the stratification within each school sector, which is usually linked to resources and finances.

My student voices confirm that subsidized voucher schools vary in quality, depending on its location, what organization, business or institution funds the school, and

¹⁰⁸ Torche. “Privatization Reform and Inequality of Educational Opportunity”

how much families pay for their child to attend. Pedro*, a student from a more upper-middle class family, went to two different subsidized voucher schools. The first was a religious institution and was very good; he said his classmates were *los cuicos*, Chilean slang for upper class people. The school was expensive and his family had to pay but the education was good and liberal. He recalls they even had a class once a week discussing issues of justice. The second subsidized voucher school he went to, however, was extremely disorganized, and he felt that the teachers didn't really care or participate within the school, which was evident through their lack of control over the students.

The theme of discontent throughout my conversations and surveys continued. One surveyed student from El Bosque expressed his discontent, because he felt his education only taught how to be a good worker, and that the building was in a bad state. The student said, "My greatest challenge was getting out."¹⁰⁹ A surveyed student from Peñalolén also upset with the system quoted, "I am not happy, my education in school was poor. There were as many good teachers as bad. Depending on the teacher a class would be interesting. My biggest challenge was not knowing what I was really interested in learning."¹¹⁰ Another unhappy student from Independencia expressed, "Schools worry a lot over instructing and communicating classes full of facts (curriculum content), and little of actual education."¹¹¹ Sandra* from La Florida explained how her subsidized voucher school was very small, and she felt that it was geared towards preparation for the PSU. Ironically, many students weren't even prepared for the test, because neither the academics nor the teachers were that effective.

* Names have been changed.

¹⁰⁹ Translated from Online Survey February 18, 2013.

¹¹⁰ Translated from Online Survey February 21, 2013.

¹¹¹ Translated from Online Survey. February 18, 2013

A few surveyed students mentioned that at the time of their schooling, they didn't realize that their education was lacking. A surveyed student from Maipu said while in school he thought he was receiving a normal education. However, when he discovered he couldn't go to university right away and had to attend a pre-university, he realized he was far behind in his schooling. A surveyed student from La Granja explained that compared to other institutions his education was horrible. But during his primary and secondary school years, his education seemed to be okay. At the time, it seemed like a good thing that teachers would give you the answers to everything. He later began to realize it was so the teachers wouldn't get a bad evaluation. This reflects the literature in chapter 2 that discussed the limited access to information about better quality schools and access to choice.

Of course, there were exceptions where I would come across students who did receive what they perceived to be a good education from a subsidized voucher school. Cristobal* from the community Macul, went to a subsidized school with a Catholic affiliation and required parents to also pay, but he felt that he received an education that also taught him good values. Because of his primary and secondary education he felt very prepared for university. Another surveyed student from Puente Alto noted that he had received an excellent education. Despite the fact that materials were scarce, there was always another way to do activities using what was available. The teachers were very capable and masters in their material. Clearly, subsidized voucher schools, although the fastest growing sector in Chile's education system, vary greatly in quality as shown by student perceptions.

Private Schools

“I had the privilege to attend to Colegio San Ignacio, a private Jesuit school. I couldn’t be more grateful for the quality of the education that I received and the experiences that I could have there. Most of the teachers were very good and some classes quite engaging. However, what I liked the most wasn’t the academic training, but the strong personal formation in terms of values and social commitment.”¹¹²

Finally, private schools are the most elite of the group. They have more resources, highly qualified teachers, and a noticeable larger amount of funds. Those that can afford to send their children to private school do so. In the private sector, a notion known as “creaming,” will often take place, where schools will only take the “cream of the crop” of the students in a selective admissions process. As a result, more middle and higher-income students actually go to subsidized fee-based private schools, and lower-income students continue to be trapped at municipal schools.¹¹³ Creaming does occur at the subsidized voucher schools as well, which has also contributed to widening the achievement gap instead of lessening it.¹¹⁴ Costs of private schools vary, but to provide an example, one of the most prestigious schools, The Grange School, costs over four hundred dollars per month for kindergarten.¹¹⁵

Private schools can offer a progressive education. Students are challenged but have many resources, extracurricular activities, and high-quality teachers. Many students I talked to felt that they learned how to think rather than how to become laborers. Yet, there was still an overwhelmingly acknowledgement of students’ privilege, and many were grateful yet critical of the education they received. A student from Providencia stated, “I am happy with the education I have received, but I think school is a stage too

¹¹² Translated from Online Survey ‘February 18, 2013.

¹¹³ Arango. “The Failings of Chile’s Education System.”

¹¹⁴ Camoy. “Lessons of Chile’s Voucher Reform Movement.”

¹¹⁵ “The Grange School.” Santiago, Chile. 2012. <http://www.grange.cl/>

formative in academics and intangible factors rather than respect, humility, sociability, sincerity among others. And my school was able to give me these factors. I had enough resources, good teachers, just as we also lacked in other elements and deficient teachers.”¹¹⁶

Despite the many successes of private schools, many students expressed things that were lacking. Pablo* from Vitacura told me that his school lacked diversity. In his case, ninety percent of students came from the barrios Vitacura, Las Condes and Ochoa, three of the wealthiest communities in Santiago. He referenced his school experience to living in a bubble, and that there was little diversity. He noted that all of the students in his private school had big houses, and the school was American. As a child, he was aware of the little diversity, and wished there was more, especially after attending university. Pablo realized how sheltered he was, and how unequal Chile really is.

Lorena* from La Cisterna told me she also went to one of the best private schools in Santiago. Being one of the best, it was also one of the most expensive. It was small, basic, but with a great quality, and most of the students went on to private universities. Echoing Pablo, she felt that the school was a bubble, since generally all of the students were from upper household incomes, and thus there was little diversity. Rich and poorer perceptions are parallel in that they both perceive inequality, but each group had a very different educational experience.

The president of the Students' Union at the University of Santiago Camilo Ballesteros is from a lower-income neighborhood but was able to go to a private American school. His classmates generally were elite and richer than he was, and often

¹¹⁶ Translated from Online Survey February 18, 2013.

times he felt discriminated against. He said the quality of the school was relatively good, definitely better than public schools, but the biggest difference to him was the school's location: a much nicer neighborhood, greener and with more vegetation. As someone who went on to be a notable student leader in the on-going student movement, it is clear Camilo acknowledges the unequal system and wants to change it.

For those who went to private school, they feel that they received a great quality education, but that there were still limitations in terms of diversity and feeling sheltered. In contrast, many less privileged students with whom I spoke echoed frustration towards the upper class students; Victor perceived students who went to private school to be full of themselves, elitist, and rich.

Analysis of Experiences in School

Understanding the basic school system in Chile with input from the students points out key themes. Without a doubt, public schools clearly don't receive enough funding when the municipality has a lower average household income. Generally, students who go to public school face a curriculum different than those in more affluent schools. They are taught to be obedient workers, they are taught facts. "Knowledge" is to "have verifiable facts," rather than knowledge being a process of experience.¹¹⁷ Students are taught to the test, and are educated for practical reasons, to be financially independent from the state.¹¹⁸ This phenomenon has been observed by Jean Anyon, which we will discuss shortly. In contrast, in certain subsidized private schools and private schools, students are taught how to think, they are given values, more resources, and teachers have the resources to teach effectively. This not only shapes perceptions of students, but it

¹¹⁷ Hinchey. *Finding Freedom in the Classroom*. p 15.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p 13

reinforces the already existing inequalities, because the opportunities are different. As Sandra noted, everyone has access to a free education, but not everyone has access to a good education.

Paulo Freire mentions these different experiences, which are crucial when understanding critical consciousness. He said, “We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of ‘banking’ or of preaching in the desert.”¹¹⁹ As educators, as actors striving for education reform, it is crucial to understand the different educational experiences of students, because if not, reform will not be implemented. The ‘banking’ concept he refers to is the idea of depositing facts into students, rather than teaching critical thinking. This ‘banking’ model is what often happens in schools with fewer resources, in public schools, or when students are taught to the test. Noting that the students come from diverse backgrounds and experiences already acknowledges their critical awareness and different way of thinking.

In addition, it’s important to point out that when discussing their entire educational experience, most students expressed that they have been very happy with the quality of their *tertiary* education, but they all agreed that the system was extremely expensive and that something needs to be done so it is more accessible. Many gave me an anecdote saying students go to a university for five years but it takes thirty years to pay for it. In fact, students made a notable distinction between their secondary and tertiary educations. Quite a few students from public schools had to attend a pre-university to

¹¹⁹ Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. p 96.

catch up on certain requirements and classes. Also, a few of the students who went to private schools made note of an increase in diversity in university. Nevertheless, half of the students interviewed were from Pontificia Universidad Católica, the best university in Chile. It was nice to see however, that even the more privileged students were bothered by the inequalities and have participated in the fight for a more equitable system. Thus, perhaps social class among students did not necessarily matter in one's perception of inequality, because every student interviewed acknowledged that educational inequality was a problem in Chile.

Table 3.1 below shows the results of a question from the online survey, asking students to evaluate the overall quality of their educational experience. Some students went to multiple types of schools. As you can see, only a few felt their education quality was excellent, and the majority felt their education was just okay or not good. This should be a flag that the system is unfair, that something isn't right.

Table 3.1: How Students Perceived Quality of Their Education

Type of School Attended	Number of Students & Quality of Education Surveyed Students Felt They Received ¹²⁰			
	Bad	So/So	Good	Excellent
Public	1	4	1	0
Subsidized Private	2	6	4	0
Private	1		2	2
Technical	1	2	1	0

Source: Online Survey February 2013.

¹²⁰ This was based on the survey responses: Obviously the majority went to subsidized, some went to more than one type of school. I don't know how effective this is, or if I should represent it in another way.

Mirroring Student Experiences with Critical Theory

Student perceptions surrounding their experiences within the education system are supported by educational critical theory. Jean Anyon conducted a notable study on social class and schoolwork in the late 1970s at different schools in New Jersey. Anyon argues that the five different schools were taught differently based on the location and social class demographics of the student body. Two of the schools were “working-class” (low-income), one was a middle-class school, and two were affluent. The dynamic of each school suggested differences of social class. In the two working-class schools, learning was following directions; teachers gave orders and controlled the classroom, little explanations were given, and as a result there was a prominent sense of student resistance. Students resisted by not listening to the teacher, not completing work and getting into trouble. In the middle-class school, learning meant finding the correct answer. The curriculum included more conceptual processes, teachers weren’t as controlling and were subject to external rules and regulations, and there was the possibility for kids to obtain valuable knowledge. The two-elite schools allowed for problem solving, expression by students, and the freedom for individuality.¹²¹

After listening to these students, one can see that Jean Anyon’s study on the four schools is applicable to Chile’s educational inequity. Generally, lower-income students receive a different education than higher-income students: an education that prepares them for labor or for continuing their class position. On the contrary, higher-income students are able to receive an education that is more constructive in teaching, and the students have more access to cultural capital. The type of schooling received can also

¹²¹ Jean Anyon. Marx & Education (New York & London 2011).

affect the “local knowledge” and perception of inequality, because some students might have personally experienced inequality, while others have not. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

Developing a Critical Consciousness

Listening to student experiences and opinions on the education system Chile is crucial. The students are subjects of the educational policies in place, and clearly, there are factors affecting an equal opportunity for success among students. Education in Chile is perceived by society as a business. Is this a problem? Maybe to some it's not, however, by treating it as such, the system continues to promote competition over a universal human right. Overall, depending on social class, people think education is either just bad or, it can be good but public schools (and even some subsidized schools) suffer from a lack of resources and support. Victor passionately spoke to me how he has experienced the worst of the worst in Chile. He knows what it's like, and it *has* to change: it's not fair.

The students whom I interviewed and surveyed were all generally passionate about educational inequality in Chile. It is very clear that the system is flawed: those who have experienced the worst *really* understand the reality. Although the education system in Chile is one reason for the exacerbated inequality in Chilean society, it is nevertheless very powerful. However, we can conclude that although class didn't necessarily matter in the detection of inequality, it played a part in the level of understanding. The next chapter will take a look at the socioeconomic disparities and discourse on inequality in Chile through the eyes of the students, further adding to the story of educational inequality in Chile, and how students understand it.

Chapter 4: The Realities of Life & Inequality in Santiago

In-equal-i-ty (*noun*): difference in size, degree, circumstances, etc.; lack of equality; imbalance, inequity, inconsistency, prejudice, discrimination, unfairness

How do people identify inequality, and why does it matter? You may identify it by one's clothes, language, skin color, gender, even one's level of education. We, everyday people, all have our own interpretations of this term, and perceive it differently based on our life experiences. Yet too often we fail to recognize the significance of this knowledge, of our experiences and the potential in us to instill change. Paulo Freire says in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "Almost never do they [the oppressed] realize that they, too, 'know things' they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men."¹²² Understanding perceptions are far more important than we realize.

Inequality is a battle many parts of the world face every day. Mirroring this societal inequality is educational inequality, because societal values are institutionalized, and access of opportunity is often based on one's income level. Yet rather than an avenue for change, unequal education systems reproduce unequal societies. We have seen that this is the case in Chile. Every student I interacted with acknowledged that inequality is a problem in Chile. One survey student noted, "It is our biggest social problem."¹²³ However, how do students understand how inequality operates in their lives the city of Santiago? How does one identify inequality, and what does this say about the student experience? This section will talk about student perceptions of inequality; how they identify it, and then how inequality is exacerbated in the Chilean culture through neoliberalism and through what students have identified as the Chilean consciousness.

¹²² Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* p 63.

¹²³ Translated from Online Survey February 19 2013.

Santiago: A Segregated City

“The metropolitan region, Santiago in particular is a very segregated region by social classes. In reality...in the north are good areas, communities that have higher incomes, better infrastructure...in the south there are middle class and lower class communities.”¹²⁴



Photograph by Hillary Sapanski Jan. 2013

Walking in the barrio Las Condes, you feel as if you are in West Hollywood, Los Angeles or in Greenwich Village in New York City. Starbucks are on every other corner, sidewalks are immaculate, and buildings are modern. People have lighter colored skin. The artwork on the street consists of painted benches rather than graffiti. There's grass and trees. Hop in a taxi and within five or ten minutes arrive in Vitacura or Lo Barnechea, where executives, politicians and the elite have large homes. Or, hop on the subway south for fifteen minutes, and head towards Ñuñoa, a middle/upper-middle class neighborhood, which is full of apartment buildings, condominiums and houses. Certain areas have lots of vegetation and bike paths, while the main roads are lined with sushi restaurants, car dealerships and banks.

Head down to Estación Central near Santiago Centro, where you'll find informal vendors everywhere on the streets, graffiti speaking of social justice and revolution covering the buildings, dogs running around, and people with darker-colored skin. You

¹²⁴ Translated from Interview with Sandra* January 2013.

are told to be aware of your belongings, because pickpockets are common. Barrio Brasil, known for its Bohemian architecture, is a mix of beautiful old buildings and auto shops, local kiosks and cafes. Walking around, especially as a female and a *gringa* (foreigner), it is extremely common to get catcalls from the local men at almost every corner. In the center of the city, it's a mix of colonial architecture, forts, churches, and more modern skyscrapers.

Plaza Italia is the center of the city. From there, I've been told, if you go northeast, you are in the richer part of the city, and if you go south, it's "everybody else." Students have also referenced the river Biobio, saying that it also divides Santiago: those living on the east side are middle and upper classes, whereas to the west it is primarily lower-middle class and poorer communities. No matter the geographic point of reference, students find a very segregated Santiago. As a foreigner, I knew where I could go without a problem, where I needed to have my backpack in front of me, and where I shouldn't be going. These little indicators alone were clear of existing unequal communities.

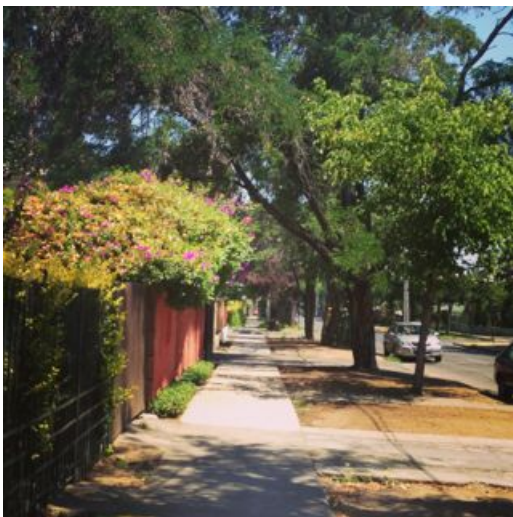


Photo by Hillary Sapanski, January 2013, Nuñoa

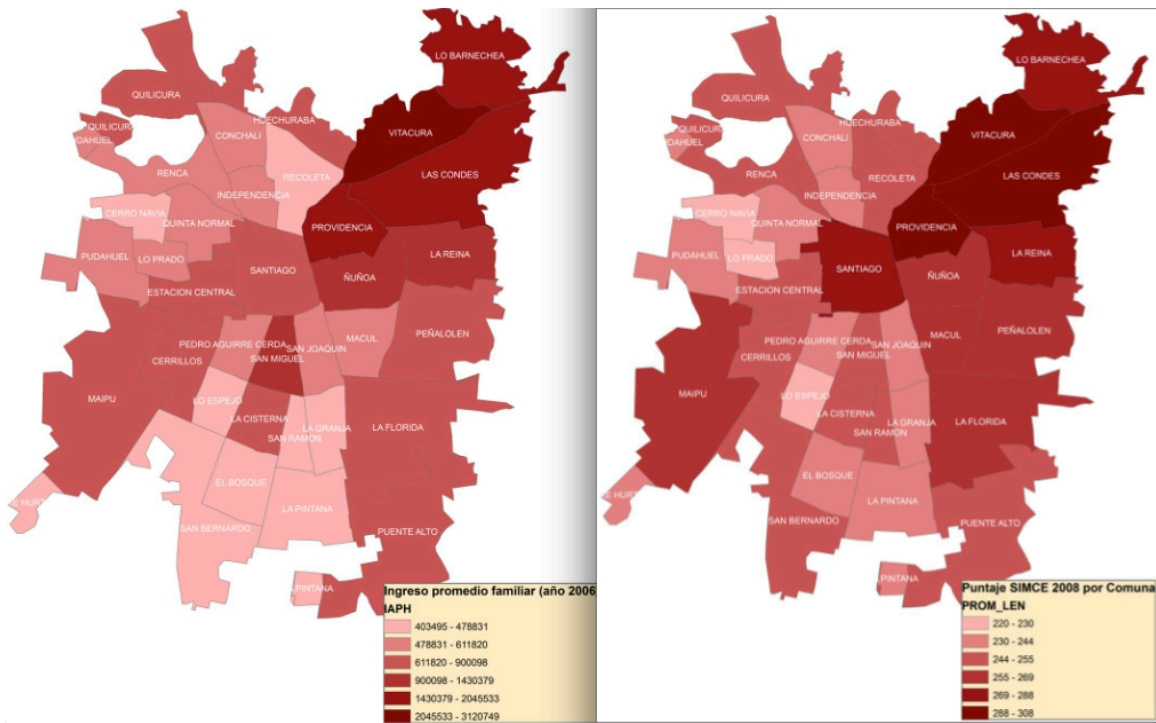


Photo by Roberto Villaseca, March 2012, Población La Victoria

Figure 4.1 below shows a map of greater Santiago based on 2006 household income averages in each community, and Figure 4.2 shows Santiago based on 2008 SIMCE scores, Chile's national test scores that measure education quality. As you can see, income household and SIMCE scores have a correlation. Students in this study came from an array of communities in Santiago. In total, my sample included students from twenty different communities in Santiago, and one from the city of Valparaíso, an hour and half from Santiago. The Northeastern communities have the highest household incomes, surrounding this region are upper middle and middle class communities, and as you go further west and further south, communities are much poorer.

Figure 4.1: 2006 Household Incomes in each Barrio

Figure 4.2: 2008 SIMCE Results



Source: <http://tvmaipoeducacion.blogspot.com/>

Table 4.1 below lists the communities where interviewed and surveyed students live. As you can see, the majority of students come from the growing middle class, which I will discuss shortly.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Barrios from Student Sample

Community	# Of Students	~Economic Standing
Vitacura	1	Upper Class
Providencia	1	Upper Class
Las Condes	2	Upper Class
Lo Barnechea	1	Upper Class
Peñalolén	1	Upper/Middle Class
La Cisterna	1	Middle Class
Macul	1	Middle Class
La Florida	5	Middle Class
Santiago Centro	3	Middle Class
Melipilla	1	Middle Class
Estación Central	2	Lower/Middle Class
Independencia	1	Lower/Middle Class
Quinta Normal	1	Lower/Middle Class
Puente Alto	2	Lower/Middle Class
Paine	1	Lower/Middle Class
Maipú	4	Lower/Middle Class
Padre Hurtado	1	Lower/Middle Class
La Granja	1	Lower Class
Lo Espejo	1	Lower Class
El Bosque	1	Lower Class
Other: Valparaíso	1	Middle/Upper Class

Referenced from 2006 Income Household Income, Observation, and Student Identification.¹²⁵

The city of Santiago is a very unequal and segregated society, though its poverty rate is actually only 11.5 percent compared to the national average of 14.4 percent.¹²⁶

Exploring the layout and culture of Santiago helps better understand the everyday experiences of the students who reside there. You can visibly see the contrasts among the

¹²⁵ I used the 2006 Income Household Income data from the map in Figure 4.1, as well as student identification and my own observations, since the 2006 data might be a bit outdated, and also didn't include all of the barrios. This is not an accurate representation of the communities in Santiago, but rather an interpretation from my experience.

¹²⁶ "Indicadores de Pobreza." *Casen: Encuesta de Caracterización Socioeconómica Nacional*. Gobierno de Chile, 2011. <http://observatorio.ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl>

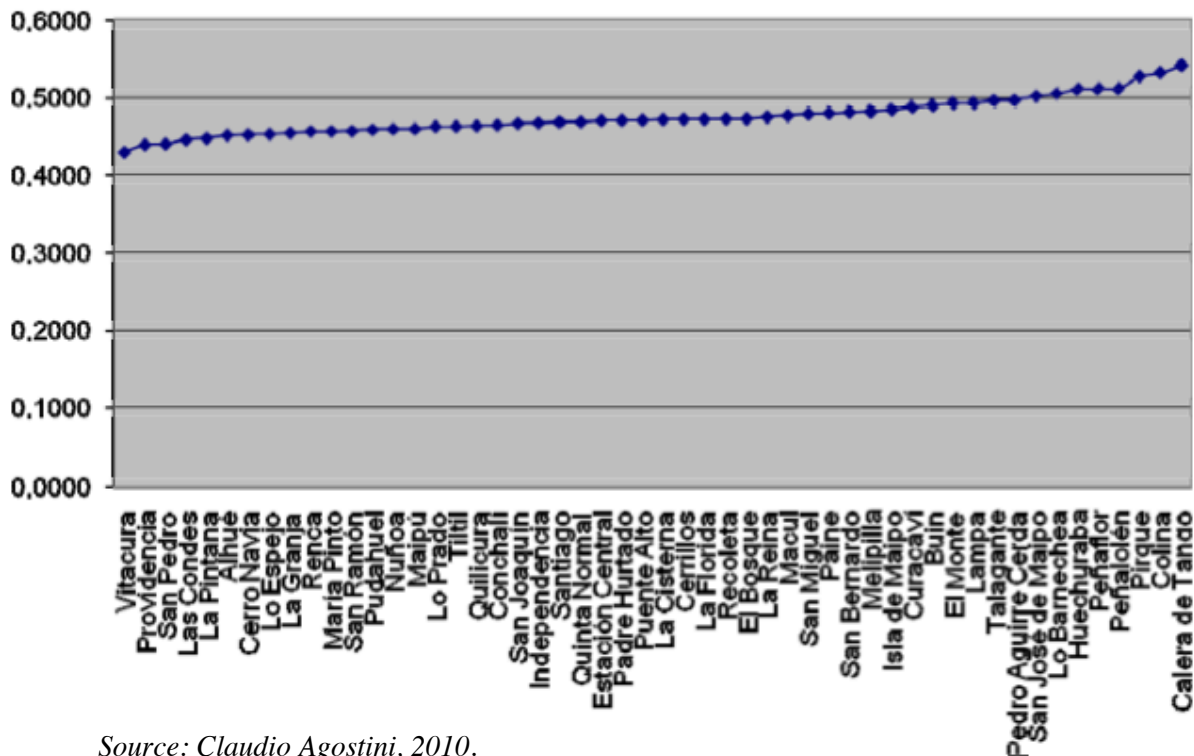
different neighborhoods; you know which neighborhoods to “stay away from,” though middle class neighborhoods are becoming larger. Different classes and minority groups do not often mix together.¹²⁷ Many of those impoverished feel isolated from upper-income classes. This leads to a handful of effects, such as low retention rates, poor academic results, poorer health and higher levels of crime.¹²⁸ However, Victor, who actually lives in Las Condes with his grandmother, originally came from a lower socioeconomic background, and told me he feels very uncomfortable living there. To him, he feels that the elite classes are arrogant, very materialistic. People don’t talk to each other like they do in *poblaciones* (poor communities), where there was a stronger sense of community.

Chart 4.1 on the following page demonstrates the Gini Coefficients in different neighborhoods of Santiago, hovering between .4 and above .5. Higher income neighborhoods and lower income neighborhoods generally have lower Gini coefficients than middle class neighborhoods. This may suggest that the middle class has a broad definition, and that the lower end of the middle class is not as secure as it should be. The next section will very briefly look at the emerging middle class and suggest why the inequality discourse is still so strong despite this growth.

¹²⁷ Claudio Agostini. “Pobreza, Desigualdad y Segregación en la Región Metropolitana.” Universidad Adolfo Ibañez. January 29, 2010. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1607432>

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Chart 4.1: Gini Coefficient of Communities in Santiago 2003



Source: Claudio Agostini, 2010.

An Emerging Middle Class & Looming Inequality

In the background chapter, I discussed how Chile's middle class is emerging rapidly. I asked a few of my interviewees about this phenomenon, and if they think that the new middle class will change inequality in Chile, let alone its discourse. I also discussed this matter with my host mom, who told me the middle class has definitely grown, but they don't receive any benefits, and thus she still feels that she struggles, she still feels that Chile is very unequal.

Pablo also shared this sentiment with me. When I asked him if inequality would lessen or worsen with a growing middle class, he told me, "I think it's going to get worse." He went on to explain that, because the middle class is growing, and more people from lower classes are joining the middle class, more students have an opportunity to go

to university. However, now, fewer people value technical professions, and there aren't enough jobs to suit the growing middle class. Pablo was talking about a bottle neck approach, even though there's a growing middle class, not all of the students are going to be able to get middle class jobs, so there should be a bigger emphasis on technical degrees. Echoing Pablo's concerns, Education Minister Harald Beyer jumpstarted a website aimed to promote technical programs among Chilean youth.¹²⁹ Perhaps more technical degrees can provide more opportunities to middle class jobs, and perceptions around inequality can change.

Cristobal explained to me the distinctions of our perceptions of middle class during our interview. He expressed that the middle class in the United States is different from the middle class in Chile, and the established poverty line in Chile is actually too low, and that in reality, many people in the middle class really struggle. Cristobal also pointed to the economy and things like credit cards; Chileans think they can buy all these materials, but they end up in thousands of dollars worth of debt that they cannot pay back. Cristobal further discussed that the middle class gets the least amount of help from the government, it's the very poor and the rich who seem to benefit the most, and the middle class have to fend for themselves. Overall, he was very unhappy and not super optimistic looking ahead in the future of the middle class.

When I asked Carla about the growing middle class, she also felt that inequality wasn't going to improve. Her reasons were due to this consumerism mentality. When Chilean families get more money, they spend it. Carla said many students have smart phones, a Wii, Nintendo games, because their parents buy that from them instead of

¹²⁹ Alicja Siekierska. "Chilean government encourages youth to pursue technical studies." *The Santiago Times*. March 15, 2013. www.santiagotimes.cl

putting their money towards a better education. Thus, middle class families still struggle with a not so great education, and with less security because of how they consume. Carla, who comes from lowest income quintile, told me that there are people in her community with smart phones, and she doesn't understand why their families pay for that instead of using the money for better opportunities.

The emerging middle class could decrease inequality society overtime, but the discourse on inequality, at the very least among the students, still continues strongly. Although Lorena did think that perceptions of inequality were going to change with a growing middle class, the other students echoed continued dissatisfaction. Further, the majority of students that I interviewed and surveyed came from the middle class, yet there was still a strong notion of inequality in Santiago: *why*? Camilo told me in his interview, "In Chile, there are the rich and the poor, the good and the bad." This emerging middle class perhaps has not yet shifted people's thinking on inequality.

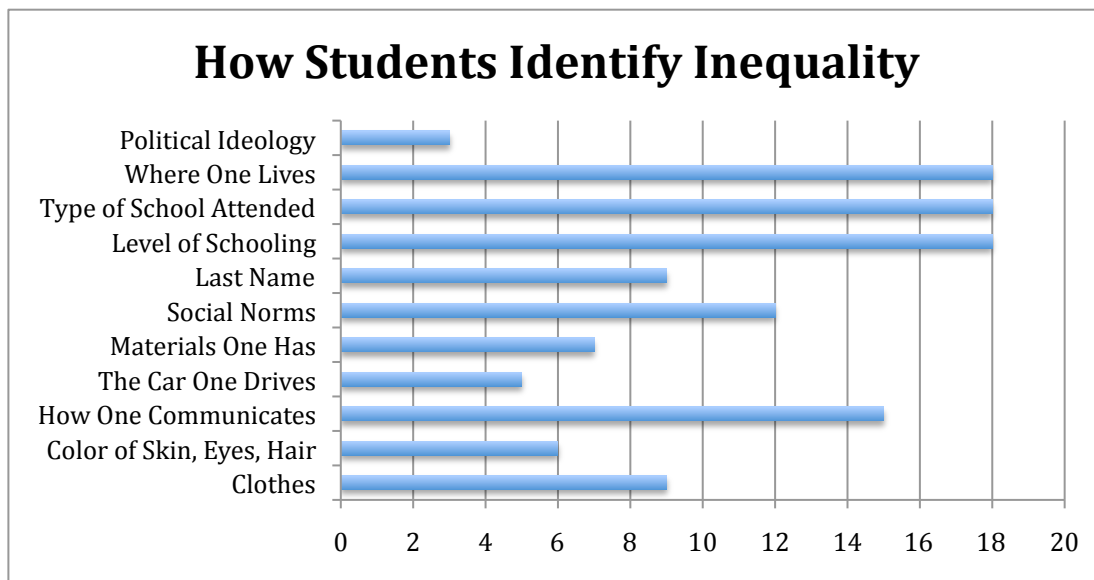
Chilean Students Identifying Inequality

“You see someone from far away walking, you see what they have, and right away you know what community they live in.”—Pablo¹³⁰

“We are the most unequal country among the members of OECD. Our educational system, just as our society, is highly segregated and consequently this reproduces the inequality.”¹³¹

When I asked students about their understandings of inequality, responses came in multiple forms. My interview questions were open-ended, but in the online survey, I gave them a list of qualities with a blank box so they could add more if needed. Overall, many referenced physical characteristics such as hair, eye and skin color. Others pointed to how one physically speaks, walks, the materials one has, as well as the level of schooling and type of schooling received. Chart 4.2 below shows the survey responses and what students checked off as ways of identifying inequality.

Chart 4.2: How Students Identify Inequality ¹³²



¹³⁰ Translated from Interview January 2013.

¹³¹ Online Survey February 18, 2013.

¹³² In Chart 4.2, Political Ideology came up a few times during my field research because some students associated ideologies such as communism or socialism with lower class, and more conservative ideologies with upper class.

Where someone lives, the type of school attended and the level of schooling were the qualities most chosen in the survey, with how one communicates as the fourth most common factor. Not only is the city demographically divided, but it's also reflected in the school system. And the level of schooling also indicates the amount of resources and support one has, which was discussed in chapter 3.

My investigation listening to student responses on how they identify inequality encouraged me to also reflect: *how do I identify inequality in a person?* This question proved to be more difficult than I realized, since I found myself always withholding judgments about a person. I found that I, too, assume someone's socioeconomic status based on where someone lives in Santiago. As soon as Pablo told me he was from Vitacura, I automatically thought to myself: okay, he is very wealthy. I also found that how someone communicates was also a strong factor: Chilean Spanish is already difficult, but depending on the community, sometimes the slang is tougher, and I wouldn't be able to understand. And, on an interesting note, most people who received a "better" education could actually speak in English, and so if I had trouble understanding they would translate for me, or even just talk to me in English. In short, listening to Chilean students and how they identify inequality really opened up my eyes to my own perceptions, and made me question *why* I perceive people as such.

Themes from the survey results were also present in interviews. Besides physical characteristics, the materials one has, the music one plays, where one lives, and level of schooling, students went beyond this identification of inequality, and pointed to very valuable, important concepts that demonstrate their critical consciousness. Camilo said that by knowing even the last name of someone, you can identify their socioeconomic

status or where they live. In an informal conversation with a few high-school students, a boy explained that yes, you identify inequality by these characteristics, and may consider someone to be poor because of their appearance and how one talks, but it is “because they know the reality:” the reality of being poor.

Three students I interviewed, Pablo, Lorena and Sandra all told me how they didn’t really experience inequality until they went to university, where they went to school with students from all over Santiago. In their primary and secondary education, they went to school with people in their communities, whether it was a higher-income demographic or more middle class. Sandra, who comes from a middle-class community, noted how she never really encountered lighter-colored people until she was in university.

Benjamin said within his school he observed inequality because of the classist culture in his school, as well as a few discriminatory practices by his teachers. Benjamin told me about how his teachers would make discriminatory comments to fellow students. One teacher singled out his friend who was gay, and told him, “You need to get away from here.” Benjamin also mentioned that there is this mentality where teachers tell students, “*deja la población en la casa,*” or, leave the poverty at home. When they were at school, they had to act sophisticated, and elite.

Some of the students I spoke with have witnessed discriminatory acts, while others personally experienced it. Nevertheless, it was clear that inequalities are very visible in Chile. What we will talk about next is this inequality consciousness, which many students believe is a part of the Chilean culture.

Chilean Slang & Inequality Around Santiago

A few terms were thrown around when discussing inequality with students: *Los flaites* and *los cuicos*. *Flaites* refer to people who are “lower” class. *Flaites* have little access to education; according to Pedro, they also do not want anything to do with it. They are known for stealing and wearing materialistic clothing, with big watches and the latest sneakers. They drive run down autos with blasting music. I’ll never forget when I was in the car with Cristobal before his interview, and he randomly pointed them out to me when the car passed. The word *flaite* is even used in the Chilean dialect when saying something is low quality or worn down. Pedro felt that the actions of *flaites* are a result of how their parents raised them.

Victor, who doesn’t come from a high socioeconomic background, had a lot to say about *flaites*. He felt that they were the problem of Chile: because they aim to have the nicest shoes, the biggest watch with diamonds, they are actually destructing society because they want all of the most expensive, hot commodities. He said *flaites* are an example of how materialistic Chile has become as a society, and how that promotes inequality, dividing those who have and those who have not. Those who have not, such as *flaites*, steal. Victor said that in Chile, there is a “you are what you wear” theory, where, people identify inequality based on your appearance. In other words, your appearance describes your value, how you are as a person, and how you seem. Thus, people feel the need to buy or maybe steal materials to prove they are higher status, that they are worthy.

On the other hand, *los cuicos* are upper class Chileans. When Camilo Ballesteros told me about his experience in school, he specifically said he went to school with *los cuicos*, distinguishing himself from them. Some students characterized *los cuicos* as

being elitist, full of themselves, and individualistic. Alert to these terms from my field research I came across a “map” from the perspective of *los cuicos*. Figure 4.5 on the next page shows the map.

Figure 4.3: Cuico Map

santiago segun los cuicos



Source: www.lun.com. November 25, 2012.

As you can see, the Northeast in purple, *casita*, meaning home, is where a majority of *los cuicos* lives. This includes communities such as Las Condes and Vitacura. *Pobres y mano de obra*, refers to the poor and labor force, and encompasses communities to the west of Santiago Centro, such as Quinta Normal and Independencia. *Maipunga* is referencing the Maipo barrio *flaite*, marginals of the city. *Puente Asalto* accuses Puente Alto as being a barrio with high rates of assault. *Gente como uno*, which

means “people as one,” refers to the middle & upper-middle class communities Ñuñoa and Providencia, suggesting that middle class families are all very similar. As you can see once again, Santiago is segregated, and this *cuico* perspective, one I did not encounter often, demonstrates how perceptions of inequality come in many ways, but clearly is a common discourse.

Inequality & Neoliberal Model Linked

Throughout my fieldwork, the neoliberal economic model kept coming up in my conversations and interviews with students. Pedro explained to me that he perceives the poverty in Chile as a capitalist poverty, because versus a country like Nepal, there is such a drastic difference from the wealthy. Pedro's statement became a theme throughout my research and reiterated by other students. Many acknowledged that Chile's capitalist and neoliberal economic model were to blame for inequality. In another informal conversation I had with a student, the student said that certain neighborhoods in Santiago lack opportunities and resources because of the neoliberal system. Lorena pointed to educational opportunities as a leading factor in Chile's continued inequality. Chile's primary problem with combating education inequity is that it seems impossible to have an equal education for all in a market-based education system. Straying away from the neoliberal model is a very difficult thing to do, however, because it is deeply rooted in Chilean politics and economics.¹³³ Many students acknowledge this reality, and are unsure how change can happen.

Camilo Ballesteros explained to me that Chileans are *individualistas*, or individualists, reflecting the neoliberal economy. Chileans seek individual happiness, but not happiness for society as a whole, and that's why there is so much inequality. He went on to tell me how Chile is one of the least happy countries in Latin America, which is odd, because they are not happy yet have a great economy. So, I asked him then, why aren't people happy? He answered: it is because the money is not going to the people. A

¹³³ Ann Matear. "Equity in education in Chile: The tensions between policy and practice." International Journal of Educational Development: vol. 27 pp 101-113. 2007.
www.sciencedirect.com

few students told me that they felt capitalism was actually stronger in Chile than in the United States. Many students acknowledge this reality.

The Economist (2012) explains, “Roberto Méndez of Adimark says that, for the first time in thirty years, ‘trust in the liberal economic model has weakened,’ from 60 percent to 40 percent. That may be because the student movement has crystallized a widespread feeling that the economy, politics and the media are all rigged in favor of a small elite.” The protests have shone light on the linkages between education equity and socioeconomic disparities, and more and more people are questioning the neoliberal model.

Characteristics of inequality and neoliberalism students demonstrate how socioeconomic disparities and educational inequality play out within a society. Patrick Finn (2009) in his book *Literacy with an Attitude* states, “The free-market economy comes into its most serious conflict with social rights, particularly economic rights.”¹³⁴ Most students talked about the economy and how capitalism has exacerbated inequality. The students are in the process of understanding the world around them, using Freire’s critical consciousness to understand social norms and everyone’s place in society. Freire, quoted in the foreword of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* from his book with Donaldo Macedo, *Ideology Matters*, said,

“We need to say no to the neoliberal fatalism that we are witnessing at the end of this century, informed by the ethics of the market, an ethics in which a minority makes most profits against the lives of the majority. In other words, those who cannot compete, die...I embrace history as possibility [where] we can demystify the evil in this perverse fatalism that characterizes the neoliberal discourse in the end of this century”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Patrick Finn. *Literacy with an Attitude*. (New York 2009) p 158.

¹³⁵ Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* pp. 25-26.

Freire feared the effects of the neoliberal model on societies, and points out how it can be unethical. The students are also pointing to the neoliberal market as a main reason for the inequalities in society. And the neoliberal market approach isn't just in the Chilean economy. It's used in education, in healthcare, and in everyday consumer choices. Freire hoped that there is possibility beyond the dominating neoliberal discourse, and some students are trying to address that.

La Consciencia Chilena

Another theme that popped up in my fieldwork was *la consciencia chilena*, or the Chilean consciousness, that students used when explaining their perception of societal inequality to me. *La consciencia chilena* varied from student to student, but similar to the previous section, referenced the neoliberal model and pointed out its effects on both society and the education system, and how it has shaped the Chilean consciousness today.

Students noted that Chileans have big egos, that they have strong opinions, and that they are easily influenced. In an informal conversation, one student said that there is an ethical consciousness, or a moral consciousness, that needs to change among Chileans, so that money is not the only definition of success. Victor explained to me how basic family values in Chile have changed: you can't go home and see your dad because he's working. If you're poorer, your mom is working too, and if you're even poorer, *you* are working.

A surveyed student, when asked about suggestions for education reform, said, that beyond a radical change in the government, there needs to be, "a change in the social consciousness in the Chilean people, removing social disparities that are created in the

mind and in social media.”¹³⁶ In a similar fashion, Benjamin said that there is definitely a cultural surrounding inequality, because of awareness of the different opportunities people have. Benjamin provided an example, going to a friend’s house whose father travels to England often, it was clear his friend had more opportunities, more cultural capital and security. He of course didn’t fault his friend for his opportunities, it was just an observation, a reality Benjamin encountered daily especially going to *Instituto Nacional*.

When I asked Carla about how she perceives or identifies inequality, she told me that your family and where you live definitely influence one’s upbringing and understanding, but inequality in Chile is something cultural; it’s in the mentality of Chileans. It’s how she takes the bus an hour or more to Universidad Católica everyday, where other students drive in fifteen minutes. It’s where she goes to work, how her mom works in an informal market. Inequality is all around in Santiago, it’s on the streets, in schools, in neighborhoods, it’s in the actions of people, and in the culture. And perhaps, it’s this deeply rooted part of the culture that continues inequality and shapes perceptions.

Students’ Developing Critical Consciousness

Inequality can be identified in many ways. Understanding how students identify inequality is important because it goes beyond the numbers and statistics of household income levels. There’s a local knowledge, a street science in identifying people within Chilean society, whether it is where someone lives, how someone dresses, what their interests are, or how someone communicates. These factors, which may derive from the

¹³⁶ Translated from Online Survey February 19, 2013.

level of schooling or type of school attended, is how inequality exists in a society. And this is how students develop their critical consciousness.

What have the students taught us, that we didn't know before? What local knowledge is there? We learned that certain communities have stigmas because of their income level, that it matters the level and type of schooling one received, and how one communicates on the street. Inequality is not just determined by the amount of money one has but can be identified by one's appearance; by the way one speaks. This is why *flaite*s feel the need to have the most expensive clothes and items: to look rich. The effects of the neoliberal model are evident in the culture and actions of Chileans; people are accustomed to buying things all the time, working for individual happiness rather than societal happiness. This Chilean consciousness has been identified as a factor of inequality; and it has become engrained in student perceptions.

It is important to understand the socioeconomic dynamic within Chilean society from the perspective of students because it helps us understand where they are coming from when we listen to their reasons for activism and their suggestions for education reform, to understand why many students are *still* actively protesting. It also is the basis of their critical consciousness. Part III looks at students responding to inequality, particularly within the student movement as well as other initiatives. It will then look at student suggestions for reform, understanding the possibilities and limitations that come with student activism and power.

Part III: Students Respond to Inequality: Critical Consciousness in Action

“I am more and more convinced that true revolutionaries must perceive the revolution, because of its creative and liberating nature, as an act of love. For me, the revolution, which is not possible without a theory of revolution—and therefore science—is not irreconcilable with love. On the contrary: the revolution is made by people to achieve their humanization. What, indeed, is the deeper motive which moves individuals to become revolutionaries, but the dehumanization of people?” ...Che... “Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality.” *Venceremos*—The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara, edited by John Gerassi (New York, 1969), p. 398.

“If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity.”
—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, p. 88.

Chapter 5: Student Activism: Voicing Injustice

A mass of Chilean students over the past seven years have been exercising their right to speak out, and vocalizing what they see as injustice and unequal. This dynamic of public discourse in Chile is what makes understanding student perceptions so interesting: students implementing their



Photo by Roberto Villaseca, May 2012

critical consciousness. What empowers them to speak out? What are the possibilities and limitations? Freire quotes, "The correct method lies in dialogue. The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight in their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientização* [critical

consciousness]." Chilean activists use Freire's critical consciousness to stand up. Yet, certain factors we will explore have limited their progress.

This chapter will first explore the latest on the student movement in 2012 and 2013, and the experience within it. Then, it will look at an array of student perceptions of the movement, and where students think its future lies. Third, we will take a closer look at what Benjamin Gonzalez Guzman did at his graduation, and why his speech was so charged. Finally, I will discuss student activism, its possibilities and limitations, and what this suggests about educational inequality and Chilean society more generally. Listening to the active and everyday student voices in different social classes present not only the local knowledge and discourse of these students, but it shows the greater implications of the student critical consciousness.

2012 & 2013 Student Protests: Not Giving Up

As of March 2012, 85 percent of the Chilean population was still in support of the students and their demands, but no one was expecting significant responses from the Piñera government.¹³⁷ Although not nearly as large as the year before, student demonstrations continued. The protests also sparked demonstrations and outcries in other policy areas throughout Chile. Down in Aysen, Patagonia, citizens protested over a new fishing law, and for cheaper Petrol, to heat their homes and for their cars. Similar protests occurred further south in Punta Arenas, and up north in Calama.¹³⁸

Students themselves expanded their demands beyond educational inequality. Students are also rising against the neoliberal economic model, a concern echoed in the last chapter, and are encouraging the Piñera Administration to refinance the copper

¹³⁷ Goldman. "Camila Vallejo, the World's Most Glamorous Revolutionary."

¹³⁸ "Chile: Progress and its discontents." *The Economist*. 14 Apr 2012. www.economist.com

mines, which are Chile's primary export.¹³⁹ Clearly, Chileans are exercising their right to protest, and are voicing deeply rooted inequalities that are on the brink of change.

By the end of 2012, however, the student movement seemed to lose a bit of momentum. Camila Vallejo noted, "We are obviously in a different stage this year...I would be wrong to say that the movement has the ability to mobilize that it did last year, because that isn't so."¹⁴⁰ School occupations only lasted for about a month, and negotiations with the government were minimal. Esteban Miranda, a student spokesperson from the history department at Universidad de Chile, told *The Santiago Times*, "The movement has realized that it is not enough to appeal to institutions, that when Congress discusses the issues behind closed doors, it always ends in defeat for the students and a victory for the politicians and businessmen."¹⁴¹ This is a stark reality that the student movement is facing: governmental officials not validating the demands of the students.

Piñera has also dismissed the student protests, arguing that because only 9 schools were occupied out of 11,000 schools, why should the government listen?¹⁴² Yet, that does not mean that other students in public schools do not feel their education is lacking; students might not have the means to mobilize and act. Nevertheless, although the movement might have died down, its discourse still continues. My student informants continue to support the movement and its future potential.

¹³⁹ Sarah Slater. "Chilean Student Movement: Reflections and Projections." *Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA)*, July 10, 2012. www.coha.org

¹⁴⁰ Aaron Walck. "Chile's student movement struggles to find footing in 2012." *The Santiago Times*. Sept 14 2012. www.santiagotimes.cl

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Since the 2013 school year began, there have already been unauthorized and authorized protests.¹⁴³ There was an unauthorized protest on March 7, 2013 within the first few days of school. Marches are normally organized through CONFECH or MESUP (private university organization), but this protest was by *los encapuchados*, students who wear hoods and tend to throw rocks and missiles at the *pacos* in response to the tear gas, water cannons and sometimes paintballs. The students were said to be protesting, “Chilean education is not for sale” and “the education system of Pinochet will fail.”¹⁴⁴ Around three hundred people came together in downtown Santiago, and about thirty students were arrested.¹⁴⁵ The new president of the Student Federation of *Universidad Católica* noted the importance of continued student pressure. Vela says, “We understand that the changes we are looking for won’t happen in one day, that this is a long-term fight...but we are hoping that this year, especially with the elections, we will be able to see some big changes to the education system.”¹⁴⁶ And so, despite the struggles and violence that students endure, the movement continues as the 2013 school year commences.

The first official, authorized march of the year, headed by CONFECH, took place in Santiago on Thursday, April 11th, 2013.¹⁴⁷ Marches took place throughout the country as well. It was estimated that 150,000 students walked from Plaza Italia to Estación Mapocho. The march lasted around 3 hours, and was relatively tame until the end near Estación Mapocho. The march had dances, singing, chants, waving flags and confetti.

¹⁴³ Marches have to be authorized by the government, though many unauthorized marches have taken place, and very shortly become violent.

¹⁴⁴ George Forrester. “Violent protests mark start of school year in Chile.” *The Santiago Times*. March 7 2013. www.santiagotimes.cl

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Siekierska. “Chile’s student leaders schedule first official march of 2013.”

Nevertheless, around 2p.m. things became violent as *los encapuchados* started attacking the *pacos*, and some protesters began burning things.¹⁴⁸ Nito Rojas told the *Santiago Times*, “If we didn’t have these marches, we wouldn’t be able to talk about education and health and justice.”¹⁴⁹ Another student from Universidad Alberto Hurtado said, “Education should be equal for everyone, it should be free—we all have the same rights.”¹⁵⁰ The mission and fight for the students remain the same, even today, providing an equal education for everyone. How much longer will students continue to march from Plaza Italia, until the government decides to listen?

Spotlight: Camilo Ballesteros

Sitting down in a restaurant near Plaza Italia, I was sweating profusely. Not only was it a hot, ninety-five degree summer day, but I was with Camilo Ballesteros, one of the prominent leaders



Source: latercera.com

of the university student. Camilo, who goes to the University of Santiago, has been fighting to reform the education system since the Pingüino movement. In 2012 he ran for Mayor in the Estación Central barrio. Although he lost, it’s impressive for a university student to run for office.

Camilo is a part of the communist party, but he told me that the movement isn’t predominately communist, contrary to a few comments from students like Pedro, who as

¹⁴⁸ Weiru Fang. “More than 150,000 take part in Chilean education march.” *The Santiago Times*, April 11, 2013. www.santiagotimes.cl

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

soon as I mentioned the movement, Pedro replied, “*Ataca a los comunistas!*” (Attack the communists)! Camilo said the movement is made up of different political ideologies, but that it’s, “*para la misma esperanza,*” or the same hope. Camilo has worked closely with Camila Vallejo to plan marches and talks with the government. As Camilo sees it, students are getting closer and closer to making change. He says they already have come a long way by having conversations with the government. Camilo feels that the students still have to fight, and that they will do so until there is change. I asked Camilo about the high school movement and university movement as separate entities, and he said that the two movements do work together sometimes. Although they do have different goals, the overarching message is the same: an affordable, quality education.

One obstacle Camilo mentioned was that Chileans are already so accustomed to paying for everything, like paying for a good education, so it can be hard for them to realize that they shouldn’t have to pay for a universal human right. Camilo believes there is hope for the movement, but that Chile needs to move away from an economic education.

Spotlight: In the Thick of the Movement: Brutality, Frustration, Reality.

“I’ve really informed myself about this theme [student movement], I’ve attended marches, assemblies, I read the newspaper (of all natures), I’ve attended conferences, and above all, I’ve encouraged more people to join.”—Online Respondent¹⁵¹

While walking through the matriculation fair in the Plaza de Armas, in Santiago Centro, I ended up talking to high school students who have actively been a part of the movement. One boy told me that he was not in school for seven months over the course of 2011 and 2012 because of the movement. But, he looked at me and said, “I’ve learned more in the streets than I have in the classroom.” Students wanted to tell me about their experience in the movement, they wanted me to know the *reality* of the movement, since what you see on television and read in papers is *not* the truth. They also wanted to stress that students aren’t a part of the movement because they don’t do well in school, an assumption also perceived by the public. Rather, students are a part of the movement because they’ve lived the demands students are asking for; they know the reality of poorly funded public schools.

Victor was also eager to tell me about his experience. He’s been a part of the movement since he was in seventh grade. He told me that the movement is extremely brutal, especially the governmental response. He witnessed a fifteen-year old girl have her knee broken by a *paco*, or a policeman. Victor himself was once beaten by a *paco*. He told me that the physical pain of being stomped on lasted for maybe a few hours, but, emotionally, it has never left him. Victor also explained how often times the government has vilified the students. In one situation three buses were burned down, but one of them

¹⁵¹ Translated from Online Survey February 18, 2013

was a set up and not done by the students, although they were accused of it. He said the bus was already abandoned, with no driver, and was completely barricaded.

I also asked Victor of his thoughts on Camila Vallejo, since she is a primary face of the movement. He looked at me angrily. Victor felt she left them out, because she became too involved with the communist party, money, and fame. As an outsider, and from the media, Camila seemed to be loved by all students in the movement. Victor explained that the movement is much more complex and diverse than one thinks: students aren't politically organized, they're fighting for a common goal: for education to be more equally accessible to every Chilean.

Other interviewed and surveyed students explained their involvement. Most had participated at some level, whether it was going to watch the protests or actually march. Some students viewed participation as simple as spreading information about the movement, telling friends and families about its mission. Some raised money; others attended in meetings, or organized students. Some were a part of political groups on a university campus or in their university's student council. Some students desired a revolution, while others hoped for some sort of change within the system. I did interview and survey students who did not participate in the movement because it was too risky, civilly disobedient, and they perceived the movement as too political. Nevertheless, the student movement discourse, both inside and out, is very telling of the will of the students. Freire questions, "Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society...who can better understand the necessity of liberation?"¹⁵² The oppressed students know the reality, and it's why they're fighting.

¹⁵² Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed p. 45.

Student Perceptions of the Movement: What's going on, and where is it going?

“Education needs long term changes...cultural changes.”—Online Respondent¹⁵³

The student movement, although it has died down since 2011, is still alive in Chile. But what do students make of this? What is significant about this movement? The fact that students are not giving up suggests that the educational inequality at hand has not been addressed the way students would like. This section will explore perceptions of students in university who have participated in the movement, and also those who haven't participated. Overall, as you will find, the general consensus is that although many students agree with the movement, they don't think it will be successful because of its methods and also because of the lack of power students have. This is key because it suggests that the students' critical consciousness in action has limitations.

Sandra explained how the movement is very powerful; although it doesn't represent everyone, it has unified many people. The movement has made it clear that many people are unhappy with the government and the economy; Chileans feel that they don't see where all the money goes, and that the government does not represent the people or give them what they want. One of my expectations of outcomes was that upper-class students wouldn't participate as much in the movement as lower-income students. This expectation was more or less correct, though I found that upper-class students commended the movement for standing up for what they believe in, though they didn't necessarily agree with the mission or the way they were going about it. Pablo echoed this perspective. He told me that, in a way, he is totally in agreement because the students brought attention to the discontent that exists surrounding education, but he doesn't think

¹⁵³ Translated from Online Survey February 18, 2013.

education should be free. Lorena said that she doesn't like the marches, but the students have to do it because they need to call attention to the issue, they need to fight for the quality of education.

As I mentioned earlier, as soon as I asked Pedro about the movement, he immediately said: *attack the communists!* He does applaud them for standing up for what they believe in, but doesn't agree it is the right way to do it, and he also doesn't agree with their demands. He explained that many students want education to be free, and they think that it is going to get better tomorrow, which is not the case. As an upper-middle class student, Pedro, although he was critical of the education he received, he doesn't think a free and quality education is going to be effective. We will look at his suggestions in the next chapter.

Jose said the student movement is a long process, something that has been going on for years, since Chile regained its democracy. Jose also talked about the symbolism of the movement, how a group of people questioning the way society is run, questioning the government and its actions. He has participated in the movement during his time in university and in Santiago. Carla was very active in the Pinguino movement during her second year in high school; she was on board with all the goals of the Pinguino movement. Today, she thinks that the movement has its justifications, but she's unsure of the effectiveness of a free education. Further, not being a fan of politics, it's hard for her to be a participant of the movement. She also thinks that because the movement is students, they are a bit too idealistic. It's notable how her perception has changed overtime from high school pinguino to a college student.

Looking Ahead: Is there Success in the Student Movement's Future?

I asked students if they thought that the movement was going to be successful, and I received both optimistic and pessimistic responses. Some felt long term it could be successful but not right now. Some fight for revolution, and others are more “realistic.” Below are excerpts, voices of the students from the online surveys that demonstrate the discourse around the student movement and its future. I am presenting their voices as such because I found their responses to be powerful and telling of their discourse and critical consciousness surrounding education reform, and their hopes for the future.

*Optimistic but Struggles Ahead*¹⁵⁴

“I have hope that we will achieve an agreement with some of the government, but not from the [political] right of course. However, the student movement lacks a bit of citizen support.”

“I think so [the movement will be successful], but it’s difficult to be able to determine the level of success, up until now the things that they’ve acquired have not been satisfactory. Other ways to address this issue would probably not work.”

“The movement will probably be successful even though I don’t think everyone should have a free education, those who have sufficient resources should pay for their own education. ”

“The student movement is going to be successful when...the Chilean politics change their mentality and level of worry...In addition they should stop using partisan politics, which does not think of the social but remains in macroeconomics ...”

“I think that you can see success coming, but in many more years. I think that this movement will last for years, but will achieve its objective. The protests are very valid, but look, it’s not the only thing that this movement has utilized, protesting is only what you see in the street, but nobody realizes what happens in homes, in schools, in places where the people can gain more information.”

“Success will happen, but they still lack an internal organization. The marches serve, although it’s not the only way to protest.”

“The student movement is going to be successful because it’s become something national, and not something local. The problem is when the movement begins to move towards politics, violence and intransigence. It’s here when it loses its course and strength, and then followers. I am not very involved in the student movement because it was tied to politics although they didn’t want it to be.”

¹⁵⁴ All quotes in these three sections are translated from Online Survey February 18-21 2013.

The student voices quoted above want to believe that the movement can be successful, and that there is hope. However, they are also aware of many obstacles against the movement, whether it's the power of the government and politicians, the need for more citizen support, a lack of cohesiveness within the movement, or a need for a social change. Only Victor and Camilo who I interviewed were very positive that the movement would eventually be successful. Both of them emphasized the fact that they were *never* going to stop fighting until they reach their goals, and many leaders of the movement also argue this; they have to keep fighting for liberation.

Unsure of the Movement's Success

"Sincerely, I think that there needs to be a movement with more force and social compromise. A solution beyond problems."

"Honestly, for the movement to be successful, there should be coordination with the students and a general support from parents, teachers, schools and society in general, something that doesn't exist, because politicians and society are not ready to give up even a little to give our country a quality education."

"I think that to be successful, they should learn every year the errors that they made. In other words, it's a movement that has a linear progression."

"If in the next election Chile elects a government from the Right, or one from La Concertación...this tug of war will continue."

"It can be successful, however, in the country that we live in, the fight is very tough, politicians are very tough and aren't that flexible."

"It is difficult to predict what will happen with the educational movement as well as knowing if our demands will be accepted by the government. To be honest, I don't think that the government and the Congress have any intention to make a significant change in education due to the strong neoliberal beliefs and ideology that they have. The state is seen, if, as a regulator, not as an entity that should provide and guarantee some basic rights and needs. The only way that students have to point out the problems is appealing not to the establishment, but to the people and their consciousness."

These students express uncertainty of the movement's future. So far it seems that all of the students have a consensus that the movement's success depends on how future elections go, if the Chilean government changes, if the movement gains more followers,

if people acknowledge the effects of the neoliberal model. This group of students isn't sure if these structures within the system are going to change, and they are skeptical with good reason, because the powerful governmental structures and policies may not change.

Not So Hopeful

"It will not be successful. The political machine is more powerful than an army of people without being able to reflect (a level of the country). There are other ways besides the protests. Basic conversation is very important, from there exist a set of values that will fundament our opinions and minds."

"The student movement, in the way that it is going, doesn't seem to have a good future. The marches and demonstrations have lost their feeling of pressure, it has become routine and is now becoming part of the daily routine in the city, and now its effect has numbed. The student movement has authorities and powerful people against them, especially the press."

"I think that it will not be successful, but I want to be proven wrong...because there are powerful political and economic groups that control much more than what the people think, and they will not have the intention to change the system. A great part of the big decisions fall in their hands."

"No, unfortunately. Already in my country there already exists the fear of retaliation, that aren't clear, for example when you go to the street to protest, the police forces almost in a state of vengeance (part of the government, the police are only doing their job) go out to 'control' the situation, there are other ways, but we are a country of only 200 years and we still haven't found other solutions, good that we have intended other years before, but we have not achieved objectives (in 2006 they established a dialogue table which broke up the movement, but was not reactivated till 2010) already they have created laws that follow a market-based education."

Interviewed:

These students stress the forces up against the student movement, which the students in the previous sections were hesitant about. The Chilean government, politics, and the lack of power that the students have *will* prevent them from being successful. Some might say that these students are being realistic, because, capitalism isn't going anywhere, the Chilean constitution isn't going to be changed anytime soon and neither is its greedy politics. But why does it have to be like this, why can't students make a difference? Aren't their demands valid, if inequality within the education system and within Chile is such a problem? This perhaps realistic approach really acknowledges the limitations of students' critical consciousness in action.

Alternatives to the Movement

“Yes, I think there are other ways. However, I believe that there will never be success in changing education no matter what initiative if they continue negotiating with powerful politicians already settled in control of the Chilean state. What’s necessary is a change of politicians, as well as the policies of the State itself. A revolution in every sense, in form of weapons, for example, would be one of the most one of the most effective measures in this case...”¹⁵⁵

In my interviews and online surveys, I also asked students about possible alternatives to the movement, that is, other ways to get the government’s attention. Students did have suggestions, but most added onto their response that it might not necessarily work. Some students noted more marginal alternatives to the movement, such as discussing at home and in communities with families and friends. One student said to create a public initiative that could gain international recognition, and then international groups could be involved and help their cause, giving the students global support.

As the student quoted above said, unless the politicians in power change, unless there is some sort of revolution, students will not be granted the power to make change or be effective. Another student stated, “Of course there are other alternatives, the dialogue of communication is the main one, but when they respond to us with tear gas, attacks and special force...the only way we can respond is by protesting.”¹⁵⁶ As this student noted, dialogue is obviously a more peaceful and maybe proactive way to work with the government. But how can dialogue work if the government is constantly attacking the students, if the government is too deeply rooted in politics to change? Students were unsure about alternatives that would be effective with the government because of the nature of power and politics. I asked about alternatives because I wanted to tap in to the discourse to see if there were other ways students could act and lead to change, and to see

¹⁵⁵ Translated from Online Survey February 19 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

how plausible it is for students to attempt more dialogue or get respect from the government. The next section will discuss an alternative to the student movement: an extremely brave, risky, move.

A Special Voice: Benjamin Gonzalez Guzman

“Today, I come to talk about something we as *Institutos* are silent about, how we prefer to forget actual history and keep it away the public. That we are all guilty: the authorities for hiding under the cloak of tradition or the love of the emblem, the *Instituto* supporters who support and defend irrational conducts that rob the ill, and us, the *Institutos*, who recognize the illness, but don’t do anything about it, we don’t leave the school or try to change something.”¹⁵⁷



Source: cuatroletras.cl

Benjamin introduced this project as he bravely stood in front of hundreds of people at the graduation of the most prestigious public high school in Chile, and questioned their education. Benjamin proved that students are not only critically aware, but they can be empowered to advocate for change. After seven or so years at *Instituto Nacional*, Benjamin, although very grateful for his education, was also questioning his experience, and made the bold decision to act upon it and speak out.

When Benjamin was asked to make a speech, he started thinking about what he would talk about. Would it be one of the boring speeches celebrating the history and success of *Instituto Nacional*? He felt that it wasn’t enough. So, he wrote a speech that had to be submitted and approved, and then really went to work on what he was truly going to say. In Benjamin’s speech, he thanked *Instituto Nacional*, his teachers, his friends, because, he really doesn’t regret going to this school. He was able to have conversations about issues such as politics, he was exposed to the arts, and he was able to

¹⁵⁷ Translated quote from Benjamin Gonzalez Guzman’s Speech, 12/28/12.

receive an education that he would not have had if he went to one of the local public schools in Maipo.

Nevertheless, he saw discrimination: in the textbooks, in the classrooms, in the actions of his classmates and his teachers. Choosing to not mention presidents such as Allende, glorifying fellow *institucionistas* such as Pedro Montt, a former president of Chile who killed 3,500 nitrate miners, known to be the second largest massacre behind the dictatorship. Benjamin told me that everything he said in his speech about the mentioned presidents were true; no one could contest that. Unfortunately, students weren't actually taught these realities.

Benjamin's speech also talked about the culture within *Instituto Nacional*, how his education was geared towards economic success rather than learning to become a critical thinker, and how, if the education system in Chile was equal, there would be no need for this elite institution. The school promoted excellence, but excellence in the results, in the test scores. Though he added that *Instituto Nacional's* PSU scores aren't the highest in the country, which they should be if they are one of the most elite institutions. Private schools, while teaching students how to learn rather than take tests, often do better on national exams as well.

After his speech, Benjamin's speech went viral, throughout the school, Chile, and Latin America. All the major news stations in Chile interviewed Benjamin. He actually met the mayor the day before meeting me. Benjamin knows that he doesn't represent everyone, he doesn't want to, but he felt that the school needed to know what he got from his education. Overall, Benjamin received positive feedback, from friends, teachers, and although not right away, his family as well. The whole country was listening; and the

school was infuriated. When I asked him if he was going to speak out again, or what is going to happen next, he wasn't sure. He said some time had passed since his speech, and things would probably go back to normal again.

Benjamin actually doesn't participate in the student movement that much, because he looks at it as a fight among social classes. Nevertheless, he still feels strongly about reforming the education, both within the system and individual curriculums, as well as structurally. Benjamin is a prime example how, although the student movement has a lot of attention, the movement is not the only voice speaking out about education inequality. He doesn't think that the system will be revamped because of the government and politics, but he believes there should be more access to a quality education.

Benjamin's speech and interview really resonated with me. A senior in high school boldly stood up as an individual, disrupting a formal, traditional event, to shine light on the structural inequalities and realities of the Chilean education system. Benjamin felt some sort of empowerment to do this. After speaking with Benjamin, it really made me believe in the potential power of students and how their experiences within the education system are very significant. Especially when a student like Benjamin reflects on his experience, he is able to critically assess and acknowledge that, there's something wrong. Critical consciousness questions assumptions of a society, everyday norms. Benjamin questioned what he read in his history books, he questioned the classist attitudes within his school, and he questioned his elite education, especially when too many Chilean students are receiving a much poorer one.

Why Does Understanding Current Student Activism Matter?

“This is more than just a fight for the students...this is about supporting other social movements—the workers, the people in Aysén. It’s about the people that want changes to the economic and political system in Chile.” –Fabian Araneda, *Vice President of the Student Federation of the Universidad de Chile (FECH)*¹⁵⁸



Source: pnews.cl

Student activism around the issue of educational inequality in Chile says a lot about society’s response to inequality, and about Chile’s current discourse on education. In my interview with Cristobal, he told me that the Chilean people, “*no es gente crítica*,” that they are not critical people. Carla also shared Cristobal’s perspective in that Chileans do not question societal norms or assumptions enough. The majority watch television and listen to the news, thinking that everything is okay. He further added that the media makes it seem like everything in Chile is great and that it is in an ideal situation, yet it is one of the most unequal countries. Nevertheless, *the youth* are now a bit more vocally critical than their parents, and a primary reason for this is because the current students did not live through the Pinochet dictatorship like their parents. So, the youth feel inclined to speak out and respond to their critical consciousness and awareness about societal inequalities, whereas their parents often do not. Jose also felt that the student movement,

¹⁵⁸ Siekierska. “Chile’s student leaders schedule first official march of 2013.”

although it has been a long, democratic process, is coming from a generation that did not experience the dictatorship; their parents' generation was silent.

Activism is always a contested topic. Many disagree with it because it can be often considered civil disobedience. But, I think these students deserve to be listened to. As stated earlier, Victor is a part of the movement because he knows the reality of a poorly funded public school, he's lived through it, and it's not simply fair. And especially after now attending an elite traditional high school in Santiago, he has lived the difference.

Although my sample of experience and perceptions of the student movement are small, and although Benjamin is just one student, these are all examples of critical consciousness in action, with the movement and Benjamin's speech putting into praxis their critical thinking. This does, however, show its limitations. It is possible that, the movement isn't successful because there is a generational gap where activism was not something that was done for twenty years. Freire does argue that for critical consciousness and praxis to be effective, one should have some sort of guidance or framework to follow. I don't know how much of a framework the students have, besides going to the streets and conversing with the government successfully. The power in Chile is very hierarchal, and the opportunity for student voices to be heard, appreciated and acted upon is in question. Part of the attraction to this topic for me was understanding first, what experiences have students have that made them want to act out, or made them feel unequal, and secondly, why isn't anything being done, if a substantial amount of the Chilean population is unhappy, if they feel oppressed? How does the government continue when its constituents are unhappy? What does this mean?

~

The next chapter will look at the different suggestions students have for education reform. Suggestions without a doubt vary based on educational experiences and socioeconomic status, but nevertheless, they should all be considered, and understood, because they call to interesting themes and questions about the future of Chile's education system and society.

Chapter 6: Where Do We Go From Here? The Student Agenda For Reform

“Eliminate subsidized private schools. Change PSU for diverse and non-discriminatory methods to access to higher education. Increase the investment in public education. Close the private universities that are making profits in spite of being illegal. Be more rigorous when assessing the quality of colleges. Create incentives from the state to promote more integration at schools. Offer more scholarships to teachers to perfect and improve their performances. Regulate teachers’ training and people who can study this profession. Increase non-teaching hours in order to help teachers to have more time to prepare their classes and do a personalized work with their students. Give more flexibility to schools to innovate.”¹⁵⁹ — Online Respondent

Above is a response from a surveyed student from Santiago Centro. He lists numerous demands that need to take place for a more effective and quality education. Above all, this student is asking for social justice, to discontinue education as a business, and to give more money to public institutions. This student echoes many demands that I heard in the student movement discourse: to them, the whole system must be rendered and reconstituted.

Chilean students have grown up in a very unequal society. Not only are their cities segregated demographically, but their education is also stratified. This post-dictatorship society is becoming more active; students are starting to be more and more vocal about their discontent. So, where exactly do we go from here? How can the government better address education policies that students will accept? Because I interviewed an array of students, across social classes, and from different educational experiences, I received numerous responses to the question, *what are your suggestions for education reform?* This brief chapter will present some of the themes that were most important to the students, and will also analyze how their suggestion correlates with their critical consciousness and their experiences within Chilean society, and suggest why their discourse matters.

¹⁵⁹ Translated from Online Survey, February 18, 2013.

A New System: Revolution, Changing the Constitution & Politics

“...We continue to be submerged under the laws and logistics of a dictatorship where the only thing that matters is the individuality of the person and not in the growth of a society. I think that what is necessary to be able to achieve themes so important like changes in education, health amongst others, it is necessary without a doubt a constitutional change, where laws can actually help and benefit Chilean society and not just a tiny percentage of families that control the economic system.”¹⁶⁰

“That the teaching by teachers is corrected, that they are actually certified and are not just doing it for the money. Secondly, that the high schools are free for students in middle and lower class, and those who can go to private schools share methods of teaching with teachers and are able to have trips that integrate and create coexistence between public and private high schools. Third, end the PSU system and create more incentives so that people with few resources or people with social risks can go to university with more economic benefits. Helping in this way for students in university will give more security, or creating a technical institution.”¹⁶¹

Many students whom I was in contact with that were deeply involved in the movement tended to be revolutionary in their ideas for effective reform. One surveyed student said, “In a few words, the reforms the education system has to be done in a totally different way, not a recycle of reforms already existing, but a new development of laws that take into account all that the actors ask for a successful education.”¹⁶² Students were bold in suggesting a new form of government. Students called for new politics, new governmental structure: *revolution*. They are frustrated with neoliberal policies, especially with underlying Pinochet laws still in place. Negotiations are tough, however, because of the number of Pinochet supporters that still exist in Chile.

Numerous students also said the constitution needed to be changed. Camilo told me that the constitution lacks democracy, and although a free education exists in the constitution, it is not listed as a right, and because of this, education can be manipulated into a business. When Pinochet came into power, he disarmed the political rights of

¹⁶⁰ Translated from Online Survey, February 18, 2013.

¹⁶¹ Translated from Online Survey, February 18, 2013.

¹⁶² Translated from Online Survey, February 19, 2013.

many. Allende's government had organizations within the government like workers' councils, which consisted of peasants, students, and the urban poor. However, Pinochet eradicated the political power of these groups.¹⁶³ The constitution has not been reformed since Pinochet, because his government made it very difficult to do so, since according to Victor, he never liked opposition. Today, although Chile is a democracy, it is still overseen by military generals.¹⁶⁴ Victor told me the constitution should be written by the people, that there shouldn't be an authoritarian constitution. His perception of the constitution was that there is only a line or so about education, but then pages and pages about private property laws. The *Latinobarómetro* public opinion database recorded as of 2010, 82.6 percent of Chileans do not think that their Constitution permits equal opportunity of access to justice.¹⁶⁵ This percentage calls for change.

In addition to changing the constitution, students emphasized the need for a national Constituent Assembly, which would alter elite power. It would consist of more working and middle class Chileans having a say in the government. This is a very controversial reform and could only occur if the constitution was changed. This reform is also tricky to obtain because it is often associated with socialist or communist governments, such as Soviet Russia or Bolivia.¹⁶⁶ Whether it's changing the constitution, creating a Constituent National Assembly, or starting a revolution, students are clearly calling for a major structural governmental change. They understand that their place in society and their experience in school is a function of these larger, national actors. These

¹⁶³ "Chile: Constituent Assembly and Workers Power." *The Internationalist*, October 2011. <http://www.internationalist.org/chileconstituentassembly1110.html>

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ "Igualdad de oportunidades de acceso a la justicia." Análisis de Resultados en línea. Latinobarómetro Corporation 2013. <http://www.latinobarometro.org>

¹⁶⁶ See <http://www.internationalist.org/chileconstituentassembly1110.html> for more information on the need for a Constituent assembly.

students tended to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, where they did not benefit economically from capitalism, and have experienced the public education system. It is interesting that the students are promoting systemic reform rather than piecemeal approaches to address educational deficits.

Nationalizing Education

“Chile should end its lucrative education, selections, and with our national curriculum, its objective to create non-participatory citizens and memorizers of dates and names.”¹⁶⁷

“Not only do they need more resources. They need to distribute the resources in a better way. They need to reform the way that they prepare teachers and fix the gap between the rich and the poor. They could nationalize some natural resources that today are in the hands of private owners or raise the taxes of the most rich so they could reach some progress.”¹⁶⁸

“Yes, the biggest change that needs to happen is from the bottom, for example you start from primary or elementary education and then apply it to secondary and tertiary education.”¹⁶⁹

In a similar fashion to changing the political structure of the government, many students are calling for education to be nationalized. This is a central goal of the movement, and again can also be a polarizing factor, deterring people from following the movement, because nationalizing education is a political move that has



“For an education of quality, end profit! Education is a right” Photo by Hillary Sapanski, March 2012

controversial communist or socialist ties. Nevertheless, many students feel that if education were nationalized, there would be a more equal access of opportunity to a

¹⁶⁷ Translated from Online Survey February 19, 2013.

¹⁶⁸ Translated from Online Survey February 19, 2013.

¹⁶⁹ Translated from Online Survey February 18, 2013.

quality education, as well as a sentiment that there is the same opportunity for everyone, because funds will be distributed more evenly. Some suggested refinancing the copper industry, since it has been extremely successful, yet many Chileans feel that they don't see where the money goes.

It is understandable why this desire for nationalizing education is so strong, because many are tired of viewing education as a for-profit. Education should be perceived as a human right, not as a business. Although nationalizing education is a common discourse among the youth, especially in lower and middle social classes, I still came across students from these classes who didn't think that nationalizing education was the answer, but they felt this way more so because it wasn't realistic given the politics and current economic situation. The next section shows student ideas around working within the system and making it more accessible in other ways.

More Access to Quality: Scholarships and Credit

"Access, we have, there is access...but education with quality? No." –Sandra

Shifting gears, the other side of the argument from nationalizing education is providing *more access* to quality through scholarships and credit. Lorena told me that, "we need to fight for the quality of education." Many students I interviewed, especially those from upper class backgrounds, felt that the system should not be nationalized, but that there should be more credit, scholarships and loans. This continues the neoliberal and privatization model of education, but creates more opportunities for students to have a more affordable, quality education. More access to quality also includes better teachers.

Pablo said that university should not be free, because it does you a service, because university is a service that you then receive a career and a salary. But more

scholarships and credit should be given. But if you can afford the education, you should pay for all of it. Pablo actually referenced Argentina and the free university system mentioned in the background chapter, and echoed a similar sentiment: that the free university system isn't necessarily taken advantage of and there are low retention rates. Chile's neighbor, Argentina, does offer free public universities, but it hasn't necessarily resulted in full equality. *The Economics of Education Review* released a study in 2002 by Martín González Rozada and Alicia Menendez, who found that ninety percent of students at the free public universities come from higher-income families, and fifty percent went to private, tuition-based high schools. This theme continues today. In addition, there is a low graduation rate in public universities. So, higher-income students are still getting the better deal. Why? What needs to change?

In addition to more credit and scholarships, Pedro pointed out the importance of incentivizing education. Pedro felt that rather than being free, education should be incentivized, because not everyone would take advantage of a free quality education, there needs to be a motive, and those who will want a good education will find a way to pay for it. Thus, if there is a good quality education available, and people have access to information that education will help them get a job, people should then pay for it. Pedro added that there could be more programs that could assist poorer students.

New Education Pedagogy and Social Change

When questioning students about reform, I was also given suggestions about new education pedagogies, and the need for a social change. Students referenced Paulo Freire's popular education. One surveyed student said that reform should take place, "Starting from home, from family and community members, strengthening popular education and self-education."¹⁷⁰ Popular education is based on class, social transformation and political struggle, something strongly promoted by Freire. It challenges traditional education.

Liam Kane in his book, *Popular Education and Social Change in Latin America* (2001) says,

"What distinguishes popular education from 'adult,' 'non-formal,' 'distance,' or 'permanent' education, for example, is that in the context of social injustice, education can never be politically neutral: if it does not side with the poorest and marginalized sectors- the 'oppressed' – in an attempt to transform society, then it necessarily sides with the 'oppressors' in maintaining the existing structures of oppression, even if by default."¹⁷¹

In a sense, if popular education were to be more widely used in the education system, the poorer and middle classes would be supported when using their critical consciousness to be empowered and transform society. Essentially, this suggestion encourages students to use their critical consciousness to educate themselves and their families, working from the bottom up.

Many powerful suggestions proposed by students were centered on social change. Quite a few students, including Pablo and Carla, from both upper and lower social classes, said that there should be more mixing of social classes in public schools, so that

¹⁷⁰ Translated from Online Survey February 19, 2013.

¹⁷¹ Liam Kane. *Popular Education and Social Change in Latin America*. Nottingham, UK: Russell Press, 2001. p. 9.

not only would more funds be allocated to the schools, but then students would be exposed to diversity, and could learn from each other. Many students told me they didn't encounter more diversity until they went to university, where they'd be with students of other classes. Even then, however, the lower-class students they encountered were those who had scholarships and credit to go to university. Pablo and Lorena reflected on their primary and secondary school experiences as living in a bubble because there wasn't any diversity, and they perceived inequality to be exacerbated because of this. This mixing could change perceptions of inequality, and could shift perceptions of how the education system should be run. A surveyed student wrote as a suggestion, "Stop stealing money. Mix up social classes to help them get to know one another better. Stop exacerbated classism."¹⁷² This student, in addition to working on refinancing education, proposed mixing social classes at a younger age, because when educated separately, students from different classes perceive the other at a distance, which sometimes leads to classist attitudes.

Chilean scholar Juan Eduardo García-Huidobro from Universidad Alberto Hurtado also suggests this solution in his article, "*Segregación en la Escuela*" (*Segregation in the School*). García-Huidobro says,

"If we want to advance our inclusive society, it should happen in school. It should possess a social mixture. Only then the students, leaving the private world of their families and going to classes, will enter a public world, a world that treats all different people the same. Equal in rights, equal in citizenship. Equal also in the capacity of respect and tolerance of differences between one another."¹⁷³

García-Huidobro acknowledges that schools are the door to society, and if the culture created within them changes, if diversity among socioeconomic status is encouraged, it

¹⁷² Translated from Online Survey February 21, 2013.

¹⁷³ Translated, Juan Eduardo García-Huidobro. "Segregación en la Escuela." *Semana de Acción Mundial por la Escuela*. Universidad Alberto Hurtado, May 2011.

could change perceptions of inequality and provide more opportunities and broaden student perspectives.

A surveyed student said that their suggestion for reform is, “A radical change in the government, but more than anything, a change in the social conscious of the Chilean people, taking away at once the social gap, that is created in the mind and in the social media.”¹⁷⁴ This statement is powerful, because the student points not only to the Chilean consciousness that many students felt existed when it came to perceiving inequality, but the student also addresses outside forces such as social media, and the need for a radical governmental change. How is this education inequality actually going to change without a large, radical change? Is it possible?

A Possible Solution: Student Research for the Government

During my time in Chile, I had met a few students from Universidad Católica who did research that they presented to the Ministry of Education.¹⁷⁵ It was about a project that took most of the academic year, and the students then presented their findings to the Ministry of Education in October 2012. The research was looking at new teachers and how schools select them. They looked to identify a definitive process or specific characteristics for selection—a topic that hasn’t really been researched. She said it isn’t as common for pedagogy students to do research that they present to the government, but Sandra hoped that these types of projects would start to happen more and more. This idea could be a way for the student and governmental discourses to bridge, to work together.

¹⁷⁴ Translated by Online Survey

¹⁷⁵ I came across this project by a Colby student, who actually was apart of this research group while she was studying abroad at Universidad Católica, I interviewed a few of her group mates for this project, and one of the students, Sandra*, explained the project to me.

Although as one of the most prestigious universities in the country Universidad Católica certainly has a more privileged student body, without a doubt it could be an effective way to start conversations between the government and the people, outside of a protest or manifest culture. What is key here is being able to validate student knowledge.

What do Student Suggestions Demonstrate?

During my fieldwork, I learned about many different ways of how to go about education reform. Suggestions ranged from revolutionary action, to providing more information to parents, to new teaching pedagogies, to refinancing the system, or adding more scholarships. The offered suggestions for reform are definitely related to socioeconomic status and educational opportunity, acknowledging that the students surveyed and interviewed came from distinct parts of society. What begs the next question, then, is, how do you go about effective reform, if people from distinct backgrounds have different ways of approaching it? What does this dynamic suggest?

About half of the students I spoke with want to nationalize education, the other half want to keep privatization but have more scholarships, and others mentioned changing teaching pedagogies within the classroom. All are concerned with educational inequality, but have different ways of approaching it. Despite students' varied suggestions for reform, most of the students I spoke with have participated in the movement, even if they didn't think nationalizing the education was the answer. They are all fighting for a *better* education, for access and quality, in whatever form that can come in, and in one that does not symbolize for-profit or business. This also speaks to the necessity for power in numbers. One thing that all students can agree on is that the system

is unequal and needs to be changed. But a limitation in addressing the problem is finding a solution a majority of the student body can support.

Fabian Araneda, the Vice President of the Student Federation of Universidad de Chile (FECH) said, “Universidad del Mar shows the greater problem with Chile’s education system...we need a public system, one that is not running for profit, with more equality that can benefit the students.”¹⁷⁶ Universidad del Mar, which is the university caught in the profiteering scandal, is a prime symbol that creates this perception of education in Chile as a business, as a for-profit sector. Perceptions of inequality then, may not change until education can be seen as something other than a business.

The suggestions I received were outcomes of the critical consciousness of these students, their level of awareness and engagement in Chilean society. Cristobal was very assertive in explaining to me that the Chilean people are not critical enough, they don’t question assumptions of society, at least not until the students started vocalizing their concerns on education. Despite their suggestions, no matter how radical, conservative, realistic, idealistic, or how effective they may be, the students still seem to run into a wall in their empowerment, because the government is still not giving in. The students’ critical consciousness alone won’t lead to a social transformation, which is the full process laid out by Freire. So then, what reform can feasibly happen, and does that involve student empowerment?



“Popular education project for a new society”
Photo by Roberto Villaseca, May 2012

¹⁷⁶ Siekierska. “Chile’s student leaders schedule first official march of 2013.”

Conclusion: Barriers and Hope

“It is no exaggeration to say that a tectonic shift has occurred. A whole generation is breaking through and entering active politics and struggle. Layers of formerly “apathetic” students, cut off from collective action after 17 years of a dictatorship and 20 years of marginalization of protest, have appeared on the scene in the tens of thousands.”¹⁷⁷



“Another education is possible, another Chile is necessary.” *Photo by Roberto Villaseca, May 2012*

Camilo hopes that the constitution will be changed. Victor will not stop fighting until the movement’s goals are achieved. Benjamin wants classist and elitist attitudes to stop within *Instituto Nacional* and within society more generally. Cristobal wants Chileans to become more critical of the government and society. Lorena wants there to be more access to a quality education. Pablo hopes there can be more technical schools to give more opportunities and to keep that sector running. Carla wants the culture around consumerism to shift so people stop worrying about buying iPhones and seek out educational opportunities. Students want the neoliberal culture to change, for education to no longer be viewed as a business, for social justice to be achieved, for equality in the system. Through life experiences, these young adults have become critically aware of themselves and their world, of society and injustices that are too often unquestioned.

¹⁷⁷ René Rojas. “Chile: Return of the Penguins!” *Solidarity*, March/April 2012.
<http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/3535>

This project toured the unequal education system and socioeconomic disparities in Santiago, Chile through the eyes of its students. We first looked at their experiences that make up their critical consciousness and local knowledge, and then we saw it put into action with limitations. Whether students were in upper or lower social class standings, all acknowledged that the level of inequality in Chile is unacceptable, but all had different approaches in addressing it. All students also acknowledged that education in Chile has become a business. Their experiences in school were supported by critical pedagogical theorists such as Jean Anyon, Patricia Hinchey and Patrick Finn, demonstrating that generally, you are given a specific education and treated a certain way based on your social standing, continuing your placement and treatment in society. Lower-class students are generally stuck with fewer resources in public schools, and any family that can afford private school will pay for it. People identify social classes and inequality based on appearance, the way someone talks, where they live in Chile, and their level and type of schooling. This has become a norm in Chilean society.

But maybe things are slowly starting to change. Since the Pingüino movement in 2006, student voices have gone mainstream. Although everyone is not in agreement, education inequality has become a dominating discourse. The movement, which sparked again in 2011, is beginning to pick up strength again in 2013 after a lull in 2012. It has been suggested that students may be more vocal than their parents, who were silenced from the Pinochet military dictatorship for twenty years. Michele Bachelet, who is running for re-election this November, recently announced that she would fight to end for-profit education. Is the discontent of the students and their critical consciousness a possible reason for this political move?

Attempted Empowerment Through Critical Consciousness

Paulo Freire's process of critical consciousness is a path towards empowerment if fully achieved. In its full realization, the process of critical consciousness and liberation of the oppressed leads to a societal or political transformation. However, this is hard to attain, because it requires a revolution, a social change, and Chilean students have a lot against them. Freire ends his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by stating,

“This work deals with a very obvious truth: just as the oppressor, in order to oppress, needs a theory of oppressive action, so the oppressed, in order to become free, also need a theory of action. The oppressor elaborates his theory of action without the people, for he stands against them. Nor can the people—as long as they are crushed and oppressed, internalizing the image of the oppressor—construct by themselves the theory of their liberating action. Only in the encounter of the people with the revolutionary leaders—in their communion, in their praxis—can this theory be built.”¹⁷⁸

The students, who in this case are the oppressed, must have a theory of action to effectively reach a consensus with the oppressor, or the Chilean government. There could be a collaborative action among Chilean people, a level of understanding, a realization that the state may in fact be oppressing by limiting educational access, or by focusing on economic gains rather than human rights. Although the majority of the movement has radical reforms for education, there is not one specific solution, only the end goal of providing more quality of education and ending for-profit education. Without a doubt, there are limitations to Freire's argument as well, because I don't think the Chilean state is as oppressive as it once was under Pinochet. However, the remnants of Pinochet's dictatorship, and the existing inequalities do create an oppressive environment. But that's why I suggest Chile is in transition. As Chile moves away from this post-dictatorship society, future leaders (students) who have had the praxis and reflection from their critical consciousness could address the oppressive policies.

¹⁷⁸ Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* p 182.

Chile in Transition

“In sum, for the first time since the years of rising struggle that forced Pinochet to give up power and laid the groundwork for the historic and ignominious deal that gave birth to democratic neoliberalism in Chile, popular forces, students and workers together are back on the scene and will have an undeniable say in their country’s future.”¹⁷⁹

Chile is in transition. As the 2013 elections are approaching, Michele Bachelet, running for her second presidential term, has not only offered to stop a lucrative education, but she also proposed changing the constitution: two reforms that students are fighting for. Bachelet says if elected, she will send a bill to Congress to end for-profit education, and move towards a free and public system. In her first major interview of her campaign, she said, “you cannot make money with public resources.”¹⁸⁰



Michele Bachelet, *Photo from The Santiago Times April 11, 2013*

A second, important platform Bachelet took was changing the constitution. Bachelet addressed that although the constitution has gone under many amendments, there are aspects that need to be addressed and changed. She publicly stated said, “I believe it is necessary to consider a new constitution.”¹⁸¹ This is a big political move on her part, since Pinochet made the constitution very difficult to change. But Bachelet aims

¹⁷⁹ Rojas. “Chile: Return of the Penguins!”

¹⁸⁰ Alicja Siekierska. “Elections 2013: Chile’s Presidential candidates on education.” *The Santiago Times*. April 15, 2013. www.santiagotimes.cl

¹⁸¹ Alicja Siekierska. “Bachelet speaks out, calls for new Chilean constitution.” *The Santiago Times*. April 11, 2013. www.santiagotimes.cl

to create a model for a new constitution with a group of specialists and will do her best to make it a reality.¹⁸²

Bachelet also made clear that Chile is changing. She acknowledged that Chile is different from her first presidency, and that, “Chile has been able to generate a more organized social force, of citizens that are more aware of their rights and are more demanding.”¹⁸³ She added, “Citizens no longer think a representative democracy is enough. They want it to be more participatory, where your voice is heard.”¹⁸⁴ This idea is not new, and the students who have been vocally active in stating their discontent have without a doubt contributed to this slow but occurring transformation.

Bringing it back to the students, Cristobal said that the student movement will last for years but that eventually, these students will be the future leaders of Chile, and things will be changing. And, in a sense, things have already changed. Giorgio Jackson, former president of CONFECH at Universidad Católica and Camila Vallejo are both congressional candidates for the upcoming elections. Giorgio is releasing a new book, *El país que soñamos* (The country we dream of). The book critiques neoliberalism in contemporary Chile.¹⁸⁵ Giorgio made clear that what he is fighting for is to end the *lucro* or profit, of the education system. With new, young actors getting politically involved, and with presidential candidates attempting to propose new education policies, it further demonstrates that times in Chile are changing, and that maybe, it will be the students’ critical consciousness that will one day result in a social transformation.

¹⁸² Alicja Siekierska. “Bachelet speaks out, calls for new Chilean constitution.”

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Sam Edwards. “Former Chilean student leader Giorgio Jackson launches book.” *The Santiago Times*. April 16, 2013. www.santiagotimes.cl

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Student experiences of educational inequality in Santiago demonstrate the realities of the school system, the significance and relevance of student perceptions, and call for reform. Educational inequality is not unique to Chile. In fact, one may find parallels in this study to the United States; with poorly funded schools having to teach to the test, not having enough resources, or low-teaching quality. However, it's this existing, charged discourse on inequality and the will of the students to act that distinguishes the Chilean case. Many Chilean students are in the process, using their critical consciousness, to transform society by calling for education reform and questioning societal norms that lead to inequality. Although it may be a few years, their time is coming, and students will have an opportunity to be successful. Chile is in transition.

Appendix

Photographs taken in 2012 and 2013 by Hillary Sapanski



"Piñera: Chile is not sold."



"Fascist Police. What happened UAH (Universidad Alberto Hurtado), did they beat you?"



"Free Education" graffiti in Valparaíso



Universidad del Mar, to be closed down in 2014 for profiteering scandal



Victor Jara



Education! Free, graffiti in Barrio Brasil, Santiago



Downtown Santiago



La Moneda, Bombed in the military coup in 1973.

Interview Questions

1. Age, what neighborhood do you live in?
2. Describe your experience in school. What types of schools did you go to? What was the dynamic/culture/quality of the school like? Do you feel like you have learned a lot throughout your education?
3. What do you think about inequality? How do you visualize it, is it by the clothes one wears or the materials one has, or their appearance, etc?
4. Do you have an experience that comes to mind when you think of inequality? Whether it was personal or something you observed?
5. Do you think that perceptions of inequality are going to change with the middle class growing?
6. What are your thoughts about the student movement? Are you apart of it? How do you understand its mission and do you think its effective? Are you in agreement?
7. What do you think will happen with the movement this year and in the future? Will it be successful?
8. Do you think there are alternatives or different ways besides protesting for students to be heard?
9. For you, what is the most important education reform that should be addressed?
10. What are your aspirations or goals, and do you feel that they are accessible to you?
11. Anything else you would like to add?

Additional Questions For Benjamin:

1. Describe your experience in *Instituto Nacional*. Why did you choose to go there? What kind of school did you go to before?
2. Had you been thinking about your speech for a long time? Why did you do it? Were you nervous?
3. After you made the speech, what happened?
4. In your speech you mentioned that there were a lot of discriminatory acts in school. What types of discrimination exists at *Instituto Nacional*?
5. Were your friends and/or your teachers in agreement with your speech? What you said about the Chilean Presidents was very interesting.
6. You think that education should not be for economic benefit, correct? What is a good education? Have you received one? Where have you learned the most in your life?
7. Do you feel that you have a public voice now, especially after your speech? Do you think your professors or adults you know are listening to you? Will the government listen to you? Why or why not?

Survey Questions

1. What neighborhood of Santiago do you live in?
2. What types of schools have you gone to in your primary/secondary education? (Check all that apply: Private, Subsidized, Public, Other)
3. Assess the overall quality of your education (Poor, Okay, Good, Great, High)
4. What has been your biggest challenge in school?
5. Do you think you have learned your most valuable lessons inside or outside the classroom? Explain.
6. How do you identify inequality? (Check all that apply: clothes, race, skin/hair/eye color, ways of speaking, where one lives, last name, materials, car one drives, social norms, type of schooling, other)
7. Have you participated in the student movement? If yes, explain your role. If not, why not?
8. Do you think the student movement will be successful? Why or why not? Are there other ways to address this issue?
9. Do you have suggestions for education reform? If so, what are they?
10. What do you want to do when you “grow up”? Do you feel that your goals are accessible to you?

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